

# ARIZONA JOURNAL OF ENVIRONMENTAL LAW & POLICY

---

VOLUME 14

SPRING 2024

SPECIAL ISSUE

---

## WHITE NATIONALIST PARKS, ECO-FASCISM, AND CONSERVING GLOBAL CAPITALISM

Gabriella Makerita Hinetu Brayne<sup>1\*</sup>

### Abstract

*This article contextualizes fortress conservation as a violent system of green-colonialism that is rooted in eco-fascist ideology. Drawing upon the work of Aimé Césaire, I highlight how colonial capitalism is inherently fascist, although prevailing historical narratives of the 20th and 21st century tend to obscure the fascist realities of settler colonial states such as the United States. With contradictions in capitalism rupturing through the crisis of climate/ecological disaster, our attention must also turn to the violence of eco-fascism as it has formed the environmental and conservationist policies of Western colonial powers, particularly in the creation of National Parks as intertwined with the concurring histories of removal, warfare and genocide. From tracing the early history of fortress conservation in the national building projects of settler colonial states, the article then turns to the militarized violence of imperialism and colonialism throughout the Global South in the contemporary management of fortress conservation projects, financed by Western aid development agencies and co-managed by ‘corporatised’ environmental NGOs. I argue that underpinning the Global North’s persistent interest in conservation parks is the ‘offshoring’ of global capitalism’s climate/biodiversity crisis into continued systems of colonialism, built upon the self-preservation of ecocidal capitalism and voyeuristic colonial desires for ‘untouched wilderness’ to whatever means necessary, normalizing the rise of eco-fascism in the West’s response to climate change. Campaigns against fortress conservation must work with strategic urgency to place pressure on Global South governments to halt*

---

<sup>1\*</sup> Positionality: I write this piece from the ancestral positionality of a Samoan (Falefā), Māori (Ngāti Maniapoto) and Pākehā woman from Aotearoa New Zealand in solidarity with Global South Indigenous struggles against imperialism and militarized fortress conservation. Currently I am studying my LLM at Indigenous Peoples Law and Policy Program at the University of Arizona, James E. Rogers School of Law, on the lands of the Tohono O’odham and Pascua Yaqui Nations.

*evictions against Indigenous peoples, while also recognising the wider solidarity struggles to decarbonize, demilitarize, and ultimately to decolonize against the global extractivist economy of colonial capitalism - eager to outlive its day.*

INTRODUCTION	80
PART I: COLONIAL CAPITALISM, FASCISM AND ECO-FASCISM	80
PART II: NATIONALIST PARKS AND CONSERVING THE SETTLER STATE	83
PART III: THE MILITARIZATION OF FORTRESS CONSERVATION THROUGHOUT THE GLOBAL SOUTH	85
PART IV: DECARBONIZE, DEMILITARIZE, AND MOST IMPORTANTLY—DECOLONIZE	88

## Introduction

“Every border implies the violence required to maintain it” is a saying by Pakistani-American writer Ayesha A. Siddiqi, written in response to the Islamophobic border policies of Western states against Muslim asylum seekers from war-torn (read: imperialized) regions.<sup>2</sup> Writing this piece from the Arizona borderlands where the Indigenous Peoples Law and Policy Program is based, all around us are visible reminders that the militarisation of colonially-imposed borders has long been critical to the creation and maintenance of settler states. A racist and fascist policing of citizenship, the brutal infrastructure of which has devastating impacts for Indigenous communities and ecologies with land-based connections that long predate the state itself. Colonial borders also exist within the construction of states, although their violence tends to be invisibilised for many of us who are not violently policed and excluded by them. This essay focuses on protected areas (such as conservation parks) as an example of violent colonial borders within states, built upon the enduring dispossession and militarized exclusion of Indigenous peoples from their lands. In understanding the underlying fascism of settler colonial states and the global capitalist economy, we can see how the growth of fortress conservation throughout the Global South as a response to the biodiversity crisis is a covertly systematized and widely supported form of eco-fascism. This calls for a wider struggle against the environmental destruction, colonial violence, and worsening contradictions in global capitalism for Indigenous peoples to seek liberation beyond the colonial climate apocalypse.

