

**THE POLITICAL ECOLOGY OF HUMAN-ELEPHANT RELATIONSHIPS IN
INDIA**

ENCOUNTERS, SPACES, POLITICS

Maan Barua

School of Geography and the Environment

&

Brasenose College

Thesis submitted to the University of Oxford

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Hilary Term 2013

ABSTRACT

This thesis presents an examination of the political ecology of human–elephant relationships in India. Its overall aim is to revitalize the ecology that has been sifted out from the discipline. The thesis draws upon, and consequently develops, more–than–human geography through a sustained engagement of nature–society relations in a non–Western context.

The thesis has three broad objectives. First, to examine what more–than–human geography’s emphasis on non–dualistic forms of agency, could contribute to understandings of policy, planning and politics in conservation. Second, to examine the spatial dimensions of human–elephant relations and the social orderings of space which influence these relationships. The third objective of the thesis is to interrogate the politics of elephant conservation through a sustained engagement with diverse modes of human–elephant encounters and the socio–political assemblages with which they are entangled.

The thesis first deploys and develops the concept of ‘encounter value’ to account for the different forms of human–elephant encounters and how they contribute to the political economies of biodiversity conservation. The thesis then draws from a multi–sited ethnography examining both encounters and spaces of elephant conservation. It shows how elephants help forge connections across difference and the ways their geographies are reconfigured by global networks of conservation. The third empirical section has an implicit spatial dimension. It is concerned with writing a ‘more–than–human’ geography of landscapes, examining how humans and elephants cohabit with and against the grain of political design. Finally, the thesis examines politics as an ecology of relations, showing how human–elephant relations as well as social and political outcomes may be mediated by materials.

Modes of enquiry between these papers overlap. They offer critical insights into three themes that interface between political ecology and more–than–human geography. First, the thesis contributes to conceptualizing modes of human–animal encounters in a symmetrical fashion. It explicates the role of nonhuman agency as an organizing force in political economies of conservation. Second, it posits new understandings of the spaces of animals. This is developed in two ways: landscapes as dwelt, political achievements and as fluid spaces emerging through international networks of environmental governance. Third, the thesis ecologizes politics and goes beyond the humanist frameworks of political ecology. It fosters novel conversations between more–than–human geography and the postcolonial critique of political ecology in the context of human–elephant relationships. Taken together, the thesis offers up a concerted, symmetrical and novel approach to the study people’s relations with animals.

Dedicated, with fond memories, to

Mark Roland Shand

(1951–2014)

Fellow traveler, elephant man, friend

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My DPhil research was funded by the University of Oxford Clarendon Fund, the Felix Scholarship and a grant from the Harold Hygham Wingate Foundation. I would like to thank the trustees and administrators of these scholarships for their support. I am grateful to Brasenose College for appointing me as Senior Hulme Scholar during the course of my DPhil (2009–2012).

I wish to thank Dr Paul Jepson, my DPhil supervisor. His support and advice have been integral to this work. I value the stimulating conversations, ideas and debates we have shared.

I am grateful to Prof Sarah Whatmore for her initial supervision and for helping me draw this work to a closure; her work always spoke through the middle.

My examiners Prof Gail Davies and Dr JSP Lorimer painstakingly read the entire work and offered invaluable suggestions. I wish to thank them for a very stimulating and enjoyable two-and-a-half hour examination at Hertford College. Dr Thomas Thornton and Prof Kathy Willis assessed my work at various stages. I thank Ruth Saxton (Geography) and John-Paul Roche (Administration) for their help. Giles Wiggs, Owen T Lewis and the Principal of Brasenose College have been generous with their time and support.

During the course of my fieldwork in Sonitpur, I am grateful to Alex Zimmerman, Nandita Hazarika, Bhaben Hazarika, Apurba Basumatary and Narayan Das of the Assam Haathi Project, and Dhruva Jyoti Das whose enthusiasm for elephants remains contagious. Scott Wilson at the Chester zoo kindly provided maps of the SP04 herd. I am grateful to those families I interviewed in Sonitpur who shared their stories and imagination. The elephant Tara and SP04 herd shaped much of my work. In Sundarpur, I am grateful to Dipak Gowala and his family who took me on as a family member. My friends Jemesh, Bapu, Costan and Jame, in whose crop-guarding shelters I spent many nights, provided valuable insights into village life. Jyoti Das and Niranjana Bhuyan of *Aaranyak* provided valuable contacts. In the UK, I am grateful to the Elephant Family. A big thanks to Mark Shand, Ruth Powys, Dan Bucknell and Mary Powys. Members of ‘Gerald’s Groupies’ shared their enthusiasm for the Elephant Parade; the Wildlife Trust of India and WWF-India extended help in Delhi and Assam.

I am very grateful to Sushrut Jadhav, Mallika Sekhar and Leela Jadhav for letting me be ‘part of the furniture’ in their Shepherds Bush home in London. The stimulating conversations with Sushrut often went on until early hours of the morning. In Assam, my friends Taz Ahmed, Sumon Gowala and Bablu Saikia for their camaraderie. I wish to thank Kamini Barua, Dipak Chakrabarty and the staff of Wild Grass. In Oxford, my friends from over the years have always

been there for me: Kate Fayers–Kerr, Manu Ferragina, John Zablocki, Daniel Gurdak, Adam Gilbertson, Peter Clark, Arnaud Brohe, Manav Bhushan; Joe Gerlach and Tom Jellis, fellow geographers, and Ian Ashpole (the ‘DPhil Warhorses’). My gratitude to Lydia Cole is difficult to pin down.

I have benefitted from conversations, advice and help from a number of people: Bhupendra Nath Talukdar, Aasim Khan, Bill Adams, David Goldberg, Dilip Simeon, Mahesh Rangarajan, Meredith Root–Bernstein, Nandu Kannuri, Rajib Handique, Ramachandra Guha, Raman Sukumar, Richard Ladle, Rob Whittaker, Roland Littlewood, Shonil Bhagwat, Steve Redpath, Tim Ingold, Troy Sternberg and Uli Beisel. Charlotte von Mangoldt kindly translated some German texts for me.

Last but not the least, to Ma and Manju Papa: they made it possible.

PREFACE

I initially trained as a zoologist and did extensive work on natural history prior to coming to Oxford. In 2008, I completed an MSc at the School of Geography and the Environment, and continued to do my DPhil at the school. A key debate that took place in India whilst I was growing up pertained to what has been called the ‘Tiger vs Tribal’ debate. Natural scientists in one camp, social scientists in another. The battle waged on, with vitriolic attacks and ripostes. I thought it was odd that one should edit out the concerns of the poor. Neither did I find the social science being put forth by ‘political ecologists’ then to be satisfactory. Animals, I strongly believed, were not texts or animated cultural constructs. I have perhaps written this thesis against this backdrop. Geography has a privileged vantage point to address some of these concerns. The thesis and its author have juggled multiple worlds in the endeavour: India/the UK, nature/society, human/animal, theory/practice. I do not know whether these are good times for interdisciplinary work, or not. Working through the *media res* is what remains of one’s craft.

CONTENTS

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Preface.....	vi
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	3
1.1. Why animals? Why now?.....	3
1.2. Asian Elephants	10
1.3. Research Aims	12
1.4. Conceptual Milieu	13
1.5. Thesis Structure	17
1.6. References	20
Chapter 2: METHODOLOGY	28
2.1. Tracking animals in more-than-human geography	28
2.2. Encounters, spaces, politics: research aims and methodology	31
2.3. Generating Materials I: Multi-sited ethnography	33
2.4. Generating Materials II: Make-do methodology	42
2.5. Generating Materials III: More-than-human ethnography.....	50
2.6. Analyzing Materials	59
2.7. Reflections, limitations, positionality	62
2.8. References	66
CHAPTER 3: Encounter value: charisma, conflict and Asian elephants.....	74
Abstract	74
3.1. Introduction.....	74
3.2. Interspecies encounter value: a brief outline.....	77
3.3. Encounters: charisma.....	80
3.4. Encounters: conflict	86
3.5. Encounter value in the political economy of conservation.....	90
3.6. Discussion.....	94
3.7. References	99
CHAPTER 4: Circulating elephants: unpacking the geographies of a cosmopolitan animal.....	104
Abstract	104
4.1. Introduction.....	105

4.2. Traveling—with elephants.....	108
4.3. Vibrant sculptures and conservation publics	115
4.4. Cosmopolitan returns: friction.....	122
4.5. Discussion.....	126
4.6. References.....	131
CHAPTER 5: Bio-geo-graphy: landscape, dwelling and the political ecology of human-elephant relationships.....	136
Abstract	136
5.1. Introduction.....	136
5.2. Bio-geo-graphy I: Political ecology from the archive.....	139
5.3. Bio-geo-graphy II: Tracking elephants	144
5.4. Bio-geo-graphy III: Storying the world.....	149
5.5. Discussion: landscape, dwelling and political ecology	153
5.6. References.....	159
CHAPTER 6: Volatile ecologies	164
Abstract	164
6.1. Introduction.....	164
6.2. Crop-guarding	168
6.3. Alcohol.....	172
6.4. Ethologies.....	178
6.5. Discussion.....	181
6.6. References.....	188
CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION: The Encounters, Spaces and Politics of Human-Elephant Relationships.....	194
7.1. Introduction.....	194
7.2. Theme I: Encounters	195
7.3. Theme II: Spaces.....	200
7.4. Theme III: Politics.....	204
7.5. Conclusion: moving forward.....	209
7.6. References.....	214

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Why animals? Why now?

People's relationships with animals and the ways in which we account for them in our understandings of the world has become a subject of renewed interest in human geography and the wider social sciences. Also termed 'the animal question' (Philo and Wilbert 2000; Wolch and Emel 1998), human geography's 'turn' to animals has come about with the discipline's displacement of the nature–society dualism and an embracement of relational ontologies. Within human geography, the popularity of studying animals has been marked by burgeoning literatures in two of its sub–disciplines that are implicitly concerned with society–environment relations. The first pertains to what has been termed 'more–than–human' geographies (Hinchliffe 2007; Whatmore 1999), and concomitant, but not necessarily sympathetic, 'animal geographies' (Philo and Wilbert 2000). The second sub–discipline is an even wider body of work that is often clumped under the label 'political ecology' (Hobson 2007; Robbins 2011). Tensions and differences between these disciplines aside, both share a common interest in questions about how human life is shaped in relation to animals and how their mutual environments are constituted. The mediation of human–animal relations by socio–political processes is another collective concern, poised to take off even further now that humans are seen as an earth–changing force that have staged a new era some term the Anthropocene (Crutzen 2002; Gibson–Graham and Roelvink 2010; Lorimer 2012).

Looking at animals, their environment and relations with human societies has been an enduring concern in human geography, paging back to at least the 1950s, if not before (Philo 1998). However, resurgence in the topic started in the late 1990s, which on hindsight constitute the 'first wave' of geographical studies implicitly concerned with animals. This wave focused on at least three interwoven themes. Firstly, it involved tracing the ways in which ideas and representations of animals mould personal and collective identities of both humans and animals (Anderson 1997; Elder et al. 1998). Scholarship illustrating how wolves were hunted by 'Euro–American males' in the US is one such example (Emel 1995). Secondly, it attended to the ways

in which animals shape, contest and leave traces on space and place (Philo and Wilbert 2000; Whatmore and Thorne 1998). Studies examining how urban spaces such as zoos are co-constituted by animals and the sentient relations they afford is illustrative of this early work (Wolch 2002). Thirdly, this wave sought to rethink animals in the moral landscape, i.e. the ethical and moral dispositions of humans toward animals (Wolch et al. 2003). Scholarship on how animals have been subjected to a range of social and political practices of inclusion and exclusion from human society are a case in point (Philo 1995, 1998). Indeed this work, which seeks to bring animals back into social theory, a domain from which their legacy was seemingly absent (Whatmore 2002), has been an important project. It held promise for the practice of human and cultural geography as it was concerned with a study of the living rather than abstract spaces of social life, it opened the discipline to notions of hybridity rather than the dual separation of nature and society, and promoted a more inclusive mode of ethics and politics sensitive to nonhumans (Whatmore 2002; Wolch et al. 2003).

Developing these insights further, a second wave of studies following Whatmore's (2002) landmark *Hybrid Geographies*, have begun to examine the bodies, ecologies and lived experience of animals themselves, rather than simply 'adding nature in' to the social sciences. These studies, that have come to be termed 'more-than-human' geography, differ from the previous approach in several ways. Firstly, it acknowledges the 'liveliness of life' that got framed, fixed and rendered inert in earlier geographic approaches slanting toward discursive interpretation and representation (Braun 2008; Lorimer 2005). Secondly, it seeks to critically rethink the ontologies of humanism that have had primacy in deciding which forms and processes have agency to constitute social and political outcomes. Instead, the focus is on heterogeneous organisms, forces and materials with which agency, and therefore outcomes, are co-produced (Hinchliffe 2007; Hinchliffe et al. 2005; Whatmore 2006). Thirdly, more-than-human geography turns away from cognition to issues of embodiment, performance, skill and affect. These are understood as relational forces and competencies that cut across amateur-expert and human-animal divides (Bear and Eden 2011; Despret 2004; Latour 2004a; Lorimer 2008), a concern shared with nonrepresentational geographies (Thrift 2007). Contrary to Cartesian ideas of animals being automatons, or Heidegger's notion of the animal being 'poor in world', this literature draws from ethology and

the biological sciences to foreground animal intelligence and sentience in its accounts of nonhuman lifeworlds. Finally, more-than-human geography illuminates humans' material connections to the earth. There has been a new interest in the socio-political role of matter and things (Braun and Whatmore 2010), entities often viewed as 'lacking world' (Heidegger 2001a), dead and incapable of prompting any form of action.

Yet, there is a telling lacuna in this work. First, as Braun (2008) perceptively observes, too much research out there sets out to simply *demonstrate* emergence. Claims that objects are 'ontologically unstable' or that agency is dispersed across human-nonhuman bodies are repeated time again. Adding yet another claim does little in terms of enhancing the field of more-than-human geography. To move things forward we need to examine how nonhuman agency contributes to the ways in which social organization occurs. There is a need for understanding what an emphasis on the inventiveness of life offers, and is relevant, to the world of planning, policy and politics (Braun 2008). One would argue that a more productive engagement for studies on human-animal relations is to ask what difference does a consideration of nonhuman agency make to the ways in which political economic practices unfold (Bakker 2010; Lorimer and Srinivasan 2013). Of specific interest here, and in the context of this thesis, are practices of biodiversity and wildlife conservation, which have had a long history of mediating society's relationships with animals and their environment (Adams 2004; Jepson and Whittaker 2002). Examining nonhuman agency in the context of the political economies of conservation, i.e. its social, economic and political dimensions, offers considerable promise for taking more-than-human geography forward. Second, scholarship in more-than-human geography in postcolonial and non-Western contexts has been limited in comparison to the scale of work conducted in the global North (but see Lorimer 2010; Lorimer and Whatmore 2009; McGregor 2005; Rose 2012; Srinivasan 2012; Whatmore and Thorne 1998). In postcolonial contexts such as Asia or Africa, people's understandings of animals are often through non-Western ontologies that do not always fit easily with those of more-than-human geography or posthumanism (Gandhi 2012). Further, the politics of conservation, proceeding through colonial pasts, are often volatile with people and animals being pitted against one another (Guha 1997). There is a need to mobilize understandings of the agency, liveliness and concerns of animals as they relate to the lives of

postcolonial subalterns. Bringing insights from more-than-human geography into conversation with ‘third world political ecology’ (Bryant and Bailey 1997; Guha and Alier 1997), would be an arena for enhancing scholarship in human geography. Looking at animals can indeed be a timely intervention.

Accounting for how social organization occurs and engaging with postcolonial contexts come together more strongly in political ecology. The diverse and transdisciplinary field of political ecology, with its varying currents of thought and large corpus of empirical and theoretical literature, are difficult to order into a concise taxonomy.¹ Two currents of thought from this milieu are of particular relevance for engaging with the politics of human-animal relationships. First, political ecology has drawn from political economy to analyze underlying drivers of environmental degradation and conflict (Blaikie 1985; Robbins 2011; Wolf 1972), a theoretical approach that overlaps with those of Marxist environmental geography (Castree 2002). In this political economy of nature, animals (nature) are shown to be subsumed by capital, which not only circulates through animal bodies but also (re)produces them (Smith 2007). This critique of how capital subsumes nature has been pertinent in the context of biodiversity conservation. By being turned into fetishes, animals serve to further a ‘conservationist mode of production’ (Brockington and Scholfield 2010). Charismatic creatures such as pandas, tigers and elephants are deployed to mobilize a particular set of policy and planning imperatives, which in turn reproduces the power of conservation institutions. As commodities, animals may also produce spectacular natures for Western consumption, giving rise to a range of consumerist practices including

¹ In short-hand, one could summarize the diverse strands of enquiry in political ecology into the following: (1) a primary emphasis on environmental politics of social and institutional practices often relying on textual discourse analysis [Peet R and Watts M eds 1996 *Liberation ecologies: Environment, development, social movements*. Routledge, London]; (2) a primary emphasis on the political economy of nature and commodification in particular [Robbins P 2011 *Political ecology: A critical introduction*. Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford]; (3) a primary emphasis on ‘politicized’ biogeophysical changes and evidence stemming from environmental sciences and physical geography [Zimmerer K S and Bassett T J eds 2003 *Political ecology: an integrative approach to geography and environment-development studies*. The Guilford Press, New York]; (4) feminist political ecology with an emphasis on gender analysis [Ogra M V 2008 *Human-wildlife conflict and gender in protected area borderlands: A case study of costs, perceptions, and vulnerabilities from Uttarakhand (Uttaranchal), India*. *Geoforum* 39: 1408–22]; and (5) geographical political ecology that seeks to address nature-society relationships at various scales of interaction [Zimmerer K S and Bassett T J eds 2003 *Political ecology: an integrative approach to geography and environment-development studies*. The Guilford Press, New York]

ecotourism and wildlife hunting (Duffy and Moore 2010).² In other words, positing animals as commodities that serve regimes of capital have been central to this strand of political ecology.

Second, political ecology has examined the place of animals in (post)colonial landscapes. Inspired by the efforts of postcolonial historians, such as subaltern studies (Chakrabarty 2002; Guha 1982), it has sought to write environmental histories against the grain of colonial narratives of nature (Fairhead and Leach 1996; Gadgil 2005; Guha and Alier 1997). Their achievement mainly lies in a poignant critique of Western constructions of nature, and of who benefits when wildlife is preserved through such an apparatus. This current has a strong spatial dimension. Scholars have looked at how the conservation of wildlife in South Asia and ‘big game’ in Africa has been used to legitimate control over and claims to large tracts of land (Adams and Mulligan 2003; Brockington 2002; Guha 1997). The concomitant geographies produced as a result of such social orderings of space dictate how humans and animals inhabit landscapes (Zimmerer 2003). This is an inherently political project, proceeding through what Robbins’ describes as a dialectical metaphor of a ‘hatchet and seed’ (Robbins 2011). In contexts such as South Asia, the reverberations of their critique have been felt in conservation practice (Guha 1997; Karanth 2005; Shahabuddin and Rangarajan 2007). One other strand of political ecology’s engagement with animals valid against this political backdrop is those that examine how contestations over animal meanings, representations, and preservation are part of broader political struggles (McAfee 1999; Woods 1998). In postcolonial contexts, scholars have been attentive to the ways in which colonial or Western representations of animals serve a power function, erasing local modes of knowledge and representations of these creatures (Jalais 2008, 2010). These approaches, with their emphasis on the discursive productions of animals, share similarities with the early wave of animal geographies.

² It is important to mention that within conservation a trend of thought examining ‘cultural’ and ‘ecosystem services’ that nature provides is gaining considerable traction [especially since the publication of: Costanza R, d’Arge R, de Groot R, Farber S, Grasso M, Hannon B, Limburg K, Naeem S, O’Neill R V, Paruelo J, Raskin R G, Sutton P and van den Belt M 1997 The value of the world’s ecosystem services and natural capital. *Nature* 387: 253–60]. These are mainly contingent forms of valuation rooted in neo–classical economics and a lively debate with Marxist political economy is ongoing [Brockington D 2011 Ecosystem services and fictitious commodities. *Environmental Conservation* 38: 367–9]. This trend, whilst important for understanding political economies of nature, is not central to this thesis’ focus on human–animal relationships.

However, political ecology is not without its share of criticisms. Some of these arise when the discipline is pitted against the more-than-human geographies project. First, the overt emphasis on politics has led some to ask where is the ecology in political ecology (Walker 2005)? Critics of political ecology argue that the discipline's conceptualization of animals is not just that of beings subsumed by capital but by their very structuralist analysis. Animals appear as no more than cultural constructs, whereby their lifeworlds are rendered inert (Hobson 2007). This is seemingly at odds with a discipline that deploys the label 'ecology', as the latter inherently means the study of living organisms in its dwelt environment (Ingold 2005).³ To move the study of animals in political ecology forward, we need to move away from its humanist framework. The experiences and lifeworlds of animals matter when they intersect with humans and are entangled in fields of power. Furthermore, an ecological engagement with politics, i.e. accounting for nonhuman ecology and agency in the constitution of political outcomes, also leads to a different awareness of the question 'where lies politics in the discipline?' (Walker 2007). The locus of political activity is potentially deflected to a wider assemblage, rather than resting within a human subject. This opening up of ecology to politics, and politics to ecology is, to use Latour's Leninesque quip, 'what is to be done' (Latour 2004b).

The second concern with political ecology that this thesis seeks to take up relates to landscape. Whilst political ecology unpacks how social orderings of space has deep political impacts on human lives, landscape tends to be treated as a *tabula rasa*. It becomes a surface that is inscribed upon through institutional arrangements, which in turn is meant to dictate where people should live and where animals are to be emplaced (Hinchliffe 2003; Ingold 2000). This notion of inscription is rather limiting, as we are unable to account for how space might be apprehended by animals and the ways in which they inhabit landscapes with and against the grain of human inscription. To move into new ground, we need symmetrical readings of the

³ Ernst Haeckel, who coined the term 'ecology', used it in conjunction with 'chorology' [χώρα, n. dwelling place, distributional area], meaning the study of the dwelling [*der Wohnort*] and distribution of organisms [Haeckel E 1866 *Generelle Morphologie de Organismen. Allgemeine Grundzüge der organischen Formen-Wissenschaft, mechanisch begründet durch die von Charles Darwin reformirte Descendenz-Theorie*. Verlag Von Georg Rimer, Berlin, Stauffer R C 1957 Haeckel, Darwin, and Ecology. *The Quarterly Review of Biology* 32: 138-44.] Whilst chorology pre-empted biogeography, or the science of spatial distributions of organisms, its roots and initial emphasis on dwelling is noteworthy.

landscapes of political ecology. This implies examining how animals dwell in landscapes, how they interact with cohabiting communities and institutions, and how their activities contribute to the co-constitution of landscapes. Such an endeavour is to look at the rich conjunction between the *bio* (life) and the *geo* (earth), divisions between which have not been deeply entrenched in geography (Whatmore 2006). There is scope here for new conversations between bio- and human geographers (Jepson et al. 2010; Lorimer 2010; Spencer and Whatmore 2001). Intra-disciplinary bio-geographies are likely to provide new insights into the political dynamics of the distribution of life (Lorimer and Srinivasan 2013).

Examining the animal question, i.e. humans' relationships with animals and ways of accounting for them in the social sciences, through the perspectives of political ecology and human geography offers productive opportunities for moving both fields forward. Political ecology provides lenses for understanding how social organization occurs. In turn, more-than-human geography enables ecologizing the humanistic frameworks of political ecology. Both disciplines have much to offer for apprehending the politics, dynamics and complexities of life in the Anthropocene (Gibson-Graham and Roelvink 2010; Lorimer 2012). Drawing upon literatures and methods from these two approaches, this thesis examines the geographies of Asian elephant conservation. It has a trio of overarching objectives, set against the concerns raised above and linked together through three interrelated themes.

The first objective relates to further developing the corpus of work on the animal question to explore how notions of nonhuman agency and effects inform conservation planning, policy and politics. The thesis attempts to address this through a sustained enquiry into modes of human-elephant relationships and elephant conservation in India. It critically focuses on interspecies encounters and how they establish order or unsettle conservation practices. Second, the thesis seeks to develop new understandings of how humans and elephants inhabit landscapes, with and against the grain of socio-political design. This strand of enquiry examines the lively and dynamic bio-geographies that humans and elephants co-produce in postcolonial contexts. The thesis' third and final objective is to unpack the politics of elephant conservation. It investigates how new understandings of politics might be generated when the ecology of elephants, their relations with humans and other nonhuman beings, are given careful

consideration. Through empirical research and grounded arguments, the thesis makes contributions to developing a revitalized and symmetrical political ecology of human–elephant relationships.

1.2. Asian Elephants

Asian elephants (*Elephas maximus*) provide a compelling opportunity for investigating these concerns. It is an endangered species with less than ten populations surviving in the wild (Choudhury et al. 2008). This threatened status makes the creature a species of high conservation concern, generating considerable research interest and global funding. Twenty percent of the world’s human population exists alongside the elephant’s current range, exerting considerable pressure on areas set aside for elephant conservation. The creature’s large habitat requirements, much of which is fragmented due to deforestation (Leimgruber et al. 2003), results in considerable overlap between elephant home–ranges and human settlement. For instance, in India, only 27% of the areas declared ‘Elephant Reserves’ is legally protected under the country’s Protected Area network, and almost 30% of these reserves are outside the purview and control of the Forest Department (Rangarajan et al. 2010). Elephants frequently foray out of protected areas and enter human settlement (Gubbi 2012), unsettling the cartographic arrangements that seek to exclude them from human domains. Hence, elephants provide avenues for thinking about the spatial politics of conservation. In addition, their intelligence and unpredictable activity makes it difficult to manage populations according to a tier–based landscape approach. Neither are these creatures entirely reducible to governance and control. Accounting for the lifeworlds and recalcitrance of elephants cannot be more compelling, especially in light of understanding the ways in which we might cohabit with these creatures.

Further, elephants are cultural icons in India and the West. They are creatures so long drawn into networks of trade and religion, ceremony and entertainment, that ‘traces of their presence litter the histories and geographies of civilizations’ (Whatmore and Thorne 2000; P.187). In India, the history of conserving Asian elephants stems from pre–colonial times, when the creature was commoditized and became an important medium of exchange in relations of diplomacy and state control. In the colonial period that followed, the East India Company sought

to take control over the extant trade of elephants in India, resulting in the birth of hybrid scientific practices that appropriated local sciences of classifying and managing elephants into ‘Western’ modes of understanding (Sivasundaram 2005). Colonial ownership of the elephant led to it becoming the first ‘protected’ species in the country, and a consequent framing of the creature as a ‘government animal’ ensued (Nongbri 2003). Vestiges of these colonial policies continue to play out in elephant conservation today, thereby making investigations into human–elephant relationships a political project, one that needs to take seriously the fraught histories of colonialism with which the animal is intertwined. Furthermore, there is a complex mythology surrounding the elephant in India that is of considerable interest to geographers studying nature–society relations. This mythology rests uneasily between reverence in the form of Lord *Ganeśa*, one of the most popular gods in the Hindu pantheon (Brown 1991), to vilification as *Gajasura*, a demon in elephantine form (Banerjea 1956). These cosmologies introduce specificity to analysis and provide important avenues for examining cultural dimensions of human–animal relations.

Finally, in practices of conservation the charisma of elephants is successfully mobilized in the form of flagship species to elicit the support of a range of publics, donors, patrons and institutions (Barua et al. 2010). Tracing human–elephant encounters through the different networks elephants inhabit offers up opportunities for in–depth analyses of interspecies encounters, and the values and actions they generate. However, through their enrollment into international assemblages, the elephant also becomes a powerful tool of persuasion for governing landscapes from afar. It leads to a partitioning of resources between people and wildlife, thereby deepening inequality (Duffy and Moore 2010). Tensions arise between local communities and those mobilizing elephants to further conservation agendas, the most prominent manifestation of which is human–elephant conflict. In India alone, elephants kill c.400 people every year, damage 10,000–15,000 houses and destroy crops worth up to US\$ 3 million annually (Bist 2006; Rangarajan et al. 2010). It leads to retributive action toward elephants, but also toward the institutions seeking to conserve the species. Such conflict opens up a range of epistemological concerns that have been at the heart of geographical scholarship on the animal question. Whose knowledge and what kinds of knowledge matter in redressing the situation? Must the ecological sciences continue to have a privileged standpoint in addressing the issue, or should competencies

that cut across amateur–expert and human–animal divides be brought to the fore? In summary, a close inquisition into the geographies of elephant conservation, particularly the plural modes of encounters, spaces and politics, has much scope in terms of extending the project of animal geography and developing less humanist political ecologies.

1.3. Research Aims

This research has three aims.

The **first** aim of this research is to unpack the diverse modes of human–elephant encounters, and examine their role in constituting practices and politics of conservation. More specifically, **what organizing role do agencies emanating from human–elephant encounters have? What material political ecologies do these encounters and their mobilization foreground?** As Haraway (2007) has noted, a lot is at stake when species meet, not just how to inherit histories but also how to get on together. Accountability, being affected, entering into responsibility are all potential outcomes of interspecies encounters. They have important ramifications in shaping the values that underpin conservation practice. The main contribution to wider literatures this aim seeks to make is to bring more–than–human geography, with its emphasis on liveliness, and political ecology, with its slant toward structural organization, into conversation (Lorimer and Srinivasan 2013). Methodologically, this research seeks to examine the lifeworlds of elephants in a fashion that accounts for elephants’ difference and does not render inert all that is vital about them.

The **second** aim is concerned with critically examining spatial aspects of human–elephant relationships in order to articulate their dynamic bio–geographies. Landscapes cohabited by both humans and elephants are ordered by conservation goals and spatial planning. Space is partitioned between people and elephants. Regimes of conservation seek to govern how the two should inhabit. Yet, these spatial arrangements are challenged by the unruly movements of elephants, the actions and needs of people on the ground. **How do social orderings of space and concomitant configurations of the elephant influence human–elephant relationships? In what ways do humans and elephants cohabit with and against the grain of conservation cartographies? How might a re–animation of human–elephant landscapes contribute to the project of revitalizing political**

ecology? The wider contributions this strand of enquiry seeks to make is toward developing intra-disciplinary bio-geographies (Jepson et al. 2010; Lorimer 2010; Lorimer and Srinivasan 2013; Spencer and Whatmore 2001), where the complex dynamics of the politics and distribution of life can be articulated in a sensitive and sophisticated manner. Through its ethnographic and South Asia focus, special attention is given to the voices and concerns of the postcolonial subaltern, such that conversations between more-than-human geography and subaltern political ecology may be opened up (Guha and Alier 1997).

The above strands come together through the **third** aim of this research, i.e. to examine the politics of elephant conservation. **How do elephants participate as actors in the politics of conservation, especially in situations of human-wildlife conflict? What bearings do their material ecologies have in influencing political outcomes?** These questions enable us to ecologize politics, i.e. opening political enquiry to the retinue of nonhuman bodies and entities in concert with which humans act. This endeavour is critical if we are to bring back the ecology that seems to have gone missing from the discipline of political ecology (Walker 2005). Further, it prompts careful consideration of what it means to use the terms ‘political’ and ‘ecology’ together (Hinchliffe 2008; Latour 2004b), for the two are knotted into a relation where neither trumps or gains ground over the other. The contribution to wider literatures this aim seeks to make is to develop a symmetrical political ecology that enhances understandings of the politics of conservation.

1.4. Conceptual Milieu

Examining the lifeworlds and spaces of animals requires both theoretical and methodological innovation, which may not sit easily with the orthodox approaches of the interpretative social sciences. Since this thesis is written in the form of four papers, each of which contains its own literature review, a single designated review of literature is not presented. Instead, this section will outline some of the main theoretical resources informing this thesis. These largely pertain to the animal and more-than-human geography literatures, and variants of political ecology that play on a third world or subaltern theme. The currents and debates pertinent to this thesis have already been outlined in the introduction. Here, I will briefly

summarize what these approaches encompass and what they offer in terms of addressing the questions posed in this thesis.

At least three interwoven themes permeate more-than-human geography. First, working against the ‘cultural turn’ in geography that renders nonhuman nature as a passive realm and receptacle for human strivings, this body of work seeks to account for nonhuman difference and pay close attention to their agency, capacities and effects in influencing ‘social’ outcomes (Hinchliffe 2007; Whatmore 2002). It challenges ontologies of humanism and seeks to grasp the fabric of social life without recourse to the old settlements of Science, Nature, Politics, Ethics and Religion (Latour 1993, 2004b; Whatmore 1999). Actors influencing outcomes are distributed across an ontologically heterogeneous field populated by diverse organisms, things, materials and forces (McFarlane and Anderson 2011). These concerns are shared with posthumanism, which unsettles the sovereignty of the human subject being the sole source of agency in the world (Bennett 2010; Connolly 2011; Wolfe 2010). Human geographers have engaged with posthumanism in a variety of registers, but certain tensions in terms of how animal worlds are understood remain (see Castree et al. 2004). More-than-human geography has ambivalence about the ontology of the animal, where it is at times different and at other times similar to humans (Whatmore 2002). Posthumanism on the other hand posits an ontology where the nonhuman is radically other (Bennett 2010). Debates aside, a careful acknowledgement of nonhuman agency clears the ground for a symmetrical analysis of human–elephant relationships. We can deploy this perspective to examine how humans are always in composition with nonhumanity, never outside of a ‘sticky web of connections or an ecology of matter’ (Whatmore 2006; P.603).

Second, the ontological shifts prompted by more-than-human perspectives have epistemological consequences. Close engagement with human and nonhuman others inflict a critical rethinking of which forms of intelligence, truth and expertise count. Skills and knowledge are no longer the sole capacity of humans or the privilege of elites and epistemic communities. Rather, as more-than-human geographers have argued, this may cut across lay–scientist divides (Braun and Whatmore 2010; Latour 2004a; Whatmore 2009). This manoeuvre shares certain tendencies with third world political ecology, and in fact across much of the critical social

sciences. The latter seek to dismantle the gulf between (colonial) science and the indigenous knowledges it has historically marginalized (Agrawal 1995; Bryant 1998; Peluso 1995). But more radically, the challenging of the ontologies of humanism makes knowledge and skill achievements that permeate across human–nonhuman divides (Bear and Eden 2011; Lorimer 2008). Practices of science and natural history are processes through which humans ‘learn to be affected’ by particular nonhuman organisms (Latour 2004a; Lorimer 2008; Smith 2009). This tuning–in is what Vinciane Despret has termed ‘isopraxis’, an embodied relation between organisms, sometimes across species, where the primacy and influence of one body over the other is blurred (Despret 2004). These manoeuvres enable us to rethink the cartographies of elephant conservation, and helps interrogate whose actions matter in conservation design. It provides scope for thinking through how we might incorporate the voices of marginalized humans and the actions of nonhuman actants into policy and planning.

Finally, there is a distinct politics and ethics to more–than–human geography. It opens up notions of what constitutes politics to the capacities, effects and recalcitrance of things and material entities (Braun and Whatmore 2010). This in turn prompts a mode of relational ethics and cosmopolitics (Haraway 2007; Stengers 2005a). Politics is crafted ‘in the presence of’ diverse others (Stengers 2005a), i.e. the things, technologies and organisms we study or engage with, and without whom achieving pathways and goals would not be possible (Stengers 2005b). As a consequence, questions of responsibility are not just directed to fellow humans, but the vast entourage of sentient beings with whom we become human (Haraway 2007). This trend puts firmly on the agenda the constitutive force of nonhumans in social and political life, and opens up new possibilities through which we might understand and practice political ecologies of human–elephant relationships.

An associated theme of enquiry, overlapping with concerns of more–than–human geography, is the environmental anthropology of Tim Ingold. Working against Cartesian dualisms of nature and society, Ingold seeks to blur distinctions between human and nonhuman modes of production and history (Ingold 2000, 2011). Drawing upon the bio–semiotics of Jacob von Uexküll (von Uexküll 1957, 2010) and the ecological psychology of James J Gibson (Gibson 1986), Ingold contends that animals are not dead cultural constructs or mere receptacles for

human thought. Rather, they are behavers and perceivers of the environment. As much as animals are a part of humans' environments, we are a part of theirs, although animals' perceptions of humans or their own surroundings may be in very different spatial registers and temporal scales. Expanding upon von Uexküll's concept of the *umwelt* (environment) of a nonhuman organism, Ingold argues that it might be further appropriate to think of animals' relationship with their environment as *lebenswelt* (lifeworld), where the subjectivity of animals are foregrounded. Ingold expands upon this logic to argue that animals *inhabit* landscapes, rather than occupy spaces laid out for them through human inscription (Ingold 2000). An awareness of the landscape emerges not by taking ourselves out of it, but through interactions with the activities of a motley range of beings that contribute to the landscape's continual regeneration. Dubbed the 'dwelling perspective' (Ingold 2000, 2011), a term Ingold takes from Heidegger's famous essay *Building, Dwelling, Thinking* (Heidegger 2001b), this work has been influential in human geography's concerns with the landscape of animals (Johnston 2008; Lorimer 2006). In the context of this thesis, it provides conceptual resources for understanding how humans and elephants cohabit, and for interrogating the cartographies of Modernity that fissure such landscapes into binaries of 'them' and 'us', 'here' and 'there' (Braun 2005; Peluso 1995; Whatmore and Thorne 1998), in a more symmetrical fashion.