## Part I: Colonial Capitalism, Fascism and Eco-fascism

*“At the end of capitalism, which is eager to outlive its day, there is Hitler.”*

Aimé Césaire, Discourse on Colonialism.<sup>3</sup>

Fascism is defined as a political system that operates as a far right, ultranationalist dictatorship with violent military repression and the manifestation of extreme social hierarchies at its core. Fascist regimes are historically born from violent colonial projects where extreme racialized violence is first conducted against colonized peoples. In Discourse on Colonialism, Aimé Césaire writes about how fascist policies are inherent to all Western settler

<sup>2</sup> See Harshia Walia and Ayesha A. Siddiqi, *On the Real Migrant Crisis*, HIGHSNOBIETY (March 17 2021), <https://www.highsnobiety.com/p/harsha-walia-interview-ayesha-siddiqi-honors-week/>.

<sup>3</sup> AIMÉ CÉSAIRE, DISCOURSE ON COLONIALISM 37 (Monthly Review Press, 2000).

colonies—through the genocides, ethnic cleansing, and violent repression that has built settler capitalist economies. Césaire cites W. E. B. Du Bois as making some of the clearest historical connections between the regression of Western economies into fascism as an inversion of their colonial and imperialist policies throughout the construction of the Global South; "I knew that Hitler and Mussolini were fighting communism and using race prejudice to make some white people rich and all colored people poor. But it was not until later that I realized that the colonialism of Great Britain and France had exactly the same object and methods as the fascists and the Nazis were trying clearly to use."<sup>4</sup> The connection between fascism and colonialism has been obscured by historical framings since WWII erasing the genocidal horrors of settler colonialism and chattel slavery that built Western settler democracies, and Nazi Germany's borrowing of eugenic ideas and technologies from the United States' policies of racist colonial violence of ethnic cleansing against Indigenous peoples and the brutal economic formation of the nation state through the Trans-Atlantic slave trade.

Carroll Kakel's *The American West and the Nazi East* maps how the Nazi expansionist policy of Lebensraum drew direct inspiration from American historian Frederick Jackson Turner's "frontier thesis" and the colonial conquest of the American West through the creation of the reservation system, which saw the genocidal mass dispossession of Native Americans from their ancestral lands.<sup>5</sup> Since the apotheosis of fascist regression in Nazi Germany and the state's dismantling at the end of the Second World War, we cannot forget the United States' employment of Nazi intelligence staff in their continued cold warfare—which saw the backing of far-right coups and overthrow democratic movements and install fascist dictatorships throughout the Global South. Despite post-Cold-War framings, the violence of fascism remains deeply embedded into the political economies of capitalist core states, where the words of Aime Césaire brutally remind us that "At the end of capitalism, which is eager to outlive its day, there is Hitler."<sup>6</sup> Today, the militarized violence against racialized Hispanic communities trying to seek asylum across the US-Mexico border, the state of the prison industrial complex which policies and incarcerates Black and Brown communities en mass, and Washington's \$813 billion dollar military budget to finance imperialist forever wars and create refugee crises throughout the Middle East are some of many structural examples that illuminate the enduring fascism of the settler colonial state, even under seemingly liberal governments.<sup>7</sup> And as the global project of colonial capitalism—mechanized by the exploitation of Indigenous lands—has brought us to this apocalypse of ecological collapse—the self-preservation attempts of capitalism to outlive its day are (once again) revealing themselves as fascistic.

---

<sup>4</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, *A Forum of Fact and Opinion: Race Prejudice in Nazi Germany*, THE PITTSBURGH COURIER (December 1936).

<sup>5</sup> CARROLL P. KAKEL III, *THE AMERICAN WEST AND THE NAZI EAST: A COMPARATIVE AND INTERPRETIVE PERSPECTIVE* (Palgrave Macmillan London, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> CÉSAIRE, *supra* note 2 at 37.

<sup>7</sup> See, U.S. Department of Defense, *The President's Fiscal Year 2023 Defense Budget* (March 28, 2022),

<https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/2980014/the-department-of-defense-rel-eases-the-presidents-fiscal-year-2023-defense-budg/>.