A final body of work that informs this thesis pertains to South Asian environmental history and the political ecologies it has heralded. This scholarship draws inspiration from subaltern studies of history. The latter has been an influential movement in postcolonial scholarship, involving attempts to write history 'from below' (Chakrabarty 2002), i.e. from the perspective of the colonized rather than the colonizer. Led by the Gramsci-inspired writings of Ranajit Guha on peasant uprisings and revolt (Guha 1982), this scholarship seeks to read archives against the grain of major, nationalist histories. Some tendencies within this movement have sought to avoid grand narratives, settling for 'small histories' or personalized accounts of the subaltern citizen (Chakrabarty 2002). In a similar vein, environmental historians of South Asia have examined how the histories of conservation have unfolded through coercion and control, highlighting the protests and resistance put up by the peasantry against the fencing of forests and designation of space for wildlife (Arnold and Guha 1995; Guha 1990). The subaltern political ecologies it has

heralded seeks to retrieve ‘environmentalisms of the poor’ (Guha and Alier 1997; Martinez–Alier 2002), perspectives on conservation that might be more attuned to salving the histories that the marginalized have had to bear. The influence of this work has been widely felt (see Bryant 1998). This critical approach provides impetus for engaging with the troubled pasts and politicized presents of the geographies of elephant conservation. When combined with resources from more–than–human geography, and set into motion through ethnographic research, this literature enables new engagements with the encounters, spaces and politics of human–elephant relationships.

1.5. Thesis Structure

This thesis comprises of a collection of four papers, all under review in different journals. Due to the format of the thesis as a whole, bibliographies are included at the end of each chapter. These are single–authored works. Each paper adheres to the associated word limit and formatting requirements of the target journal. Since each article has its own literature review, the thesis does not contain a single, designated literature review. Instead, themes and theoretical contributions within the thesis as a whole have been outlined in the introduction.

Chapter 2 provides the methodology for the thesis, which reflects an overview of methodologies in animal/more–than–human geography, followed by in–depth accounts and discussions of three distinct bodies of research undertaken.

Chapter 3 comprises of the first paper of this thesis and is primarily related to human–elephant encounters. This paper, entitled ‘Encounter value: charisma, conflict and Asian elephants’ is a contribution towards working with the tensions between political ecology and more–than–human approaches. Drawing upon and developing Haraway’s concept of ‘encounter value’, the paper seeks to take up geographers’ calls for incorporating ecology and non–dualist accounts of agency into studies of political ecology. It examines encounter value in the context of human–elephant relationships in India. This investigation is driven by two objectives. First, to explore the different trajectories encounter value takes. Second, to examine how encounter value emerging from relationships with elephants, is mobilized in practices of biodiversity conservation. The paper identifies two trajectories of encounter value: charisma and conflict.

Nonhuman charisma has significant organizing power, and is analyzed symmetrically in this paper. Conflicts have disruptive effects and affect both conservation practice and rural political economies. Conservation organizations mobilizing encounter value amplify charisma through a range of technological practices, whilst conflict is subdued. The paper concludes by discussing some of the broader implications of the concept of encounter value and how it might enable us to incorporate nonhuman agency into studies of political ecology.

Following on from a specific focus on encounters, **Chapter 4** presents the second paper ‘Circulating elephants: unpacking the geographies of a cosmopolitan animal’. This paper seeks to examine human–elephant encounters across different cultural contexts. The rise of mobility, circulation and networks has been paralleled by academic scholarship on cosmopolitan others: diasporas, travelers, and itinerant social groups. The role of nonhumans as participants and subjects of cosmopolitanism has received scant attention. This paper seeks to address this gap by developing a ‘more–than–human’ cosmopolitanism that accounts for the presence of nonhuman animals and entities in stories of circulation and contact. Through a multi–sited ethnography of elephant conservation in India and the UK, this paper illustrates how animals participate in forging connections across difference. It shows how, through modes of circulation, elephants themselves may become cosmopolitan, present world over and participants that serve banal globalisms. The paper then illustrates how cosmopolitan elephants may be coercive, giving rise to political frictions when mobilized by powerful environmental actors. It concludes by discussing the methodological and conceptual implications of a more–than–human cosmopolitanism.

Considering the importance of landscape and the thesis’ focus on the spatial politics of elephant conservation, **Chapter 5** presents the third paper ‘Bio–geo–graphy: landscape, dwelling and the political ecology of human–elephant relationships’. This paper is a contribution toward ongoing attempts in human geography to articulate the politics of the dynamics and distribution of life. Drawing upon postcolonial histories of the environment, animal ecology and more–than–human geography, the paper examines how humans and elephants cohabit with and against the grain of political and cartographic design. Through fieldwork in northeast India, it develops a ‘dwelt political ecology’ of human–elephant relations that reanimates landscapes and is sensitive to postcolonial subaltern concerns. The paper develops and deploys a methodology of ‘tracking’

through which archival history, elephant ecology and voices of the marginalized may be followed and linked. It concludes by discussing the implications of this work for bringing more-than-human geography and subaltern political ecology into conversation.

The final paper ‘Volatile ecologies’ foregrounds the role of matter in human–elephant relationships. This constitutes **Chapter 6** of this thesis. Political ecology has had a long connection with matter, paging back to some of its canons. Yet it is rendered inert with no capacity to mobilize situations or political action. The role of matter in wider ecologies of human cohabitation has been glossed over. This paper examines the role of matter in mediating people’s relationships and conflict with elephants in rural northeast India. Drawing upon ethnographic research and ethological studies of elephants, the paper shows that human–elephant conflict is not a simple interaction between elephants and people. Matter, in this case alcohol, plays a vital role. It binds people and elephants in unforeseen ways. This wider ecology of relations generates political outcomes, with deep impacts on the livelihoods and wellbeing of the rural poor. By ecologizing politics, the paper shows how social and political life is enacted through the actions of humans, animals and matter in concert. It concludes by offering a symmetrical political ecology where both politics and ecology equally matter.

Lastly, **Chapter 7** attempts to draw together the research questions and themes set out in the introduction and individual papers. It organizes these into three themes, viz. the encounters, spaces and politics of human–elephant relationships. It reflects on the findings and broader implications of the research.

1.6. References

- Adams W M 2004 *Against extinction: the story of conservation*. Earthscan, London
- Adams W M and Mulligan M 2003 *Decolonizing nature: strategies for conservation in a post-colonial era*. Earthscan/James & James, London
- Agrawal A 1995 Dismantling the divide between indigenous and scientific knowledge. *Development and Change* 26: 413–39
- Anderson K 1997 A walk on the wild side: A critical geography of domestication. *Progress in Human Geography* 21: 463–85
- Arnold D and Guha R 1995 *Nature, Culture, Imperialism: Essays on the Environmental History of South Asia*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
- Bakker K 2010 The limits of "neoliberal natures": Debating green neoliberalism. *Progress in Human Geography* 34: 715–35
- Banerjea J N 1956 *The Development of Hindu Iconography*. Calcutta University Press, Kolkata
- Barua M, Tamuly J and Ahmed R A 2010 Mutiny or Clear Sailing? Examining the Role of the Asian Elephant as a Flagship Species. *Human Dimensions of Wildlife* 15: 145–60
- Bear C and Eden S 2011 Thinking like a fish? Engaging with nonhuman difference through recreational angling. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 29: 336–52
- Bennett J 2010 *Vibrant Matter: a political ecology of things*. Duke University Press, Durham
- Bist S S 2006 Elephant conservation in India – an overview. *Gajah* 25: 27–35
- Blaikie P 1985 *The Political Economy of Soil Erosion in Developing Countries*. Longman Scientific and Technical, New York
- Braun B 2005 Environmental issues: writing a more-than-human urban geography. *Progress in Human Geography* 29: 635–50.
- Braun B 2008 Environmental issues: inventive life. *Progress in Human Geography* 32: 667–79
- Braun B and Whatmore S eds 2010 *Political matter: technoscience, democracy, and public life*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN
- Brockington D 2002 *Fortress Conservation: The Preservation of the Mkomazi Game Reserve, Tanzania*. Currey, Oxford

- Brockington D 2011 Ecosystem services and fictitious commodities. *Environmental Conservation* 38: 367–9
- Brockington D and Scholfield K 2010 The Conservationist Mode of Production and Conservation NGOs in sub-Saharan Africa. *Antipode* 42: 551–75
- Brown R L ed 1991 *Ganesha: Studies of an Asian God*. State University of New York Press., New York
- Bryant R and Bailey S 1997 *Third world political ecology*. Routledge, London
- Bryant R L 1998 Power, knowledge and political ecology in the third world: a review. *Progress in Physical Geography* 22: 79–94
- Castree N 2002 False Antitheses? Marxism, Nature and Actor–Networks. *Antipode* 34: 111–46
- Castree N, Nash C, Badmington N, Braun B, Murdoch J and Whatmore S 2004 Mapping posthumanism: an exchange. *Environment and Planning A* 36: 1341–63
- Chakrabarty D 2002 *Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago
- Choudhury A, Lahiri–Choudhury D K, Desai A, Duckworth J W, Easa P S, Johnsingh A J T, Fernando P, Hedges S, Gunawardena M, Karanth U, Lister A, Menon V, Riddle H, Rübel A and Wikramanayake E 2008 *Elephas maximus* (www.iucnredlist.org [IUCN Red List of Threat Version 2010.2]) Accessed 12 July 2010 2010
- Connolly W E 2011 *A World of Becoming*. Duke University Press, Durham NC
- Costanza R, d'Arge R, de Groot R, Farber S, Grasso M, Hannon B, Limburg K, Naeem S, O'Neill R V, Paruelo J, Raskin R G, Sutton P and van den Belt M 1997 The value of the world's ecosystem services and natural capital. *Nature* 387: 253–60
- Crutzen P J 2002 Geology of mankind. *Nature* 415: 23
- Despret V 2004 The Body We Care For: Figures of Anthro–zoo–genesis. *Body and Society* 10: 111–34
- Duffy R and Moore L 2010 Neoliberalising Nature? Elephant–Back Tourism in Thailand and Botswana. *Antipode* 42: 742–66
- Elder G, Wolch J and Emel J 1998 Le pratique sauvage: Race, place, and the human–animal divide. in Wolch J and Emel J eds *Animal geographies: Place, politics, and identity in the nature-culture borderlands*. Verso, London 72–90

- Emel J 1995 Are you man enough, big and bad enough? Ecofeminism and wolf eradication in the USA. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 13: 707–34
- Fairhead J and Leach M 1996 *Misreading the African landscape: society and ecology in a forest-savanna mosaic*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge
- Gadgil M 2005 *Ecological Journeys*. Permanent Black, New Delhi
- Gandhi A 2012 Catch me if you can: Monkey capture in Delhi. *Ethnography* 13: 43–56
- Gibson–Graham J K and Roelvink G 2010 An Economic Ethics for the Anthropocene. *Antipode* 41: 320–46
- Gibson J J 1986 *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*. Taylor & Francis, New York
- Gubbi S 2012 Patterns and correlates of human–elephant conflict around a south Indian reserve. *Biological Conservation* 148: 88–95
- Guha R 1982 On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India. *Subaltern Studies* 1: 1–19
- Guha R 1990 *The unquiet woods: ecological change and peasant resistance in the Himalaya*. University of California Press, Berkeley
- Guha R 1997 The Authoritarian Biologist and the Arrogance of Anti–Humanism. *The Ecologist* 21: 14–20
- Guha R and Alier J M 1997 *Varieties of environmentalism: essays North and South*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
- Haeckel E 1866 *Generelle Morphologie de Organismen. Allgemeine Grundzüge der organischen Formen-Wissenschaft, mechanisch begründet durch die von Charles Darwin reformirte Descendenz-Theorie*. Verlag Von Georg Rimer, Berlin
- Haraway D J 2007 *When species meet*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN
- Heidegger M 2001a *The fundamental concepts of metaphysics: World, finitude, solitude*. Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Indian
- Heidegger M 2001b *Poetry, Language, Thought*. HarperCollins, New York
- Hinchliffe S 2003 Inhabiting: landscapes and natures. in Anderson K, Domosh M, Pile S and Thrift N eds *The Handbook of Cultural Geography*. Sage, London
- Hinchliffe S 2007 *Geographies of Nature: Societies, Environments, Ecologies*. Sage Publications, London

- Hinchliffe S 2008 Reconstituting nature conservation: Towards a careful political ecology. *Geoforum* 39: 88–97
- Hinchliffe S, Kearnes M B, Degen M and Whatmore S 2005 Urban wild things: a cosmopolitical experiment. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 23: 643–58
- Hobson K 2007 Political animals? On animals as subjects in an enlarged political geography. *Political Geography* 26: 250–67
- Ingold T 2000 *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on livelihood, dwelling and skill*. Routledge, London
- Ingold T 2005 Epilogue: Towards a Politics of Dwelling. *Conservation and Society* 3: 501–8
- Ingold T 2011 *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description*. Routledge, Abingdon, Oxon
- Jalais A 2008 Unmasking the Cosmopolitan Tiger. *Nature and Culture* 3: 25–40
- Jalais A 2010 *Forest of Tigers: People, Politics and Environment in the Sundarbans*. Routledge, New Delhi
- Jepson P, Barua M, Ladle R J and Buckingham K 2010 Towards an intradisciplinary biogeography: a response to Lorimer's 'lively biogeographies' of Asian elephant conservation. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 36: 170–4
- Jepson P and Whittaker R J 2002 Histories of protected areas: internationalisation of conservationist values and their adoption in the Netherlands Indies (Indonesia). *Environment and History* 8: 129–72
- Johnston C 2008 Beyond the clearing: towards a dwelt animal geography. *Progress in Human Geography* 32: 633–49
- Karant K U 2005 Reconciling Conservation with Emancipatory Politics. *Economic and Political Weekly* XL: 4803–5
- Latour B 1993 *We have never been modern*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA
- Latour B 2004a How to talk about the body? The normative dimension of science studies. *Body and Society* 10: 205–29
- Latour B 2004b *Politics of Nature. How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts

- Leimgruber P, Gagnon J B, Wemmer C, Kelly D S, Songer M A and Selig R A 2003 Fragmentation of Asia's remaining wildlands: implications for Asian elephant conservation. *Animal Conservation* 6: 347–59
- Lorimer H 2005 Cultural geography: the busyness of being 'more-than-representational'. *Progress in Human Geography* 29: 83–94
- Lorimer H 2006 Herding memories of humans and animals. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 24: 497–518
- Lorimer J 2008 Counting corncrakes: The affective science of the UK corncrake census. *Social Studies of Science* 38: 377–405
- Lorimer J 2010 Elephants as companion species: the lively biogeographies of Asian elephant conservation in Sri Lanka. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 35: 491–506
- Lorimer J 2012 Multinatural geographies for the Anthropocene. *Progress in Human Geography* 36: 593–612
- Lorimer J and Srinivasan K 2013 Animal Geographies. in Johnson N C, Schein R H and Winders J eds *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Cultural Geography*. Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford 332–42
- Lorimer J and Whatmore S 2009 After the 'king of beasts': Samuel Baker and the embodied historical geographies of elephant hunting in mid-nineteenth-century Ceylon. *Journal of Historical Geography* 35: 668–89
- Martinez-Alier J 2002 *The Environmentalism of the Poor: A Study of Ecological Conflicts and Valuation*. Edgar Elgar Publishing, Northampton, Massachusetts
- McAfee K 1999 Selling nature to save it? Biodiversity and green developmentalism. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 17: 133–54
- McFarlane C and Anderson B 2011 Thinking with assemblage. *Area* 43: 162–4
- McGregor J 2005 Crocodile crimes: people versus wildlife and the politics of postcolonial conservation on Lake Kariba, Zimbabwe. *Geoforum* 36: 353–69
- Nongbri N 2003 Elephant Hunting in Late 19th Century Northeast India: Mechanisms of Control, Contestation and Local Reactions. *Economic and Political Weekly* July 26: 3189–99

- Ogra M V 2008 Human–wildlife conflict and gender in protected area borderlands: A case study of costs, perceptions, and vulnerabilities from Uttarakhand (Uttaranchal), India. *Geoforum* 39: 1408–22
- Peet R and Watts M eds 1996 *Liberation ecologies: Environment, development, social movements*. Routledge, London
- Peluso N L 1995 Whose woods are these? Counter–mapping forest territories in Kalimantan, Indonesia. *Antipode* 27: 383–406
- Philo C 1995 Animals, geography, and the city: notes on inclusions and exclusions. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 13: 655–81
- Philo C 1998 Animals, Geography and the City: Notes on Inclusions and Exclusions. in Wolch J and Emel J eds *Animal Geographies: Place, Politics, and Identity in the Nature-Culture Borderlands*. Verso, London
- Philo C and Wilbert C eds 2000 *Animal spaces, beastly places: New geographies of human-animal relations*. Routledge, New York
- Rangarajan M, Desai A, Sukumar R, Easa P S, Menon V, Vincent S, Ganguly S, Talukdar B K, Singh B, Mudappa D, Chowdhary S and Prasad A N 2010 *Gajah: Securing the future for elephants in India*. Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India., New Delhi
- Robbins P 2011 *Political ecology: A critical introduction*. Wiley–Blackwell, Oxford
- Rose D B 2012 Cosmopolitics: The Kiss of Life. *New Formations* 76: 101–13
- Shahabuddin G and Rangarajan M 2007 *Making Conservation Work: securing Biodiversity in the New Century*. Permanent Black, New Delhi
- Sivasundaram S 2005 Trading knowledge: the East India Company's elephants in Indian and Britain. *The Historical Journal* 48: 27–63
- Smith N 2007 Nature as accumulation strategy. *Socialist Register* January: 1–36
- Smith R 2009 Affect, Friendship and the "As Yet Unknown": Rat Feeding Experiments in Early Vitamin Research. in Tyler T and Rossini M eds *Animal Encounters*. Brill, Leiden 99–114
- Spencer T and Whatmore S 2001 Bio–Geographies: Putting Life Back into the Discipline. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 26: 139–41

- Srinivasan K 2012 The biopolitics of animal being and welfare: dog control and care in the UK and India. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* doi: 10.1111/j.1475-5661.2012.00501.x
- Stauffer R C 1957 Haeckel, Darwin, and Ecology. *The Quarterly Review of Biology* 32: 138–44
- Stengers I 2005a The cosmopolitical proposal. in Latour B and Weibel P eds *Making things public*. MIT Press, Cambridge, MA 994–1003
- Stengers I 2005b Introductory Notes on an Ecology of Practice. *Cultural Studies Review* 11: 183–96
- Thrift N 2007 *Non-Representational Theory: Space, Politics, Affect*. Routledge, London
- von Uexküll J 1957 A stroll through the worlds of animals and men. in Schiller C ed *Instinctive Behaviour*. International Universities Press, New York 5–80
- von Uexküll J 2010 *A Theory of Meaning*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN
- Walker P A 2005 Political ecology: where is the ecology? *Progress in Human Geography* 29: 73–82
- Walker P A 2007 Political ecology: where is the politics? *Progress in Human Geography* 31: 363–9
- Whatmore S 1999 Hybrid Geographies: Rethinking the 'Human' in Human Geography. in Massey D, Allen J and Sarre P eds *Human Geography Today*. Polity, Cambridge 22–40
- Whatmore S 2002 *Hybrid geographies: natures, cultures, spaces*. Sage, London
- Whatmore S 2006 Materialist returns: practising cultural geography in and for a more-than-human world. *Cultural Geographies* 13: 600–9
- Whatmore S 2009 Mapping knowledge controversies: science, democracy and the redistribution of expertise. *Progress in Human Geography* 33: 587–99
- Whatmore S and Thorne L 1998 Wild(er)ness: reconfiguring the geographies of wildlife. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 23: 435–54.
- Whatmore S and Thorne L 2000 Elephants on the move: spatial formations of wildlife exchange. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 18: 185–203.
- Wolch J 2002 Anima urbis. *Progress in Human Geography* 26: 721–42
- Wolch J and Emel J 1998 *Animal Geographies. Place, Politics, and Identity in Nature-Culture Borderlands*. Verso, London
- Wolch J, Emel J and Wilbert C 2003 Reanimating cultural geography. in Anderson K ed *Handbook of Cultural Geography*. Sage, London 184–206

- Wolf E 1972 Ownership and Political Ecology. *Anthropological Quarterly* 45: 201–5
- Wolfe C 2010 *What is Posthumanism?* Minnesota University Press, Minneapolis, MN
- Woods M 1998 Mad cows and hounded deer: political representations of animals in the British countryside. *Environment and Planning A* 30: 1219–34
- Zimmerer K S 2003 Environmental zonation and mountain agriculture in Peru and Bolivia. in Zimmerer K S and Bassett T J eds *Political ecology: an integrative approach to geography and environment-development studies*. The Guilford Press, New York 137–58
- Zimmerer K S and Bassett T J eds 2003 *Political ecology: an integrative approach to geography and environment-development studies*. The Guilford Press, New York

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

2.1. Tracking animals in more-than-human geography

This research begins with a methodological commitment to engage with human–elephant relationships in a more symmetrical fashion, one that accounts for nonhuman difference and takes into account the diverse others – people, animals, things – with whom, and through which, notions of the ‘social’ unfold. Early animal studies, seeking to restore the nonhuman subaltern in social theory, were methodologically bent toward textual and discursive analysis (Emel and Wolch 1998; Philo and Wilbert 2000). Spurred by Haraway’s work on primates and their deployment in constituting discourses of the other (Haraway 1989), the empirical focus of such analyses gravitated towards unpacking the ways in which animals have been marginalized from human societies. Familiar subjects of study were animals on display (Besio et al. 2008; Davies 2000; Gruffudd 2000), those that dwelt in and around urban spaces (Philo 1995; Wolch 2002), or creatures domesticated by humans (Howell 2000; Yarwood and Evans 2000). Yet, as scholars working in a more–than–human register of analysis have argued, emphasis on representation and discourse poses problems. It fails to take seriously the nonhuman agencies performed by diverse actors, human and nonhuman, and falls short in terms of rendering the latter as politically and ethically relevant (Hinchliffe et al. 2005; Johnston 2008; Whatmore 2002). The unequal relations that exist between humans and other species are often reproduced in such analyses (Lulka 2000). Embracing the vitality of life, and reinvigorating geographies deadened by the ‘cultural turn’, requires methodological innovation. They entail approaches that do not sit easily with the more conventional methodologies of the social sciences (Lorimer 2010c).

Following on from Whatmore’s (2002) pioneering *Hybrid Geographies*, there have been considerable theoretical advances in critically engaging with nonhuman life. These advances have been flagged up in the introduction to this thesis. In brief, they involve going beyond the dualisms of Modernity, to embrace notions of nature and society to be constituted by an ontologically heterogeneous field (Bennett 2010; Latour 1993, 2004; McFarlane and Anderson 2011). Its epistemological consequence is that notions of what counts as skill and knowledge are

reoriented. The latter are viewed as relational achievements spun between human and nonhuman bodies (Bear and Eden 2011; Despret 2004; Lorimer 2008). This engenders a mode of relational ethics and cosmopolitics, open to nonhuman difference and the recalcitrance of life (Haraway 2008; Stengers 2005). Human and animal lives are thus relational compositions co-constituted by one another.

This move away from discourse and representation has led to a methodological emphasis on how material-semiotic relationships are *performed* by heterogeneous assemblages, including both humans and animals (Besio et al. 2008; Collard 2011), to an attention to habit and embodied experience (Lorimer 2006, 2010a), and to re-examinations of meaning as it crosses porous bodies and human-nonhuman divides (Bear and Eden 2011; Despret 2004; Lorimer 2008). Yet, methods have lagged behind theoretical advances (Davies and Dwyer 2007). At least two methodological concerns need critical consideration for moving forward.

First, many studies have been ethnography-light. Geographers have drawn from Actor-Network Theory to follow ‘traces’ of animals and plants through heterogeneous networks and ‘reticulate’ topologies (Kull and Rangan 2008; Whatmore and Thorne 1998, 2000), an endeavour that might be more conventionally termed ‘multi-sited ethnography’ (Bettany and Daly 2008; Marcus 1995). Such approaches rightly problematize the spaces of nonhumans, no longer easily couched in binary dictates of ‘them and us’, ‘here and there’. Others have used inventive methods that bring together a variety of practices and sources such as moving images (Lorimer 2010c), and ethno-historical material (Lorimer 2010a) to articulate the rich conjunction between people, animals and landscapes. The theoretical demands of more-than-human geography have meant that fieldwork has gravitated towards the experimental, sacrificing deeper commitments to place and human-nonhuman entanglements over prolonged durations. Animals do animate the stories being told, but they stay in the margins more than is the case for humans (Philo 2005).

Second, most studies have had a Euro-American or Antipodean cultural focus (Panelli 2010). Scholarship outside these domains is limited (Lorimer 2010b; Lorimer and Whatmore 2009). In fact, most engagements with animals in non-Western contexts have been through biodiversity science. The purchase of conceptual vocabularies developed elsewhere therefore needs careful consideration. Terms such as ‘conviviality’ or ‘corporeal generosity’, whilst

compassionate and necessary for a more inclusive ethics, may be at odds when life is summoned with fear, where relations between people and animals are antagonistic (Livingstone and Puar 2011; Thompson 2002), or unfold in landscapes where cohabitation imposes considerable risks to both (Jadhav and Barua 2012). Writing animals into postcolonial relations has so far been a rather rare pursuit (though see Ahuja 2009; Gandhi 2012), as interest in the fate of the nonhuman animal has been viewed to trivialize the suffering of human beings under colonialism (Armstrong 2002). Practicing ‘more-than-human’ geographies in postcolonial contexts is not just about adding animals into our accounts, but to historically situate them in particular material interactions between wildlife and human livelihoods, where ‘dangerous animals’ do not appear as the ‘marginalized other’, but benefit from state and neoliberal modes of conservation (McGregor 2005). Equally, it involves paying close attention to indigenous ontologies and taxonomies of human–nonhuman difference (Ingold 2000). These may be porous but also at odds with the ‘posthuman turn’ that seeks to transcend Western ontology (Gandhi 2012; Kohn 2007).

Methodologically, this research builds on these two concerns: ethnographic understandings of animals and non-Western contexts. In fact, they page back to a canonical problematic that lies at the heart of geography as a discipline: the problem of voice (*‘speaking for’* and *‘speaking to’*) and its intersection with the problem of space (*‘speaking from’* and *‘speaking of’*). Articulating a political ecology of human–elephant relationships involves giving voice, not just to elephants, but to diverse others whose interactions with these creatures have been burdened by past histories and whose voices are easily erased. Its audience rests on different commitments that the practice and politics of research generates: a commitment to a theoretical project, to practitioners of conservation, and to both the people and elephants with whom research materials are coproduced. The sections on fieldwork that follow illustrate the different positions from which these political ecologies are articulated, at times promontory, other times subaltern, always partial and co-constituted, never complete. It perhaps survives by its claim to capture other voices and other places through its special brand of ventriloquism. Yet, this claim is subjected to reflexive examination, redoubled as it interrogates and traverses a field replete with conservationists, ecologists, and people, as well as the nonhumans that these agents, along with the researcher, represent.

2.2. Encounters, spaces, politics: research aims and methodology

The methods deployed in this research are informed by the three overarching aims of this thesis, outlined in the introductory chapter. To reiterate, the first aim of this research is to unpack the diverse modes of human–elephant encounters, and examine their role in constituting practices and politics of conservation. The second aim is concerned with critically examining spatial aspects of human–elephant relationships in order to articulate their dynamic bio–geographies. These two currents come together in ways in which knowledge is produced, hardwired into the social fabric and contested in a variety of public and expert forums. Thus, the third aim of this research is to examine the politics of elephant conservation. It investigates how humans and elephants make themselves at home in the world with, and against, the grain of political design.

To address these aims of examining the encounters, spaces, politics of human–elephant relationships, this research fuses some of the innovative and experimental approaches of more–than–human geography (Whatmore 1999), with more traditional modes of inquiry (Herbert 2000). Choice of method and design are influenced by the social theories that inform the research. Philosophical materials are not ‘added on’ but rather are ‘sets of ideas, values and assumptions appropriate to the different stages of the research process. The result ... is a series of philosophically informed crafts and a range of craft–informed philosophies’ (Pryke et al. 2003; P.3). The theoretical resources of ‘more–than–human’ geography mobilized here have been integral to the ways in which fieldwork was conducted. The first pertains to the question of symmetry in unpacking human–elephant encounters. Merging Gibson’s notion of affordances (Gibson 1986; Ingold 2011), and von Uexküll’s notion of the *umwelt* (von Uexküll 1957), with ecological / ethological studies of elephants (Sukumar 2003), this research seeks to take nonhuman lifeworlds seriously when articulating different ‘cultural’ interactions with elephants. Encounters are seen less as ‘cultural’ or ‘cognitivist’ framing of elephants, than a series of becomings—with these creatures. Conceptually, this implies a calibration of ethology and phenomenology (Lorimer 2010a). Similarly, landscape is viewed as a relational achievement coproduced through the rich conjunction between the *bio* and the *geo*, through the actions and

interactions of humans and nonhumans who inhabit them (Massey 2005; Sukumar 2003; Whatmore 2006). In parallel, the layered, onion-model of the world (Peet and Watts 1996) is challenged: space and place are rhizomatic, performed over fluid typologies and multiple ecologies (Bingham and Thrift 2000; Whatmore and Thorne 2000). Finally, paying close attention to the ecologies of elephants, and the diverse material beings that constitute the social, implies starting with a very different awareness of who or what can influence political outcomes (Braun and Whatmore 2010). This awareness is critical for writing ecology into political ecology.

Thus, there were three distinct, but not entirely unrelated, bodies of research. Each of these methods addresses the three aims of this thesis, albeit in different ways. The following sections elaborate in greater detail how fieldwork was conducted. More specifically, they illustrate how each body of fieldwork generated different materials, the rationale for selecting the method, their potential and shortcomings. These three bodies of work were informed by, and generated, specific questions. Constituent papers of this thesis corresponding to each corpus of fieldwork are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Methods, questions generated and corresponding papers

METHOD	QUESTIONS	PAPER
Multi-sited ethnography	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How do particular configurations of the elephant influence human–elephant relationships? ▪ How do these configurations change in different sites along the fluid topologies of conservation? ▪ What practices and politics of representing nature do elephants promote? ▪ How do elephants help assemble global networks of conservation? How are they mobilized by different actors? 	#2 Circulating elephants: unpacking the geographies of a cosmopolitan animal
Make-do methodology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What organizing role do agencies emanating from human–elephant encounters have? ▪ What material political ecologies do these encounters and their mobilization 	#1: Encounter value: charisma, conflict and Asian elephants

METHOD	QUESTIONS	PAPER
	foreground? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How do social orderings of space and concomitant configurations of the elephant influence human–elephant relationships? ▪ In what ways do humans and elephants cohabit with and against the grain of conservation cartographies? ▪ How might a re–animation of human–elephant landscapes contribute to the project of revitalizing political ecology? 	#3: Bio–geo–graphy: landscape, dwelling and the political ecology of human–elephant relationships
More–than–human ethnography	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How might we ground human–elephant conflict in the practices of everyday life? ▪ How do elephants participate as actors in the politics of conservation, especially in situations of human–wildlife conflict? ▪ What bearings do their material ecologies have in influencing political outcomes? 	#4: Volatile ecologies

2.3. Generating Materials I: Multi-sited ethnography

The first body of fieldwork comprised of a ‘multi-sited ethnography’ of elephant conservation in the UK and India to examine how elephants circulate through multiple spaces and forge connections across difference (Marcus 1995; Tsing 2005). By mapping the circulation of elephants (in diverse embodied and material forms), I sought to unpack how different social actors configure elephants and the ways in which these differ across socio-spatial contexts. Further, keeping with the research objectives of examining human–elephant encounters, their spatial aspects and the modes of politics to which such encounters give rise, I investigated how elephants become part of heterogeneous assemblages that mould contemporary environmental governance (Murdoch 2006). Fieldwork, conducted between February and December 2010, was focused on the 2010 London Elephant Parade and its conservation outcomes.

Organized by the Elephant Family, an elephant conservation charity based in London (UK), the Elephant Parade was a public art and conservation event. It sought to reinvigorate the profile of the Asian elephant amidst a ‘Western’ cosmopolitan public and generate funds for securing elephant corridors in Asia. The Elephant Parade displayed over two hundred fiberglass

sculptures of elephants in London, many of which were designed by artists and celebrities. Each sculpture had a sponsor; they included corporations, individual donors and patrons of the Elephant Family, as well as conservation NGOs that worked on Asian elephant conservation. The sculptures contained messages about the plight of the Asian elephant and what the city's public could do to save them (Figure 1). At the end of the event, each sculpture was auctioned and the funds invested in corridor conservation projects for fragmented elephant populations in South and Southeast Asia.

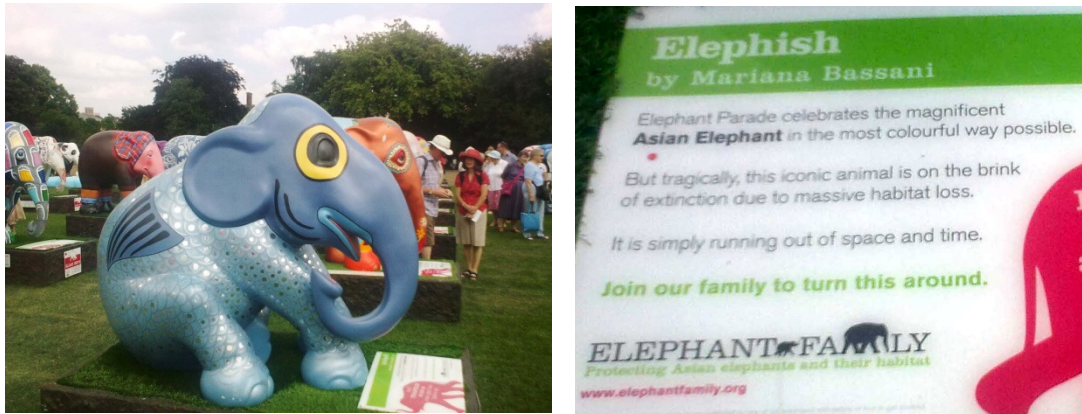


Figure 1: 'Elephish': one of the sculptures of the 2010 London Elephant Parade, displayed at The Royal Hospital Chelsea, London (July 2010).

My involvement with the event was in many ways shaped by the existing relations I had with the charity. I had known Mark Shand, the founder of Elephant Family, from India. My doctoral supervisor too had close links with the Elephant Family. I first heard of the Elephant Parade when Shand and his team visited my field site in Assam in January 2010 with their donor and brand ambassador. This personal connection was critical for my 'entry' into the field: I built a rapport with key people who otherwise might have been difficult to contact and gained access to private Elephant Parade events closed to the public. Yet, as I shall discuss later, this generated certain constraints and was influential in shaping the nature of my ethnography.

Over the summer of 2010, I undertook participant observation of the Elephant Parade in London. The main objective of participant observation was to investigate how elephants drew in

different actors into assemblages of conservation, and how these actors in turn reconfigured the identity of the Asian elephant. I volunteered for the Elephant Family, and was assigned the task of accompanying 'Cloudia' – an elephant sponsored by a Cloud Company and used as a focal point to collect signatures for a petition on elephant conservation that the Elephant Family had drawn up. I spent time collecting signatures, talking to other volunteers and members of the public about elephant conservation. These informal discussions allowed me to gain insights into what people thought about elephants, their knowledge of conservation issues and willingness to support the charity's mission. Many of my discussions with members of the public were cursory, often without an exchange of names or ideas. Most frustrating was the lack of questions from people about elephants. As a volunteer adorned in an Elephant Family t-shirt, I expected many more questions about the plight of elephants, their conservation status and what needed to be done to secure a future for them. Yet, these exchanges reflected the ways in which the city public related to elephants: fleeting and transient, triggered by images or the odd news story. However, my involvement as a volunteer helped me gain a certain 'presence' in the event. I was privy to several conversations amongst the Elephant Family team about fundraising for conservation, their relationships with project partners and sponsors, and the ways in which traces of elephants seeped through them.

Participant observation further extended to attending four social events and auctions organized by the Elephant Family. Attended by the charity's donors, sponsors and patrons, the events were often in select and privileged spaces (e.g. the British Telecom tower in London), sealed off from the city public. Celebrities and elites attending included The Duchess of York, Princess Beatrice and Eugenie, and Indian steel magnate Lakshmi Mittal. The Elephant Family was able to attract such patrons through the social capital of their founder Mark Shand, who also happened to be the brother of The Duchess of Cornwall. Participating in these events was integral to understanding how elephants circulate through networks of power and wealth, and gets enmeshed in modes of 'celebrity conservation' (Brockington and Scholfield 2010). Portrayed as a young Indian conservationists studying elephants 'at Oxford', my role here was to tell people about what needs to be done for conserving elephants on the ground and how they could help. At these events, I sought to open up conversations about elephants, the ways in which they

viewed these creatures, and why they supported the Elephant Family’s vision. Such participant observation enabled me to take elite configurations of the elephant seriously, as something to absorb and understand. Subtle feelings of unease and of not belonging pervaded my interactions. These sites later provided an important referent for contrasting how elephants were configured by others who cohabit with them on the ground. They were also integral to the ways in which I traced (and therefore co-produced) interconnecting networks of elephant conservation (Marcus 1999).

In addition to participant observation, I conducted 18 formal interviews with different project partners, sponsors and artists. The objective of these interviews was to develop an understanding of how elephants are (re)configured by cosmopolitan practices of conservation far removed from elephants in the wild. Poised as a researcher in geography, my questions were centered on what messages the artwork was meant to convey, their reasons for being involved in the project, and the futures for elephants they envisaged. These interviews often centered on the individual elephant sculptures the subjects designed or sponsored. Contacts for formal interviews were facilitated by the Elephant Family.

Finally, my ethnography of the Elephant Parade involved tracking public comments on the event page on the social networking site Facebook. My passive observation of Facebook conversations was suddenly brought to life through an unexpected trajectory. A particular elephant, named ‘Gerald’, was withdrawn from public viewing as it contained bits of explicit pornography pasted on its body. This absence led to a mass following, particularly amongst members of the public who were following the event closely. A group named ‘Gerald’s Groupies’ (Figure 2) was formed and I got a chance to become a member. The group organized Elephant Parade-related outings over the summer. By joining the outings I was able to build a team of key informants through whom I could understand why people wanted to participate in the Elephant Parade, what their motivations were and how they engaged with the sculptures. In total, I attended six of the group’s outings during the course of the event. Gerald was a compelling example of how nonhumans assembled in the event of research affects its conduct, exceeding its mobilization as compliant data and complicating assumed distinctions between social subjects and materialist objects reproduced through academic divisions of labour (Whatmore

2003). In this research the ‘online’ and ‘offline’ mingled and intertwined, a feature characteristic of emergent modes of qualitative inquiry conducted through the Internet (Hine 2008).

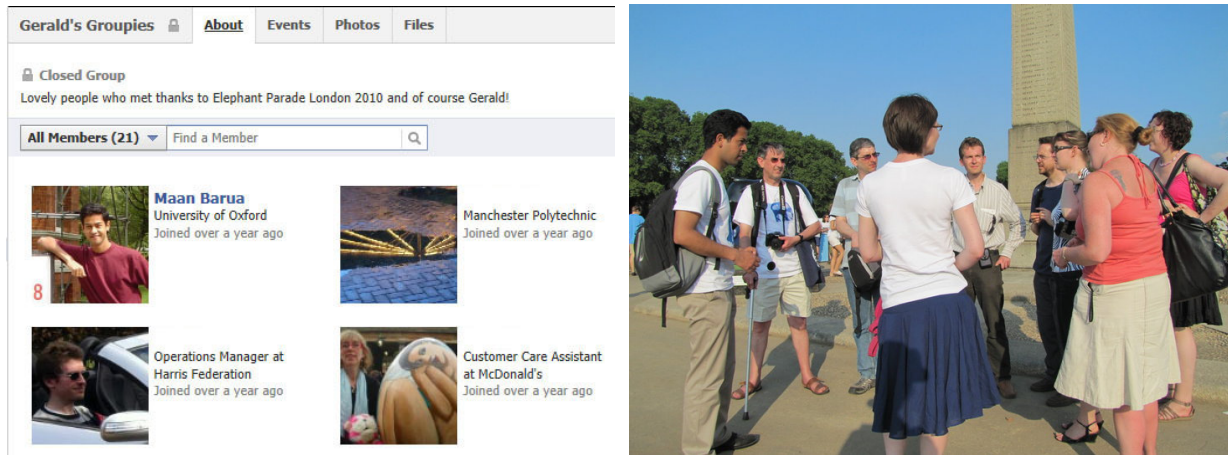


Figure 2: Gerald's Groupies Facebook group (left); with key informants from the group (right)

Long conversations with these informants enabled me to gain insights into how the sculptures convened a public: ‘elephant-spotting’, building photographic ‘collections’ online, getting involved with the Elephant Family’s cause. I paid close attention to the haptic encounters people and children had with these sculptures (Blake 2011), to elicit the regimes of touch in operation and how they enabled the public to ‘get in touch’ with the elephant, a creature otherwise removed from people’s lives. Indeed, filming and observing the haptic-optic encounters with these vibrant sculptures was essential for developing insights into the affects, charisma and sentience that elephants generated in these spaces (Lorimer 2010c). It facilitated a more symmetrical approach toward conducting ethnographic research, where the materials generated by the event began to matter (Whatmore 2003). This was an analytical relief from the discursive and representational bent of the interview methods I deployed. Conducting research with and through these elephant sculptures was critical for the thesis objectives of examining ‘the constitutive power of things’ (Bingham 2006) and how they shape political ecologies of human–elephant relationships.

After the conclusion of the parade, I then traced how the elephant ‘returns’ to the ground in India. Here the elephant travels in the form of a ‘transportable package’ comprising of GIS technologies, cartographic visualizations and monetary capital to secure elephant corridors (Fujimura 1992). Some of the funds raised from the event were shared with the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) and the Elephant Family’s in-country partner, the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI). The latter had a long history of working on elephant conservation issues and had produced a manual that classified all major elephant corridors in the country (Menon et al. 2005). In New Delhi, I conducted six semi-structured and open-ended interviews with WTI representatives with the aim of understanding the ways in which they configured the Asian elephant, how elephants mapped on to their conservation agenda, and the science underpinning their prioritization of elephant corridors in India. This following of the chains and paths taken by the elephant and its material traces (Latour 1999), established or rather posited, a logic of connection among sites that defines the argument of this multi-sited ethnography. In this sense, the ethnographic practice conducted here revives a practice of co-constructivism (Law 2004; Marcus 1995). The connections produced here is less about discovering a connected world ‘out there’, than a set of creative encounters with other subjects, materials and beings through which these connections are forged.

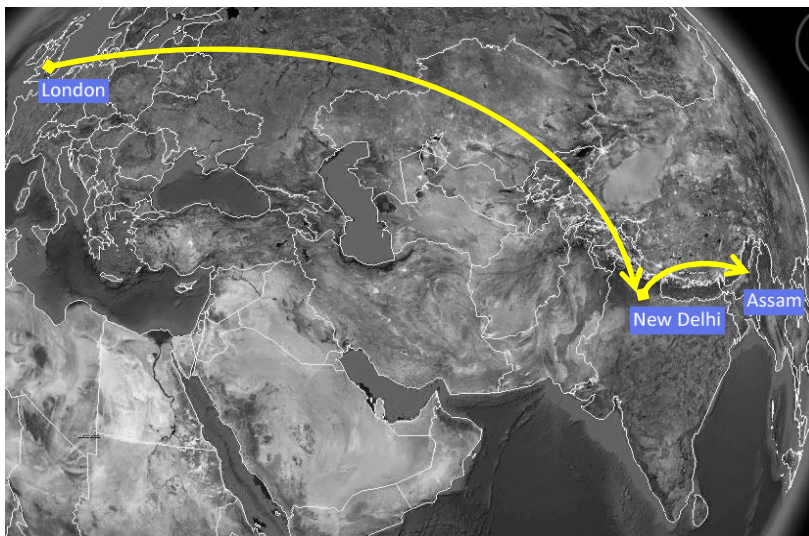


Figure 3: Tracing the circulation of elephants: London – New Delhi – Assam; the ‘god-eye trick’.

Following on, I further traveled to Assam in northeast India to examine how one of the WTI elephant corridor conservation programmes unfolded on the ground (Figure 3). The corridor the WTI was helping to secure, in Panbari outside Kaziranga National Park, was close to my family home. A partisan political movement opposing the corridor had formed here, in response to a series of notices issued by the government, ordering people to give up their land to pave way for a corridor. During the course of my fieldwork, conducted intermittently between September and December 2010, there was considerable local opposition to its implementation. These political frictions provided a compelling case study for understanding what aspects of human–elephant relationships are edited out by cosmopolitan configurations of the elephant (Jalais 2008). Further, it allowed for a close investigation into the asymmetric relationships and modes of coercion that play out in ‘contact zones’ (Pratt 2008) and ‘connections across difference’ (Tsing 2005).

Being a resident of the area, my entry into the field here too was shaped by the pre-existing informal contact I had with some of the local farmers and activists. I renewed these contacts through two key local informants: one a member of the partisan political movement, the other a farmer who owned land adjacent to the proposed corridor site. Through them, I interviewed several other farmers and landholders, and took part in some of the public meetings and demonstrations they had organized. This involved seven interviews with farmers and six with landholders. These were informal and open-ended interviews, of an ethnographic nature (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). The key themes explored through these interviews was about what people thought of the conservation project, views on elephant movement and corridor mapping, and asking about the ways in which they interfaced with the different institutions promoting the elephant corridor. As this was a political issue, I only got to speak to men for they were the spokespersons for the households in the community. My own gender too played a role in terms of restricted access to conversing with women. All interviews were conducted in Assamese, the local language of which I was a native speaker. The ability to speak Assamese (and to a lesser extent Hindi in New Delhi) was important for this research, which makes a claim to be multi-sited. As scholars have argued, just as literal language-learning remains an important part

of traditional fieldwork in the bounded-site, multi-sited fieldwork needs to be multilingual if it is to flourish (Marcus 1995).

The anomalous standpoint of a ‘partial insider’ generated several constraints. Questions about my political stance on the issue were frequently posed: Did I support the people at Panbari or the corridor project? Was I willing to endorse their cause? This put at stake my naïve attempt to be politically detached from the issue; my responses were deliberately ambiguous, evading an either-or situation, stating that conflict-mitigation should comprise of a tripartite dialogue involving the community, the government and the conservation NGO (WTI). This ambiguity is one of the challenges germane to multi-sited research: each trajectory that is traced poses its own set of commitments, often contradictory, and unresolved (Falzon 2009). Later, through triangulation with my key informants, I learnt that people were often skeptical of my views; the line between being a researcher and ‘an informer’ for the conservation NGO was thinly drawn.

This changed slightly in November 2010. Together with a few other local political activists, I was ‘kicked out’ of a government office whilst a meeting between landholders, government officials and WTI representatives was underway. The government officials said people who did not own land in the corridor area should leave as they were uninvited. Being excluded with other activists in public opened up new spaces for belonging. The farmers and landholders saw me as ‘a sympathizer’, and in subsequent conversations opened up an entire repository of local dissent. These were stories that, until then, I had not heard. They told me about the measures they had taken to stall elephant movement through the corridor, and how they hoped this would lead to the corridor becoming defunct. These were precarious measures, not entirely illegal, but with potential consequences. Spending time with farmers in their fields, I was able to gain an alternative perspective on human–elephant interactions, one that was very different from those portrayed by conservation organizations. Here, encounters were unruly and unpredictable (Figure 4), less cozy and deeply political.



Figure 4: Encountering elephants with farmers at night; Panbari corridor, Assam (November 2010).

Discussion

Several methodological concerns emerge from this research and need further elaboration. First, the terrain mapped through this multi-sited ethnography may come across as a worrying claim to be a holistic representation of contemporary, ‘global’ spaces of conservation. Rather, there is no such totality or macro-system at play. It is through the practice of ethnographic work, opportunistically constituted by the paths and trajectories taken, that these spaces of conservation emerge. This research should thus be seen as an attempt to construct a fragile synthesis of a *complicated* (folded) world (Bingham and Thrift 2000), where particular spatialities of knowledge-production are at play (Massey 2005). Here, the onion-model of the world, the local-global contrasts so frequently evoked, are dissolved, and contextualizing referents of research such as ‘Conservation’ are questioned (Marcus 1995).

Second, the issue then arises of whether such a multi-sited ethnography is possible without assuaging kinds of knowledges and competencies that are expected from traditional, site-bound fieldwork (Geertz 2001). Whilst in-depth single-site research would have led to different understandings,⁴ many of its competencies were unevenly practiced in this multi-sited ethnography, by design, by opportunity and by circumstance. More importantly, what is not lost

⁴ See Section 5 on an in-depth, site-bound inquiry

but remains essential to this multi-sited endeavour is the function of translation from one cultural context to another. Rather, this function is enhanced as it is no longer practiced in the dualistic, 'us-them' frame of investigation. It undergoes a more nuanced shading for the practice of translation connects several sites explored by this research along rhizomatic, and even dissonant, fractures of location (Marcus 1995). Not all sites were treated by a uniform set of fieldwork practices of the same intensity. This research is invariably a product of uneven knowledge bases of varying intensities and qualities, but one that permits ways of discussing, critiquing and legitimating.

Third, the identity of the ethnographer too is at stake. In this multi-sited research, I found myself enmeshed in all sorts of crosscutting and contradictory personal commitments. These conflicts are not entirely resolved, and if so, only ambivalently. Efforts to be a detached geographer are undermined; rather one turns into a sort of ethnographer-activist, renegotiating identities in different sites as one traces the circulation of elephants across social, cultural and political difference. Committed to conservation at the start of my research, ethnographer throughout it, the identity or persona that gives a certain unity to this movement through disjointed space is the circumstantial activism involved in working in such a different variety of sites. Here, the politics and ethics of working in any one reflects on work in the others.

Yet this persona of an ethnographer, who connects multiple sites and gives it the logic of coherence, does so at the risk of imagining the self at the centre of things. It is equally important to realize that the divergent commitments to which the ethnographer is drawn are co-shaped by different ways of configuring the elephant: an anthropomorphized, lovable animal in London, a creature enabling landscape-scale conservation in New Delhi, an unruly and political beast in Assam. Thus, the identity of the ethnographer needs to be seen as a becoming-with the vast number of nonhuman entities that make us act, judge and reflect (Haraway 2008).

2.4. Generating Materials II: Make-do methodology

This second body of fieldwork involved tracking a herd of bull elephants through a human-dominated landscape in the Sonitpur district of Assam, northeast India. Over the course of five months between September 2010 and January 2011, I shadowed a team of three field

researchers – Dhruba, Bhaben and Apu – who were mapping elephant movements in the district. This was part of the Assam Haathi Project (AHP), a human–elephant conflict mitigation project funded by the UK DEFRA Darwin Initiative. This long–running conservation project, initiated in 2004, had been monitoring the movement of elephants outside formally designated protected areas – ‘the non–reserve matrix’ to use conservation biogeography parlance – attempting to map the home–ranges of elephant herds and the spatial distribution of conflict in the district.

In the summer of 2010, I made initial contact with the principal investigator of the project, who was based at the University of Oxford and The Chester Zoo, explaining my DPhil research goals and that I wanted to examine the ways in which they mapped elephant landscapes. She agreed for me to shadow the project. In September 2010, I arrived in the project field camp in Balipara (Fig. 5). I spent a few weeks every month with the project team, living in their camp, conducting participant observations of them tracking elephants.

The movements of elephants were mapped by the AHP team in conjunction with a network of local informants (‘monitors’) that they had recruited across the district. The project team kept regular contact with these monitors who relayed information about elephant sightings in their vicinity. In addition, the monitors maintained a logbook of elephant movement, crop and house damage in their area, reports of which were submitted to the AHP team once a month. The project team would regularly travel to the field to verify this information. Verification or ‘ground–truthing’, as the team called it, involved noting the extent of damage, the number of elephants and ascertaining the identity of the herd that caused it. The coordinates of the locality where the incident occurred were plotted using a GPS. This method of tracking elephants is gaining currency in India, with conservation biologists deploying them to examine elephant home–ranges (Kumar et al. 2010), and generate maps of human–elephant conflict (Datta–Roy et al. 2009; Gubbi 2012).

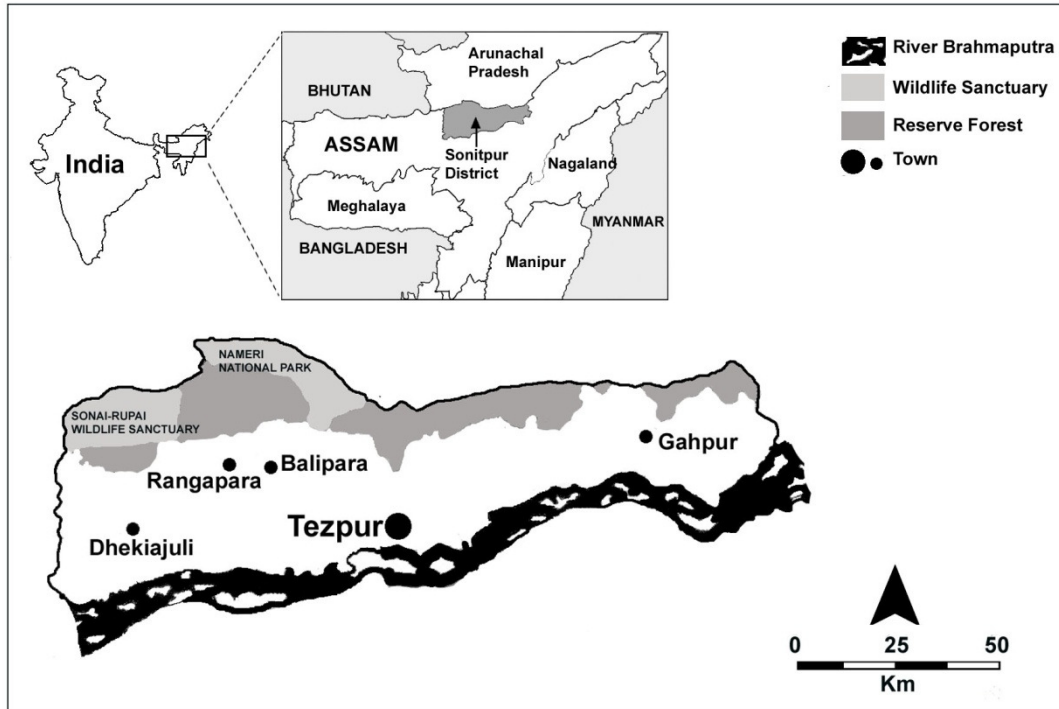


Figure 5: Balipara in Sonitpur district, Assam, northeast India where the Assam Haathi Project field station is located.

I accompanied the AHP team on several such journeys, participating in both the mapping and verification process (Figure 6). These journeys, often on foot or on motorcycles, and sometimes at unexpected moments (both during the day and at night), were an important avenue through which I engaged with the practices of mapping elephant landscapes. I became cognizant of the particular sets of inscription devices and method assemblages through which maps were generated (Law 2004). These visits allowed me to conduct several in-depth interviews with monitors, to ask questions about how they were involved with the project, their knowledge of elephant movement and what cohabiting landscapes with these creatures meant. In total, I conducted fourteen interviews with monitors, all of whom were men. The interviews were often spontaneous and open-ended, sometimes spurred by elephant sightings or the incidents of damage that we had come to verify. They were not formal interviews dictated by pre-set questions; instead, questions were more often generated by the events that had taken place. Far from being a neutral conversation, they were an interactional accomplishment (Denzin 2009).

Further, these journeys informed how I learnt about the ‘sweep of the land’, a particular ‘topography and its peculiar brand of local information’ (Lorimer 2006), vital for developing dwelt geographies of human–elephant relationships, but so partially captured by circumferential readings of maps.



Figure 6: Tracking, ground–truthing elephant movements with Dhruba (left) and Bhaben (right)

A major focus of this research period was to track the movement of a specific herd of elephants that the AHP team had named SP04. This was a herd of four bull elephants, led by a dominant bull named Tara–1. The other elephants in this bull herd included Tara–3 a subadult, and two older bulls Tara–4 and Tara–5 (Fig. 7). An older bull, Tara–2, had left the herd before I commenced my fieldwork. There were three reasons for choosing to focus on the SP04 herd. First, the AHP team was readily able to identify individuals from this herd and had a relatively good grasp of its movements in the past three and a half years. Second, this intimate knowledge of particular elephants lent itself to the project of examining individual animal geographies, a concern that I felt needed urgent attention from geographers if one were to unpack nonhuman difference and the diverse modes of being the term ‘animal’ subsumes.⁵ Finally, bull Asian elephants are largely solitary animals but are known to form small groups in order to raid crops (Sukumar 1990, 1996). The SP04 herd had broken fifty–five houses in the Sonitpur area in the

⁵ This concern has been fleshed out in the beginning of this chapter.

past one year. Hence, it provided an opportunity to critically develop more-than-human geographies in situations where there was conflict between people and elephants.



Figure 7: The SP04 herd (left to right: Tara-4, Tara-3, Tara-1 and Tara-5) in a tea plantation.

In conjunction with the AHP team, I followed the SP04 herd as they moved through the Sonitpur landscape. I paid close attention to eth(n)ological interactions between the herd, local communities and the project team. Using videos and conducting ethological field observations (Lorimer 2010c), I sought to develop a symmetrical appreciation of interspecies encounters and unpack sentient experiences familiar to both people and elephants. This ‘make-do’ method draws from the work of geographers who have collaborated with ecologists and naturalists in order to learn about the organisms they study, and to examine the practical, sensual and affective interactions ecologists have with their study organisms (Hinchliffe et al. 2005; Lorimer 2008). The activity of tracking, following the SP04 herd in ‘the open’ (Agamben 2004), was an attempt to grapple with the question ‘how might an elephant create its own ‘-scape’ where the sensation of mediums, flows and currents is particular, and where attributes, speeds, ranges and distances are differently apprehended’ (Lorimer 2010a)? To attempt this was to become cognizant of the ways in which Tara-1 and the other bulls behaved, what they were likely to *do* in different situations and the ways in which I was to *respond*. Learning to ‘read’ the elephants’ bodily cues – the

exhibition of alert behavior, a raised tail indicating retreat, or a full-fledged charge (Fig. 8) – were integral to this fieldwork.



Figure 8: Tara-1 charging the AHP team (stills from video sequence) © Apurba Basumatary / AHP

Attending to these ethological registers enabled me to critically engage with the diverse agency potentials performed by the elephants, and how one might ‘write’ about the herd without editing out all that is lively and vital about them. This engagement can be read as a form of ‘isopraxis’ where the AHP project team (and me for that matter) ‘learnt to be affected’ by Tara-1 and the SP04 herd (Despret 2004). When tracking the elephants, Dhruba regularly insisted that we maintained a distance and a separate identity from local villagers, who would come in groups to see or chase the elephant herd. By remaining separate, Dhruba argued that it would enable Tara to distinguish between those who were just passive observers and those who posed a threat to the safety of the herd. Elephants have been shown to be able to distinguish among humans, reacting differently to the different odour and colour of clothing worn by tribes that hunt them and those that do not (Bates et al. 2007). It is plausible that a similar process may be at work here, but there is no empirical evidence to state this for certain. However, what is important and

evident is that encounters with the SP04 herd prompted actions and thought among team members that lead to a cultivation of respect for, and across, human–elephant difference. This research, focusing on the eth(n)ological interactions between the SP04 herd and the AHP project team forms the basis for Chapter 3 of this thesis.

Besides generating material on the practices of mapping elephant landscapes, and following the herd of bull elephants through this landscape, I sought to examine practices of dwelling from the perspective of those who shared space and regularly encountered the SP04 herd. The AHP team, by monitoring the SP04 herd for over four years, had built a database of all houses the elephants had broken into when foraging into human settlement to raid crops or stored food grain. Drawing upon this database, I traveled to these households and conducted 18 ethnographic interviews about the incident (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). These interviews were open ended. I made efforts to first discuss aspects of people’s daily lives and bring up the topic of elephants later; this enabled me to better contextualize people’s interactions with elephants in relation to everyday life. I realized that mentioning elephants upfront often led to short–lived conversations, limiting scope for further probing. Furthermore, these interviews were difficult to orchestrate in a formal sense. They sometimes took the form of spontaneous focus groups where several members of the household and occasionally neighbours, joined in. Whilst most of the interviews involved men, on four different occasions, took part. The informal and open–ended natures of these interviews enabled friction, discrepancies and talk generated between the interviewer and interviewed to amplify. With the help of these interviews, I sought to elicit whether people were able to recognize the SP04 herd, their knowledge of the elephants’ behavior and movements, and what sentient encounters with these creatures meant to them. This was part of an attempt to ‘reconstruct’ a history of the herd and gain insights into how people and elephants cohabit landscapes with and against the grain of political design.

Hence, this research attempted to critically examine spatial aspects of human–elephant relationships and to articulate their dynamic bio–geographies from three positions: (1) the standpoint of the AHP team and monitors mapping elephant movements, (2) the collective capacities of a herd and the dispositions of individual bull elephants, and (3) sentient recollections of local communities about these animals. This approach was one of methodological *triangulation*,

whereby more than one method was used to generate materials and verify the credibility and validity of results (Denzin 2009). Triangulating the AHP practices of mapping elephant home-ranges with eth(n)ological encounters between people and elephants, enables articulating the diverse modes of representing landscapes and dwelling in them. It provides cues for a more ‘careful political ecology’ faithful to ‘the politics of inhabitation’ (Hinchliffe 2003), rather than one that is narrowed down to representation. An inherent risk in fieldwork and writing about animals is to reproduce the unequal relations between humans and elephants (Lulka 2000). Triangulation allows one to be cautious about this. However, triangulation can often boil down to eclecticism where data collected from different sources are combined without critical reflection (Yeung 1997). Mine was a form of ‘between-method’ triangulation (Denzin 2009), where I sought to cross-examine different materials generated from participant observations, ‘archival’ material and ethological observations. The objective was less about replication *per se*, than about making connections within particular cases. This fieldwork forms the basis of Chapter 5 of this thesis.

Discussion

In many ways, the term ‘make-do methodology’ can be used to describe this research (Braun 2008; Lorimer 2006). This methodology cobbles together a variety of practices and sources: walking a sentient topography of the non-reserve matrix; renewing encounters with elephants in the open; consulting an archive of past conflict events; and mapping a political ecology of human–elephant conflict. The specifics of such method can be hard to pre-plan (Lorimer 2009), especially when there is a cross-disciplinary traffic of ideas. Prior to starting fieldwork in Sonitpur, I had little idea of what materials I would be able to generate. I was only cognizant of the exercise of mapping elephant home ranges, not of the archive of past conflict events. My initial plan for examining the impact of human–elephant conflict on people’s lives was to be done through ‘deep hanging out’ (Geertz 1973) in one Sonitpur village. When I arrived in Balipara, the insurgency problem in the district took a turn for the worse, and I was

advised against living on my own in a village by the AHP organizers.⁶ Stumbling upon the records of past conflict events at the AHP field office not only enabled me to adapt to the situation, but also provided scope for innovation. Here, the potential richness of sustained ethnographic work in one village was replaced by an endeavour to retrace the past movements of a herd dispersed across the landscape.

Yet, these ideas strike at the very heart of empirical research that rests on formulating specific questions at the outset of conducting fieldwork. Here, the iterative process of asking and refining questions was equally informed by unexpected limitations such as the outbreak of political events as it was by intellectual endeavour. The openness of my starting question ‘how do social orderings of space and particular configurations of the elephant influence human–elephant relationships?’ meant that I had some flexibility in terms of what I could do. The database I encountered too played an active and generative role in shaping this work (Whatmore 2003). Strangely, the repeated forays I made from the AHP camp to different locations where the SP04 herd had left traces of their presence, mimicked the movements of the elephant herd itself: taking refuge in small forest patches or tea estates, entering human settlements and paddyfields at night, never settled and always on the move. Elephants indeed are nomadic creatures. To follow them, as I later realized, meant becoming–nomadic oneself. In this sense, the rhizomatic tendency of this make–do methodology shares similarities with the multi–sited ethnographic imagination (Marcus 1999). This effort should be read more as a ‘knowledge–event’ (Stengers 2005) than as an attempt to discover a pre–figured world ‘out there’.

2.5. Generating Materials III: More-than-human ethnography

The third body of fieldwork involved an in–depth approach to unpacking the political ecologies of human–elephant conflict in rural Assam. There were several questions I wanted to answer through this work. How might we ground human–elephant conflict in the practices of everyday life? How do we account for the vast array of nonhumans that shape the political ecologies of conflict? Further, keeping with the research aims of examining ‘more–than–human’

⁶ Ethnographic fieldwork was conducted in the Golaghat district instead (see Section 5).

geographies in non-Western contexts, I sought to explore ways in which people configured elephants on the ground, how these configurations differed from the ontologies and political dispositions of posthumanism, and what implications they have for developing conceptual terminologies for engaging with human-animal relationships. I approached this through participant observation and ‘deep hanging-out’ (Geertz 1973) in one village where conflict was prevalent.

In the winter of 2010–2011, I spent six months in Sundarpur, a “conflict-affected village” at the edge of the Lower Doigurung Reserve Forest in the Golaghat district of Assam (Fig.9). My entry into the village to conduct fieldwork was facilitated by a conservationist working on a human-elephant conflict mitigation project run by *Aaranyak*, an Assamese biodiversity conservation NGO. I had initially approached him for suggestions on localities where I could conduct participant observations of human-elephant conflict. Sundarpur was the village he recommended, as crop-depredation by elephants was severe and he had contacts in the village that would be willing to host me. He accompanied me on my ‘introductory visit’, when I met with the family I was to later stay with.

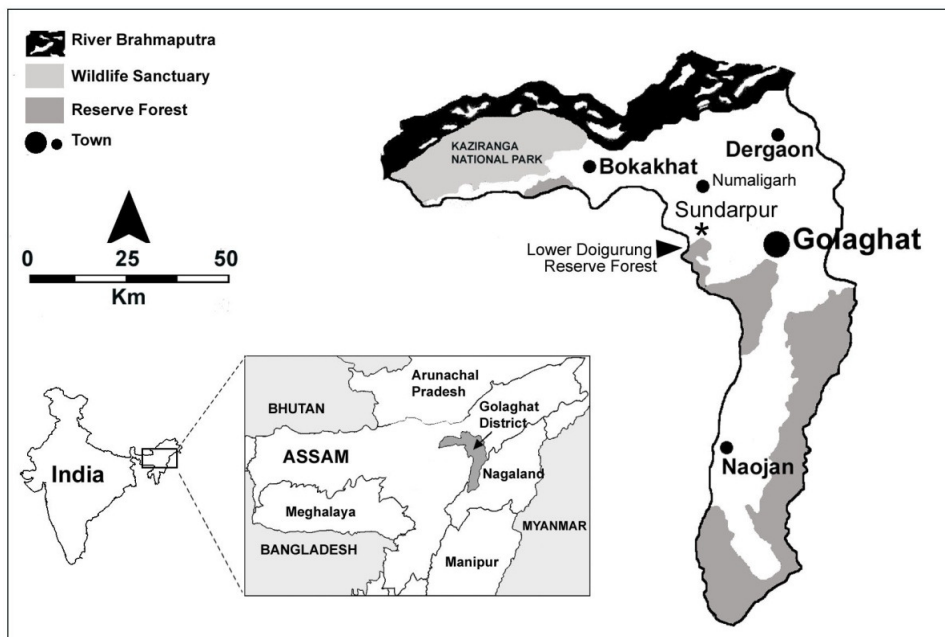


Figure 9: Location of Sundarpur in the Golaghat District of Assam, northeast India.

Sundarpur was an erstwhile forest reserve that had been cleared by settlers in the 1970s. The village comprised of people from the *Adivasi* or ‘Tea-tribe’ community. Brought in during the 19th century by British colonial planters as indentured labourers from the Chhota Nagpur Plateau region in central India (Behal and Mohapatra 1992), the community has had a fraught and distinct identity in Assam. There has been little assimilation into mainstream Assamese society. In fact, the Assamese, a community of which I was a part, had historically marginalized the ‘Tea-tribes’ on racial, cultural and economic grounds (Sharma 2009). Even in contemporary Assam, their social position remains fairly low. A majority of the people in the village worked as daily labourers in the neighbouring tea estates, supplementing their family income through rice-paddy cultivation. Over 80% of the households in the village were American Baptist Christians, having converted to Christianity in the first half of the 20th century. Sundarpur was a relatively ‘remote’ village, over 20 km from the nearest small-town market and the highway connecting it to the district capital Golaghat. There was no public transport to the village and neither did it have electricity.

The family I lived with were *Gowalas*, members of the upper-caste *Kayastha* community. They were amongst the families that had ‘influence’ in the village, and belonged to the Hindu minority. My host Dipak Gowala lived with his wife and two children, mother younger brother and sister. The family owned a considerable amount of land, as Dipak’s father had been a pioneer in terms of clearing forest land for settlement. Their main source of income was from cultivating rice paddy, but supplemented by a small family-run grocery store (*dokān*) in their home, and a sand quarry business that Dipak had started. Dipak was my first key informant in the village, and it was through him that I gradually got to know other people. He was also the president of the ‘Village Defense Party’, a village unit supported by the Assam police to maintain law and order in remote parts of the state. This role meant that Dipak constantly liaised with the Forest Department officials when they came to chase elephants out of the village or when people filed complaints for crop loss and compensation. The relation I had with Dipak was thus important in terms of understanding the community’s response to state-led elephant conservation.

Elephants in the vicinity comprised of one elephant herd (c. 35–40 animals) (Figure 10a), and 3–4 lone bulls. The construction of a major oil refinery in the elephants’ home range c. 6km

from Sundarpur in the early 1990s had resulted in rapid deforestation and loss of foraging habitat for elephants in the region (Sarma et al. 2008). As a result, crop-raiding and house damage by the elephant herd was a common feature (Figure 10b). Most of the elephant incursions into the village took place at night. Villagers in Sundarpur had taken several precautions to minimize such damage. This included digging trenches around homes and the construction of *tongis* (crop-guarding shelters) in paddy fields. Villagers stayed up in these shelters at night to guard their fields from elephants.



Figure 10: (a) Elephant herd in Sundarpur, seen resting in scrub at the fringe of the village (left); (b) house damaged by elephants in the village (right).

During the crop season, over a period of three months, I spent a considerable amount of time staying up at night in *tongis*, helping villagers guard crops (Fig 11a). There were two shelters I frequented: one belonging to a Christian farmer and cycle mechanic, the other to a Hindu rice farmer. Both of them became friends and key informants through whom I learnt about everyday life in Sundarpur. Spending large amounts of time with people, getting to know about the history of the village and the elephant issue, observing their practices of agriculture, enabled me to pay close attention to how the social and political fabric of Sundarpur was co-constituted with elephants. More specifically, this deep hanging-out enabled me to grasp several hidden factors that mediated human-elephant conflict (e.g. alcohol, kerosene), as well as the temporally-delayed impacts conflict had on poverty and wellbeing of the community. When the importance of alcohol and kerosene as material agents influencing the conflict began to emerge, I made an effort

to further investigate the sites in which alcohol was brewed and consumed in the village, and to explore how the kerosene ‘black market’ operated.

Participant observation of crop-guarding was a critical element through which I sought to understand people’s interactions with elephants, especially in situations when there was conflict. With no electricity, elephants were very difficult to see or detect at night (Fig 11b). The paddy fields themselves were slippery, uneven and difficult to run through at night. Crop-guarding and chasing elephants out of people’s fields were dangerous activities; the threat of being attacked by an elephant was high. During the course of my fieldwork in Sundarpur, one farmer was trampled by the elephant herd. Initially, I had to take extra precaution, as I had not yet learnt how to spot elephants or move through muddy fields at night. These were the moments when I felt the most inadequate, unskilled and vulnerable. On the ground, literally speaking, any assumption of authority or expert knowledge on my part, were conclusively challenged. What was being shattered was not just the technology of vision, but my point of view, my way of organizing the world. With time, my skills at crop guarding improved, although I precariously remained ‘an acceptable incompetent’ (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). Observing human–elephant interactions was the easier part; unlike the farmers who were guarding their crops, my own means of subsistence was not at stake. At many points, my commitment would have come across as wanting, and in this sense my participation was not ‘complete’ (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). This is perhaps an all-too-familiar situation of conducting research amongst the poor and disenfranchised. Yet, it allows for a serious engagement with ethical questions and interrogates the conceptual apparatuses through which this research was conceived and mobilized.

However, I had begun to find my feet amongst people. Indeed, as Clifford Geertz (2000; P.13) puts it ‘Finding our feet, an unnerving business which never more than distantly succeeds, is what ethnographic research consists of as a personal experience’. Conducting an ethnography of human–elephant conflict was about learning to run–*with* the villagers of Sundarpur, through slippery paddyfields at night. Here, ‘with’ implies not a face-to-face confrontation, but heading the same way, sharing similar anxieties, and retreating from the same threats (Ingold and Vergunst 2008). This embodied experience was also critical in terms of *grounding* the politics of dwelling and developing a critical political *ecology* of inhabitation (Ingold 2005).

Despite clarifying what my research was about, and that I was based at the University of Oxford in the UK, people thought I was from the Assam State Forest department. ‘Forester’ was the term they used to describe me. There were also initial rumours of me being a plainclothes police officer from ‘the special branch’. The suspicion that people had toward me was understandable, and such initial responses are a theme that runs through ethnographic research (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007; Kaplan 1991). People were familiar with the occasional and short visits NGOs or the media made to the village, but no one had stayed in the village and slept out in paddy fields. Perhaps it was odd that a middle-class Assamese person, from a very different social background to theirs, spent so much time in Sundarpur, constantly asking questions, taking notes and photographs. Participant observation is far from neutral, and being viewed as someone from the forest or police department influenced what I observed and encountered in the initial stages of my research. One evening early on in my fieldwork, I noticed a few people carrying homemade gun-like contraptions to fire at elephants at night. The next morning, I asked Dipak about these weapons, and made notes of what they looked like in my field notebook. From then on, I stopped seeing these weapons. Months later, Dipak told me that following my inquisitiveness and note taking, he told all the villagers to hide these weapons whilst I was there. When Dipak made this disclosure, I realized that it was only during this period that I gained *access* to the village in an ethnographic sense (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). By hanging out in the village long enough, to not betray people, was critical for generating trust. Consequently, my informants became more open to sharing stories about village politics, about past rifts over kerosene and ration distributions, about the tensions between Hindus and Christians. People also showed me their homemade weapons and how they used them.