Eco-fascism is a specific branch of fascist ideology, contextualized by the rising threats of climate collapse to white survival and characterized by rhetoric that “blames the demise of the environment on overpopulation, immigration, and over-industrialization.”<sup>8</sup> In recent years, eco-fascist movements have aligned with the growing proliferation of the ‘great replacement theory’ among far right media channels, calling for the mass murder of (predominantly Brown and Black Muslim) refugees in Western countries in the interests of ‘preserving nature’ for white populations, as well as other racialized and Indigenous communities throughout the world.<sup>9</sup> It takes on extreme forms of violence through white supremacist terrorist attacks compelled by eco-fascist rhetoric (and settler state complicity in the surveillance of racialized communities/failures to protect racialized communities from white supremacist terrorism), such as the horrific massacre of 51 Muslim community members at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand in 2019, the terrorist of which explicitly referred to himself as a ethno-nationalist eco-fascist in targeting migrant communities of color.<sup>10</sup> It is also normalized within ideas and expressions such as the anthropocene and ‘we are the virus’ rhetoric which became popular at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, placing the blame for ecological devastation on humanity as a whole as opposed to the economic structures of colonial capitalism that have worked to destroy Indigenous peoples’ relational sciences and environmental practices for the wellbeing of the earth. Within the context of the climate catastrophe, eco-fascism is gaining traction as a paradigm for the far-right and capitalist class to distort the narrative against the histories of colonial, capitalist exploitation that have led us to ecological collapse and the false fearmongering of Indigenous, racialised peoples as the problem. However, as histories of fortress conservation teach us - this rhetoric is not new and is deeply embedded into structures of Western conservation and the ways in which colonial capitalism works to offshore its environmental destruction into other systems of racially targeted violence and death.

---

<sup>8</sup> See Zachary Kamel, Mack Lamoureux & Ben Makuch, ‘Eco-fascist’ Arm of Neo-Nazi Terror Group, *The Base, Linked to Swedish Arson*, VICE (Jan. 29, 2020), [https://www.vice.com/en/article/qjdvzx/eco-fascist-arm-of-neo-nazi-terror-group-the-base-linked-to-swedish-arson?utm\\_source=reddit.com](https://www.vice.com/en/article/qjdvzx/eco-fascist-arm-of-neo-nazi-terror-group-the-base-linked-to-swedish-arson?utm_source=reddit.com).

<sup>9</sup> See Steve Rose, A deadly ideology: how the ‘great replacement theory’ went mainstream, *The Guardian* (Jun. 8, 2022), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/jun/08/a-deadly-ideology-how-the-great-replacement-theory-went-mainstream>.

<sup>10</sup> See Scott Martelle, *Two Mass Murders, a World Apart, Share a Common Theme: Ecofascism*, *The Washington Post* (Aug. 18, 2019), [https://www.washingtonpost.com/science/two-mass-murders-a-world-apart-share-a-common-theme-ecofascism/2019/08/18/0079a676-bec4-11e9-b873-63ace636af08\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/science/two-mass-murders-a-world-apart-share-a-common-theme-ecofascism/2019/08/18/0079a676-bec4-11e9-b873-63ace636af08_story.html).

## Part II: Nationalist Parks and Conserving the Settler State

*“When Yellowstone was established, the Plains Wars were raging all around the park’s borders. It was as though the government paused mid-murder to plant a tree in the victims’ backyard... Viewed from the perspective of history, Yellowstone is a crime scene.”*

David Treuer, *Teaching the Truth About National Parks*.<sup>11</sup>

Fortress conservation is a conservation model based on the idea that biodiversity is best sustained by creating protected areas where ecosystems can function in isolation from human disturbance. The creation of national parks throughout settler states, for example, emerged as a response to the ecocide of colonial capitalism, where settlers became increasingly aware of the ecological destruction caused by land theft, unsustainable urbanization, and resource exploitation.<sup>12</sup> But in order to justify the continuation of colonial capitalist projects, these ‘protected areas’ became a common means for off-setting these ecological harms, drawing from racist propaganda that framed Indigenous peoples as being environmentally destructive, despite co-existing with and caring for these ecologies for millenia. In his essay ‘The Mountains of California’, founder of the Sierra Club and ‘Father of National Parks’ John Muir, contrasted his romanticized view of California’s natural wilderness with racist descriptions of Indigenous communities he encountered, claiming they had “no right place in the landscape.”<sup>13</sup> This racism in the early (and enduring) environmentalist policy of the West fueled the further ethnic cleansing of Indigenous communities from their lands to create protected areas, where they were continuously denied access or right of return to - often enforced by militarized violence and policing.