Figure 11: (a) Crop-guarding in informant's tongi (top); (b) movement of elephant herd through a Sundarpur paddyfield at night (bottom) (December 2010).

Once relationships with people were formed in the village, I conducted thirty-three ethnographic interviews with particular individuals (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007). Some of these interviews focused on questions such as elephant movement, and changes in crop-raiding patterns and intensity following the deforestation that had taken place in the region. At other times, I sought to elicit stories about life in the village, what cohabiting space with elephants meant and the impacts conflict had on everyday life. With the help of my key informants, I selected interview candidates based on how deeply they were affected by the elephant issue. Typically, this included households who had lost members of their family to elephant attacks, those that had *tongis* and guarded their fields regularly, and individuals involved in village-level governance (e.g. members of the village *Panchayat*). All interviews were open-ended, mostly spontaneous and informal. They were mainly with men, as they were either in fields or in crop-guarding shelters. Interviews were conducted in Assamese. People in the village spoke *'Baganiya'*

(a mixture of Assamese and central Indian languages), that I could understand but not speak. Men generally spoke to me in Assamese, whilst women and children understood Assamese but often replied in *Baganiya*.

Further, I sought to elicit people's views on the religious symbolism around the elephant. For the Hindus, the creature was simultaneously a deity and a vilified animal, contrary to the way it is mobilized as an icon (*Ganesha*) in conservation discourse (Gureja et al. 2002). The participant observations I conducted enabled an understanding of how mythologies are also linked to practices of everyday interactions with elephants. They also provided insights into the ways in which people configured elephants, the vocabularies and terminologies they used to describe them, and how such configurations differed from posthumanist understandings of nonhumans.

Discussion

This short ethnography, conducted at the interstices of human–elephant relationships, was an attempt to focus not just on people but also on the effects of human entanglements with other living selves and nonliving entities. It mirrors what scholars have begun to call etho–ethnology (Lestel et al. 2006), or multi–species ethnography (Kirksey and Helmreich 2010), where close attention is paid to both human communities and the nonhuman beings they may feed, shepherd, breed or interact with. There is recognition that the nonhumans agents that co–produce the ‘social’ may (dis)engage with humans over very different space–times, ones that can sometimes ‘turn out to clash or even be mutually antagonistic’ (Lestel et al. 2006). The goal of multi–species ethnography is not just to give voice, agency or subjectivity to the nonhuman, or to nature that begins to function like an ‘exotic’ culture in traditional fieldwork. It seeks to radically rethink these categories of analysis (Kirksey and Helmreich 2010).

However, one shortcoming of this research is that it did not have the same focus on individual elephants and tracking their movements as in the Sonitpur study (see Section 4). My efforts were less about following the movements of elephants, than learning to respond to them in the way in which villagers in Sundarpur did. Here there is a tendency to clump the Sundarpur elephants under the category of ‘the herd’ and to narrate stories about this collective. Studies deploying the ‘multi–species ethnography’ label, on the other hand, have tended to focus on

individual animals, to compare animal societies with that of humans, and to ask how issues of attachment and engagement also play out in relation to not just humans but the animals that are part of the ethnography (Candea 2010; Fuentes 2010). Keeping with the theme of the thesis' geographical research, I have deployed the term 'more-than-human ethnography'.

The second issue about this research is that it was in many ways tied to the 'bounded site'. This resulted in focusing on micropolitics, and on the local(e). I did not attempt to trace the circulation of commodities or elephants into or out of the village. I do recognize that the landscapes and spaces of human-elephant conflict do not operate in isolation, but are enacted through multiple topologies and fluid networks (Whatmore and Thorne 2000). Yet, focusing on human-elephant encounters, and unpacking them through a mode of deep hanging-out and thick description (Geertz 1973), opened up insights that I did not get in the other two bodies of research outlined above. More specifically, these related to the 'hidden' impacts and mediators of human-elephant conflict. Further, participant observation enabled locating mythology and local accounts of elephant being in the practice and performance of everyday life, specific to time and place.

Finally, there is the dilemma of conducting fieldwork 'at home'. Converse to the anthropological tradition of studying a 'foreign' culture and writing ethnographies in the researcher's 'own' language, mine was the opposite: I studied something close to my own culture and am writing it up in a language that I can't claim to be entirely my own. Such research has often, problematically, been termed 'auto-ethnography' or 'native anthropology' (Harden 2011). The pre-existing social relations I had in Assam, my class, caste and social background, all played a role in the ways in which I interacted with the village community. The other difficult issue with conducting fieldwork somewhere familiar was perhaps that of seeing things in new light. Having grown up in rural Assam, I was already cognizant of many of the issues surrounding human-elephant conflict. These notions of familiarity often numb inquisitiveness and generate an unwillingness to put at risk one's assumptions of the world (Latour 1999). I had to constantly strive to suspend my preconceptions and generate a consciousness that prompted curiosity, to follow things and events, to not take for granted features that appear trivial or cursory.

2.6. Analyzing Materials

The experiential richness of methods outlined above is not seamlessly transferred into finished chapters. The disparate bits of ‘data’ generated through conversations, first-hand experiences, tracking and studying elephants get recontextualized once the researcher is ‘back’ from the field and starts to make sense of the materials generated. This process of analysis is indeed a creative, active, making process, one that needs to be done with certain degrees of accountability and transparency (Crang and Cook 2007). The creative emphasis here involves refocusing and refining some of the research questions based on seeing material in new light and in relation to questioning some of the theoretical resources mobilized by the research. This thesis considers analysis to take part in an ‘expanded field’, a space that is not detached, but a connected and connecting process (Crang 2005; Crang and Cook 2007). The partial, yet locatable and critical positions of fieldwork (Haraway 1991), are perhaps crystallized in some form through the activity of analysis. In this section, I will briefly elucidate the process through which analysis was conducted and the bearings this has upon the ways in which materials generated were rearticulated in subsequent chapters.

The three bodies of fieldwork conducted in this thesis gave rise to the accumulation of a wide range of materials, ranging from field notebooks and diaries, to audio tapes of interviews, photographs and short film sequences of participant observation. The first step toward analysis involved the task of turning this inchoate experience into a more ordered rendering (Throop 2003). Materials were initially approached by sorting them into distinct piles. Field notebooks were then re-read to get an overview of each body of work, ideas about interesting events at the time, and possible ways of interpreting them. The diaries contained detailed notes of formal and informal interviews, especially contents of audio and video recordings, as well as personal reflections on events. Re-reading involved typing-up diary notes into an MS-Word document, sketching key themes and emergent stories. Notes were re-organized under broad headings, which later formed rough outlines for each chapter.

Digital audio recordings of interviews were similarly sorted into different folders depending upon their content. The latter was gauged from a logbook of interviews that was maintained during fieldwork. These audio files were then played back and transcribed into MS-

Word documents. Interviews in Assamese were transliterated into English. Important passages and responses were then annotated following an ‘open-coding’ process, where the emphasis is not to look for significant relations, but to examine what is being said and what the meaning and intent of each statement (Strauss 1987). This process, however, was not entirely about avoiding pre-judgement. The ways through which materials were generated during fieldwork informed the sorting of material and initial approach to analysis. A second reading of interview transcripts was then made in order to firm up annotations and code them systematically into themes. A ‘theoretical memo’ was maintained in parallel (Crang 2005), where new ideas about the topic in the material and ways in which it could be conceptualized were jotted down. Relevant sections of the transcripts were then pasted under each heading to in order to analyze how statements related to one another. This led to an axial development of themes and emergence of a narrative through which findings could be articulated. The materials here, in some sense, were approached as ‘scripts’ and analysis the activity of retelling them (Revill and Seymour 2000).

Epistemological issues become important in this process of coding and organizing materials. Of primary concern is the distinction between emic and etic, whether coding is one’s own interpretation or a reflection of relationships participants use more consciously (Crang and Cook 2007). Instead of adopting a strict emic/etic binary, this thesis viewed codes as a blend of these categories (Agar 1986). More appropriately, the process of coding was viewed as a coproduction, mutually constituted by the relations between the geographer and his subjects (Latour 1999; Stengers 2010). A second concern associated with emic/etic interpretations is that of power. Ethnographic interpretation is inherently linked to systems of power, and may serve to produce or sustain them (Rabinow 1986). It is thus critical to realize that whilst both the researcher and his or her subjects are involved in interpreting the meaning of everyday life, their goals are not necessarily the same. When analysis is conducted for the purpose of writing up a thesis, that imposes its own disciplinary and institutional demands, a certain degree of reflexivity needs to be exercised. Throughout the course of analysis, I made an effort to consider whose concerns were being represented, to what effect and with what potential consequences. Notes on these issues were maintained in the theoretical memos.

The step following coding and development of themes was to draw relations between statements, events and happenings in order to build a conceptual argument. This process was iterative. There were moments when inconsistencies arose, whereby ideas developed in the theoretical memos were challenged by the materials. Ambiguous positions toward perceiving elephants or surprising actions by the elephants themselves are two examples among several such inconsistencies. This sometimes resulted in a reorientation of what event one ought to deem significant and what ought to be incorporated into the wider story. Geographers have likened this mode of analysis as a process of ‘abduction’, whereby researchers do not necessarily examine data through an inductive method, but ‘pick up ideas from the world and develop them ... to see where they can lead and what they can do’ (Crang and Cook 2007; P.184). This is not an argumentative act devoid of methodological rigour or interest in empirical findings. Following a sort of Popperian logic, it works through the relation between data/theory by picking up on the ‘surprise’, what ‘each can bring to the other ... [through a] continuous process of shifting back and forth ... between induction and deduction’ (Cloke et al. 2004; P.186). Attending to these misfits and breakdowns posited by the material challenged some of the assumptions and modes of interpretation of the analysis. It forced one to think about the story in new ways, to modify theoretical arguments to the complexities posed by the case in hand.

Through this iterative process, the material and theoretical memos were brought together in order to configure the narrative of each chapter. Connections between events, statements and theory were sketched out on an A4 sheet of paper. This made the act of writing a form of ‘architecture’ whereby spaces for imagination and narrative were created (Crang and Cook 2007). In some of the chapters, questions were put to an emerging subject of study, as the contours, sites and relationships were not entirely known beforehand. The sequence of vignettes and scenes were planned accordingly, the justification for their inclusion based on how they mobilized, or at times resisted, the theoretical arguments and imperatives set out at the beginning of the thesis. As each of the four papers in the thesis dealt with different methodologies, the architecture was not uniform, but varied across each chapter. For instance, Chapter 3 developing the concept of ‘encounter value’ draws from material across the three bodies of fieldwork. It posits a dialogical narrative shuttling between case vignettes and theory development. Chapter 4 draws upon a

multi-sited approach, where the storyline emerges through movement, by following materials as they travel through space and time. Chapter 5 presents multiple points of identification throughout the text, where different registers of analysis are used to interrogate cartographies of human–elephant cohabitation. The narrative here is ‘braided’ as it alternates between the field and the archives. Finally, Chapter 6 deploys a more traditional ethnographic analysis, where the story unfolds through attempts to uncover hidden actants that mediate human–elephant relations. At this juncture, I should perhaps mention that not all of the material from each body of fieldwork has been written up for this thesis. Parts of the tale that remain untold could perhaps receive fuller ethnographic treatment in the future.

Finally, analysis and presentation of materials involved writing by evoking the technique of montage. As this research was mobilized by a hybrid collective, constituted by not just people, but elephants and a plethora of other nonhuman actants, the narrative had to be crafted in ways that allow for heterogeneity and difference to speak through. Whilst montage is an editing technique originating in film (Eisenstein 1943), it has had a strong presence in social science writing for its ability to enable pieces of fieldwork in separate space–times to be ‘clipped together’ (Beach 2001). Montage does introduce a ‘cinematic edge’ to the presentation of materials, but it also helps articulate entanglements between nature and society, connections and comparisons across multiple spaces, and the material processes linking data generation and representation (Law 2004). It is a mode of representation that lends itself well to materials generated through methods that do not necessarily follow more conventional approaches of the interpretive social sciences (Crang and Cook 2007). In the context of this thesis, montage operates at two levels. First, within individual chapters, where different forms, processes and spaces of hybrid collectives are brought together and contrasted to form a composite narrative. Second, within the thesis as a whole, where four independent bodies of work are recombined to interrogate the encounters, spaces and politics of human–elephant relationships.

2.7. Reflections, limitations, positionality

The three bodies of fieldwork described above pose several questions about method and the realities it constructs. How short should fieldwork be? This question about duration gnaws

away at many of the processes through which I generated materials. The multi-sited ethnography I conducted is perhaps most vulnerable to criticism. Scholars have branded this approach as ‘profligate, impatient, unfocussed, emphasizing surface rather than depth’ (see Marcus 1999). In defense of this work, I would concur with Marcus (1995) that the goal of multi-sited ethnography is not holistic representation, an ethnographic portrayal of a ‘totality’. Rather, it is about examining processes of circulation, translation and formation produced in several locales. The product is invariably uneven, of varying intensity and quality. Criticisms can also be leveled against the in-depth, site-bound research conducted in Sundarpur. A six-month ‘ethnography’ severely falls short of the kind of research identified with the anthropological tradition (Geertz 2001). However, the key issue here is whether fieldwork should go on as a Sisyphean labour endless and never redeemed, or should it be justified in terms of the research questions posed and the concepts one seeks to mobilize? On reflection, the time I spent in Sundarpur enabled me to unpack how local political ecologies unfold, and become aware of some of the ‘hidden mediators’ of human–elephant conflict. But perhaps it is wanting in terms of its exploration of the year-round agricultural calendar of people and how it correlates with the activities of elephants. Further, my relationships with people would be of a very different nature if I spent an entire year or more in the village.

Second, how did the politics of conservation inform my work? I had focused on ‘social’ aspects of human–elephant relationships in order to be able to work outside protected areas, and circumvent the bureaucratic hassles of obtaining permits to enter national parks or wildlife sanctuaries. Further, elephant conservation in India is a field dominated by the ecological sciences, where turf wars and politics are well-known (Lewis 2004). Conducting social science research posed less of a threat, and enabled me to work with many different organizations without necessarily being embroiled into ideological battles. The outcomes of this research would have been very different had I applied for permits to radio-collar elephants or study them in national parks. Hence, understandings of the politics of science and its relationship to bureaucracy and Indian nationalism do not occupy centre stage in this thesis.

A third, epistemological, concern is that of the position of the researcher and the relationship to the field. The tradition of empiricism has been bent toward distancing the

researcher from the research, between desk and the field, to claim an ‘objective’ vision. This is at best a dazzling, and blinding, illumination; neither total distancing, or for that matter its corollary – total immersion, are possible. What is at work are different spatialities of knowledge production (Massey 2005), where knowledges are always situated knowledges (Haraway 1991). In my own work, the traditional distinction between field and home were blurred. As a mobile cosmopolitan, shuttling between the uncomfortable binaries of west/nonwestern, inside/outside, theory/practice, social science/ecology – the list is endless – rigid positions from which one articulates the world seem suspect through and through. Yet, I seek to reject the stance of relativism that rests on the view of being nowhere while claiming to be everywhere equally. Its corollary, the ‘god-trick’ of seeing everything from nowhere, is an easy position to slip into, especially when the different bodies of research, articulated above, are parceled into a neat and tidy whole. Partial, locatable and critical positions, involving particular and specific embodiments and shared conversations in epistemology, are the ways in which I reflect upon this research. We know the world, not because we are separate from it, but because we are connected with it (Whatmore 2002).

Fieldwork demands the ability to partially translate knowledge among very different – and power-differentiated – communities. The very endeavour to write the other, human and nonhuman, is an act of accumulating power. Some of the communities I worked with were amongst the least privileged people in the world. The stories of suffering and the rich imagination they shared with me run an inherent risk of being lost when rearticulated in academic jargon. My research was equally ‘informed’ by the elephant herd that I was tracking, with whom I formed a relationship and who ‘speak back’ with a set of obligations. To write and reflect upon fieldwork is thus to write ‘in the presence of’ these others, an engagement involving responsibility and relationships of response (Stengers 2005).

The relationships I formed during the course of fieldwork inherently challenged the conservation apparatus through which I had initially designed and thought through my research. Becoming aware of conservation and its discontents makes it all too easy to level criticisms against those working to conserve elephants on the ground. It is even more tempting to do so from below, in the name of the subaltern and the subjugated. As one of the commitments of this thesis

was to develop theory in order to enhance conservation practice, I recognize the danger criticisms pose to practitioners genuinely engaged with key issues on the ground. Many of them, unlike me, deal with such issues on a day-to-day basis.

Finally, there is the question of reflexivity itself: where do we reflect from, about whom or what? Conceptually, more-than-human geography rejects both monadic individualism, where reflexivity is taken to be an inner dialogue or indeed an inner drama, and cultural determinism, where reflection is not possible as the world is sieved through cultural schemata that always, already determine meaning. Reflexivity should thus be read more as a conversing-with or 'thinking in the presence of' those about whom we write. It is not an attempt to create a distance between ourselves and our circumstances: an all too familiar trope deployed by those practicing reflexivity in its 'traditional' sense (Mouzelis 2009). Rather, it rests on a *media res*, that tense and uncomfortable location between a social self trying to escape from being a completely socialized self. Yet, in its partiality, reflection is alive, active and formative of our becomings. The work that follows is thus of a researcher partial in all his guises, never complete, becoming-geographer and perhaps becoming-elephant, always constructed and cobbled together imperfectly.

2.8. References

- Agamben G 2004 *The open: man and animal*. Stanford University Press, Stanford CA
- Agar M 1986 *Speaking of Ethnography*. Sage, London
- Ahuja N 2009 Postcolonial Critique in a Multispecies World. *PMLA* 124: 556–63
- Armstrong P 2002 The postcolonial animal. *Society & Animals* 10: 413–9
- Bates L A, Sayialel K N, Njiraini N W, Moss C J, Poole J H and Byrne R W 2007 Elephants Classify Human Ethnic Groups by Odor and Garment Color. *Current Biology* 17: 1938–42
- Beach D 2001 Artistic Representation and Research Writing. *Reflective Practice: International and Multidisciplinary Perspectives* 2: 313–29
- Bear C and Eden S 2011 Thinking like a fish? Engaging with nonhuman difference through recreational angling. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 29: 336–52
- Behal R P and Mohapatra P 1992 'Tea and money versus human life': The rise and fall of the indenture system in the Assam tea plantations 1840–1908. *Journal of Peasant Studies* 19: 142–72
- Bennett J 2010 *Vibrant Matter: a political ecology of things*. Duke University Press, Durham
- Besio K, Johnston L and Longhurst R 2008 Sexy beasts and devoted mums: narrating nature through dolphin tourism. *Environment and Planning A* 40: 1219–34
- Bettany S and Daly R 2008 Figuring companion–species consumption: A multi–site ethnography of the post–canine Afghan hound. *Journal of Business Research* 61: 408–18
- Bingham N 2006 Bees, butterflies, and bacteria: biotechnology and the politics of nonhuman friendship. *Environment and Planning A* 38: 483–98
- Bingham N and Thrift N 2000 Some new instructions for travelers: the geography of Bruno Latour and Michael Serres. in Crang M and Thrift N eds *Thinking Space*. Routledge, London 281–301
- Blake R 2011 Ethnographies of Touch and Touching Ethnographies: Some Prospects for Touch in Anthropological Enquiries. *Anthropology Matters* 13: www.anthropologymatters.com
- Braun B 2008 Environmental issues: inventive life. *Progress in Human Geography* 32: 667–79
- Braun B and Whatmore S eds 2010 *Political matter: technoscience, democracy, and public life*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN

- Brockington D and Scholfield K 2010 The Conservationist Mode of Production and Conservation NGOs in sub-Saharan Africa. *Antipode* 42: 551–75
- Candea M 2010 "I fell in love with Carlos the meerkat": Engagement and detachment in human–animal relations. *American Ethnologist* 37: 241–58
- Cloke P, Cook I, Crang P, Goodwin M, Painter J and Philo C 2004 *Practising Human Geography*. SAGE Publications Ltd, London
- Collard R–C 2011 Cougar figures, gender, and the performances of predation. *Gender, Place & Culture*: 1–23
- Crang M 2005 Analysing qualitative materials. in Flowerdew R and Martin D eds *Methods in Human Geography*. Pearson Education Ltd, Essex, UK 218–32
- Crang M and Cook I 2007 *Doing Ethnographies*. SAGE Publications Ltd, London
- Datta–Roy A, Ved N and Williams A C 2009 Participatory elephant monitoring in South Garo Hills: efficacy and utility in a human–animal conflict scenario. *Tropical Ecology* 50: 163–71
- Davies G 2000 Virtual animals in electronic zoos: The changing geographies of animal capture and display. in Philo C and Wilbert C eds *Animal spaces, beastly places: New geographies of human-animal relations*. Routledge, New York 243–6
- Davies G and Dwyer C 2007 Qualitative methods: are you enchanted or are you alienated? *Progress in Human Geography* 31: 257–66
- Denzin N K 2009 *The Research Act: A Theoretical Introduction to Sociological Methods*. Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, USA
- Despret V 2004 The Body We Care For: Figures of Anthro–zoo–genesis. *Body and Society* 10: 111–34
- Eisenstein S 1943 *The film sense*. Faber, London
- Emel J and Wolch J eds 1998 *Animal geographies: Place, politics, and identity in the nature-culture borderlands*. Verso, London
- Falzon M A 2009 *Multi-Sited Ethnography: Theory, Praxis and Locality in Contemporary Research*. Ashgate, Farnham, Surrey
- Fuentes A 2010 NATURALCULTURAL ENCOUNTERS IN BALI: Monkeys, Temples, Tourists, and Ethnoprimateology. *Cultural Anthropology* 25: 600–24

- Fujimura J H 1992 Crafting science: Standardized packages, boundary objects, and "translation". in Pickering A ed *Science as practice and culture*. Chicago University Press, Chicago 168–211
- Gandhi A 2012 Catch me if you can: Monkey capture in Delhi. *Ethnography* 13: 43–56
- Geertz C 1973 *The Interpretation of Cultures*. Basic Books, New York
- Geertz C 2001 *Available Light: Anthropological Reflections on Philosophical Topics*. Princeton University Press
- Gibson J J 1986 *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*. Taylor & Francis, New York
- Gruffudd P 2000 Biological cultivation: Lubetkin's modernism at London Zoo in the 1930s. in Philo C and Wilbert C eds *Animal spaces, beastly places: New geographies of human-animal relations*. Routledge, New York 222–42
- Gubbi S 2012 Patterns and correlates of human–elephant conflict around a south Indian reserve. *Biological Conservation* 148: 88–95
- Gureja N, Menon V, Sarkar P and Kyarong S S 2002 *Ganesha to Bin Laden: Human-elephant conflict in Sonitpur District of Assam*. Wildlife Trust of India, New Delhi 45
- Hammersley M and Atkinson P 2007 *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*. Routledge, London
- Haraway D 1989 *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science*. Routledge, New York and London
- Haraway D 1991 *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. Free Association Books, London
- Haraway D J 2008 *When species meet*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN
- Harden J 2011 Native like me: Confessions of an Asiatic black anthropologist. *Critique of Anthropology* 31: 139–55
- Herbert S 2000 For ethnography. *Progress in Human Geography* 24: 550–68
- Hinchliffe S 2003 Inhabiting: landscapes and natures. in Anderson K, Domosh M, Pile S and Thrift N eds *The Handbook of Cultural Geography*. Sage, London
- Hinchliffe S, Kearnes M B, Degen M and Whatmore S 2005 Urban wild things: a cosmopolitical experiment. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 23: 643–58
- Hine C 2008 Virtual Ethnography: Modes, Varieties, Affordances. in Fielding N ed *The Sage Handbook of Online Research Methods*. SAGE, London 257–70

- Howell P 2000 Flush and the banditti: dog-stealing in Victorian London. in Philo C and Wilbert C eds *Animal spaces, beastly places: New geographies of human-animal relations*. Routledge, New York 37–58
- Ingold T 2000 *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on livelihood, dwelling and skill*. Routledge, London
- Ingold T 2005 Epilogue: Towards a Politics of Dwelling. *Conservation and Society* 3: 501–8
- Ingold T 2011 *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description*. Routledge, Abingdon, Oxon
- Ingold T and Vergunst J L 2008 Introduction. in Ingold T and Vergunst J L eds *Ways of Walking: Ethnography and Practice on Foot*. Ashgate, Farnham, Surrey 1–20
- Jadhav S and Barua M 2012 The Elephant Vanishes: Impact of Human–Elephant Conflict on People's Wellbeing. *Health & Place* 18: 1356–65
- Jalais A 2008 Unmasking the Cosmopolitan Tiger. *Nature and Culture* 3: 25–40
- Johnston C 2008 Beyond the clearing: towards a dwelt animal geography. *Progress in Human Geography* 32: 633–49
- Kaplan I M 1991 Gone fishing, be back later: ending and resuming research among fisherman. in Schaffir W B and Stebbins R A eds *Experiencing Fieldwork: An Inside View of Qualitative Research*. Sage, Newbury Park, CA 232–7
- Kirksey S E and Helmreich S 2010 The Emergence of Multispecies Ethnography. *Cultural Anthropology* 25: 545–76
- Kohn E 2007 How dogs dream: Amazonian natures and the politics of transspecies engagement. *American Ethnologist* 34: 3–24
- Kull C A and Rangan H 2008 Acacia exchanges: wattles, thorn trees, and the study of plant movements. *Geoforum* 39: 1258–72
- Kumar M A, Mudappa D and Shankar Raman T R 2010 Asian elephant *Elephas maximus* habitat use and ranging in fragmented rainforest and plantations in the Anamali Hills, India. *Tropical Conservation Science* 3: 143–58
- Latour B 1993 *We have never been modern*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA
- Latour B 1999 *Pandora's hope: essays on the reality of science studies*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA

- Latour B 2004 *Politics of Nature. How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts
- Law J 2004 *After Method: Mess in social science research*. Routledge, London
- Lestel D, Brunois F and Gaunet F 2006 Etho-ethnology and ethno-ethology. *Social Science Information* 45: 155–77
- Lewis M 2004 *Inventing Global Ecology: Tracking the Biodiversity Ideal in India, 1947-1997*. Ohio University Press, Athens, Ohio
- Livingstone J and Puar J K 2011 Interspecies. *Social Text* 29: 3–14
- Lorimer H 2006 Herding memories of humans and animals. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 24: 497–518
- Lorimer H 2009 Caught in the nick of time: Archives and fieldwork. in Crang M, Delyser D, Herbert S and McDowell L eds *The Handbook of Qualitative Methods in Human Geography*. SAGE, London 248–73
- Lorimer H 2010a Forces of nature, forms of life: calibrating ethology and phenomenology. in Anderson B and Harrison P eds *Taking Place: Non-representational Theories and Geography*. Ashgate, Farnham, Surrey 55–78
- Lorimer J 2008 Counting corncrakes: The affective science of the UK corncrake census. *Social Studies of Science* 38: 377–405
- Lorimer J 2010b Elephants as companion species: the lively biogeographies of Asian elephant conservation in Sri Lanka. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 35: 491–506
- Lorimer J 2010c Moving image methodologies for more-than-human geographies. *Cultural Geographies* 17: 237–58
- Lorimer J and Whatmore S 2009 After the 'king of beasts': Samuel Baker and the embodied historical geographies of elephant hunting in mid-nineteenth-century Ceylon. *Journal of Historical Geography* 35: 668–89
- Lulka D 2000 Animal geographies: place, politics and identity in nature-culture borderlands. *Professional Geographer* 52: 589–90
- Marcus G E 1995 Ethnography in/of the world system: the emergence of multi-sited ethnography. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24: 95–117

- Marcus G E 1999 What Is at Stake—And Is Not—In The Idea and Practice of Multi-Sited Ethnography. *Canberra Anthropology* 22: 6–14
- Massey D 2005 *For Space*. SAGE Publications, London
- McFarlane C and Anderson B 2011 Thinking with assemblage. *Area* 43: 162–4
- McGregor J 2005 Crocodile crimes: people versus wildlife and the politics of postcolonial conservation on Lake Kariba, Zimbabwe. *Geoforum* 36: 353–69
- Menon V, Tiwari S K, Easa P S and Sukumar R eds 2005 *Right of Passage: Elephant Corridors of India*. Wildlife Trust of India, New Delhi
- Mouzelis N 2009 *Modern and Postmodern Social Theorizing: Bridging the Divide*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge
- Murdoch J 2006 *Post-structuralist geography: a guide to relational space*. Sage, London
- Panelli R 2010 More-than-human social geographies: posthuman and other possibilities. *Progress in Human Geography* 34: 79–87
- Peet R and Watts M eds 1996 *Liberation ecologies: Environment, development, social movements*. Routledge, London
- Philo C 1995 Animals, geography, and the city: notes on inclusions and exclusions. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 13: 655–81
- Philo C 2005 Spacing Lives and Lively Spaces: Partial Remarks on Sarah Whatmore's Hybrid Geographies. *Antipode* 37: 824–33
- Philo C and Wilbert C eds 2000 *Animal spaces, beastly places: New geographies of human-animal relations*. Routledge, New York
- Pratt M L 2008 *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. Routledge, London
- Pryke M, Rose G and Whatmore S eds 2003 *Using social theory: thinking through research*. Sage Publications Ltd, London
- Rabinow P 1986 Representations Are Social Facts: Modernity and Post-Modernity in Anthropology. in Clifford J and Marcus G E eds *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, California 234–61

- Revill G and Seymour S 2000 Telling stories: story telling as a textual strategy. in Hughes A, Morris C and Seymour S eds *Ethnography and rural research*. Countryside and Community Press, Cheltenham 136–57
- Sarma P K, Talukdar B K, Baruah J K, Lahkar B P and Hazarika N 2008 A Geo–Spatial Assessment of Habitat Loss of Asian Elephants in Golaghat District of Assam. *Gajah* 28: 25–30
- Sharma J 2009 'Lazy' Natives, Coolie Labour, and the Assam Tea Industry. *Modern Asian Studies* 43: 1287–324
- Stengers I 2005 The cosmopolitical proposal. in Latour B and Weibel P eds *Making things public*. MIT Press, Cambridge, MA 994–1003
- Stengers I 2010 *Cosmopolitics I*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN
- Strauss A 1987 *Qualitative Analysis For Social Scientists*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge
- Sukumar R 1990 Ecology of the Asian Elephant in Southern India. II. Feeding Habits and Crop Raiding Patterns. *Journal of Tropical Ecology* 6: 33–53
- Sukumar R 1996 *Elephant days and nights*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
- Sukumar R 2003 *The living elephants: evolutionary ecology, behaviour and conservation*. Oxford University Press, Oxford
- Thompson C 2002 When elephants stand for competing philosophies of nature: Amboseli National Park, Kenya. in Law J and Mol A eds *Complexities: social studies of knowledge practices*. Duke University Press, Durham NC
- Throop C J 2003 Articulating Experience. *Anthropological Theory* 3: 219–41
- Tsing A L 2005 *Friction: An ethnography of global connection*. Princeton University Press., Princeton, New Jersey
- von Uexküll J 1957 A stroll through the worlds of animals and men. in Schiller C ed *Instinctive Behaviour*. International Universities Press, New York 5–80
- Whatmore S 1999 Hybrid Geographies: Rethinking the 'Human' in Human Geography. in Massey D, Allen J and Sarre P eds *Human Geography Today*. Polity, Cambridge 22–40
- Whatmore S 2002 *Hybrid geographies: natures, cultures, spaces*. Sage, London

- Whatmore S 2003 Generating materials. in Pryke M, Rose G and Whatmore S eds *Using social theory: thinking through research*. SAGE Publications Ltd, London 89–104
- Whatmore S 2006 Materialist returns: practising cultural geography in and for a more-than-human world. *Cultural Geographies* 13: 600–9
- Whatmore S and Thorne L 1998 Wild(er)ness: reconfiguring the geographies of wildlife. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 23: 435–54.
- Whatmore S and Thorne L 2000 Elephants on the move: spatial formations of wildlife exchange. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 18: 185–203.
- Wolch J 2002 Anima urbis. *Progress in Human Geography* 26: 721–42
- Yarwood R and Evans N 2000 Taking stock of farm animals and rurality. in Philo C and Wilbert C eds *Animal spaces, beastly places: New geographies of human-animal relations*. Routledge, New York 99–116
- Yeung H W-c 1997 Critical realism and realist research in human geography: a method or a philosophy in search of a method? *Progress in Human Geography* 21: 51–74

CHAPTER 3: Encounter value: charisma, conflict and Asian elephants

Abstract

This paper is a contribution towards working productively with the tensions between political ecology and more-than-human approaches to the study of human-animal relations. Drawing upon and developing Haraway's concept of 'encounter value', the paper takes up geographers' calls to incorporate ecology and non-dualist accounts of agency into political ecology. It examines encounter value in the context of human-elephant relationships in India. This investigation is driven by two objectives. First, to explore the different trajectories encounter value takes. Second, to examine how encounter value emerging from people's relationships with elephants, are mobilized in practices of biodiversity conservation. The paper identifies two trajectories encounter values take: charisma and conflict. Nonhuman charisma has significant organizing power, and is analyzed symmetrically in this paper. Conflicts have disruptive impacts and affect both conservation practice and rural political economies. Conservation organizations mobilizing encounter value amplify charisma through a range of technological practices. Conflict on the other hand is subdued. The paper shows how corporeal dispositions of elephants, their ethologies and nonhuman agency are an integral component of the political economies of conservation. It concludes by discussing the broader implications of the concept of encounter value and how it enables us to fuse insights from more-than-human geography into political ecology.

For *a being* (a body, an animal, a man ...) *to be*, an encounter has to have taken place.

(Althusser 2006; P.192)

3.1.Introduction

Walking through a tea estate in rural India, a pungent odour hits us. Slowly, a large bull elephant emerges from the dense foliage. He is noiselessly followed by two others. His look is

intense, accentuated by a Proboscidean body and thick trunk. *“That’s him!”* Dhruva exclaims. The bull’s gaze is familiar. Dhruva tells us to back off a few steps, *“He might charge”*. The animal becomes calmer, but keeps watching. Only his flapping ears, and occasional raise of the trunk, punctuate the stillness. Dhruva tells me that this is his behavior, always alert and keeping the group safe: *“He is watching us, he is thinking about us”*. We are all mesmerized, captivated by the gaze of an elephant.

Later in the year, I encounter yet another bull elephant. From the cover of a report on the ivory trade, a forward-facing tusker looks at me. ‘A God in Distress’ is the caption above (Figure 1). It conjures a multitude of associations. A religious icon. An endangered species. A living commodity. The director of the conservation NGO that published this report emphasizes how important elephants are for preserving India’s biodiversity: *“Elephants represent the whole ecosystem. In India, it is worshipped as Lord Ganeśa, and it is at the base of many eastern cultures. It has always been a symbol of the conservation of forests.”*

These vignettes represent two very different encounters with Asian elephants. One embodied, reflective of the corporeal and affective responses nonhumans elicit in us. The other choreographed, conveying a sense of crisis and meant to rally public support for wildlife conservation. Both encounters can be eventful as they are enchanting and have the power to mobilize action. They give rise to a number of questions of interest to geographers studying human–animal relations. How should we make sense of this awe and enchantment generated by lively encounters with elephants? In what way do interspecies encounters contribute to institutional organization and shape political economies of biodiversity conservation? With the rise of animals as a subject of enquiry in geography and the wider social sciences (Lorimer and Srinivasan 2013; Kalof and Fitzgerald 2007), a critical and empirical engagement with these questions could indeed be a timely intervention.

Examining human–animal encounters in geography is not new. Political ecologists have examined how animal bodies circulate and are reproduced through regimes of capital (Robbins 1998). They investigate the ways in which animals may be turned into fetishes to serve a ‘conservationist mode of production’ (Brockington and Scholfield 2010), through enrollment into practices of consumption such as tourism or trophy hunting (Duffy and Moore 2010). Of

particular interest has been the role of charismatic megafauna such as pandas, polar bears, tigers and elephants. Others, following a Lévi–Straussian tradition of animals permitting the embodiment of thought (Lévi–Strauss 1969; Mullin 1999), have emphasized their discursive constitution and deployment for specific institutional agendas or goals (Proctor 1998; Jalais 2008; Rikoon 2006). In contrast, scholars working in what has come to be known as more–than–human geography, argue that an emphasis on animals as mere commodities or discursive productions risks rendering them as mute subjects (Whatmore 2002; Hobson 2007). They are circumscribed by culture from without, whereby animals’ own worlds are emptied of meaning. Inspired, among others, by the bio–semiotics of Jacob von Uexküll (von Uexküll 1957, 2010), geographers working in more–than–human registers seek to dissolve Modern subject–object dualisms. They foreground the role of nonhuman agency and illustrate the ways in which it intersects with human action to produce social practices or political outcomes (Braun 2008; Hinchliffe et al. 2005). The emphasis here is on affect, charisma and action that permeate porous bodies and cut across human–nonhuman divides (Lorimer 2010, 2007).

Tensions between these two strands are evident. The former renders inert all the liveliness of encounters, whilst the latter has paid scant attention to how the human–animal encounters contribute to organization in the world of policy and planning (Braun 2008). A more productive engagement would be to elucidate what difference a consideration of nonhuman agency makes to the ways in which political economic practices unfold. Recently, geographers have remarked that the nature–as–resource approaches of political economy could benefit by incorporating affective, ecological and non–dualistic accounts of agency in their scholarship (Bakker 2010). Similarly, there have been calls for more–than–human geography to account for political and economic dimensions in its engagement with animals (Lorimer and Srinivasan 2013; Lorimer 2012).

Working with these tensions and opportunities, this paper has two objectives. First, it examines different modes of human–elephant encounters, how they may be eventful and give rise to socio–cultural practices. Second, it investigates how such encounters are mobilized in practices of biodiversity conservation. It focuses on the nonhuman agency of elephants and the ways in which it brings order to the planning and policy imperatives of organizations involved in elephant conservation. To apprehend the generative role of nonhuman agency in constituting

conservation practice, I deploy and develop Donna Haraway’s concept of ‘encounter value’ (Haraway 2007). The concept is mobilized in conjunction with the later materialism of Louis Althusser (Althusser 2006), and geographers’ work on nonhuman charisma (Lorimer 2007, 2010). The paper is divided into four parts. It begins with a brief outline of the concept of encounter value and the concomitant literature on materialism and charisma. The paper then examines two different modes of encounter with Asian elephants in the field in rural Assam in northeast India. These pertain to charisma and conflict. Finally, it turns to practices of biodiversity conservation that choreograph encounters through their deployment of Asian elephants as ‘flagship species’ to stimulate awareness and rally conservation support (Barua, Tamuly, and Ahmed 2010). It concludes by discussing some of the broader implications of this work for conversations between political ecology and more-than-human geography.

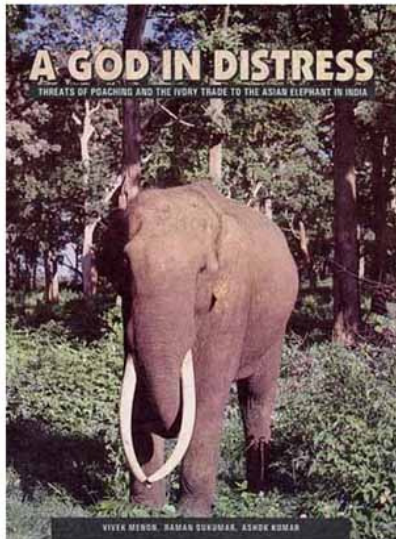


Figure 1: Front cover of the report ‘God in Distress’ © Wildlife Trust of India / Wildlife Preservation Society of India

3.2. Interspecies encounter value: a brief outline

The operationalization of Haraway’s concept of ‘encounter value’ is important for this paper and the term demands an introduction. Haraway begins with Marx’s realization of the

relational sensuousness of the commodity as he described the metabolism between human beings and the rest of the world enacted in living labour (Marx 1970; Haraway 2007). However, Marx's dissection of commodities into the doublet of use and exchange value ultimately falls back on human exceptionalism. They become end points for the production of capital (Haraway 2007; Shotwell 2011). Moving beyond this humanist teleology, Haraway asks what form would value take on when the commodity is itself a living, breathing thing? One that affords humans much more than being a passive factor in a particular mode of production and exchange (Haraway 2007)? Haraway contends that encounters with living and sensuous commodities are in themselves value forming. Encounters become eventful through trans-actions conducted across a species spectrum, rather than just transactions of inert commodities. The animal in its material-semiotic being, presenting diverse affordances to humans, and a constant source of affect, is a co-producer of value. It is not a mute object oscillating as a medium of exchange that Marx's humanist analysis gravitated towards. Haraway posits the term 'encounter value' as an under-analyzed axis of the 'lively' capital that accumulates through labour performed by the interactions of humans and nonhuman bodies (Haraway 2007). Labour could imply work, as in the case of draught animals, but it also refers to the range of skills, knowledge and agencies that cross human-nonhuman divides.

Haraway's emphasis on the encounter is also echoed in the later materialist thought of Althusser (Althusser 2006; Read 2005). Althusser refers to an 'underground current' in the history of materialist thought stretching from Epicurus through Spinoza, Marx and Heidegger, where materialism is viewed to be the product of aleatory and non-teleological encounters. For Althusser, the event of the encounter reconfigures the conjuncture's elements: bodies come into being through the encounter and they also change. Encounters precede the forces and modes of production. Rather, it is through lasting encounters, those that *'take hold'*, that structure and organization occurs. Althusser's work resonates with some of the new thinking on vital materialism (Bennett 2010; Coole and Frost 2010). What he terms 'taking hold' is the intra-actions that Haraway describes in the context of interspecies encounters, the relations through which entities, subjects and objects come into being (Haraway 2007). Like Haraway, Althusser sees the encounter as symmetrical. It is mutually constituted and both bodies in the conjuncture

play a role in forging outcomes. A further insight Althusser's work offers is that in contemporary societies, states of encounter may be increasingly engineered or imposed (Althusser 2006; Thrift 2010). The repetition of imposed encounters, for example the projection of images, may make them attain a certain currency with a value. For Althusser, value emerges from the encounter, but it is aleatory and without an end goal or essence from the outset.

Another important dimension to Haraway's notion of encounter value pertains to what the geographer Jamie Lorimer has called the nonhuman charisma (Lorimer 2007). Nonhuman charisma may be understood as a vital and relational outcome that 'elevates' particular species, making them 'accessible' and 'interesting' in the perception of humans. It is an affective force that arises through the interactions between human and animal bodies in culturally specific contexts. Nonhuman charisma may be shaped by the ecological, aesthetic and corporeal affordances of animals (Lorimer 2007). In humanist contexts, writings about charisma emerged the analyses of Max Weber who contended that it was a form of affective authority that was opposed to the bureaucratic and the mundane. Charisma has a strong organizing power in social institutions (Weber 1978). Drawing from more performative and corporeal readings of Max Weber's articulation of charisma (Thorpe and Shapin 2000), Lorimer briefly elucidates how nonhuman charisma may be mobilized in practices of biodiversity conservation (Lorimer 2007). As an affective force, charisma could indeed give rise to encounter value and in a Weberian sense, but without Weber's humanist perspective, contribute to organizational order in political economy.

Finally, Haraway uses encounter value to refer not just to values comprising a set of positive, companionate practices, but also to those that build up a world of fear and terror. In this sense, charisma does not encapsulate all the dimensions of encounter value. The example of interspecies encounters giving rise to regimes of terror that Haraway furnishes is that of the deployment of dogs used to terrorize detainees in Abu Ghraib. This terror is accentuated through the circulation of images and stories about the atrocity, akin to the imposition of encounters to which Althusser refers (Thrift 2010). This lens is particularly useful when examining conflicting encounters between humans and elephants. Together, this body of literature provides some conceptual avenues through which modes of human-animal encounters and their organizing role in the political economies of conservation can be understood. In the following sections, I will

explore how human–elephant encounters can result in both charisma and conflict and further elucidate how the two intertwine in practices of elephant conservation.

3.3. Encounters: charisma

The bull elephant described in the first vignette is a striking example of how human perceptions and subsequent evaluation of a creature is shaped by its aesthetic and ethological dispositions. This impressive animal, named Tara-1 (hereafter, Tara) is the largest in a herd of four bull elephants that my informant Dhruba and his team were monitoring (Figure 2). This was part of a human–elephant conflict mitigation project in Sonitpur, a district in the northeast Indian state Assam. Besides Tara, the herd (named SP04), comprised of a young sub adult male (Tara-3), and two older bulls (Tara-4 and Tara-5) (Figure 3). Adult Asian elephant bulls are generally solitary, but are known to form small groups when they raid crops. According to the project team, SP04, led by Tara, had become ‘expert’ crop–raiders. They frequently forayed into cultivation and human settlement in search of rice paddy or stored grain. The team’s description of Tara and his activities often hinged on awe and fascination: “*Tara is very special ... he has some mannerisms that are different from other elephants. If other elephants are ‘normal’, he is not ‘normal’. There is something ‘extra’ about him*”.⁷ The charisma of Tara, encapsulated by the word ‘extra’, was constituted through both corporeal and ecological dimensions of the encounter.

A range of bodily cues made Tara different from other elephants in the vicinity. Tara’s height, excellent body condition and large bodily frame endowed him with what Dhruba called a ‘*personality*’. Tara’s bodily stature was perhaps the result of high nutrition obtained from a diet largely comprising of cultivated crops, a factor known to stimulate secondary growth in adult Asian elephants (Sukumar 2003). Size alone did not lend to Tara’s charisma. The team described how his sloping back, stout body and strong musculature made him a ‘*Koomerab elephant*’, referring to the ‘princely’ archetype in the Indian system of elephant classification. This was a distinct cultural appreciation of the elephant body based on a non–Western taxonomy. Elephants of the *Koomerab* type of elephant have historically been valued for their strength and aesthetic build

⁷ In this context, normal denotes ‘routine’ or ‘commonplace’, rather than a condition opposed to abnormality.

(Edgerton 1985; Barkaith 1734). Several royal stables across India kept such animals for ceremony and display (Das 1999). Further, they are portrayed in Indian art and iconography (Figure 4). In contrast, Tara-4 and Tara-5's were of the *Mriga* or 'deer-like' archetype, associated with lesser strength and physical ability.

A more prominent visual feature of this encounter was the power and reciprocity of Tara's gaze. As Dhruva narrated, "*He stares at you this way [body imitating the movements of Tara, head still with eye contact] ... for a long time ... and then [slowly turning his body] at the next person. Tara's eyes are penetrating. If you are on your own and stare into them, you sense his power.*" He was affected by Tara's gaze: "*His gaze is constant, directed at us ... Looking at him one feels as though he is very calm... as though he means 'I know it all' ...*" This visual and bodily charisma of Tara may be understood through the concept of affordance, a term introduced by James Gibson to refer to what an animal '*provides or furnishes*' to its environment of which humans are a part (Gibson 1986; P.8). Affordances are what a human or nonhuman organism perceives, but it is not a purely 'subjective' matter of affixing some meaning onto a mute and inert object. Tara's gaze (Figure 2 and 5) is the result of the dominant bull having to keep the SP04 herd safe in human habitation. When the team encountered Tara, they too were subjects of his watchfulness, performed not just through an optic apparatus, but auditory and olfactory modes as well. Elephants have relatively poor vision, and gain little information about the environment through sight, except at short distances (Sukumar 2003). However, for the ocular-centric project team, it was Tara's gaze that stood out.

Second, Tara's ethology and actions within his lifeworld contributed to how his uniqueness and charisma were perceived. This included constant herding of the SP04 group (Figure 3), staying up whilst the other elephants were asleep amidst tea bushes, moving at the rear or front end of the group. This led Dhruva to attribute the title of 'leader' to Tara. Tara's skill and ability to raid crops and break into human habitation undetected was also a leadership quality important for the other elephants of the herd. "*This group, in Tara's presence, breaks into houses very quietly ... that is why they have been so successful in surviving in and around human habitation*". Leadership, in fact, is a distinguishing factor of charismatic authority in human worlds. Weber, in his seminal analysis of charisma and charismatic authority, saw the former as 'a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with ...

exceptional powers' (Weber 1978; P.241–242). Dhruba's attribution of leadership qualities to Tara is a form of anthropomorphism, but it accentuates perceptions of the animal's charisma. This theme is also mirrored in the popular Hindu mythology around elephants, which is replete with stories about elephant-kings and their divine power.⁸ The powerful force of this interspecies encounter is that it elicited affective and emotional responses in Dhruba and other members of the project team. It was the charisma of Tara that kept them interested in the process of tracking and monitoring the creature's activities. Watching Tara was an important source of pleasure for the team and their involvement in elephant conservation.

Whilst encounters with Tara generate value and meaning for human participants, we might want to ask whether charisma and encounter value can be perceived symmetrically? Is nonhuman charisma a human perception alone, or can its perception be opened up to the very bodies we find charismatic? Recent research in elephant behaviour suggests that specific leaders commonly emerge to guide the actions of other group members (McComb et al. 2011). Leaders are important in coordinating social organization amongst animals, and there is growing interest parallels between human and animal leadership in ethology. In the case of elephants, individuals with superior knowledge that enable better decisions in response to environmental or social triggers are generally accepted as leaders (McComb et al. 2001). Older elephants tend to take on leadership as they accumulate experience and are a source of ecological knowledge. The latter may include sensing threats, expertise in locating scarce resources and familiarity of migration routes (McComb et al. 2011). According to Dhruba, Tara was instrumental in coordinating collective actions of the SP04 herd. The herd lived in a landscape where they faced considerable danger from humans. Lack of sufficient forage meant they had to break into granaries. The younger bulls had begun to learn from Tara and mimicked his actions: "*Tara-3 used to be very aggressive when he first joined the herd. Nowadays he has become calm and he breaks into houses causing minimal damage – just like Tara.*" This emulation is perhaps reflective of how elephants affect one another. Here, encounters *between* elephants become important, their 'taking hold' and sustenance generate

⁸ Examples include *Gajendra*, king of elephants and devotee of Lord Vishnu, and *Airavata* the elephant-king belonging to Lord Indra

forms of collective organization. We may argue that these encounters are meaningful and value forming for animals in their own terms.

Whether charisma is an appropriate word to describe the ways elephants may be affected by a creature they accept as a leader is a moot point. However, a symmetrical exploration of encounter value as it arises through the interactions between elephants could indeed be a fertile endeavour. One such avenue is to draw together Weber's thinking on the organizing power of charisma and von Uexküll's articulations of meaning in nonhuman lifeworlds (von Uexküll 1957, 2010; Weber 1978). Two points, though speculative, may be made in this regard. First, Weber contrasts charismatic authority with more mundane forms of bureaucratic organization. He argues that charismatic authority is an affective force that is performed and emanates in relation to those subjected to it. It does not arise from 'an established order and enactments, as if it were an official competence' but something that a person 'gains and retains ... solely by proving his powers in practice' (Weber 1978; P.1114). This charisma may provide solutions to organizational problems and help establish institutional order. Robert Oppenheimer's leadership in the development of the atomic bomb project at Los Alamos during the 1940s is a case in point (Thorpe and Shapin 2000). In elephants, scientists have argued that individual personality traits such as influence, knowledge and perceptual abilities, are constitutive dimensions of leadership capacity (Lee and Moss 2012). Styles of engagement with other elephants and the ability to direct a group's movements are also important. Thus, it may not be far cry to suggest that organizational order amongst elephants may be influenced by the nonhuman charisma of elephants. Leaders need to prove their power in practice, negotiate difficult situations, and come into relations with other elephants that are value forming.

Second, Weber contends that situations of crisis may precipitate charisma (Weber 1978). In human societies, crisis creates opportunities for charismatic leadership to emerge, as exceptional qualities are projected onto leaders who promise change. History is replete with examples of the rise of political leadership in times of crisis (Madsen and Snow 1991; Bligh, Kohles, and Meindl 2004; Weber 1978). In many parts of India, landscapes represent what could be sensed as a situation of 'crisis' for elephants. Large-scale deforestation has depleted foraging grounds. Elephants constantly venture into human habitation, resulting in conflict with people. On

average, elephants kill over four hundred people every year in India. In retaliation nearly two-hundred elephants are killed (Rangarajan et al. 2010). The trauma such conflict generates in elephants has been well documented (Bradshaw et al. 2005; Bradshaw 2009). It leads to disruptions of movement and foraging patterns, ruptures in kinship bonds and poor socialization. Scientists have shown that in landscapes where humans pose a form of ‘predation pressure’, social cohesion amongst elephants becomes of great importance (de Silva and Wittemyer 2012). The Sonitpur landscape, in which the SP04 herd dwelt, exemplified such conflict. It is plausible that Tara’s leadership of the SP04 herd is accentuated by such situations. Bull herds in Asian elephants are generally ephemeral (Sukumar 1996), but SP04 had shown a remarkable stability. Dhruba had told me that these elephants had been together for about four years. Whilst elephants may not perceive such situations to be a ‘crisis’, at least in the way humans use the term, it opens up two possibilities for serious consideration. Firstly, nonhuman charisma and its social effects may have a potential organizing role for elephants. Secondly, encounter value could be a trans-species relation (also see Haraway 2007; P.46), not just a form of nonhuman agency for a human *telos*.



Figure 2: Tara (Photo © Apurba Basumatary)



Figure 3: SP04 herd with Tara (3rd from left)



Figure 4: *Koomerah* or 'princely' type of elephant in Indian iconography; Mahabalipuram rock carving, India



Figure 5: Tara's typical 'gaze', exhibiting alert behavior (Photo © Dhruva Jyoti Das)

3.4. Encounters: conflict

Although encounters with Tara generated awe and enchantment amongst the project team, there may be other such encounters with elephants where human bodies are affected very differently. One example was that of a solitary bull elephant that I came across whilst conducting ethnographic fieldwork on human–elephant relationships in a village in the Golaghat district of Assam, not far from Sonitpur. The elephant was a notorious crop–raider, regularly foraging into paddy fields and human habitation. The local community had named him ‘Buldejaar’ (bulldozer), a reference to his ‘fearlessness’ and ‘destructive’ behaviour. Although there were several elephants present in the area, this was the only animal onto which people had projected a name.

As in the case of Tara, there were aesthetic, corporeal and ethological dimensions to this encounter. Although fearful, farmers were fascinated by his *“large size, almost double that of other elephants.”* This animal too had undergone a marked secondary growth, and people likened him to a *“healthy and well-fed bullock, which walks fearlessly, not caring about who or what is in its way.”* These bodily features were viewed as aesthetic but also fear invoking. Unlike other elephants in the vicinity, farmers often had difficulty in chasing Buldejaar out of their fields: *“When you burst firecrackers, or chase elephants with flaming torches, they generally go away. But not this one. He will not budge until he has had his full.”* Most of his sojourns into cultivated paddy were at night. People said they had to be exceptionally careful as the elephant had a tendency to attack when confronted. *“He has the habit of chasing people out of the field, and then going back to feed. You cannot do anything. We have to call for armed forest guards when Buldejaar enters the village”.* Several farmers recounted stories of how they narrowly escaped when charged by the animal at night. In fact, stories about the creature circulated through the village, often conveying frustration and fear.

Buldejaar is illustrative of another trajectory through which encounter value emerges. These encounters are ‘conflicts’, the etymology of which is to come together (*con*) and to strike (*fligēre*). Their *taking hold*, through the creature’s forays into crop fields or damage of houses, gave rise to a vilification of the elephant. The projection of the name Buldejaar onto this creature encapsulates corporeal dimensions of the animal’s size and power, a comparison with the tractor. However, the name is also performative as it *does* as much as it *says* things. Buldejaar’s

behavioural disposition of breaking houses or charging people is a case in point. Unlike the case of Tara and the team of field biologists, whose research was mobilized by a conservation apparatus, here human–elephant encounters unfolded over a highly uneven economic and political terrain. Farmers have to protect their sources of livelihood from elephants, a species afforded protection by the Indian state. They do not have any legal right to take retributive action. The name is thus reflective of broader social relationships and political outcomes that emerge from sentient encounters with the animal.

In fact, one could argue that such encounters with crop–raiding bulls, especially when they unfold over uneven socio–political ground, could give rise to other cultural modes of relating to elephants. Whilst elephants are frequently associated with its exalted status as a god in India, particularly the symbolism surrounding the elephant–headed deity *Ganeśa* (Brown 1991), there runs a parallel tradition where elephants are regarded as demons. The first of these is *Kuvālayapida*, a demon in elephantine form, who is said to have wreaked havoc and posed a threat to human life (Dowson 1972). *Kuvālayapida*'s nemesis occurs when he attempts to trample Lord *Kriśna* to death. *Kuvālayapida* fails and *Kriśna* kills him by pulling his tail and breaking his back. Historians have argued that the *Kriśna* myths refer to predicaments of an agrarian society and gained popularity when agriculture became the dominant mode of production (Kosambi 2002). The story of *Kuvālayapida* may indeed be a reference to crop–depredation by elephants, not unlike contemporary encounters. The other elephant demon in Indian mythology is *Gajasura*. Literally meaning ‘elephant demon’, *Gajasura* is said to have gone on a rampage destroying homes and killing a number of people (Banerjea 1956). The demon is ultimately slain by *Śiva*, the lord and keeper of animals, who intervenes to protect the affected people. The iconography of this myth is popular across Indian art and architecture, where *Śiva* is shown dancing on the body or head of an elephant (Figure 6).

A more recent manifestation of cultural vilification emerging from encounters fraught with fear, is that of calling certain elephants ‘Bin Laden’ in different parts of India. When human–elephant conflict escalated in Sonitpur in the early 2000s, villagers in the area poisoned over twenty elephants and wrote *Paddy thief elephant Laden* on the body of one dead animal (Gureja et al. 2002) (Figure 7). According to my informants, people had become irate with the

increase in crop-depredation and had begun to name bold but troublesome elephants ‘Laden’ or ‘Bin Laden’. This was shortly after the World Trade Centre bombings, when Osama Bin Laden had become a household name associated with terror. The practice of labeling problematic elephants ‘Bin Laden’ is not a reference to elephants’ association with any political or religious organization. Rather, it is a way of encapsulating the fear and strife emanating from encounters with fierce bull elephants. In fact, this practice of vilifying elephants as ‘Bin Laden’ gained currency across parts of India. In Assam, a bull by this name, reported to have killed fourteen people, was declared a ‘rogue’ and was culled by the government (Anon. 2006). In 2008, another ‘serial killer’ Bin Laden was killed by the police and forest authorities in the central Indian state of Jharkhand (Shankar Raman 2011). Stories about Bin Laden bear an uncanny resemblance to earlier myths of elephant demons. Both refer to uneven encounters, where elephants cause harm to people and are consequently vilified. Like *Kuvālayapida* and *Gajasura*, Bin Laden too is killed by a powerful authority, in this case the state and not divine power.

Although vilification does not generate the same values of empathy and enchantment as charisma (Lorimer 2007), these encounters are value-forming and have currency. They give rise to particular social representations that amplify the dangers and threats posed by elephants. In other instances, they may be reflective of the power and authority of the state that protects elephants, sometimes against the will of local publics. The encounter gains further currency through the circulation of names and stories, sometimes fueled by discursive links with media reports on the war on terror. In a more symmetrical fashion, one could examine the act of vilification through the actions of elephants themselves. Studies in Africa suggest that elephants are able to differentiate between ethnic communities through olfactory and colour cues, reacting aggressively to those communities that hunt them (Bates et al. 2007). It is highly plausible that in landscapes riven with conflict, bulls that have gone through trauma seek retributive action. Towards the end of my fieldwork in Golaghat, I noticed Bulldejaar had some bullet scars on his left hind leg. The animosity that the creature had generated also led to quiet retributive action by people.

Furthermore, it is not just fear that emerges from these encounters. Conflict can jeopardize conservation goals, leading to local protests and opposition to biodiversity conservation

imperatives (Barua, Tamuly, and Ahmed 2010). More importantly, this disruption of conservation is due to the impacts the ‘taking hold’ of conflict has on the rural political economy. In Golaghat, people had lost substantial amounts of crops to elephants. In parts of India this can be as high as 10–15% of the annual agricultural output (Madhusudan and Sankaran 2010). The reduction of available food supply is known to affect women who often have to eat less to provide nourishment to children (Ogra 2008). Education and employment opportunities may also be compromised as men and sometimes children have to guard crops from elephants at night, leading to fatigue and poor school attendance (Barua, Bhagwat, and Jadhav 2012). To cope with fatigue, several farmers that I knew in Golaghat had resorted to excessive alcohol. They told me that it helped cope with the tiredness, but also to overcome the fear to confront elephants in their crop fields at night. Together, these impacts of conflict illustrate how rural political economies may be influenced by ecology and encounters between people and elephants. Thus, the production, distribution and consumption of resources are mediated by social relations that are more-than-human in nature, not sole products of human action.



Figure 6: Śiva as the slayer of the demon *Gajasura*. Trichinopoly, India. Source: Victoria and Albert Museum.



Figure 7: Elephant killed in Sonitpur, writing on the body states ‘Paddy thief elephant Laden’. © Sunil Subba Kyarong, Wildlife Trust of India

3.5. Encounter value in the political economy of conservation

In the previous sections, I have illustrated the ecological and aesthetic dimensions of human–elephant encounters, and have illustrated two distinct forms of value to which they give rise. In this section, I will turn to practices of biodiversity conservation to illustrate how encounters, their affective potential and nonhuman agency are harnessed and mobilized. This is usually in the form of a ‘flagship species’: species that serve as symbols and the leading element of an entire conservation campaign (Simberloff 1998; Barua, Tamuly, and Ahmed 2010). More specifically, I will examine how elephants are leveraged as flagships by two conservation NGOs – the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) and the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) – and the ways in which the creative, if unstable force of encounters is routinized to achieve institutional order (Weber 1978). I pay close attention to how these encounters are choreographed, what is amplified and downplayed, such that they begin to attain a currency with value (Althusser 2006).

The Asian elephant is framed as a flagship for the conservation of forests and biodiversity across its range in Asia (Blake and Hedges 2004). This is a highly choreographed process, partly drawing from a scientific rationale and in part from the emotion and sentience elephants elicit amongst diverse publics. From an ecological science perspective, the large spatial requirements of elephants and the location of their home ranges in some of the most biologically diverse parts of

the world provide a compelling rationale for Asian elephant conservation. It ensures ‘the persistence of very significant proportions of the earth’s biodiversity’ (Sukumar 2003; P.354). This is strongly echoed in a profile of the Asian elephant on a WWF webpage: *“Asian elephants are ... charismatic representatives of the biodiversity within the complex ecosystems they inhabit. Because these large animals need a lot of space to survive, their conservation will help maintain biological diversity and ecological integrity over extensive areas and so help many other species”* (WWF 2006). As encapsulated in the opening vignette of the paper, for the WTI elephants ‘represent the whole ecosystem’ and therefore are a strong ‘symbol for the conservation of forests’.

However, a greater impetus for conserving Asian elephants emanates from its charisma and cultural associations. The director of the WTI tells me how important its popular appeal is for rallying conservation support: *“People, whether they come from an elephant-range state or not, empathize with the elephant. They want it safe as they think it is an intelligent social animal with memory, consciousness and other things”*. Similar sentiments are evoked by the director of WWF–India’s species programme: *“If you appeal to the public, then charismatic megafauna are very important ... Imagine raising funds for the Pigmy Hog as opposed to the elephant ... Who is likely to cut eyes small?”* (Director, WWF–India Species Programme). The Pigmy Hog, though endangered, is ordinary in the public eye: *“For you and me it’s very important, but for the guy sitting down the road in London, it’s a hog...”* Harnessing empathy and sentience from human–elephant encounters is an integral strategy to generate capital by both organizations: *“Elephants have the capacity to earn resources ... they have earning appeal and earn biodiversity conservation”* (Director, WWF–India Species Programme), *“Birds and reptiles don’t get you money. Even whales do not get you money. But somehow, elephants are able to”* (Director, WTI). This ‘earning’, enabled by the aesthetic and ethological charisma of elephants, is capital generated through encounter value. In regimes of conservation, this value is spawned through trans–actions with lively animals, rather than through transactions of a dead commodity. It is when ‘value becomes flesh’ that elephants are able to earn biodiversity conservation. The affective force of charisma, emanating from aesthetic and bodily encounters with elephants, is what is tapped into and mobilized for the reproduction of conservation capital.

Whilst the preceding sections have illustrated how direct encounters with living elephants generate value, charismatic affects may also be located outside the temporal immediacy of

encounters on the ground. The visual materials crafted by both WTI and WWF through reports and project websites are a case in point. For instance, WWF's description of this flagship species highlights the elephant being the 'largest terrestrial animal' (WWF 2013b). A number of statistics are presented to foreground its longevity, social bonds and memory, thereby serving to heighten their aesthetic charisma. The websites are replete with images of elephants, accentuating parts of the elephant body such as the trunk, eyes and even skin, the latter downloadable as a desktop background or screen saver. A striking feature of this disembodied imagery is the large number of photographs from a frontal perspective. As the Director of the WTI tells me, "*What makes the elephant so effective a flagship is that they have forward-facing eyes. I think we relate to those things that are close to us – elephants, the apes – which all have forward-facing eyes*". Both anatomic configurations of the elephant body and the visual, face-to-face contact with upright, bipedal humans play an important role. Unlike live encounters, where the face of an individual animal is transient and hard to distinguish, images on posters and websites stabilize elephants' faces. They gain this stability through manipulated close-ups, which in turn generate intimacy and affection for the creature.

Repetitive presentation of the nonhuman face is intrinsic to the choreography of charisma in conservation practice. It allows animals to be treated as ethical subjects worthy of empathy and conservation action (Lorimer 2007; Jones 2000). Through an engagement with the work of Althusser, Nigel Thrift has argued that the genesis of such states of encounter themselves have currency with a face-value (Thrift 2010). Whilst face-to-face encounters with living elephants is value forming, such as that of Tara, the simulation of nonhuman faces through mediated encounters are equally vital. This affective force of elephants' charisma issues forth as a 'singularity' (Deleuze 1990), i.e. events and expressions that are neither individual nor personal, but a potential that produces individuals and persons through actualizing and realizing itself. Singularities are "points of fusion, condensation... points of tears and joy, sickness and health, hope and anxiety" that "preside over the genesis of individuals and persons" (Deleuze 1990; P.63, P.118). In these mediated states of encounter, the traits and ethological dispositions of individual elephants are lost, but as aggregates, they effectively serve to orchestrate public support in favour of elephant conservation.

The religious connotations of elephants in Indian culture, and its endangered status, are integral to this orchestration. Both dimensions are encapsulated by the WTI report ‘God in Distress’ encountered in the opening vignette (Figure 1). Similarly, a WWF webpage states, *“Sacred but exploited, the Asian elephant has been worshipped for centuries and is still used today for ceremonial and religious purposes”*. Religious connotations serve to heighten the charisma of Asian elephants and are an effective mobilizing force in conservation. As the Director of WTI tells me, *“In many cases we’ve found that using cultural symbolism, even religious symbolism, is the fastest way to conserve in India”*. Similar sentiments are echoed by the WWF representative I interviewed: *“Religious associations are very important ... This is a powerful idea that works in favour of the elephant, one that we use for conservation”*. Furthermore, the Asian elephant is projected to be in a situation of crisis, facing multiple threats to extinction (WWF 2013a). Weber has argued that crisis may be socially mobilized to enhance charisma (Weber 1978). The choreography of encounters by the two NGOs operates along a similar logic: the Asian elephant faces a high risk of extinction, and people need to act *now* in order to avert their extinction. Indeed, the term ‘endangered species’ functions simultaneously to locate value and to evoke death (Haraway 2007). It should however be borne in mind that elephants do not deliberately participate in conservation. It is people who bring them forward and narrate stories of their plight.

A critical aspect of this orchestration of charisma is that it downplays affects of fear and the vilification of elephants. Encounters with disaggregated elephant bodies are never presented in ways bring to life trampled human bodies or the dark side of conflict. Narratives of people vilifying elephants too are toned down or given a different interpretation. For instance, following the spate of elephant poisonings in Sonitpur, the WTI released a report entitled ‘From Ganesha to Bin Laden’ (Gureja et al. 2002). Mobilized through a conservation apparatus, it states that the ‘famed tolerance’ toward elephants has ‘eroded’, ‘changing the elephant from Lord Ganesha to Osama Bin Laden’ (Gureja et al. 2002; P.v). There is little mention or reference to elephant demons which, as illustrated in the previous section, have run parallel to Indian traditions of deifying the creature. Furthermore, it edits out the moral concerns of those who cohabit with elephants, and in some ways concerns of elephants themselves. This selective framing has two important functions. Firstly, it provides consistency to cultural narratives devised and deployed by

NGOs. Ambivalence and the diverse modes of being subsumed under the term ‘elephant’ are kept at bay. Secondly, it minimizes potential disruptions to the generation of value through the encounter. If anything, a sense of impending crisis is reinvigorated to reproduce capital through public donations and fundraising for action.

The value emanating from human–elephant encounters serves to forge identities of these organizations. Furthermore, it contributes to their planning and policy imperatives. The Director of the WTI tells me that their close association with elephants almost made them “*the Elephant Trust and not the Wildlife Trust of India*”. This association was influenced by the charisma of elephants, their ability to garner funds and help conserve “*large tracts of forest in India, covering several important ecoregions*”. Part of this was also because international donors “*feel very comfortable if you work with species such as the elephant*”. The sentience, joy and comfort evoked by elephants, in part through choreographed encounters, shows that there is much more at play in practices of biodiversity conservation than political economy alone. Charisma and value generated through encounters are equally what makes these organizations act. For instance, in 2008 the WTI relocated hand–raised elephant calves from one of their wildlife rehabilitation centres to Manas National Park in western Assam (WTI 2008). Elephants, through the sentience they garner and the emotions they trigger, have immense lobbying power with state governments. As their Director tells me, “*The thousand square kilometers which comprises Greater Manas would not have come into being had we not moved elephants there ... If we moved a bird, say the Blue-naped pitta, instead, we would not have achieved this*”. This is achieved in concert with elephants. Other creatures such as the Blue–naped pitta or the Pigmy hog do not have the same leveraging power in political economies of conservation.

3.6. Discussion

Through a close engagement with human–elephant relationships in India, this paper has fleshed out the concept of encounter value and how it operates in the political economies of conservation. It has unpacked two among the many different trajectories encounter value can potentially take. The first pertains to nonhuman charisma, which is not just an affect that makes organisms appealing to humans, but a vital force that helps achieve institutional order in

conservation organizations. The second entails conflict, where humans encounter elephants through friction. When taking hold, conflicting encounters work in a direction very different from charisma, jeopardizing conservation action and disrupting local political economies. The paper has shown how these dimensions of encounter value play out in practices of biodiversity conservation. Through the choreography of encounters, charisma is amplified whilst conflict is subdued. In this section, I will briefly summarize what this paper contributes to the literatures it has deployed and to key debates in geography.

This analysis has sought to work with the tensions between political economy and more-than-human approaches to understanding nature-society relations in geography. Through its lively engagement with elephants on the ground, as well as its dissection of the mobilization of charisma through disaggregated images, statistics and facts, the paper shows how nonhuman agency is vital for the production of conservation capital. Without their affect and sentience, the emotions they trigger, conservation organizations would not be able to ‘earn’ biodiversity conservation. On the other hand, by orchestrating encounters, and proceeding through the logic of accumulation, these organizations produce specific elephants. These are commodities to be consumed in order to save nature. Yet, it is their liveliness that makes them effective as commodities.

The concept of encounter value deployed here provides an avenue to work through this gulf. It encapsulates the range of more-than-human agencies and affects that come to the fore when the material lives and spaces are given due attention. The capital that it produces is ‘lively’ (Haraway 2007), emerging through the intra-actions between an array of sentient beings, devices and able-bodied humans. Value is generated when these encounters ‘take hold’, where both elements in the conjuncture are reconfigured (Althusser 2006). To use Haraway’s term, it is through ‘trans-actions’ between a motley array of beings, ‘when value becomes flesh’ that encounter value is generated (Haraway 2007; P.45). Further, as this paper has shown, animals cannot be encapsulated into discourse or subsumed by capital without leaving a remainder. Their potential to disrupt the flows of conservation is made evident in the examples of conflict furnished here. Encounter value thus has an aleatory trajectory. We do not know what is likely to happen

in advance of bodies coming together, and neither do they issue forth toward a *telos* (Althusser 2006).

This paper adds to Haraway's analysis of encounter value in two ways. First, it expands upon her rather cursory treatment of how interspecies encounters can give rise to worlds that are not always about companionship, affection and love. There is mention of the dogs in Abu Ghraib, but we learn little about what these more-than-human worlds look like, and what the dogs do there. In the context of Golaghat, the actions of an aggressive bull elephant whose encounter with people occurred over an uneven socio-political terrain, led to disruptions of daily life. Losing a substantial amount of their agricultural output had bearings upon the local political economy. Crop guarding resulted in loss in employment opportunities and excessive alcohol intake. Recent studies in fact suggest that when coupled with poor governance, such landscapes can indeed produce landscapes that are actively 'counter-therapeutic' for rural communities (Jadhav and Barua 2012). People had vilified the animal, and Bulldejaar embodied the scars of their actions. The possibility of retributive action on the animal's part cannot be ruled out. It is likely that such landscapes are counter-therapeutic for elephants as well. Unpacking these difficult becomings—with nonhuman others through the lens of postcolonial history and subaltern struggles could in fact be a productive area for future scholarship in more-than-human geography and political ecology.