Many well-known National Parks throughout the United States such as Yellowstone were created within an ongoing genocide of Indigenous people during the Removal Era of the 1800s, tied to the ideological projects of Manifest Destiny and Westward Expansion that legitimized extensive land dispossession as an inherent right of white supremacy. Isaac Kantor’s ‘Ethnic Cleansing and America’s Creation of National Parks’ traces the colonial imaginary of ‘uninhabited wilderness’ in the construction of National Parks and subsequent wording of the Wilderness Act of 1964 as connected to the legal history of the Doctrine of Discovery, which

---

<sup>11</sup> Tim Swineheart, *Teaching the Truth About National Parks*, Rethinking Schools, <https://rethinkingschools.org/articles/teaching-the-truth-about-national-parks/> (last visited April 21, 2024).

<sup>12</sup> See Elise Hogan, *Green colonisation: the racist history of national parks*, The Love Post (Dec. 10, 2020), <https://www.thelovepost.global/decolonise-your-mind/articles/green-colonisation-racist-history-national-parks>.

<sup>13</sup> JOHN MUIR, *THE MOUNTAINS OF CALIFORNIA* 91 (The Century Co. 1984).

rendered Indigenous lands terra nullius or ‘nobody’s land’ to legitimize violent conquest.<sup>14</sup> By way of the Doctrine, Indigenous nations of the Great Plains region were forcibly removed from the lands of Yellowstone in order to designate it as a National Park, from which native communities (whose hunting practices were a key community food source) were prevented from returning to. A particularly violent account of the militarization of fortress conservation in the United States traces back to 1895, when a Bannock encampment in Grand Teton National park was raided by a posse led by Constable William Manning.<sup>15</sup> The Bannocks were arrested for violating Wyoming hunting laws, had their horses and tipis confiscated, and in the escalation of violence a tribal elder was killed and two children went missing. As highlighted by Tim Swineheart’s piece ‘Teaching the Truth about National Parks’ - these National Parks became exclusively white spaces for settlers to exist within the colonial imaginary of ‘wilderness’ - disconnected from the environmental destruction their nation building project was creating.<sup>16</sup> The piece cites the propaganda of conservationist John Muir in illuminating the early colonial entitlement to enjoying the ‘pristine wilderness’ of ethnically cleansed stolen lands, laying the foundations for the extractive entitlement that drives conservation tourism - “*Thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people are beginning to find out that going to the mountains is going home; that wildness is a necessity.*”<sup>17</sup>”

It is unsurprising then, that in going back to the fundamental connections between colonialism, fascism (and eco-facism) outlined by anti-colonial theorists such as Aime Cesaire, that the founding advocates of early conservation movements within settler colonial nation-building projects were also involved in the promotion of eugenics and fascistic ideas throughout the West. Madison Grant, who founded the Wildlife Conservation Society and numerous national parks in the United States, wrote the “Passing of the Great Race” in 1916 which Hitler referred to as his bible.<sup>18</sup> The Bronx Zoo (operated by the World Conservation Society as a project central to animal conservation within the United States) recently had to apologize for displaying an Indigenous person from the Mbuti people in one of its exhibits.<sup>19</sup> The entire concept of ‘pristine wilderness’ is deeply entwined with a fascistic mindset of racial and nationalist purity, particularly when achieving that goal of wilderness preserved for the voyeurism of white settlement requires the ethnic cleansing and genocide of non-white Indigenous peoples. As this piece will further trace, with the climate and ecological catastrophe gradually threatening the order of capitalism and whiteness, this desire to hold on to that white

---

<sup>14</sup> Isaac Kantor, *Ethnic Cleansing and America's Creation of National Parks*, 28 PUB. LAND & RESOURCES L. REV. 41 (2007).

<sup>15</sup> See Kantor, *supra* note 12 at 15.

<sup>16</sup> Tim Swineheart, *Teaching the Truth About National Parks*, Rethinking Schools, <https://rethinkingschools.org/articles/teaching-the-truth-about-national-parks/> (last visited April 21, 2024).

<sup>17</sup> JOHN MUIR, *OUR NATIONAL PARKS 2* (Houghton Mifflin Company, 1909).

<sup>18</sup> Aliya R. Hoff, *The Passing of the Great Race; or The Racial Basis of European History (1916)*, by Madison Grant, EMBRYO PROJECT ENCYCLOPEDIA (July 7, 2021), available at <https://embryo.asu.edu/pages/passing-great-race-or-racial-basis-european-history-1916-madison-grant>.

<sup>19</sup> David K. Li, *Bronx Zoo operator apologizes for racist display of African man in 1906*, NBC News (July 21, 2020), <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/bronx-zoo-operator-apologizes-racist-display-african-man-1906-n1235457>.

imaginary of ‘pristine wilderness’ as exemplified in conservation parks will only further unravel the fascistic foundations of colonial capitalism itself, furthering the dispossession of Indigenous lands and the far-right’s interests in white supremacist racial purity.

### **Part III: The Militarization of Fortress Conservation Throughout the Global South**

*“Above all, neo-colonialism, like colonialism before it, postpones the facing of the social issues which will have to be faced by the fully developed sector of the world before the danger of world war can be eliminated or the problem of world poverty resolved.”*

Kwame Nkrumah, *Neo-Colonialism, the Last Stage of Imperialism*<sup>20</sup>

Kwame Nkrumah’s prophetic and ever-relevant analysis of 20th century geopolitics in *NEO-COLONIALISM, THE LAST STAGE OF IMPERIALISM* speaks to the enduring exploitation and dispossession of Global South states by the global capitalist economy following the fall of formal colonial regimes. In the aftermath of the Second World War, European empires were left crippled by war debt and were pressured to ‘relinquish’ their colonial territories in favor of burgeoning anti-colonial movements for national independence. The Charter of the United Nations affirmed its ‘*respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples*’ where self-determination is defined by the United Nations General Assembly as the “*right to freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.*”<sup>21</sup> However, many Indigenous scholars and activists have criticized the United Nations ‘Blue Water Doctrine’ as refusing to apply the right to self-determination to non-self-governing territories or trust territories, alienating Indigenous communities totally occupied and confined by the colonial borders of settler states such as New Zealand and Australia.<sup>22</sup> As Nkrumah highlights in his essay, this definition of self-determination, however, has not been fully realized for nation states that are constitutionally recognised as ‘independent’ from their former colonial administrations.

Neo-colonisation requires that imperialist ties between empires and their colonized territories continue via the economic exploitation of capitalist production that mechanizes globalization, enriching the consumption of the Global North at the violent dispossession of Indigenous lands, waterways, and people throughout the Global South. The politics of Global South states remain captured by the interests of global capitalism both through the ‘soft power’ of aid development programs as well as the financing of brutal war, fascist dictatorships, and genocides by imperial core states. Vincent Bevan’s *THE JAKARTA METHOD* highlights the history of the CIA’s involvement in Indonesia, which oversaw the installation of a puppet dictatorship that resulted in the militarized killing and disappearances of over a million Indonesians associated

---

<sup>20</sup> KWAME NKUMAH, *NEO-COLONIALISM: THE LAST STAGE OF IMPERIALISM* (International Publishers, 1969).

<sup>21</sup> UNITED NATIONS, *TREATY SERIES*, vol. 999, p. 171, 16 December 1966.

<sup>22</sup> Moana Jackson, *Decolonisation and the stories in the land*, E-TANGATA (May 9, 2021), <https://e-tangata.co.nz/comment-and-analysis/moana-jackson-decolonisation-and-the-stories-in-the-land/>.

with leftist organizing.<sup>23</sup> ‘The Jakarta Method’ became the covert foreign policy blueprint for Washington’s financing of similar fascist dictatorships and anti-communist disappearances/massacres throughout Latin America such as Pinochet’s regime in Chile, which targeted Indigenous communities (and amounted to an Indigenous genocide in Guatemala). Many Global South states are still recovering from the devastation of these brutal dictatorships, are coerced into remaining loyal to imperialist geopolitics due to threats of military intervention if operating out of line with global neoliberalism (that demands growing exploitation of resources and labor from the Global South) or are currently subject to the West’s ‘forever wars’. Thinking about the imperialist, capitalist and militarized drivers of climate catastrophe (where the U.S. Department of Defense annual carbon emissions are higher than that of entire states such as Morocco, Peru and Sweden) Nkrumah states that “*Neo-colonialism, like colonialism, is an attempt to export the social conflicts of capitalist countries.*”<sup>24</sup> Through the enduring influence of neocolonialism, several governments within the Global South have taken upon the violence of former colonial administrations towards Indigenous communities, seen in the ethnic cleansing undertaken in the name of ‘fortress conservation’ to essentially offshore the ecological devastation of capitalism’s environmental exploitation.