Second, it develops the notion of encounter value in a more symmetrical fashion. The paper has sought to do this through the lens of charisma and leadership in elephants. By drawing upon the work of Weber and von Uexküll (Weber 1978; von Uexküll 1957, 2010), and bringing it into conversation with ethological studies on elephants (McComb et al. 2001; Lee and Moss 2012), it suggests that leadership qualities of particular adult bull elephants like Tara in a landscape laden with conflict and insecurity might be a herd-organizing force. This 'charisma' of Tara, if we take a risk and use the term, emerges through inter-subjective relations of elephants, from the encounter and its taking hold (von Uexküll 2010; Althusser 2006). These encounters are value forming for elephants. It contributes to social organization in these animals, and a transfer of skills between Proboscidean bodies. The gradual improvement in Tara-3's ability to break into houses is a case in point. Here value is not being interpreted in some form of human currency or defined

by a humanist axis of calibration. It is akin to what von Uexküll terms ‘*Ton*’, or quality, that is meaningful in terms of a nonhuman organism’s own perceptual world (von Uexküll 2010). Value emerges in this case when a being or entity is drawn into relations fostered by the creature’s own activities (Ingold 2011). This symmetrical articulation of encounter value helps overcome some of the humanist biases of political ecology and opens up new avenues through which we might understand economy as the product of ecological relations between human and nonhuman bodies.

These arguments also expanded upon Lorimer’s concept of nonhuman charisma (Lorimer 2007). Lorimer’s articulation has largely been about the perception of nonhuman organisms by human beings. The symmetrical potential offered up here adds an additional axis through which we might garner purchase from the concept. Furthermore, by examining some of the specifics of the ways in which elephants are perceived in Indian cultural contexts, it adds to broader understandings of how the nonhuman charisma of Asian elephants may be perceived (Lorimer 2010). This pertains to the role of cultural taxonomies and religious myths. The former led to a specific aesthetic appreciation of the elephant body, whilst myths were mobilized (or edited out) by conservation organizations in their choreography of elephants’ charisma. I recognize that there are certain tensions here between such cultural anthropomorphism and some of the posthumanist ontologies deployed in this work. Nevertheless, what remains unresolved is how harmful anthropomorphism is to this analysis. Refraining from putting forward perspectives that certain cultures uphold in favour of a project that seeks to transcend Western ontology is certainly a concern (Gandhi 2012). One would perhaps be inclined to argue that debates are less mutually exclusive than they are made out to be, like the tensions between political economy and more-than-human geography this paper has sought to work with.

Finally, a clarification needs to be made as to how nonhuman charisma differs from encounter value, if at all. Following Lorimer, this paper takes nonhuman charisma to be an affective force, one that elevates organisms and makes them interesting to perceiving human (and perhaps nonhuman) subjects (Lorimer 2007). It has the potential to enchant, and thereby organize as envisaged by Weber, made evident in this paper and elsewhere (Lorimer 2008, 2007). However, not all encounters with the same set of beings echo charisma. In certain cases, as the

above sections elucidate, animals may induce fear and the value of encounters result in the production of enemies or rogues, or even a disrupted rural political economy. In this sense, encounter value encapsulates a more diverse set of interspecies worldings, aleatory in nature, without a *telos* of enchantment. In other words, we cannot entirely know what the value arising from encounters between lively bodies can do.

Taking encounters seriously, in all its lively, refractory and productive forms, enables us to appraise how more-than-human agencies contribute to the political economies of conservation. Neither does it sacrifice the analytical purchase political economy approaches have to offer. Working beyond the ‘false antithesis’ between relational and structural approaches (Castree 2002; Lorimer 2012), is fertile ground for examining human-animal relations in the future. This paper has been a step toward that direction, and it is hoped that there will be many more to come.

3.7. References

- Althusser, L. 2006. *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings, 1978-1987*. Translated by G. M. Goshgarian. Edited by F. Matheron and O. Corpet. London: Verso.
- Anon. 2012. *India's killer elephant shot dead*. BBC News, 17 December 2012 2006 [cited 13/11/2012 2012]. Available from http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/6183961.stm.
- Bakker, K. 2010. The limits of "neoliberal natures": Debating green neoliberalism. *Progress in Human Geography* 34:715–735.
- Banerjea, J. N. 1956. *The Development of Hindu Iconography*. Kolkata: Calcutta University Press.
- Barkaith, S. 1734. *Hastividyārnava*, ed. P. C. Choudhury. Guwahati: Publication Board, Assam.
- Barua, M., S. A. Bhagwat, and S. Jadhav. 2012. The hidden dimensions of human–wildlife conflict: Health impacts, opportunity and transaction costs. *Biological Conservation* 157:309–316.
- Barua, M., J. Tamuly, and R. A. Ahmed. 2010. Mutiny or Clear Sailing? Examining the Role of the Asian Elephant as a Flagship Species. *Human Dimensions of Wildlife* 15 (2):145–160.
- Bates, L. A., K. N. Sayialel, N. W. Njiraini, C. J. Moss, J. H. Poole, and R. W. Byrne. 2007. Elephants Classify Human Ethnic Groups by Odor and Garment Color. *Current Biology* 17:1938–1942.
- Bennett, J. 2010. *Vibrant Matter: a political ecology of things*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Blake, S., and S. Hedges. 2004. Sinking the Flagship: the Case of Forest Elephants in Asia and Africa. *Conservation Biology* 18 (5):1191–1202.
- Bligh, M. C., J. C. Kohles, and J. R. Meindl. 2004. Charisma under crisis: Presidential leadership, rhetoric, and media responses before and after the September 11th terrorist attacks. *The Leadership Quarterly* 15:211–239.
- Bradshaw, G. A. 2009. *Elephants on the edge: what animals teach us about humanity*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Bradshaw, G. A., A. N. Schore, J. L. Brown, J. H. Poole, and C. J. Moss. 2005. Elephant breakdown. *Nature* 433:807.
- Braun, B. 2008. Environmental issues: inventive life. *Progress in Human Geography* 32 (5):667–679.

- Brockington, D., and K. Scholfield. 2010. The Conservationist Mode of Production and Conservation NGOs in sub-Saharan Africa. *Antipode* 42 (3):551–575.
- Brown, R. L., ed. 1991. *Ganesh: Studies of an Asian God*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Castree, N. 2002. False Antitheses? Marxism, Nature and Actor–Networks. *Antipode* 34:111–146.
- Coole, D., and S. Frost. 2010. Introducing the New Materialisms. In *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, Politics*, eds. D. Coole and S. Frost, 1–46. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Das, A. K. 1999. The elephant in Mughal painting. In *Flora and fauna in Mughal art*, ed. S. P. Varma, 36–54. Mumbai: Marg Publishers.
- de Silva, S., and G. Wittemyer. 2012. A Comparison of Social Organization in Asian Elephants and African Savannah Elephants. *International Journal of Primatology* doi:10.1007/s10764-011-9564-1.
- Deleuze, G. 1990. *The Logic of Sense*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Dowson, J. 1972. *A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology*. London: Routledge and Keegan Paul.
- Duffy, R., and L. Moore. 2010. Neoliberalising Nature? Elephant–Back Tourism in Thailand and Botswana. *Antipode* 42 (3):742–766.
- Edgerton, F. 1985. *The Elephant-Lore of the Hindus: the elephant sport (Matanga-Lila) of Nilakantha*. Translated by F. Edgerton. New Delhi: Motilal Banarasidass.
- Gandhi, A. 2012. Catch me if you can: Monkey capture in Delhi. *Ethnography* 13 (1):43–56.
- Gibson, J. J. 1986. *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*. New York: Taylor & Francis.
- Gureja, N., V. Menon, P. Sarkar, and S. S. Kyarong. 2002. Ganesha to Bin Laden: Human–elephant conflict in Sonitpur District of Assam., 45. New Delhi: Wildlife Trust of India.
- Haraway, D. J. 2007. *When species meet*. 1st ed. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Hinchliffe, S., M. B. Kearnes, M. Degen, and S. Whatmore. 2005. Urban wild things: a cosmopolitical experiment. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 23:643–658.
- Hobson, K. 2007. Political animals? On animals as subjects in an enlarged political geography. *Political Geography* 26:250–267.
- Ingold, T. 2011. *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

- Jadhav, S., and M. Barua. 2012. The Elephant Vanishes: Impact of Human–Elephant Conflict on People's Wellbeing. *Health & Place* 18:1356–1365.
- Jalais, A. 2008. Unmasking the Cosmopolitan Tiger. *Nature and Culture* 3 (1):25–40.
- Jones, O. 2000. (Un)ethical geographies of human– non–human relations: encounters, collectives and spaces. In *Animal Spaces, Beastly Places: New Geographies of Human-Animal Relations.*, eds. C. Philo and C. Wilbert, 268–291. London: Routledge.
- Kalof, L., and A. Fitzgerald, eds. 2007. *The Animals Reader: The Essential Classic and Contemporary Writings*. Oxford: Berg.
- Kosambi, D. D. 2002. *Combined Methods in Indology and Other Writings*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Lee, P. C., and C. J. Moss. 2012. Wild Female African Elephants (*Loxodonta africana*) Exhibit Personality Traits of Leadership and Social Integration. *Journal of Comparative Psychology* 126 (3):224–232.
- Lévi–Strauss, C. 1969. *Totemism*. London: Penguin.
- Lorimer, J. 2007. Non–human charisma. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 25 (5):911–932.
- . 2008. Counting corncrakes: The affective science of the UK corncrake census. *Social Studies of Science* 38 (3):377–405.
- . 2010. Moving image methodologies for more–than–human geographies. *Cultural Geographies* 17 (2):237–258.
- . 2012. Multinatural geographies for the Anthropocene. *Progress in Human Geography* 36 (5):593–612.
- Lorimer, J., and K. Srinivasan. 2013. Animal Geographies. In *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Cultural Geography*, eds. N. C. Johnson, R. H. Schein and J. Winders, 332–342. Oxford: Wiley–Blackwell.
- Madhusudan, M. D., and P. Sankaran. 2010. Seeing the Elephant in the Room: Human–Elephant Conflict and the ETF Report. *Economic and Political Weekly* XLV (49):29–31.
- Madsen, D., and P. G. Snow. 1991. *The charismatic bond: Political behaviour in time of crisis*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

- Marx, K. 1970. *Capital, Volume I*. London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- McComb, K., C. Moss, S. M. Durant, L. Baker, and S. Sayialel. 2001. Matriarchs as Repositories of Social Knowledge in African Elephants. *Science* 292:491–494.
- McComb, K., G. Shannon, S. M. Durant, K. Sayialel, R. Slotow, J. Poole, and C. Moss. 2011. Leadership in elephants: the adaptive value of age. *Proceedings of the Royal Society B* doi:10.1098/rspb.2011.0168.
- Mullin, M. H. 1999. Mirrors and Windows: Socio-cultural studies of Human-Animal Relationships. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 28:201–224.
- Ogra, M. V. 2008. Human-wildlife conflict and gender in protected area borderlands: A case study of costs, perceptions, and vulnerabilities from Uttarakhand (Uttaranchal), India. *Geoforum* 39 (3):1408–1422.
- Proctor, J. D. 1998. The Spotted Owl and the Contested Moral Landscape of the Pacific Northwest. In *Animal Geographies: Place, Politics, and Identity in Nature-Culture Borderlands.*, eds. J. Wolch and J. Emel, 191–217. London: Verso.
- Rangarajan, M., A. Desai, R. Sukumar, P. S. Easa, V. Menon, S. Vincent, S. Ganguly, B. K. Talukdar, B. Singh, D. Mudappa, S. Chowdhary, and A. N. Prasad. 2010. *Gajah: Securing the future for elephants in India*. New Delhi: Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India.
- Read, J. 2005. The Althusser Effect: Philosophy, History, and Temporality. *Borderlands* 4 (2):http://borderlands.net.au/vol4no2_2005/read_effect.htm.
- Rikoon, J. S. 2006. Wild horses and the political ecology of nature restoration in the Missouri Ozarks. *Geoforum* 37:200–211.
- Robbins, P. 1998. Shrines and Butchers: Animals as Deities, Capital, and Meat in Contemporary North India. In *Animal Geographies. Place, Politics, and Identity in Nature-Culture Borderlands.*, eds. J. Wolch and J. Emel, 218–240. London: Verso.
- Shankar Raman, T. R. 2013. *Death of two Osamas*. Deccan Herald 2011 [cited 26/01/2013 2013]. Available from <http://www.deccanherald.com/content/163574/death-two-osamas.html>.
- Shotwell, A. 2011. *Knowing otherwise: race, gender, and implicit understanding*. University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University.

- Simberloff, D. 1998. Flagships, umbrellas and keystones: is single species management passé in the landscape era? *Biological Conservation* 83:247–257.
- Sukumar, R. 1996. *Elephant days and nights*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- . 2003. *The living elephants: evolutionary ecology, behaviour and conservation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Thorpe, C., and S. Shapin. 2000. Who Was J. Robert Oppenheimer? Charisma and Complex Organization. *Social Studies of Science* 30 (4):545–590.
- Thrift, N. 2010. Halos: Making More Room in the World for New Political Orders. In *Political matter: technoscience, democracy, and public life.*, eds. B. Braun and S. Whatmore, 139–176. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- von Uexküll, J. 1957. A stroll through the worlds of animals and men. In *Instinctive Behaviour*, ed. C. Schiller, 5–80. New York: International Universities Press.
- . 2010. *A Theory of Meaning*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Weber, M. 1978. *Economy and Society*. 2 vols. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Whatmore, S. 2002. *Hybrid geographies: natures, cultures, spaces*. London: Sage.
- WTI. 2008. *Rehabilitating hand-raised elephant calves in Manas National Park*. Wildlife Trust of India 2008 [cited 23–08–2008 2008]. Available from <http://www.wildlifetrustofindia.org>.
- WWF. 2008. *Species fact sheet: Asian elephant*. World Wide Fund for Nature 2006 [cited 12–08–2008 2008]. Available from <http://www.panda.org>.
- . 2013. *Asian elephants - threats*. World Wide Fund for Nature 2013a [cited 31–01–2013 2013]. Available from http://wwf.panda.org/what_we_do/endangered_species/elephants/asian_elephants/asianeleph_threats/.
- . 2013. *Elephants*. World Wide Fund for Nature 2013b [cited 31–01–2013 2013]. Available from http://wwf.panda.org/what_we_do/endangered_species/elephants/.

CHAPTER 4: CIRCULATING ELEPHANTS: UNPACKING THE GEOGRAPHIES OF A COSMOPOLITAN ANIMAL

Abstract

Cosmopolitanism has emerged as an important concept in geography and the social sciences. The rise of mobility, circulation and trans-national networks has been paralleled by academic scholarship on un-parochial others: diasporas, travelers, and itinerant social groups. However, the role of nonhumans as participants in and subjects of cosmopolitanism has received scant attention. This paper seeks to develop a ‘more-than-human’ cosmopolitanism that accounts for the presence of nonhuman animals and entities in stories of circulation and contact. Through a multi-sited ethnography of elephant conservation in India and the UK, the paper illustrates how animals become participants in forging connections across difference. Through their circulation, elephants too may become cosmopolitan, present in diverse cultures and serving banal global consumption. The paper then illustrates how cosmopolitan elephants may be coercive, giving rise to political frictions and new inequalities when mobilized by powerful, trans-national environmental actors. It concludes by discussing the methodological and conceptual implications of a more-than-human cosmopolitanism.

Elephants are contagious

— Paul Éluard

4.1. Introduction

In a provocative response to Ulrich Beck’s proposal for a cosmopolitan approach to handling otherness in times of global interdependency, Bruno Latour argued that Beck’s framing of the cosmos in an exclusively human club was restrictive as it limited the number of bodies on the negotiating table and failed to embrace ‘the vast number of nonhuman entities making humans act’ (Latour 2004; P.454). Since this iteration, there has been a substantial body of work in geography that brings nonhumans to the table. Scholars have examined how a retinue of organisms, things, materials and forces influence ‘social’ outcomes and co-produce hybrid geographies (Braun and Whatmore 2010; Hinchliffe et al. 2005; Lorimer 2006). They interrogate the ways in which knowledge, skill and expertise cut across human–nonhuman divides (Bear and Eden 2011; Despret 2004; Lorimer 2008), and have called for a relational ethics and politics that is open to nonhuman difference and the recalcitrance of life (Bennett 2010; Haraway 2007). What is less explicitly addressed is the notion of cosmopolitanism, how it might be a ‘more–than–human’ endeavour, critical to global interdependency.

There are a number of cosmopolitanisms on record, ranging from being a moral philosophy to a methodological approach to the social sciences.⁹ Undercutting these disputes, Beck stresses the need to distinguish cosmopolitanism as a credo from cosmopolitanism as a process of trans–territorial transformation of the social (Beck 2004). Beck provides four examples: the rise of an interconnected global public arena resulting from side effects of modernization, a ‘postnational politics’ driven by such novel configurations, a globalization of inequality as a consequence of entangled national and trans–national processes, and finally a ‘banal cosmopolitanism’ based around cultures of consuming global products and images. These

⁹ The number of ways cosmopolitanism is used can be bewildering: a political project, as moral philosophy, a way of being, condition or postcolonial disposition, and a methodological stance. This rich diversity may further be specifically defined as ‘rooted’, ‘situated’, ‘actually existing’, ‘discrepant’ and so forth [see Jazeel T 2011 *Spatializing Difference beyond Cosmopolitanism: Rethinking Planetary Futures*. *Theory, Culture & Society* 28: 75–97]. A dissection of these terms is beyond the scope or project of this paper.

concerns have appealed to geographical sensibility. Scholars have examined how the socio-cultural condition of cosmopolitanism has given rise to new spaces of engagement that transform how the world is seen or inhabited (Jeffrey and McFarlane 2008; Szerszynski and Urry 2006), and have addressed some of the ethico-political concerns that arise when engaging with radical alterity outside Eurocentric universalizing values and human normativity (Jazeel 2011). However, barring some work on the spread of less desired global mobiles (Braun 2007; Clark 2002), this scholarship largely operates through a humanist lens. The state, corporate interest or political parties remain the prominent actors (Edwards 2008; McFarlane 2008; Mohan 2008; Strang 2008), and humans largely constitute who or what is other (Jazeel 2011; Kothari 2008). All that is nonhuman melts into thin air.

In this paper, I examine the role of nonhumans as participants in, and subjects of, cosmopolitanism. Whilst embracing Beck's enterprise of examining global interconnection, consumption and the constitution of new inequalities, bringing nonhumans into this project links to Isabelle Stengers' concept of cosmopolitics (Latour 2004; Stengers 2011). In contrast to Beck, Stengers intends her use of cosmopolitics to resist politics from meaning give-and-take in an exclusive human club. She opposes restricting the set of entities that are granted entry into notions of the cosmos. Consequently, what it means to belong or to pertain is opened up to relations between heterogeneous ways of being. Here, human practices are crafted 'in the presence of' others (Stengers 2005a), the things, technologies or organisms to whom people submit, are allured by, and without whom they would be unable to achieve pathways or goals (Stengers 2005b). In light of this posthumanist argument, this paper focuses on three interrelated questions that offer up potential for developing a 'more-than-human' cosmopolitanism. First, do nonhuman entities and animals play a role in forging global connections across difference? If so, are animals themselves reconfigured as cosmopolitan, present the world-over and not just 'out there' in the beastly places traditionally assigned to them (Hinchliffe et al. 2005; Jalais 2008)? Cosmopolitanisms are themselves inherently political, moulding modes of contemporary environmental governance connected across differential fields of power. This leads to the third question: what practices and politics of representing nature are such animals used to promote? Whom do they benefit and what do they edit out?

To address these questions, I turn to practices of elephant conservation in India and the UK. The Asian elephant provides a specific but compelling opportunity for a ‘more-than-human’ analysis of cosmopolitanism. Elephants, as Whatmore and Thorne (2000; P.187) in their ground-breaking work on wildlife and mobility observe, are creatures so long caught up in social networks of trade and transport, ceremony and entertainment, that traces of their presence ‘litter the histories and geographies of civilizations and everyday lives’. Their popularity in both Asia and the West allow elephants to be mobilized in the form of flagship species to conserve wildlife habitat and generate public support for conservation (Barua et al. 2010). The creature is a conduit for connectivity: spatially by enabling landscape linkages via elephant corridors, and socially by knitting together diverse and far-flung epistemic communities to enroll financial resources and political potential for those who speak in its name (Lorimer 2010a). At the same time, geographies of elephant conservation are riven with asymmetry, especially when elephants are deployed by powerful actors to control landscapes and govern resources from afar (Lewis 2004). As the Paul Éluard maxim above provocatively suggests, elephants are contagious. They affect diverse bodies and draw them together to constitute new connections. Connections may be productive or coercive, not dissimilar to how cosmopolitanisms unfold in human contexts (Beck 2004).

Methodologically, this research draws from a multi-sited ethnography of elephant conservation in India and the UK to examine how elephants circulate and forge connections across difference (Marcus 1995). The journey is through three spatially and temporally far-flung but interconnected events. It starts by reanimating the travels of an elephant and her English companion through India in the early 1990s. Animation was an act mobilized through a reading of a travelogue published about the journey, supplemented by interviews with the author and examination of visual material of their travels. It aims to open up postcolonial histories of human–elephant encounters and the cosmopolitical sensibilities to which they give rise. The second concerns a public art and conservation event in London where elephants were deployed to raise funds and draw diverse actors into assemblages of conservation. The event was organized by a UK-based elephant conservation charity set up as a result of the previous journey. This involved participant observation through volunteering, conducting interviews with sponsors,

artists, NGO partners and charity staff, as well as joining a group of members of the London public who had got together to follow the event.¹⁰ In order to trace the trajectories through which elephants circulate and forge connections across difference, the final part of this endeavour was to follow Western configurations of the elephant back to India. Here, elephants ‘return’ in the form of ‘transportable packages’ (Fujimura 1992), combining conservation theory, monetary capital, and GIS-based cartographies to secure wildlife corridors. By travelling the routes prised open by this flow,¹¹ the paper interrogates how elephants are caught up in cosmopolitan differences of interest, fields of responsibility and modes of knowledge (Szerszynski and Urry 2002). The political frictions that arise when cosmopolitan forms of conservation are put to work are brought to the fore.

4.2. Traveling-with elephants

Travel, circulation, and contact with itinerant others are perhaps hallmarks of cosmopolitanism. They forge novel connections, foster sensitivity to difference and open up new fields of responsibility. But what if these others we come into contact with are not always human? What kind of awareness does this raise in the travelling subject, and what dispositions toward other places and cultures does it shape? These are some of the questions that come forward when reanimating the travels of the conservationist Mark Shand on his elephant through India in the early 1990s (Figure 1). Shand, an upper-class Englishman, completes an 800-mile journey from Konark to Sonepur with his elephant Tara, accompanied by her *mabout* Bhim, Tara’s ‘grass-cutter’ Gokul, and Shand’s friend Aditya Patankar (Shand 1992). This eastward

¹⁰ My involvement in the event was in many ways shaped by pre-existing relations I had with the charity, both through contacts in India and my doctoral supervisor. This enabled access to private events closed to the public, but also had bearings on how the ethnography was shaped. I will turn to some of these concerns later in the discussion.

¹¹ The endeavour involved looking at a corridor project in Assam in northeast India. The project was not implemented by the charity, but by two partners of the London event: the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) and the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW). The local community it interfaced with, and with whom I conducted participant observation, was close to my family home. Here too I had pre-existing links with local informants, which enabled other forms of access. The methodological implications this has for understanding cosmopolitanism through multi-sited ethnography will be taken up later.

journey, narrated in Shand's (1992) best-selling travelogue *Travels on My Elephant*, is a tale of postcolonial and more-than-human encounters. It is about the rise of a cosmopolitical sensibility, crafted through intimacy, contact and learning that is porous and cuts across human–nonhuman divides.



Figure 1: Shand's Journey through Orissa and Bihar (Redrawn from *Travels on My Elephants*).

Shand's inspiration to travel through India on elephant-back came about when he was sifting through books in the India Office Library in London. As he tells me in an interview: "Every old book I found literally had an elephant on each page. ... Then there was an old woodcut showing this crazy English traveler Thomas Coryate on an elephant. It just caught my imagination". This 17th century engraving depicts a disproportionately large person sitting on top of a fierce-looking elephant, wearing a plumed hat, boots, spurs and a sword. A roll of papers, perhaps his travel notes, is in his right hand. The effect borders on the absurd: it looks as if Coryate had been intending to ride a horse

and was assigned an elephant (Figure 2). A contrast between the fierceness of the elephant and the civilized attire of the Englishman, the image is representative of the ‘awkward zones of engagement’ where people with different cultural origins and histories meet and establish ongoing relations (Pratt 2008; Tsing 2005). Coryate’s is one of many past encounters with elephants that have been integral to shaping Orientalist views of India (Aune 2005). It is this romantic ideal that becomes an intensity for Shand, inspiring him to take up a similar endeavour: “I was now obsessed ... I was determined to have my picture expressed in my next book sitting upon an elephant” (Shand 1992; P.1).

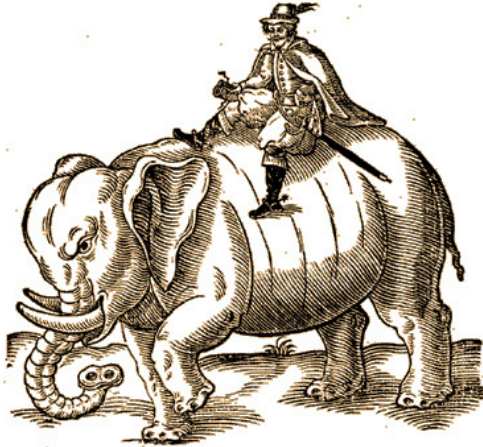
Upon arriving in India, Shand does not find it an easy country to travel in. The country is peopled with lives starkly different from his own, and one that keeps him reminded of a shared and fraught history with Britain. Shand is separated from the Indian world by an ‘affective wall’, one that has historically closed off the English sahib’s body through a complex bricolage of sexual, social and culinary prohibitions (Collingham 2001; Lorimer and Whatmore 2009). He senses this barrier in his initial musings: *“India shows what she wants to show, as if her secrets are guarded by a wall of infinite height”* (Shand 1992; P.4), and despite attempts to enter and engage with this culture, it remains closed, sealed off: *“You try to climb the wall – you fall; you fetch a ladder – it is too short”* (Shand 1992; P.4). Performing open modes of engagement with India’s culture demands emotional boundary-crossings that do not occur immediately: *“But if you are patient a brick will loosen and then another. Once through, India embraces you, but that was something that I had yet to learn”* (Shand 1992; P.4).

Thomas Coryate,

TRAVAILER

For the English wits, and the good of this Kingdom:

To all his inferiour Countreymen, Greeting: Especially to the Sireniacall Gentlemen, that meet the first Friday of euerie Moneth, at the Mermaide in Breadstreet. From the Court of the great Mogul, resident at the Towne of Ainsere, in the Easterne India.



Printed by W. Iaggard, and Henry Fetherston.
1616.

Figure 2: The image of Thomas Coryate that inspired Shand's travels (source: Thomas Coriate Traueller for the English Wits. London, 1616).

Shand travels to Orissa, a state in east India, with the hope of buying an elephant to embark upon his journey. Several attempts to procure an elephant end in failure. Finally, he tracks down a group of itinerant elephants travelling with Hindu saints begging for alms in the outskirts of a provincial town. This is when Shand first encounters Tara, a moment of intense affect and enchanting proximity that later becomes a life-changing event: *"Then I saw her. My mouth went dry. I felt giddy, breathless. In this moment the ancient wall crumbled and I walked through. With one hind leg crossed over the other, she was leaning nonchalantly against a tree, the charms of her perfectly rounded posterior in full view, like a prostitute on a street corner. I knew then I had to have her. Suddenly, nothing else mattered ..."* (Shand 1992; P.13–14). Written in sexualized prose and shadowed by notions of domination, this is indeed an uneven encounter, across past colonial divides, across humans and animals. Yet, at the same time, it is a moment of connection, one that leads to a crumbling of the affective wall that seals Shand from immersing in India's culture. The intensity of this attachment to an

elephant, and its later opening up of a common world, is deeply humbling. He recounts in one of our interviews how in the past he fitted an ‘upper–class wasteful stereotype’: *‘Before Tara, I had no direction at all...’* This encounter makes him look beyond his narcissism: *‘She healed me. It took an extraordinary animal to change me’*.

Thereafter, the journey becomes a more open mode of engagement for Shand. This is marked by his crossing of social and cultural barriers to become the disciple of Bhim, Tara’s *mabout*, in order to learn how to ride an elephant. Shand learns about the subcultures of elephant handlers, their social life and ways through which they relate and manage their animals. The expertise and skill he is exposed to is haptic, crossing porous bodies, performed by both humans and elephants. Besides riding Tara, a range of other corporeal activities such as feeding, cleaning and washing, contribute to Shand’s bonding with the creature. There is a pleasure that is experienced in the meaning offered up in these bodily encounters: *“bathing with, or washing an elephant is something close to experiencing paradise”* (Shand 1992; P.37). However, Shand is not entirely at ease during the journey, as the sight of an Englishman riding an elephant through the Indian rural landscape attracts considerable attention: *“I had not yet become adjusted to the huge crowds I knew our entourage would attract. I realized I had no right to complain. I was traveling in their country, probably camping on their land. An elephant with a foreigner was understandably fair game, but I was still too much of a tourist to tolerate such human curiosity”* (Shand 1992; P.36). It is in Tara, his nonhuman companion, that Shand finds assurance: *“There was something reassuring about an elephant close by. It was like being guarded by a huge jovial nanny”* (Shand 1992; P.39).

Whilst his assimilation into cultures of the other is incomplete, the journey itself is a cosmopolitical event in the sense that it generates an awareness of how social life in rural India is affected by nonhuman beings. This awareness arises through a more–than–human encounter. Tara ‘teaches’ Shand to ‘slow down to the pace of India’, to take notice of the impacts wild elephants have on people’s lives in rural Orissa. The notion of India’s pace as slow is a replication of a modernist cultural stereotype historically prevalent in both the West and amongst certain Indians (Chakrabarty 1991). Whilst operating through an Orientalist lens, slowing down is also integral to the development of Shand’s cosmopolitical sensibility. As Stengers takes pains to show, slowing down operates to resist consensual ways through which situations are presented or how

action is mobilized (Stengers 2005a). Shand notices the *machans* villagers put up on trees, he witnesses the travails of farmers sitting up at night to guard their fields and deter rampaging elephants from demolishing crops. Local people approach him for help: *“It is the tusker, sir. It has decimated our crops. It has already killed eleven people.”* Shand finds this surprising, but soon becomes cognizant of how grave the situation is in light of the limited interventions in place: *“The government will do nothing. The tusker has only killed eleven people, sir. It must kill twenty-four before they are even considering taking actions”* (Shand 1992; P.56). Such exposures, coupled with a frustration of being unable to help the affected rural poor, effects a realization that is different from Shand’s initial romantic musings. He writes about the ‘growing imbalance’ between ‘rural man and the natural life of the elephant’, both of whom are ‘blameless victims of greed for timber’ (Shand 1992).

Shand’s journey through rural India culminates in the development of a conservation sensibility, a desire to redress the troubled fate of the Asian elephant and the plight of the rural poor affected by human–elephant conflict. *“Sadly this situation is worsening. The Indian elephant is simply running out of living space... It is fervently to be hoped that desperate measures like culling will not be introduced, and it is up to man to redress the balance. The tiger, which until recently was almost extinct, is beginning to make a dramatic recovery thanks to the resources and expertise made available to ‘Project Tiger’. The elephant must now be given the same attention”* (Shand 1992; P.57). Upon returning to England, Shand becomes closely involved with elephant conservation. He brings together a group of individuals who share a similar passion for elephants in the UK to found a charity for Asian elephant conservation – the Elephant Family. The emotions of being affected by an elephant, as well as places and people encountered during the journey, are so intense that what started off as a topic for his next travelogue becomes a life–long obsession. Shand goes on to write a second book on elephants, which contain close observations of the travails of the rural poor as they are affected by human–elephant conflict (Shand 1996). He recounts how lives are lost, the lack of adequate compensation and mechanisms to redress the issue. These stories are grave, and he later tells me: *“I had researched the journey. I had not researched the emotion”*.

Tara too is transformed by this encounter. She is renamed Tara, meaning ‘star’ in Hindi, from ‘Toofan Champa’ as her former owners called her. Corporeal changes start to occur as her health and body *“in poor condition due to mishandling and starvation”* through care turns to that of *“a*

lovely riding elephant". This bodily transformation is well reflected in the photographs of Tara in Shand's book. Behaviour too is modified as a consequence of her encounter with Shand. Tara's mahout Bhim is insistent that she be trained to get rid of the 'begging habits' acquired whilst living with the itinerant saints "*Mummy learn proper manners ... She too greedy. She have bad habits. She Raja-sahib haathi now. She behave like one*" (Shand 1992; P.35). Through continual prodding and reprimands, Tara's "*habits of a beggar elephant were dying*" and she was "*acquiring a new pride*" (Shand 1992; P.109). According to Shand, Tara was probably an elephant caught in the wild in the northeast Indian state of Assam and used in erstwhile elephant capture operations. Marks from crupper ropes and spurs on her back were indicative of this. She had perhaps exchanged many hands prior to being auctioned in one of India's biggest elephant markets at Sonepur where her previous owners purchased her. Shand contrasts Tara's new identity with that of her being an elephant for used capture operations: "*Looking at her now, as she stuffed her face with paddy, I wondered if she could catch a bus, let alone a wild elephant*" (Shand 1992; P.48). Tara's own travels and biography, the changes in her identity and behavior through contact with people as diverse as elephant catchers, itinerant saints and later Shand, suggest that lives of these creatures too may in some sense become cosmopolitan. Elephants might indeed be able to 'adapt' to cultures of human others, in this case amplified through captivity. Yet, these encounters are uneven, where becoming cosmopolitan is not a conscious endeavour on elephants' part, but through human action and control.

Further, there is a power dynamic involved in how Tara's cosmopolitan identity is effected and mobilized. Bhim's quip that she is '*Raja-sahib haathi*' or a prince/sahib's elephant is reflective of Shand's own elite position and links to British Royalty.¹² Tara's becoming 'a princess' is in part a result of her entanglement with Shand and the tabloid appeal this offers up. At the end of their journey, Shand finds Tara a home in an exclusive ecotourism lodge in central India. A stable "*on the scale of St Paul's Cathedral*" is designed for the "*whims of our spoilt client*" (Shand 1996; P.10), something that not everyone is able to afford. Tara's work-free lifestyle is indeed very different from those of other elephants laboring under captivity. Her enrollment into wider

¹² Shand's sister is the Duchess of Cornwall, second wife of Charles, Prince of Wales

elite networks is also constituted through her being the mascot of the Elephant Family – “*Our real founder*” as the charity’s brochures proclaim. Here, Tara stands for a celebrity creature that represents the Asian elephant’s predicament and serves to promote conservation campaigns amongst UK publics. The story of her encounter with Shand circulates through numerous popular media articles and images. Such entanglement with high–society assemblages makes her part of the banal cosmopolitanisms of global consumption.

In summary, this tale of traveling–with an elephant illustrates the roles animals play in forging cosmopolitanism, understood as connections across global difference. It provides new ways to understand ‘contact zones’ where peoples with different cultural and geographical origins and histories meet and establish ongoing relations (Pratt 2008). Such zones are not solely about human contact, but may be scaped through encounters with many other lively bodies whose presence is often overwritten in scholarship about cultural circulation and exchange. Reanimating Shand’s journey shows how elephants can affect human bodies and lead to new attachments to people, places and things. For Shand, Tara is infectious, as it is through her that he develops a desire to conserve Asian elephants and the landscapes they inhabit. Yet, this connection proceeds through fraught histories and unfolds over unequal socio–economic terrain. His journey with Tara is made possible through his elite position. Whilst forming attachments, an element of the exotic is still retained. He becomes cognizant of the cultures of mahouts and the travails of farmers, but assimilation is not complete. Cosmopolitanisms are thus always partial and laden with ambiguity. To further explore how cosmopolitanisms proceed as a more–than–human endeavour, I will turn to how elephants ‘travel’ to other contexts where they are deployed to draw different actors into assemblages of conservation.

4.3. Vibrant sculptures and conservation publics

It is the middle of a warm English summer. I am in London’s Hyde Park, a green space in the heart of the capital of the erstwhile British Empire, where a herd of eleven elephants are stranded. Solitary animals lurk in the streets, in front of the Marble Arch, in Harrods and in Piccadilly square, all iconic landmarks of the metropolis. These are not living elephants, but decorated six–foot fiberglass replicas. They form a part of the 2010 London Elephant Parade – a

three-month long conservation and public art event organized by the Elephant Family to raise the profile of Asian elephants amongst the city's public. Each sculpture clings on to a piece of artificial turf, representing shrinking forest patches. They are metaphors of fragmentation, akin to polar bears on melting ice signaling impending threats of climate change. One message of this event is prominent: Asian elephants are endangered due to habitat loss and that we must act upon this by securing corridors – linkages that connect fragmented elephant habitat in different parts of South and Southeast Asia.

The London Elephant Parade is a compelling illustration of how animals are reconfigured as cosmopolitan through their entanglement in trans-national networks and selective representation in the West. Here, cosmopolitanism refers to elephants' global presence through their transformation into icons for banal consumption. Over two-hundred and fifty elephants were placed all over the city (Figure 3), many of them designed by famous artists and celebrities such as Marc Quinn, Tommy Hilfiger and Lulu Guinness to resonate with the aesthetic inclinations of an urban public. The elephants are anthropomorphized, with accentuated eyes and soft facial features. Some embody iconic images of London. For instance, "Bobby" is depicted with the uniform of a London policeman, whilst "Taxi Elephant" is in the form of a black cab, blending a popular mode of London travel with notions of transport the creature has been long entwined with. Similarly, there is "Tara" – a grey elephant with Mark Shand's intense text of their first encounter draped over the body. Such representations are an important way in which elephants circulate outside of their home ranges in Asia. As stylized works of art, they easily cross into domains of Western cultural consumption. This stylization, is akin to the cosmopolitanization of music described by Beck, where elements from many different cultures are continually being compared, rejected, fitted together and remixed (Beck 2004).