Protected areas in many parts of the Global South are operating militarized forms of fortress conservation, financed by Western imperialist aid development programs and corporatised multinational ‘environmentalist’ NGOs. Throughout neo-colonized nations in Asia, Africa and Latin America, horrific human rights violations such as forced evictions, torture, and murder are taking place against Indigenous communities whose ancestral lands extend beyond the borders of the government occupied ‘protected areas’ and UNESCO recognised world heritage sites. In India, many game reserves were first created through land confiscation under brutal British occupation for the European colonial class.<sup>25</sup> Post-independence, these reserves were instead designated as ‘wildlife conservation sanctuaries’ and the nationwide Project Tiger campaign was launched under Indira Gandhi’s government in 1976, where many of these lands were converted into Tiger Reserves.<sup>26</sup> Despite the importance of the Independence struggle from British colonialism, the creation of these tiger reserves throughout India has occurred at the continued ethnic cleansing and grave human rights abuses of Indigenous communities. Notably, with the Kaziranga Tiger Park, according to 2014 park management reports, rangers/guards are actively encouraged to shoot anyone suspected of unauthorized entry.<sup>27</sup> The documentary “Our World, Killing for Conservation” reported that 96 people have been killed by armed park rangers in Kaziranga over the past nine years, with 42 people killed between 2014 and 2015

---

<sup>23</sup> VINCENT BEVAN, *THE JAKARTA METHOD: WASHINGTON’S ANTICOMMUNIST CRUSADE & THE MASS MURDER PROGRAM THAT SHAPED OUR WORLD*, 2020. New York NY: Public Affairs Hachette Book Group.

<sup>24</sup> NKRUMAH, *supra* note 19, at 12.

<sup>25</sup> Swati Shresth, *Sahibs and Shikar: Colonial Hunting and Wildlife in British India, 1800-1935*. Dissertation, Duke University (2009), available at <https://hdl.handle.net/10161/1647>.

<sup>26</sup> See Sibi Arasu, As India’s tiger count grows, *Indigenous groups protest evictions from ancestral lands*, PBS (Apr. 9, 2023), <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/as-indias-tiger-count-grows-indigenous-groups-protest-evictions-from-ancestral-lands>.

<sup>27</sup> Justin Rowlett, *Kaziranga: The park that shoots people to protect rhinos*, BBC (Feb. 10, 2017), <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-south-asia-38909512>.



alone.<sup>28</sup> Many Indigenous communities have refused to be removed from their lands and are fighting legal battles in court, protesting in alliance with unions and human rights defenders, and campaigning for greater international awareness of the colonial violence taking place, as well as their sovereign ecological knowledge being necessary resistance to climate exploitation. Similarly in Tanzania, the government has been escalating their brutal and militarized eviction campaign of Maasai communities from their lands which have since been designated as protected areas. Earlier this year in January, park rangers raided a village outside of Tarangire National Park where they shot and arrested several Maasai community members and, on January 18, the Tanzanian government announced their plan to forcibly remove 100,000 Indigenous Maasai from the Ngorongoro Conservation Area.<sup>29</sup>

Unsurprisingly, aid development programs in countries such as the United States, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Belgium, and Japan are all tied to the financing of parks that operate under fortress conservation with violent impacts on the Indigenous communities of those lands.<sup>30</sup> Many of these nation states have extensive histories of colonialism and imperialism throughout the Global South where these protected areas are now based, for the extractive interests of Western tourism. Much like the early propaganda and colonial imaginary surrounding the creation of national parks in the colonization of the Americas, wildlife safari tours throughout Africa and Asia are marketed to Western tourists through the exotic gaze of ‘uninhabited wilderness’—removed from the violent realities of Indigenous land dispossession and brutal ethnic cleansing. Western powers are furthermore backing the 30x30 initiative, a “global effort to conserve 30% of nature by 2030” that “offers a promising vision for connecting protected areas across the globe in an extensive network of diverse habitats.<sup>31</sup>” In 2021, President Joe Biden made 30x30 the official policy of the United States under Executive Order under the National Climate Task Force briefing. While ‘The Conserving and Restoring America the Beautiful’ Report does highlight the need to support Tribal led conservation and restoration priorities, framing 30x30 as “necessary to reverse nature’s decline, fight climate change, and secure the natural life support systems” evades the much larger role that the United States plays in destroying the earth through its global military presence and imperialist over-consumption.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, the continued and increased provision of US aid to conservation projects throughout the Global South is additional fuel for the militarized models of fortress conservation.

---

<sup>28</sup> See Robert Williams, *Kicking Native People Off Their Land Is a Horrible Way to Save the Planet*, NEW YORK TIMES (Feb. 20, 2024),

<https://www.nytimes.com/2024/02/20/opinion/indigenous-peoples-biodiversity-climate.html>.

<sup>29</sup> *Id.*

<sup>30</sup> See Stephanie McCrummen, *This Will Finish Us*, THE ATLANTIC (Apr. 8, 2024),

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2024/05/maasai-tribe-tanzania-forced-land-evictions-serengeti/677835/>.

<sup>31</sup> See Conservation Corridor, *What is 30x30?*, <https://conservationcorridor.org/what-is-30x30>, (last visited April 15, 2024).

<sup>32</sup> See Alison Chase, *Biden’s Historic Action on 30x30*, Natural Resources Defense Council (Jan. 27, 2021), <https://www.nrdc.org/bio/alison-chase/bidens-historic-action-30x30>.

Multinational conservation NGOs such as the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and World Conservation Society (WCS) are partners in the conservation management of protected areas that are built and maintained via extensive Indigenous human rights abuses.<sup>33</sup> While many of us may recall the World Wildlife Fund's charming social media and television campaigns to 'Save the Tigers,' these NGOs are not collectives of environmental rights defenders but corporations that rely upon greenwashed marketing strategies, deeply entrenched with extractivist industries and hyper-consumerism that is destroying our planet. The WWF has partnered with logging companies in Cameroon and likewise the WCS has partnered logging companies in the Congo Basin.<sup>34</sup> Both WWF and WCS are managed by corporations with ties to multinational companies; the WWF current CEO previously held marketing positions for Procter and Gamble, and the former board executive was the CEO of Coca Cola.<sup>35</sup> The WCS is less transparent about its corporate connections, however, the current Chair of the Board is billionaire Alejandro Santo Domingo of the Santo Domingo conglomerate.<sup>36</sup> Ultimately, the corporatisation of environmental NGOs should raise serious alarms for all of us who care about an earth beyond the climate apocalypse. Corporations that promote themselves through the guise of conservation do not have the interests of environmental justice at heart, they are merely opportunities for capitalism to simply offshore its violence and ecological destruction into pockets of fortified land of which Indigenous peoples must be violently evicted from to create. Amidst growing levels of ecological collapse, fortress conservation furthermore enables wealthy individuals to satisfy their voyeuristic desire for 'wilderness' through tourism on stolen Indigenous lands, while Indigenous peoples continue to suffer the worst effects of pollution and climate change. And again, we cannot forget the roots of conservation organizations such as World Conservation Society in the ideological development of fascism and eugenics throughout the West. These are violently racist foundations that cannot be un-entangled from its ties to ongoing Indigenous human rights violations throughout the Global South today.

#### **Part IV: Decarbonize, Demilitarize, and Most Importantly–Decolonize**

Calling the governments of Global South states to account for their grave human rights abuses against Indigenous communities in the name of conservation is an urgent matter; environmental/Indigenous human rights advocates must place direct pressure on these governments to halt their militarized evictions from all effective and strategic levels. At the same time, corporatised environmental NGOs and Western imperial interests that are often financing these parks through aid development projects cannot be turned to as saviors let alone lawful proponents of human rights. Walter Rodney's powerful words in *HOW EUROPE UNDERDEVELOPED AFRICA* reminds us of the United States' fundamental contradiction as a nation state that promotes

---

<sup>33</sup> See Survival International, *New report exposes widespread abuse funded by big conservation organizations* (Sept. 25, 2017), <https://www.survivalinternational.org/news/11828>.

<sup>34</sup> See Survival International, *WWF wins Survival's "Greenwashing of the Year" award* (May 2, 2017), <https://www.survivalinternational.org/news/11677>.

<sup>35</sup> See World Wildlife Fund, *Board of Directors & National Council*, <https://www.worldwildlife.org/about/board-council> (last visited April 15, 2024).

<sup>36</sup> See WCS Newsroom, *Alejandro Santo Domingo Is New Board Chair of the Wildlife Conservation Society* (Nov. 13, 2018), <https://newsroom.wcs.org/News-Releases/articleType/ArticleView/articleId/11710/Alejandro-Santo-Domingo-Is-New-Board-Chair-of-the-Wildlife-Conservation-Society.aspx>.

itself as a bastion of democracy and development, when history illuminates as having one of the most deprived human rights records both internally and internationally. “*Actually, if “underdevelopment” were related to anything other than comparing economies, then the most underdeveloped country in the world would be the United States, which practices external oppression on a massive scale, while internally there is a blend of exploitation, brutality, and psychiatric disorder.*”<sup>37</sup> Similarly, there have been significant movements towards Indigenous led conservation initiatives throughout settler colonial states as part of necessary land back/rematriation processes for material decolonisation. In the United States, some National Parks are now run by Indigenous Nations (including Monument Valley National Park owned by the Navajo Nation) and in New Zealand, Māori communities have fought for the rematriation of stolen lands and waterways that have come under the management of the Department of Conservation.<sup>38</sup> In 2014 Te Urewera Forest was delisted as a national park to become the world’s first ecosystem with legal personhood, co-governed by eight representatives from Tūhoe Nation and three from the Department of Conservation.<sup>39</sup> These examples illuminate that alternative models of Indigenous-led conservation are indeed possible and proven to be some of the most effective forms of ecological restoration, due to the Indigenous scientific knowledges and relational practices that ultimately heal the land from the extractive harms of colonial capitalism. However, suggesting these as models for Global South states to simply follow suit does not address the fundamental contradiction of imperialism which has driven our global ecologies to crisis point - and from which militarized fortress conservation only scapegoats and violently targets Indigenous peoples as the issue. Environmental justice relies upon the wider struggles to decarbonize, demilitarize and ultimately to decolonize in the revolutionary, abolitionist meaning of that crucial word, not simply to grant states formal ‘independence’ while extractivist economies remain but to enable the liberation of Indigenous communities from the exploitation of colonial capitalism.

Knowing the interests of the United States and multinational conservation charities such as the WCS and WWF in promoting violent colonial models of fortress conservation can be difficult given the deliberate lack of transparency at a policy level. However, looking at the climate catastrophe that colonial capitalism has driven us towards, fortress conservation remains exemplary of green colonialism and eco-fascism in that it is designed to off-set the ecological crisis at the devastating expense/exploitation of Indigenous peoples, all for the preservation of enduring capitalist violence. But this is a major contradiction which will inevitably rupture. The only way out of the climate crisis is to see the end of imperialist extraction and restoration of land, ocean, and sky sovereignties that Indigenous peoples have been fighting for and continuing to honor through lived practice, against all attempts of erasure and exclusion from the arbitrary yet colonizing borders that are upheld through the violence of their maintenance. Where the concept of ‘untouched wilderness’ remains in the colonial (and eugenicist) imagination of white

---

<sup>37</sup> WALTER RODNEY, *HOW EUROPE UNDERDEVELOPED AFRICA* (Verso, 2018).

<sup>38</sup> Sierra Kennedy, *This Land Is Not Our Land, This Land is Their Land: Returning National Park Lands to Their Rightful Protectors*, 10, *AIJL*, 1, available at <https://digitalcommons.law.seattleu.edu/ailj/vol10/iss1/3>.

<sup>39</sup> Kennedy Warne, *Tāmāti Kruger: Down that way, glory waits*, *E-TANGATA* (Sept. 19, 2018), <https://e-tangata.co.nz/korero/tamati-kruger-down-that-way-glory-waits/>.

voyeurism, it is within the boundless, liberatory imaginations of Indigenous peoples to remember and recreate worlds where caring for our natural ecological kin is not confined to bordered regions, but woven into the relational fabric of the land beyond colonial cartographies.