Yet, these cosmopolitan commodities retain characteristics of elephants and allow for publics to associate them with live counterparts in Asia. This is evident in the way people interact with these vibrant sculptures. I observe children climb on to their backs, nestle between their feet and slide down their trunks. The mother of one of the children tells me: "*[They are] an interactive work of art ... You can't touch these things in a museum, but here you can... and this is so important for people to connect with the elephant*". The sculptures prompt haptic responses not dissimilar to what elephants

might afford in captivity. Connection thus proceeds through prehensive encounters that fashion a love for the creature and prompt apprehensions about its endangerment and extinction. In other words, these sculptures work as ‘traveling landscape—objects’: portable representations of elephants and their habitat embedded in material supports which allow for the creatures to move through space and time (della Dora 2009). Their material affordances enable people to ‘get in touch’ with an animal that is otherwise far—removed from the life—spaces of the urban metropolis.

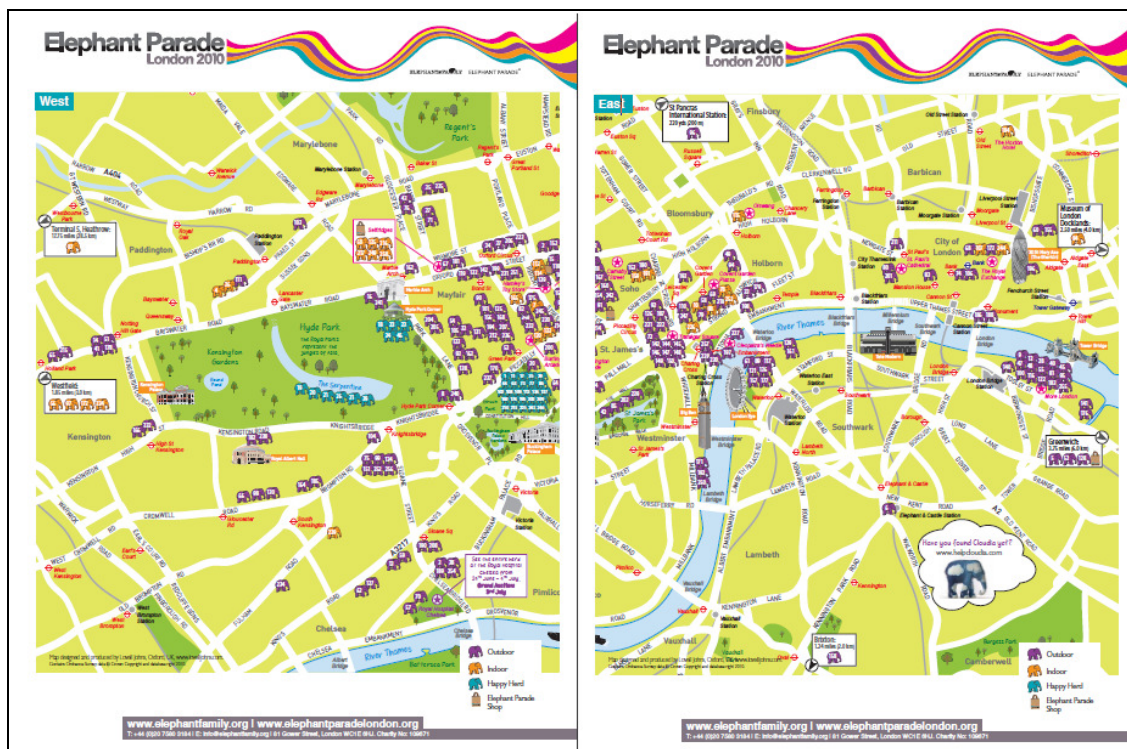


Figure 3: Map of the sculptures placed around London, London Elephant Parade 2010.

These sculptures are able to draw diverse actors into assemblages of conservation, reflecting the constitutive agency elephants may have when mobilized in material form. An example of how such material elephants may convene publics was that of a sculpture named “Gerald”, designed by the artist Jonathan Yeo. An elephant with swirling autumn leaves covering its body, the sculpture was on public display in Selfridges, a high—end departmental store. It later

turned out that the leaves depicted on its body contained a collage of explicit pornography, a style that gained Yeo attention after he deployed it in a controversial portrait of George W Bush (Anon. 2007). Following a number of customer complaints received by the store management, the Elephant Family was asked to remove Gerald as it was offensive to their clientele. Housed temporarily in the charity's office, Gerald's absence began to gain traction amongst members of the London public who were trying to photograph every elephant in the parade. A person working in the city started a campaign page called 'Free Gerald' on the social networking site Facebook, stating the removal was "*a punishment*" for Gerald and demanding that he be made available for public viewing: "*It's not his fault. He's a work of art. Give us Gerald back! Free Gerald!*" The page soon became very popular and members of the London public began to post comments about the sculpture in ways that anthropomorphized the material thing and attribute personhood to it: "*Poor old Gerald! Free him for ... when they are gathered at Royal Hospital Chelsea, the other 257 [elephants] may mock and tease him for his lack of public appearances!*" Messages were often about belonging, displacement and home, resonating with the plight of its living counterparts in Asia: "*I don't mind if they want to stick Gerald outside my house if they are struggling to re-home him! Let him be free and roam as nature intended!*" An aleatory outcome rather than a public relations stunt, the Elephant Family received close to three hundred emails and phone calls asking where Gerald was (Moore–Bridger 2010). When a viewing was arranged in the charity office, more than two hundred people arrived to photograph the elephant. Later placed in a Soho nightclub, Gerald attracted two hundred visitors an hour (Anon. 2011).

Gerald provides a compelling example of the constitutive force of things in social and political life (Bingham 2006), of how a vast number of nonhuman entities link the cosmos and the polis (Latour 2004). Here, material elephants, whilst anthropomorphic and presenting selectively edited facets of these creatures may convene public constituencies that support elephant conservation. The 'Free Gerald' campaign led to the formation of a fan club called 'Gerald's Groupies', members of which met on a regular basis, coordinating trips around London to spot elephants. As Paul, one of the group members put it, the desire to find elephants did not stem from prior love for nature or conservation. Rather it was from the interest these sculptures aroused: "*I wanted to find them all ... It is a sort of 'collector's mentality' ... Like going on safari, but the shooting*

is obviously with a camera, not an elephant gun.” Members of the group displayed their digital trophies via online albums, and shared information about the specific locations of elephants in the city. Elephant spotting in London was often described as finding elephants *“in the wild”*. Yet, the elephants were also contagious, in the sense that they generated concerns about conservation of counterparts in the wild, bound publics, the charity and elephants in new ways. Members of the group raised money for the event and contributed to the Elephant Family’s cause. Two years on, the group continues to meet and have attended elephant parades in other European cities. Their main aim is to ‘maintain personal contact, promote the plight of the Asian elephant and enjoy outdoor photography’ (Anon. 2011).

The trans-national connections woven together by elephants are not just restricted to the charity and elephant-spotting public. The event was co-hosted with the Elephant Parade company which had organized similar events in Holland and Belgium prior to London (Figure 4).¹³ At the interface of ‘art, business and conservation’, connection was the key logic at play here. The first set of connections was between artists, corporate houses and conservation charities. A student artist who designed one of the sculptures told me that he was motivated to do something for a charity with a mission to save Asian elephants. His elephant, named “Claire de Lune”, was inspired by a desire to connect people: *“I used the moon as a metaphor – it is something everybody in the world sees in the same way. It is a good metaphor for connecting people”*. He further remarks: *“Elephants are far removed from British culture. You would think the ordinary person cares very little or hardly knows much about the elephant. In that sense this event has created a space for the Asian elephant and has given it a profile”*. For corporate firms, sponsoring individual sculptures provided good marketing value and publicity in London, besides opportunities to network amidst British high-society with whom the Elephant Family, through Mark Shand, had strong links. More significantly, the popular appeal and apparently apolitical stature of the elephant was an incentive to be involved. A corporate sponsor told me *“We are the only architectural firm involved in the parade. Elephants are a good way to cheer people up,*

¹³ Prior to the London event, the company had organized parades in Rotterdam, Antwerp and Amsterdam. Since 2010, there have been more parades in Bergen, Copenhagen, Milan and Singapore. Only the London event was in support of Elephant Family; the post-2010 parades support The Asian Elephant Foundation. There is a complex set of actors involved here, but this analysis is restricted to the London event.

and it is a non-political symbol that works across sectors... Everyone has different agendas – corporate houses, the Elephant Family... The elephant connects these agendas.”

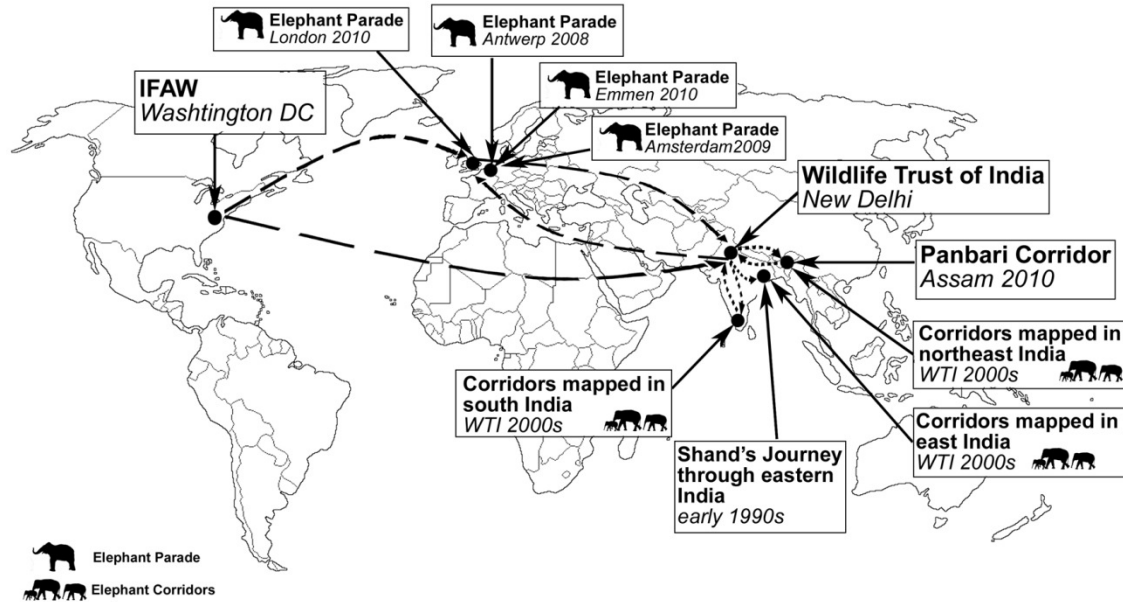


Figure 4: Sites, events and actors relevant to this ethnography and circulation of the cosmopolitan elephant.

The second way in which connection was metaphorically deployed was through elephant corridors: patches of forest that link fragmented elephant habitat. For the Elephant Family and other elephant conservation NGOs involved in the parade (e.g. WTI and IFAW), the main objective of this event was to generate funds for securing corridors on the ground. Each sculpture was auctioned and the proceeds shared between the Elephant Parade company and Elephant Family or another conservation NGO. The social capital of the charity was instrumental in terms of attracting the right celebrities whose presence interested potential buyers. One of their events was visited by Shand’s brother-in-law and sister, Prince Charles and the Duchess of Cornwall. The live auction, preceded by a gala dinner, was attended by the likes of Princess Beatrice and the actor Goldie Hawn. Elephant corridors were the key theme in the auction, posited as conduits of connectivity that are the only realistic hope for the future survival of this endangered creature.

Besides being high-quality art and representing an important cause, the sculptures became collectable as the act of buying was a measure of peer esteem. A lady who bought two sculptures tells me: *“I came here wanting to buy a particular elephant, one that both my dad and I liked. But the atmosphere here is so fantastic. I saw another elephant and I bought it as well. I felt I just had to...”* The event was extremely successful from the charity’s perspective: over four million pounds were raised for securing elephant corridors in Asia.

In summary, this event shows how elephants are reconfigured and become participants in the banal globalisms that unfold and de-sever the world. As synecdochic bodies, material representations of elephants operate as dynamic vehicles for the creature’s circulation. Both elephants and their landscapes are set in motion. Like ‘circulating references’, these representations are a valuable means for the translation of conservation issues from the field to the metropolis (Latour 1999). They make distant non-presence present. The creative traffic generated through the trans-national networks elephants get entangled in unsettles site-bound, parochial localizations of animals. Elephants are no longer confined to the ‘out there’ of national parks or forest reserves, but enrolled into heterogeneous networked assemblages that congeal in and through multiple spaces and fluid ecologies (Whatmore and Thorne 2000). Within these assemblages, elephants have a binding effect, linking things as diverse as art and publics, corporate agendas and habitat fragments. Their affects and forces are contagious. They evoke global ecological responsibilities and concerns for creatures far removed from the worlds of city publics.

Whilst cosmopolitan configurations of elephants make motion easier, they also limit where we go. Aesthetic and stylized renderings of elephants accentuate the ‘cute and cuddly’ aspects of these creatures, akin to the number of anthropomorphized elephant luminaries such as Elmer, Dumbo and Babar prevalent in the West (Lorimer 2010b). Similarly, companionate aspects of Shand’s encounter with Tara are amplified (Shand 1992), whilst his writings and later film *The Dark Side of Elephants* on elephant aggression and travails of the poor (Shand 1996), are subdued. There is a fund-raising and business logic to concealment, as the dark side of elephants does not travel well. As one of my key informants in the Elephant Family put it, *“The last time we focused on the dark side of elephants and screened Mark’s film before a fund-raising event, it was a complete failure. These are things about elephants that people here don’t want to know”*. This editing out of concerns that are grave or

antagonistic is necessary for turning elephants into commodities for consumption, and it is through such consumption that elephants become part of banal cosmopolitanisms (Beck 2004). Further, such renderings produce amongst the public, a ‘Western’ vision of what constitutes an Asian elephant and why or how the creature should be conserved. Cosmopolitan elephants may indeed be deceitful when they could leave out important actors and other ways of engaging with elephants. In the following section, I continue with my ethnography of elephant conservation to trace some of the unpredictable and dynamic effects that arise when cosmopolitan elephants return in the form of ‘transportable packages’ to secure conservation corridors on the ground in India.

4.4. Cosmopolitan returns: friction

It is a sunny morning in November 2010, and I am with a group of fifty–odd farmers in a paddy field outside Kaziranga National Park in Assam, northeast India. A public meeting is underway. The paddy is ripe, ready for harvesting, but the mood of the gathering is tense. Midway through the meeting, the farmers rise and start shouting slogans: *“Inqbilab Zindabad!”*¹⁴ *Land-grabbing will not be allowed! Stop the NGO from touting land! Inqbilab Zindabad!”* Theirs is a protest against having to sell their paddy fields to the government in order to pave way for an elephant corridor. During the past year, a succession of government notices has arrived in the village, asking the farmers to hand over their land at a pre–determined price. The farmers have been adamant: *“We will not give up our land”*. A series of negotiations over land transfer has ensued, involving landholders, civil authorities, the forest department, and a wildlife conservation NGO. The elephant is central to these negotiations, mobilized in different ways by each actor. The government and NGO try to convince the villagers that channeling the movement of elephants through the designated corridor will lead to a reduction in crop–raiding and help secure a long–term future for the animal. The farmers are less certain of this linear logic, emphasizing the

¹⁴ This Urdu phrase, meaning “Long live revolution”, was commonly used by revolutionaries during British rule over India. The term is often popular currency in contemporary social movements within the country.

unruliness of elephant behavior. One of them responds: *“Are your elephants so polite that they will use no other path besides the corridor?”*

This ripe paddy field, this place in-between two protected areas, is the site to which the cosmopolitan elephant returns in the form of monetary capital and GIS-based cartographies delineating elephant landscapes (Figure 5). This corridor project is a collaborative initiative of the Wildlife Trust of India (WTI), the Indian partner NGO of the Elephant Family, and the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW), one of the conservation organizations associated with the London Elephant Parade. The director of WTI tells me how important corridors are: *“In a land with a billion people, if I want to leave something for my son, what will I leave? The first thing you think of leaving the next generation is land. So if you want to leave something for wildlife in this country, it has to be land. And what is the land that we should prioritize? Simply that bit which connects two protected areas.”* Elephants fuel these cartographic aspirations of conservation: *“For the elephant [corridors are] even more important as it’s a nomad, a big nomad.”* Here the elephant becomes a corridor-enabling animal: a creature that introduces a sense of groundedness into GIS visualizations, making fragmented landscapes legible and *connectable* (Jepson et al. 2011). Furthermore, its ability to attract funding and support from Western donors and publics make it an ideal ‘flagship species’ to mobilize conservation aspirations: *“Very soon we found we could use elephants as a powerful tool to conserve chunks of land in India”*. Under a programme entitled Wild Lands, the trust undertook a nation-wide exercise of mapping elephant corridors, standardizing their names and categorizing each corridor according to its ‘ecological priority’ and feasibility of acquisition. This classificatory work was published in the form of a manual by the WTI (Menon et al. 2005). The Panbari corridor, as this site in Kaziranga is called is listed as ‘high’ in terms of ecological priority and conservation feasibility.

These discourses and cartographic practices project corridors as pure spaces of ecological connectivity, from which traces of the social are expunged. However, corridors are seldom the conservation panacea they are projected to be, nor are they entirely exempted from troubled histories of colonial control of land and resources (Goldman 2009). The creation of Kaziranga National Park in the early part of the 20th century had met with considerable resistance from the neighbouring peasantry, who were ultimately dispossessed of their rights to collect resources or graze cattle in the reserve (Saikia 2009). Tensions between the local community and park

authorities have ensued at various times, often when proposals or moves to expand the reserve are mooted. These fraught histories are evoked when people claim ownership over the land of the proposed elephant corridor: my informants frequently remarked that their forefathers had once lived inside what is now the national park. As a move to gain legitimacy of ownership of the corridor land, the farmers repeatedly tried to establish the fact that their community had been cultivating the land proposed as a corridor over many generations. This idea of belonging was also voiced in an official response to one of the government notices the farmers had received: *“We have been living here since British times”*. Further, local narratives described the corridor as a paddy field, a place in which they dwelt and cultivated. This was contrary to the NGO discourse, which posited the corridor as a space connecting two important elephant habitats, an interpretation resting on promontory and distant mapping that marginalizes embodied narratives of belonging.

Through the actions, practices and aspirations of diverse actants, the corridor emerges as a site of political friction. Contending interpretations of what constitutes an elephant corridor led to heated debates in the course of the protests and demonstrations that ensued over the winter of 2010. During one such protest, one of my key informants who was a landholder in Panbari, pointed out to a WTI representative that there were several corridors in the landscape, not just the one the trust and forest department were fixated on securing: *“Why aren’t you doing anything about other corridors in the vicinity? There are so many hotels and resorts coming up in paddy land surrounding the national park. One of them has even erected a high concrete wall, completely barricading elephant movement. Instead of trying to grab people’s land at Panbari, why aren’t you trying to stop these other corridors from becoming defunct?”* The representative, with a copy of the manual on the science and classification of elephant corridors in India in hand, made an attempt to defend his position: *“You can’t call those movement tracks corridors. Just because there is elephant movement does not mean it is a corridor”*. For the representative, what constituted a corridor was backed by the science of meta–population ecology, a definition of which was standardized in the manual in his hand: *“a corridor is a linear landscape element where the immigration rate to the target patch is increased over what it would be if the linear patch was not present”* (Menon et al. 2005; P.26). Such standardization is integral for building bridges and channels of circulation across epistemic communities (Tsing 2005), but its validity may be established by gaining an

epistemological high-ground and relegating contending interpretations to the margins (Haraway 1991). Further, the process of translation must occur if corridors are to move smoothly from one social world to another (Goldman 2009). In this context, incomplete translations and contentious interpretations led to heated political frictions.

However, these political frictions were not just spun between the interests and epistemologies of the state, conservation NGOs and local inhabitants. Elephants, and the diverse ways of engaging with them, were implicitly enrolled into the political fabric. One of my informants in Panbari drew attention to an electric fence that the forest department and WTI had erected along the national park boundary to minimize animal incursions into people's fields. A gap had been left in the corridor area to facilitate elephant movement, and he claimed this was a deliberate ploy to funnel animals into their fields: *"This is a policy of the NGO and forest department. They want to make sure that the elephants only move through here, so that crop depredation increases in our fields and we inevitably have to sell our land for the corridor project"*. The farmers were well aware of the *political effect* thwarting elephant movement through the corridor might have. The same informant told me how the villagers had taken steps to forestall such movement: *"If we chase away the elephants regularly, there will be a time when they will stop using this corridor. If usage of this track by elephants stops, the forest department and NGO won't bother us anymore."* Indeed, the political resistance to corridor implementation comes together in the presence of elephants. Politics thus becomes a more-than-human endeavour, enacted in conjunction with elephants, where their movements and trajectories matter. Not only the notion of who is put on the negotiating table is changed, the very process of political negotiation is altered, as it no longer means give or take in an exclusively human club.

In conclusion, this journey illustrates what happens when cosmopolitan elephants return to the ground. The creature, represented as an animal enabling landscape-scale conservation, helps build channels for conservation ideas to travel. The contingent linkages it creates as a transportable package allows modes of environmental governance to operate from afar. Yet, this is not a smooth outcome. Cosmopolitan elephants and the modes of conservation they represent, generate frictions between rural farmers and trans-national conservation assemblages (Tsing 2005). This in part arises due to a sanitized portrayal of the elephant to fit purposes of fund-

raising through banal consumption in the West. Concerns of local actors, their modes of relating to elephants, or the creatures' unruly behaviour, are edited out. Cosmopolitan connections across difference are thus ephemerally held together. These linkages entail asymmetric power relations and can give rise to new forms of inequality that are products of trans-national entanglements (Beck 2004).

4.5. Discussion

In this paper, I have sought to examine the role of nonhumans as participants and subjects of cosmopolitanism. The notion of cosmopolitanism mobilized here pages back to Beck's proposition of a global public arena, trans-national processes and consumption as constitutive features of a cosmopolitan condition (Beck 2004). Although geographers have looked at the implications such cosmopolitanism has for developing an understanding of geopolitical arrangements (Edwards 2008; Mohan 2008), economic and political life (Jeffrey 2008; Strang 2008), or its failure to address radical alterity (Jazeel 2011), the bodily presence of nonhumans and their diverse agencies are evacuated from their analyses. In contrast, the symmetrical analysis adopted here opens up this geographical sensibility to a more diverse array of materials, things and animals that make humans act. This analysis of more-than-human cosmopolitanisms has a number of implications for geography and the wider social sciences.

First, it has bearings upon how we account for histories of environmental conservation in (post)colonial contexts (Guha 2006; Guha and Alier 1997). In opposition to a linear, diametric tendency of viewing conservation as a hegemonic imposition of Western ideals onto local South Asian communities,¹⁵ the criss-crossing and flows elucidated here suggest that imposition is less polar and far more ambiguous. Further, contrary to the localizing tendencies of this work, this paper suggests that South Asian environmental issues are far more ambiguous. Oscillations between contexts result in the formation of multiple loyalties toward different people, animals or places. Shand's journey with Tara and the conservation outcomes it leads to is a case in point.

¹⁵ This polarization between the West and the rest has also been a feature of subaltern studies of history that have influenced environmental history in India [see Simeon D 2001 Subaltern studies: Cultural concerns. International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences, London 15241–5]

Yes, this encounter is fraught with a romantic ideal. It does occur over uneven social and historical terrain, between the privileged and the disenfranchised. However, Shand is also opened up to a common world populated by both human and nonhuman others. The resources that he mobilizes following this intense, affective encounter are to act for elephants, to create new networks and global publics that are concerned with the plight of elephants in the Anthropocene. Some of his writings and films profess loyalty to the marginalized, but at other times depoliticizes human–elephant relationships to serve strategic goals. The apparently apolitical nature of the elephant that appealed to corporate investors in the Elephant Parade is not purely coincidental. Rather, it becomes apolitical only when contested aspects of human–elephant cohabitation are downplayed. There is thus a tension between Shand’s cosmopolitan sensibility and the cosmopolitics in which he is engrossed. Further, trans–national linkages imply that there are many more actors involved in environmental governance, not all of whom can be considered ‘Western’ or operating from without. This complexity of shared sensibilities and difference needs to be taken into account when writing histories of environmental conservation and governance. Rather, environmental conservation needs to be understood as something issuing forth rhizomatically through an assemblage constituted by Indian and Western NGOs, networks of wealth and capital, concerns of global publics engrossed in banal consumption, not to mention the unruly effects of elephants themselves.

Second, appreciating cosmopolitanism as a more–than–human endeavour has bearings upon how we configure animals and account for the spaces they inhabit. For instance, it begs the question as to what makes an animal cosmopolitan, and what such creatures might look like in the Anthropocene? Annu Jalais, in her work on cosmopolitan animals, suggests that some creatures such as the tiger are cosmopolitan because by their very presence the world over, they personify the universalism of a Western particular, that of wildlife and its need to be protected (Jalais 2008). This presence is in the form of This paper builds upon this notion to argue that animals such as elephants may in fact help co–constitute the diverse cosmopolitan cultures in which they are entangled, rather than being mute commodities for consumption. As the above ethnography suggests, elephants enter other cultures as live animals, circulating images or as vibrant sculptures. The agency of such a cohort is contagious (Deleuze and Guattari 1987), in the sense that they

draw and bind different actors and give rise to novel cultural configurations. Such cosmopolitanisms are not about global belonging in a Kantian sense of the term, but a partial and asymmetric endeavour where unevenness is always at play. Furthermore, contrary to Jalais' predominantly discursive understanding of cosmopolitan animals (Jalais 2008, 2010), this paper foregrounds the liveliness and agencies of ontologically diverse bodies which together contribute to a becoming-cosmopolitan of the elephant. Here, the affordances of elephants, living, material or virtual, the registers of sentimentality and affection they generate (Lorimer 2010b), are important. They play a role in terms of how elephants become commodities for banal global consumption.

Tara's relationship with Shand provides insights for thinking how animals' ethologies may change through encounters across difference. Her own journey from being an animal used for elephant capture to an itinerant begging elephant and finally the companion of an English aristocrat involves moving through different cultures and having to adapt to them. The labour, skills and accommodation demanded by elephant capture is indeed very different from say that of begging for alms, or being a celebrity animal living in an ecotourism lodge. One could potentially argue that animals kept in elephant centres where tourists from across the world come to learn to ride elephants, and where these creatures are trained to showcase different activities such as pulling timber, and even playing instruments or painting (Anon. 2013), is a form of cosmopolitan culture in elephants. As Whatmore argues in the case of an African elephant in Paignton Zoo, the creature's history makes a difference: it may belong to a particular species, but its life at the zoo bears only distant relations to its counterparts in the African bush (Whatmore 2002). Identities are shared, but there is also a difference. It is highly plausible, with increasing global flows and connections, that animals in the future will further serve banal cosmopolitan consumption or, as in the case of pet dogs in the US, become consumers of cosmopolitanisms themselves (Haraway 2007).

Further, tracking the mobility of elephants as they shuttle back and forth across cultural contexts opens up new ways through which we might understand the spaces of animals. Jalais' account of cosmopolitan animals tends to contrast spaces of the cosmopolitan as a diametric opposition to the local (Jalais 2008). On the other hand, this paper argues that the geographies of

cosmopolitan animals are not parochial but dynamic and dispersed. Their spaces are better understood as networked (Bingham and Thrift 2000), issuing forth as these creatures circulate through a *complicated* (folded) world. This folding of space and time is what makes human–elephant exchanges in the UK an intimate part of the rural ecologies of Assam in India. As the ethnographic material presented here suggests, trans–national flows are at times about cooperation, and at other times lead to frictions and inequalities (Beck 2004; Tsing 2005). Who gets enrolled into networks of elephant conservation, and who is edited out is about power, but this is the power of translation, emerging from the diverse ways in which humans and nonhumans get associated with one another (Latour 1986). This perspective enables new insights into how we might engage with the politics of conservation in times of interdependency and in a world that unfolds through circulation and mediation.

Third, the posthumanist multi–sited ethnography deployed here has implications both in the context of the materials generated, and in terms of its contributions to the methodological repertoire of more–than–human geography (Davies and Dwyer 2007; Lorimer 2010b). The terrain through which this ethnography traverses could come across as a worrying claim to be a holistic representation of cosmopolitan animals and their spaces. Rather, notions of connection across difference issue forth through the paths and trajectories tracked by the travelling ethnographer. The historical and contemporary conservation contexts traced here are not some kind of ‘total system’, but a rhizomatic unfolding with a plethora of nonhuman bodies. What this work does is to follow more than just the human in multi–sited ethnography (Marcus 1995), and attend to multiple spaces and ‘fluid ecologies of performative networks’ rather than fixed sites in more–than–human geography (Whatmore and Thorne 1998; P.451). In the context of this paper, the way my own identity was perceived was influenced by the pre–existing links I had in a number of contexts: in London a ‘conservationist’ associated with the Elephant Family, amongst New Delhi NGOs a former acquaintance, in Assam a ‘local’ inhabitant of a village next to the corridor site. The different engagements with elephants, as an anthropomorphized creature in London, as maps and GIS projections in New Delhi and as an unruly beast in Assam, equally co–fabricated dispositions. These changes, shifts, occurring as I became itinerant–with elephants, in

some ways mirror the varying, unstable concerns and commitments of the subjects described in this work.

Finally, this paper expands upon the limited repertoire of work on cosmopolitanisms in more-than-human geography (Braun 2007; Clark 2002). This paper shares some of its insights of contagion at work, and how circulation reconfigures relations between people, and with animals. However, its focus on human-animal relations in the broader context of relations between India and the West is very distinct from their work on the circulation of undesirable nonhuman organisms. Further, this body of work tells us very little about the lived spaces of animals themselves or about notions of belonging through which more-than-human cosmopolitanisms proceed. Global environmental governance may proceed through differential and uneven ideas about belonging and difference, as much as it is through imperatives to control biological risks or thwart species invasions. Fluid spaces of cosmopolitanism can emerge from the multitude of ways in which elephants convene publics and make humans act. We would do well to be open to vastly more forms of cosmopolitanisms on record.

4.6. References

- Anon. 2007 *President in the Flesh: 'Porn Bush' Angers Republicans* (<http://www.spiegel.de/international/zeitgeist/president-in-the-flesh-porn-bush-angers-republicans-a-502879.html>) Accessed 12/02/2013 2013
- Anon. 2011 *Gerald the Pornographic Elephant and his 'Groupies'* (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/place-london/A84729603>) Accessed 12/02/2013 2013
- Anon. 2013 *Thai Elephant Conservation Center* (<http://www.thailandelephant.org/en/show.html>) Accessed 13/02/2013 2013
- Aune M G 2005 Elephants, Englishmen and India: Early Modern Travel Writing and the Pre-Colonial Moment. *Early Modern Literary Studies* 11: 1–35
- Barua M, Tamuly J and Ahmed R A 2010 Mutiny or Clear Sailing? Examining the Role of the Asian Elephant as a Flagship Species. *Human Dimensions of Wildlife* 15: 145–60
- Bear C and Eden S 2011 Thinking like a fish? Engaging with nonhuman difference through recreational angling. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 29: 336–52
- Beck U 2004 Cosmopolitical realism: on the distinction between cosmopolitanism in philosophy and the social sciences. *Global Networks* 4: 131–56
- Bennett J 2010 *Vibrant Matter: a political ecology of things*. Duke University Press, Durham
- Bingham N 2006 Bees, butterflies, and bacteria: biotechnology and the politics of nonhuman friendship. *Environment and Planning A* 38: 483–98
- Bingham N and Thrift N 2000 Some new instructions for travelers: the geography of Bruno Latour and Michael Serres. in Crang M and Thrift N eds *Thinking Space*. Routledge, London 281–301
- Braun B 2007 Biopolitics and the molecularization of life. *Cultural Geographies* 14: 6–28
- Braun B and Whatmore S eds 2010 *Political matter: technoscience, democracy, and public life*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN
- Chakrabarty D 1991 Open Space / Public Place: Garbage, Modernity and India. South Asia: *Journal of South Asian Studies* 14: 15–31
- Collingham E 2001 *Imperial Bodies: the Physical Experience of the Raj, c. 1800-1947*. Polity Press, Cambridge

- Clark N 2002 The Demon Seed: Bioinvasion as the Unsettling of Environmental Cosmopolitanism. *Theory, Culture & Society* 19: 101–25
- Davies G and Dwyer C 2007 Qualitative methods: are you enchanted or are you alienated? *Progress in Human Geography* 31: 257–66
- Deleuze G and Guattari F 1987 *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN
- della Dora V 2009 Travelling landscape–objects. *Progress in Human Geography* 33: 334–54
- Despret V 2004 The Body We Care For: Figures of Anthro–zoo–genesis. *Body and Society* 10: 111–34
- Edwards K 2008 For a geohistorical cosmopolitanism: postcolonial state strategies, cosmopolitan communities, and the production of the 'British', 'Overseas', 'Non–Resident', and 'Global' Indian. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 26: 444–63
- Fujimura J H 1992 Crafting science: Standardized packages, boundary objects, and "translation". in Pickering A ed *Science as practice and culture*. Chicago University Press, Chicago 168–211
- Goldman M 2009 Constructing connectivity: conservation corridors and conservation politics in East African Rangelands. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 99: 335–59
- Guha R 2006 *How Much Should a Person Consume?: Environmentalism in India and the United States*. University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, California
- Guha R and Alier J M 1997 *Varieties of environmentalism: essays North and South*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
- Haraway D 1991 *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*. Free Association Books, London
- Haraway D J 2007 *When species meet*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN
- Hinchliffe S, Kearnes M B, Degen M and Whatmore S 2005 Urban wild things: a cosmopolitical experiment. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 23: 643–58
- Jalais A 2008 Unmasking the Cosmopolitan Tiger. *Nature and Culture* 3: 25–40
- Jalais A 2010 *Forest of Tigers: People, Politics and Environment in the Sundarbans*. Routledge, New Delhi
- Jazeel T 2011 Spatializing Difference beyond Cosmopolitanism: Rethinking Planetary Futures. *Theory, Culture & Society* 28: 75–97

- Jeffrey C 2008 Kicking away the ladder: student politics and the making of an Indian middle class. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 26: 517–36
- Jeffrey C and McFarlane C 2008 Performing cosmopolitanism. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 26: 420–7
- Jepson P, Barua M and Buckingham K 2011 What is a Conservation Actor? *Conservation and Society* 9: 229–35
- Kothari U 2008 Global peddlers and local networks: migrant cosmopolitanisms. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 26: 500–16
- Latour B 1986 The powers of association. in Law J ed *Power, action and belief: a new sociology of knowledge?* Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 264–80
- Latour B 1999 *Pandora's hope: essays on the reality of science studies*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA
- Latour B 2004 Whose Cosmos, Which Cosmopolitics? Comments on the Peace Terms of Ulrich Beck. *Common Knowledge*. 10: 450–62.
- Lewis M 2004 *Inventing Global Ecology: Tracking the Biodiversity Ideal in India, 1947-1997*. Ohio University Press, Athens, Ohio
- Lorimer H 2006 Herding memories of humans and animals. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 24: 497–518
- Lorimer J 2008 Counting corncrakes: The affective science of the UK corncrake census. *Social Studies of Science* 38: 377–405
- Lorimer J 2010a Elephants as companion species: the lively biogeographies of Asian elephant conservation in Sri Lanka. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 35: 491–506
- Lorimer J 2010b Moving image methodologies for more-than-human geographies. *Cultural Geographies* 17: 237–58
- Lorimer J and Whatmore S 2009 After the 'king of beasts': Samuel Baker and the embodied historical geographies of elephant hunting in mid-nineteenth-century Ceylon. *Journal of Historical Geography* 35: 668–89
- Marcus G E 1995 Ethnography in/of the world system: the emergence of multi-sited ethnography. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24: 95–117

- McFarlane C 2008 Postcolonial Bombay: decline of a cosmopolitan city? *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 26: 480–99
- Menon V, Tiwari S K, Easa P S and Sukumar R eds 2005 *Right of Passage: Elephant Corridors of India*. Wildlife Trust of India, New Delhi
- Mohan G 2008 Embedded cosmopolitanism and the politics of obligation: the Ghanaian diaspora and development. *Environment and Planning A* 38: 867–83.
- Moore–Bridger B 2010 *Too-blue elephant banned from Selfridges* (<http://www.standard.co.uk/news/tooblue-elephant-banned-from-selfridges-6479546.html>) Accessed 12/02/2013 2013
- Pratt M L 2008 *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. Routledge, London
- Saikia A 2009 The Kaziranga National Park: Dynamics of Social and Political History. *Conservation and Society* 7: 113–29
- Shand M 1992 *Travels on my elephant*. Penguin, London
- Shand M 1996 *Queen of the Elephants*. Vintage, London
- Simeon D 2001 Subaltern studies: Cultural concerns. *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, London 15241–5
- Stengers I 2005a The cosmopolitical proposal. in Latour B and Weibel P eds *Making things public*. MIT Press, Cambridge, MA 994–1003
- Stengers I 2005b Introductory Notes on an Ecology of Practice. *Cultural Studies Review* 11: 183–96
- Stengers I 2011 *Cosmopolitics II*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN
- Strang V 2008 Cosmopolitan Natures: Paradigms and Politics in Australian Environmental Management. *Nature and Culture* 3: 41–62.
- Szerszynski B and Urry J 2002 Cultures of cosmopolitanism. *The Sociological Review* 50: 461–81.
- Szerszynski B and Urry J 2006 Visuality, mobility and the cosmopolitan: inhabiting the world from afar. *The British Journal of Sociology* 57: 113–31.
- Tsing A L 2005 *Friction: An ethnography of global connection*. Princeton University Press., Princeton, New Jersey
- Whatmore S 2002 *Hybrid geographies: natures, cultures, spaces*. Sage, London

Whatmore S and Thorne L 1998 Wild(er)ness: reconfiguring the geographies of wildlife.

Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers 23: 435–54.

Whatmore S and Thorne L 2000 Elephants on the move: spatial formations of wildlife exchange.

Environment and Planning D: Society and Space 18: 185–203.

CHAPTER 5: BIO-GEO-GRAPHY: LANDSCAPE, DWELLING AND THE POLITICAL ECOLOGY OF HUMAN-ELEPHANT RELATIONSHIPS

Abstract

The relation between the *bio* and the *geo* has been amongst geography's most enduring concerns. This paper is a contribution toward ongoing attempts in human geography to articulate the politics of the dynamics and distribution of life. Drawing upon postcolonial histories of the environment, animal ecology and more-than-human geography, the paper examines how humans and elephants cohabit with and against the grain of political and cartographic design. Through fieldwork in northeast India, it develops a 'dwelt political ecology' of human–elephant relations that reanimates landscapes and is sensitive to postcolonial subaltern concerns. The paper develops and deploys a methodology of 'tracking' through which archival history, elephant ecology and voices of the marginalized may be followed and linked. It concludes by discussing the implications of this work for bringing more-than-human geography and subaltern political ecology into new conversations.

5.1. Introduction

This paper begins by tracking. It is a dark September night in Sonitpur, a district in rural northeast India. I am with a team of conservation researchers on the trail of an elephant herd. Villagers have reported that the animals ventured out of a forest reserve to raid rice paddy. We enter a seamless, black field hoping to spot the animals. Only the sounds of our moving feet punctuate the silence, sinking into the soft earth, rising up again. Searchlights echo in the far distance. The elephants have been spotted. My companions suggest we wait. The animals may come our way. Three quarters of an hour later, we hear that sound familiar to those who inhabit

the world with elephants. The uprooting of paddy, stalks shaken to dispose clinging earth, soft rumbles. The sounds then dim. We lose the elephants to the night. The next morning, traces of elephant presence are everywhere. Tracks of a herd of four on the soil, trampled rice paddy, bricks scattered from a demolished wall. The tea plantation workers to whom the house belonged are angry and desperate: *“We constantly face this problem. These animals belong to the government, but we have to live with them. As for compensation, it never reaches us. Neither can we move out of here. With so many mouths to feed, you tell us what to do.”*

This vignette gives us a sense of the politics that emerges when more-than-human bodies (*bio*) and a lively earth (*geo*) interweave. As in many parts of the world, landscapes of human-animal cohabitation are politically fissured into reserves for elephants and spaces for people. Yet, elephants transgress these cartographic divisions, where they come into conflict with the rural poor. The latter bear an unequal burden of living with elephants, creatures afforded total protection and deployed by the state to control vast tracts of land. This interplay between human and elephant bodies, landscapes and institutions, gives rise to a political ecology and a more-than-human politics. At work here is an earth-life nexus shaping disputed presents in the shadow of a colonial past.

But how should we make sense of such lively, yet political, modes of cohabitation? How might we write (post)colonial histories in a way that does not render inert the actions and agencies of nonhuman animals? What bearings does it have for understanding the vital connections between the *bio* and the *geo* – one of geography’s most enduring concerns (Whatmore, 2006)? These questions have in many ways been the staple of political ecology. It has sought to unpack how human-animal cohabitation is mediated by broader political struggles such as that of race, gender and class (Ogra, 2008; Robbins, 2011), it has examined how political economies of power and capital control landscapes (Peluso, 1995; Zimmerer and Bassett, 2003), and it has tended to politicized bio-geophysical changes that result when economy and ecology meet (Robbins, 2001). Its South Asian variants, inspired by subaltern perspectives of writing history ‘from below’ (Chakrabarty, 2002; Guha, 1982), have gone against the grain of mainstream environmental narratives to elucidate how political protests have ensued following the fencing of forests and creation of protected areas (Arnold and Guha, 1995; Guha, 1990; Rangarajan, 1996a).

Whilst important for understanding how ecology is politicized, these approaches tell us very little about the nonhumans with whom humans cohabit, and the part they play in coproducing landscapes. As critics often ask, where is the ecology (Walker, 2005)?

In response, more-than-human geography has approached these questions by seeking to re-animate landscapes. They pay close attention to the ecologies of human and nonhuman bodies through which a vital topography emerges (Johnston, 2008; Lorimer, 2006, 2010a). The emphasis here is on dwelling and inhabitation rather than inscription (Hinchliffe, 2003), a concern shared with certain strands of environmental anthropology (Ingold, 2000, 2011). In a slightly different register, and at much broader scales, others have sought to examine the dynamics and distribution of life ‘after the end of Nature’ (Lorimer, 2012). This work seeks to develop ‘lively’ or ‘intra-disciplinary’ biogeographies, bringing the natural and social sciences into conversation (Jepson et al., 2010; Lorimer, 2010b). Whilst bringing back the life that is rendered inert by political ecology, conversation between these two fields is still in its infancy. We learn very little about the lived experiences of inhabitation, of humans or animals, or about landscapes, in the shadow of the (post)colonial state.

Both disciplines have much to offer in terms of investigating how humans and animals inhabit a lively earth, with and against the grain of political design. In this paper, I seek to develop a ‘dwelt political ecology’ that is attuned to how more-than-human bodies fabricate landscapes whilst collectively caught up within fields of power. It draws postcolonial political ecology (Arnold and Guha, 1995; Gadgil and Guha, 1992), into conversation with more-than-human geography (Whatmore, 2002, 2006), and scholarship on animating landscapes (Ingold, 2000, 2011). Crafting such political ecologies that do not deaden nonhumans or the landscape demands methodological innovation. Deploying a subaltern reading of archival material, the paper examines how human–elephant relationships unfolded in a colonial and postcolonial landscape in northeast India. Second, the paper interrogates what this archival reading of human–elephant landscapes would mean if one were to consider the ecologies and lifeworlds of elephants. This is mobilized through a five-month endeavour of tracking a herd of bull elephants in the landscape. Finally, the paper engages with the politics of cohabitation by tracing the stories of postcolonial subalterns who interacted with the bull herd. Through these interventions, the paper

offers up innovative methods for writing (post)colonial political ecologies. It contributes to wider literatures looking at the earth–life nexus in human geography.

5.2. Bio-geo-graphy I: Political ecology from the archive

I first travelled to Sonitpur in the late summer of 2010 to understand how elephant conservation unfolded on the ground. One of my early encounters was that of an official map (Figure 1), delineating elephant distribution in the region. The contrast between the elephant reserves under the aegis of the forest department and blank spaces meant to depict human habitation was stark. This apparently peaceful settlement of reserves for elephants and spaces for humans posed a number of questions. Under what political economic circumstances did these institutional arrangements of people and elephants arise? Were concerns of the subaltern citizen mapped out by this cartography? How did these cartographic practices regulate the activities of people and elephants?

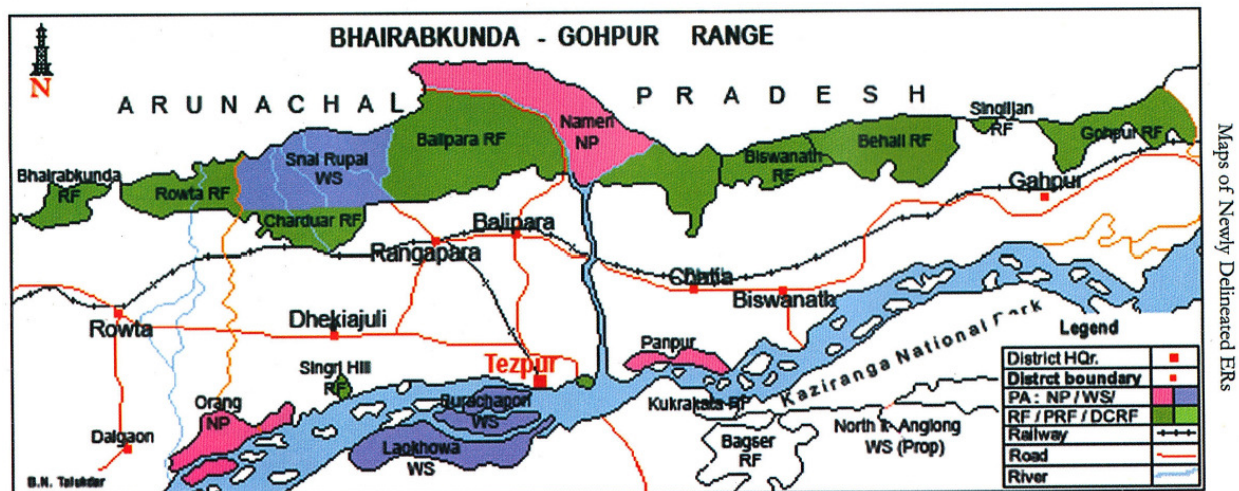


Figure 1: Institutional cartography of the Sonitpur Elephant Reserve. Source: Government of Assam (2010).

Such questions are perhaps an all too familiar trope in political ecology, but they bring into view the historical trajectories through which divisions between nature and society were entrenched and coded into the landscape. This Modernist cartographic practice (Latour, 1993;

Robbins, 2001) had its roots in colonial forestry. The Sonitpur Elephant Reserve depicted on the map was assembled from erstwhile protected areas created for forestry operations in the 19th century (Talukdar, 2010). Archival material indicates that following the annexation of Assam in 1838–39, the East India Company began a series of moves to fence forests from the local populace. Cartographic surveys of the landscape were initiated in the 1840s with the motive of identifying trees with commercial value (Saikia, 2005). Until the 1860s, the imperial administration allowed *mauzadars*¹⁶ from the local populace to fell trees in return for a nominal tax. Thereafter, with the rise of systematic forestry across the Indian empire that developed new ways to plant, order and produce timber through rational methods of regeneration (Agrawal, 2005; Arnold and Guha, 1995; Gadgil and Guha, 1992), such practice was projected as ‘reckless’ and a ‘cause of concern’ (Handique, 2004). In 1873, areas containing valuable forest produce were demarcated and declared reserve forests (Figure 2). The logic behind this practice was to fence ‘strictly what we could find really merchantable timber growth’ whilst leaving ‘the rest to the uses of the local population’ (Gustav Mann cited in Saikia, 2005; P.56). A number of regulations limiting access to forests were put in place and extraction of resources made an illegal offense. New geographies of resource use were forged, where the colonial government became owners of a large proportion of land in the district.

This fencing of forests witnessed a parallel commodification of the elephant. Like timber, elephants were considered ‘produce’ of state-owned forests to which the colonial government had privileged access. Elephant capture and trade was in operation in Assam since pre-colonial times (M'Cosh, 1837), run by feudal estates and private contractors (Campbell, 1869). By the mid 1870s, the imperial government began to regulate elephant capture. The forest reserves in Sonitpur were partitioned into sections and given out on lease to the highest bidder (Hunter, 1879). Royalty had to be paid for every animal caught and the government reserved the right to purchase all elephants from the lessee. This initial regulation later gave way to complete state monopoly and ownership of the animal. The ‘Elephants’ Preservation Act’ was constituted in 1879, prohibiting any capture or killing of elephants, unless granted a license. The state therefore

¹⁶ A private revenue agent or “revenue farmer” who represents an allocated region and collects revenue on behalf of the government with certain personal profit

exercised ownership of elephants irrespective of whether they were in forest reserves or outside (Nongbri, 2003). The legitimacy to govern elephant populations and the authority to dictate modes of human–elephant cohabitation now rested with the colonial government.

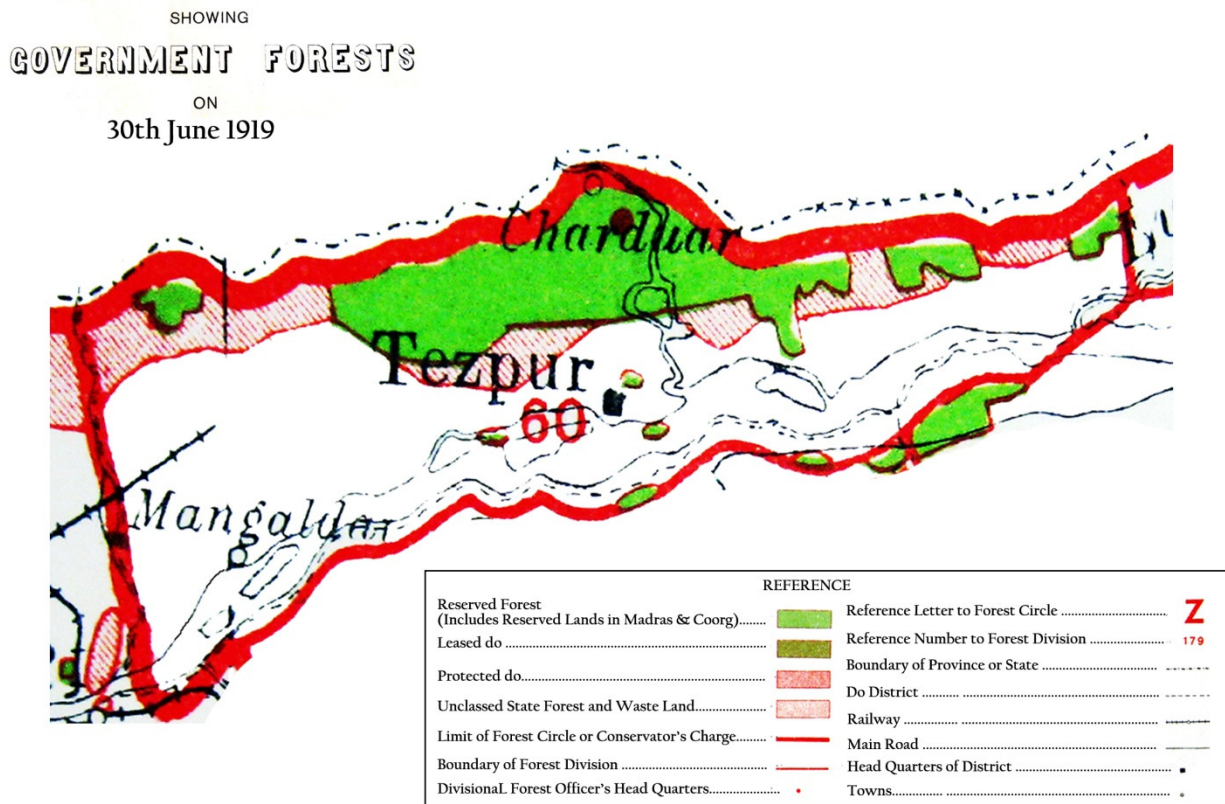


Figure 2: Map showing areas demarcated for commercial forestry in Sonitpur (Darrang); 1919.

Source: Bodleian Library, Oxford

Two schisms arose from this simultaneous fencing of forests and commodification of elephants. First, there was a disentanglement of nature from society, resulting in a *purification* of the landscape (Latour, 1993). Second, there was an *inversion* of inhabitation into occupation (Ingold, 2011), whereby the landscape became a constructed space with forests occupied by commodities like the elephant and ‘the rest’ by the local populace. These schisms were not produced without protest and conflict. Fragmentary deposits in archives seldom contain voices of the marginalized, but records suggest that there was considerable tension between agricultural

expansion and advocates of forest preservation. The local peasantry constantly insisted on grazing and cultivation rights, whilst the more powerful tea industry made demands for ‘de-reservation’ of forest areas to increase plantations (Saikia, 2008). In response, besides stating that the ‘forests of Assam are not inexhaustible’ (Progress Report of Forest Administration in Assam 1926–27 cited in Handique, 2004; P.10), the forest department retained their grasp over land on the grounds that they contained populations of elephants that could be captured for further use (Nongbri, 2003). Further, the ‘question of game preservation in Assam’ was invoked. The forest department argued that ‘[t]he public ... needs educating upto the fact that wild animals and the study of their habits are sources of great interest and delight to men of real culture throughout the civilized world’ (Progress Report of Forest Administration in Assam 1929–30 cited in Handique, 2004; P.86). These colonial ideas of conservation reflect a form of hegemony (Gramsci, 1971), whereby the logic for maintaining control over forest land is legitimized on the grounds that preserving elephants was something ‘men of real culture’ in the ‘civilized world’ practiced, and was what the local peasantry should aspire to. Although debates continued, in the 1940s, amidst much protest, the Assam Legislative Assembly adopted a bill empowering the forest department to evict anyone occupying forest land (Saikia, 2005). The fencing of forests initiated a purification of nature and society and laid out a world to be occupied. The authority and power to evict people completed this process.

However, archival readings show how the histories through which purification proceeded were also replete with *translations*, the processes through which nature and society get intertwined and knotted, leading to a proliferation of hybrids (Latour, 1993). Purification of the Sonitpur landscape and commodification of elephants generated a view that elephants, being state-owned animals, should remain in forests reserved for them. The forest department continually received complaints about elephant incursions and crop damage from the local populace (Anon., 1957; P.28). Records suggest that the issue even reached the Assam Assembly, where a speaker contended that 100,000 acres of land, with a crop output equivalent to 1.25% of India’s food deficit, could not be cultivated due to intruding elephants (Gee, 1950). The forest department sought to control elephant depredation by adopting a policy of opening up the Sonitpur landscape to *Kheddah* and *Mela Shikar* elephant capture operations. This did little to solve the problem, as

most damage was ‘the work of solitary male elephants’ for which such operations was ‘of no avail’ (Paramasivan, 1961; P.29). The department contended that ‘throwing open of almost the whole of the Reserved Forests of the State for elephant catching is no answer to the problem’ (Anon., 1957). Instead, licenses were issued to ‘approved and experienced sportsmen’ to shoot ‘rogues’ that caused serious damage. Due to a paucity of skilled hunters, even armed police were sent to ‘destroy’ elephants (Paramasivan, 1961). The government soon realized that the latter ‘merely result[ed] in reckless shooting and the killing and wounding of all and sundry, including females and calves’ (Paramasivan, 1961; P.31). Despite serious effort, elephant depredation remained a problem that was difficult to manage and govern.

In the decades after Indian independence, leading to the designation of the Sonitpur Elephant Reserve in 2003 (Bist, 2006), the postcolonial government did little to alter these Modernist cartographies or the way they addressed elephant incursions into human habitation. Rather, in the 1970s, a policy of ‘total preservation’ emerged. Grounded on the idea that India as an emerging nation should preserve its ‘cultural and biological identity’ through the retention of ‘representative patches’ of forests (Rangarajan, 1996b), all modes of human activity was to be erased from protected areas. Wherever such activity was tolerated, it was deemed a necessary evil. The elephant was integral to postcolonial framings of the Indian nation. Indian elites argued that the creature was so integral to the nation’s history and culture, that ‘it would be difficult to imagine an India without elephants’ (Lahiri–Choudhury, 1989). A drive toward protection through bureaucratic intervention ensued, leading to the passing of The Wildlife (Protection) Act in 1972. The Asian elephant was elevated to Schedule I of this act in 1977, which meant that the creature could only be killed if it had become ‘dangerous to human life’ or ‘sick beyond recovery’, not for destroying crops or property (Lahiri–Choudhury, 2006). Translations such as conflict and crop depredation were no longer issues to be managed through hunting and population control. Rather they were to be tolerated, or in the worst case, mitigated through bureaucratic measures such as compensation.

In summary, this archival reading of human–elephant relationships opens up articulations of the nexus between the *bio* and the *geo* to fraught political pasts. This brief history of the Sonitpur landscape, written from below, suggests that contemporary modes of elephant

conservation has its roots in a colonial political economic context driven by a logic of maximizing revenue from forests (Arnold and Guha, 1995). The cartographies that were constituted as a result were Modernist, entrenching divisions between nature and society, and inverting inhabitation into occupation (Ingold, 2011; Latour, 1993). These practices gave the state authority to govern landscapes and modes of humans–elephant cohabitation. Archival records, despite their poor repository of the voices of the marginalized, suggest that concerns of the peasantry were seldom heard. In fact, colonial control over resources, operating through a hegemonic logic of being an endeavour of the civilized, mapped out the subaltern citizen’s concerns. This logic found a new guise in postcolonial India. The elephant, seen as part of the nation’s cultural and biological heritage, became a lever for cementing bureaucratic control over the landscape. Whilst translations issued forth as divisions between nature and society was entrenched, elephant incursions into human habitation were highly uneven encounters. As creatures benefiting from state protection, the rural poor could do little but tolerate their presence.

5.3. Bio-geo-graphy II: Tracking elephants

Documents and maps that find their way into archives are in a sense elements of a landscape’s past. They help write about the politics through which human–elephants relationships unfold. The archive comes alive when documents start to unravel translations, those mixtures of nature and society that come about when elephants refuse to be contained within perimeters and go against the grain of boundaries that humans set them. Yet, there is a sense of unease that permeates when writing about such translations. One is constantly reminded that the lively beings that bring them about are qualitatively absent. We learn little about elephants’ lifeworlds, or what the landscape might mean for them. But what if we began to articulate this politics with a slightly different awareness of elephants and their relations with the landscape? An awareness that begins through an involvement in the activities of elephants that contributes to the landscape’s ongoing regeneration? How would we mobilize such an awareness, and what would be at stake for subaltern ecological histories?

Moving back to the field from the archives, I followed a herd of elephants over the course of five months, between September 2010 and January 2011, as they traversed the Sonitpur landscape. I was shadowing the work of three researchers – Dhruba, Bhaben and Apu – who worked for the Assam Haathi Project (AHP), a human–elephant conflict mitigation project funded by the UK DEFRA Darwin Initiative. The team was monitoring the activities of a herd of four bull elephants, named SP04, an activity they referred to as ‘tracking’. Led by Tara–1, the dominant *mukhna*¹⁷, SP04 had become experts at raiding crops and breaking into houses for stored food grain. The three other elephants in the herd included Tara–3, a subadult male about 10 years old, and two older animals Tara–4 and Tara–5 (Figure 3). A fifth elephant, Tara–2, had left the herd before I had commenced fieldwork. The prefix Tara– attached to their names stemmed from Tarajuli, the place where Dhruba and the AHP team first identified the herd in 2006.



Figure 3: The SP04 herd (left to right: Tara–4, Tara–3, Tara–1 and Tara–5) in a tea plantation.

Tracking the SP04 herd was an event of feet following quadruped movement (Gooch, 2008). The elephants led us through different parts of the Sonitpur landscape, through places

¹⁷ The vernacular term *mukhna* refers to tuskless adult bulls. It is widely used in the literature on Asian elephants.

outside forest reserves left blank in the institutional rendering of this biogeography (Figure 1): the manicured slopes of the Phulbari tea estate where Tara-1 is standing up, alert, and guarding the herd whilst women pluck tea nearby; the deep ravines of Tarajuli where they are at relative ease, making us notice a place that would otherwise seem non-existent; the flat fields of Bokagaon where we hear them cross at night, the sounds of their quadruped movement interrupted by the pulse of road traffic. At times the herd is a set of traces – fresh footprints on red clay or signs of houses damaged. At other times, they are narratives – stories of people’s encounters as they point to trampled fields. And then they are absences – we have no knowledge of where they are. Only to resurface further north, amongst hordes of villagers using slingshots and beating metal tins to ward off the creatures from their fields. The places the herd prizes open through translations are hybrid: partly Proboscidean, but not entirely human. Through this activity of tracking, we begin to perform a vital and relational topography, one through which I learn about the lay of the land. The AHP team’s intimate knowledge of the landscape too had arisen from mapping SP04’s movements.

Following elephants, we also begin to animate the places I had encountered in archival documents. The herd moves through the Harchora Tea Estate, established in the 1860s, with its long rows of ‘labour colonies’ housing communities brought to Assam as indentured labour (Behal and Mohapatra, 1992). We are on their tracks as they move into the Balipara Reserve, forests fenced off in the 1870s, where signs of colonial forest plantations still remain (Saikia, 2005). They move into parts of the district we do not dare venture, as they are hideouts of secessionist rebels. These lapses mean that the herd’s activities go undocumented. When they resurface, we follow the elephants toward Goroimari, a former elephant habitat requisitioned in 1950 to build an air base (Paramasivan, 1961). Through tracking, the pasts deposited in archives come to the fore, enabling one to write movement into inert texts and account for elephant presence in translations. The landscape becomes a palimpsest, replete with traces of past institutional arrangements and political struggles, muddied by quadruped soles and GPS points. Divisions between archive and field get blurred, as tracks issue forth between one and the other.

The AHP team had recruited a network of local informants, ‘monitors’, in different parts of the district to relay information about elephant sightings, crop or house damage. We would

then travel to these sites to find the herd, verify reports and plot coordinates of the location using a GPS device. This was a form of vernacular mapping, of reporting incidents that punctuated the rhythms of everyday rural life. The resultant cartography of everyday encounters (Figure 4), mapped through an assemblage that involved the SP04 herd, local inhabitants, and inscription devices such as mobile phones and GIS technologies, offers another way to engage with translations. The flurry of activity at the centre of this map diagrams SP04's habit of resting in the relatively less populated tea plantations and scrubland during the day, and forays into houses and paddy fields at night. It opens up a series of speculations on how elephants continually inhabit places outside the designated Sonitpur Elephant Reserve. This cartography is inherently political as it renders visible SP04's transgressions of reserve boundaries. Modernist cartographies of the landscape are unsettled. Dhruva explains the map to me: *"We might designate specific forest reserves for elephants, but this is very different from the ways in which the elephants think of their habitat. For all you know, elephants might consider human settlements and agriculture, 'our space', as theirs as well"*.

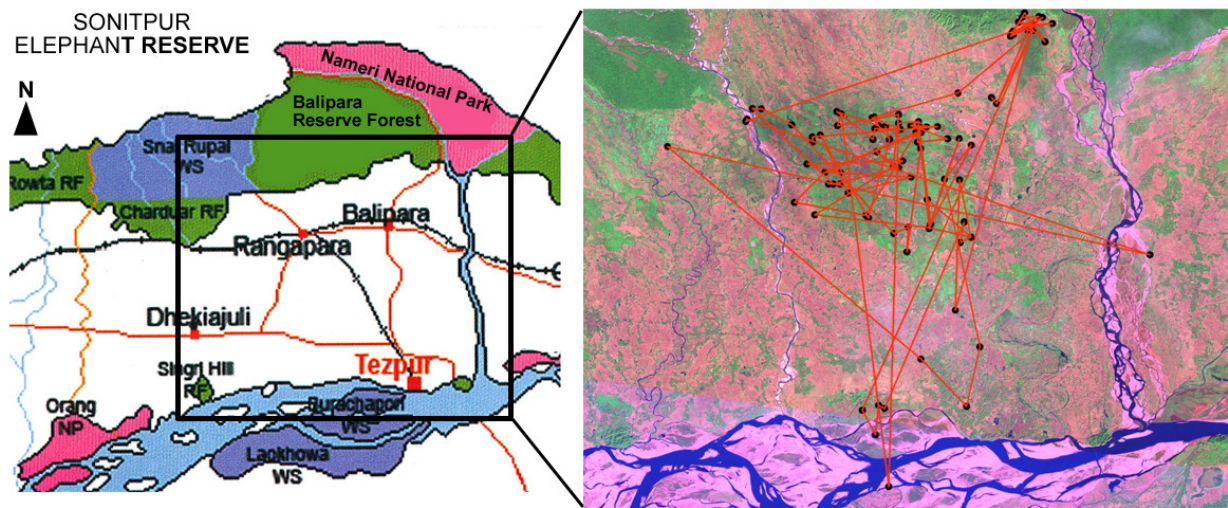


Figure 4: Map of SP04 movements during the course of my fieldwork (2010) (right). Black points indicate reported sightings of the herd and red connectors are paths drawn between points. Green indicates tea estates, village home gardens or forest fragments; paddy fields are indicated by brown. (Cartography: Scott Wilson / Assam Haathi Project). Inset on left shows area covered by this map, most of which falls outside the designated Elephant Reserve.

Cohabitation affected the herd's ethology as well. During the wet monsoon months the animals often ventured into paddy fields at night. In the fallow winter season, the elephants, led by Tara-1, would gravitate toward villages where grain was stored in people's homes. Ethologically, this manifested in highly developed raiding skills. The AHP database showed that the herd had broken fifty-five houses in the landscape over a one-year period in 2010. Dhruba told me during one of our visits to inspect a house damaged by the herd that there was always 'an element of surprise' in their raids: *"This is why they are successful. ... They are very clever, and do not unnecessarily waste energy by breaking the entire house. Neither do they raid at unnecessary hours, for instance in the early evening when people are up and alert."* Other herds in the vicinity have not become as equally skilled: *"There are many elephants that act like crazy animals on a rampage and damage the entire house. Unlike SP04, they are not calm."* Ecologists suggest that crop-raiding is a learnt habit (Sukumar, 1996), with some individuals having greater propensity and skill in doing so (Srinivasaiah et al., 2012). These skills may be passed down by older bulls to younger members of a herd. Over the years Dhruba noticed that Tara-3's skills had improved in Tara-1's presence.

Attending to these translations opens up engagement with the sentient ecologies of the SP04 herd. Unlike archival readings, which only give us a sense of how elephants may resist human placings, this ecological rendition allows us to engage with how elephants may create their own spaces. These spaces are more-than-human, where their Proboscidean ways, ends, doings can be reflected. Foregrounding the lifeworlds of elephants reverses the Western, Modernist emphasis that building precedes dwelling (Heidegger, 2001; Ingold, 2011). Contrary to colonial cartographies of resource use, the earth's surface is not already laid out and fissured into distinct spaces for people and elephants. Rather, landscapes are a dwelt achievement. They emerge through the continual unfolding of the life activities of people and elephants, activities that issue forth through lines (Ingold, 2011). Or to borrow and misuse my informants' terminology, landscapes are the interweaving of *tracks*. The hybrid nature of landscape, the translations that knot nature and society in multiple ways, is a process where the tracks of human feet and quadruped movement mingle and intertwine. It is a *bio-geo-graphy* written by human and elephant bodies.

5.4. Bio-geo-graphy III: Storying the world

Whilst the previous section opens up an engagement with how elephants dwell and co-fabricate landscapes, the absent voices of the rural poor are telling. There is thus a discrepancy between the archival reading of the landscape's political ecology and the ecological registers mobilized against it to enliven translations. In this section, I seek to consider the experience of cohabitation from the perspective of the subaltern whose lives regularly interface with elephants. How are their lives, or tracks, caught up in fields of power? What bearings would an appreciation of their stories have on our understanding of the politics of inhabiting landscapes? To answer these questions, I extend the method and metaphor of tracking to follow the stories of people as they interacted with the SP04 herd.

During the course of my fieldwork in Sonitpur, I gained access to an AHP database of the houses the SP04 herd had broken into in the past four years. This archival database provided an opportunity for further methodological innovation as it opened up avenues for 'reconstructing' past encounters between people and the herd. With the help of the AHP team, I travelled to these homes, strewn across different parts of the Sonitpur landscape. I conducted eighteen ethnographic interviews (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007), through which I sought to evoke people's memories of the event and elicit stories about the herd in the context of the everyday. These interviews were conducted in informal settings, sometimes taking the form of spontaneous focus groups where several members of the household and occasionally neighbours joined in. I realize that there is a bias in selecting only those houses that were damaged, rather than opening it up to a broader community. In defense, this selection enabled triangulating our activities of tracking the SP04 herd and kept certain specificity to the notions about cohabiting with these animals meant.

Narratives of past encounters bring to life a different mode of engaging with elephants. One of the first people I interviewed was Putru, a twenty-eight year old tea plantation worker who lived with his wife and child in the Phulbari tea estate. According to the AHP records, his house was one of 'thirteen huts damaged in the area' a year ago. Putru spoke about the event with anguish: *"The elephants came at night and broke into the room in which I was sleeping. Not finding any food, they went and demolished my neighbour's kitchen wall, then a couple of other houses, only to come back here*

again. I desperately tried to stop them. But they charge! They will trample you! It is all so sudden that there is no time to even light a fire. What will you do?" Similar sentiments of fear were expressed by Budhiram, an eighteen-year old boy, who narrowly escaped: "I was asleep, and suddenly I heard the wall collapse. It was an enormous, terrifying elephant. I silently crouched under the bed. It felt as though the elephant would demolish the entire house around me." Both these men reiterated the AHP team's observation of how skilled the SP04 herd had become in breaking into houses. Budhiram described the elephants as "clever", approaching houses very silently at night: "The large one breaks in from the side, whilst the others wait at the front and back of the house ... When people chase them, they hide. You think they have gone, but they come back again." Putru told me that these elephants "could not be trusted" as they could come any time of year and at unexpected hours: "Sometimes there are three, at other times two or four elephants ... The moment you open the door, they will strike. You tell me, how can one escape?"

The herd's journeys through the landscape also led to the circulation of stories about the creatures. They had gained a reputation of being 'raiders'. People like Putru readily distinguished SP04 from other elephant herds: "None of them have tusks... They roam around in our vicinity, going into villages and breaking houses. I was told by people that when you chase them, they retaliate. They were right." Andreas, another tea plantation worker who had his house broken into thrice, spoke of their fearless behaviour: "If you chase other crop-raiding elephants, they leave the fields, or even go away. But not these elephants ... They are obstinate. They only break houses". People had given the herd names. Bahadur, a sugarcane farmer, said they were the 'party of thieves', as they broke into houses. Debanand, a former *mahout* living in a different corner of the district, described Tara-1 as the "very tall elephant, the proud one who shows off". The latter's remarks reflected Tara-1's bodily stature and leadership of herding the other bulls. This description was not very different from those the AHP team used when talking about the bull's dispositions.

Further, people believed that the herd's ethological dispositions had changed from that of other elephants following their inhabitation of human landscapes: "Entering homes has become their habit ... they are so habituated that they won't even budge ... In fact, they have become like humans" (Putru). Some even said that the animals scaped their own places: "For instance, Hātidobā¹⁸ in Phulbari tea estate. That is their space, a place where they congregate during the day." Cohabiting with these creatures had

¹⁸ The term means 'elephant-pool' in Assamese.

in fact affected some of their everyday activities. Bahadur had abandoned cultivating his sugarcane fields, as he was unable to guard them from elephants. Putru's travels were affected for he could not leave his family alone at night. He was seriously considering moving somewhere else with less elephant presence: *"A home can be rebuilt. But what if someone is killed? Will you be able to bring back their lives?"* Both Bahadur and Putru expressed their frustration of having to bear the burdens of living with these creatures.

The long histories of state control and its fissured cartographies of elephants also had bearings on how people's relations with elephants unfolded, in some sense blurring divisions between archival histories and oral narratives in the present. During our interview, Putru told me that elephants were forest department property and therefore it was their responsibility to prevent animals from foraging into villages: *"Anything that is in the forests belongs to the government, the elephant being one of them. The government has employed foresters. They should prevent them from coming into our homes."* Anger and frustration toward elephants were often directed toward the government, sentiments that were shared by several people. One interviewee whose house had been damaged by the SP04 herd remarked: *"This band of elephants that comes into our village is government dacoits! The government has kept these three to wreak havoc!"* A powerful metaphor frequently used to describe the herd's activities was that they *"carried out an eviction"*. Through the 1990s, the forest department had undertaken several eviction drives in Sonitpur (Gureja et al., 2002). The mobilization of this metaphor of eviction is a reflection of how Modernist schisms of purification and inversion are internalized by postcolonial subjects. Alluding to elephants as 'government dacoits', is rooted in a history of state ownership of the elephant and the protection that the creature has historically benefited from.

Indeed, the entanglement of peoples' lives with the tracks of elephants issues forth through asymmetric relations with institutions of power. As the following vignette illustrates, dwelling with elephants may be a fraught process involving struggle and defeat for the poor. One night in September 2009, the SP04 herd had broken twelve houses in the vicinity of Balipara. One such hut belonged to a family of landless labourers living at the periphery of a corporate-owned tea estate. Although the family of five fled unhurt, a burning kerosene lamp fell over as the elephants knocked down a wall. The family's entire possessions were burnt down. Ironically, the only

belonging they managed to retrieve were the few sacks of rice the elephants got hold of. Mala, the forty-year old woman to whom the house belonged, described their helplessness: *“We watched our home burn with tears in our eyes. There were three elephants. Tell me, what could we do?”*

The family became homeless. As temporary labourers they did not get any compensation or support from the corporate tea estate. For weeks they lived with neighbours in adjacent labour quarters. Mala described their poverty-stricken condition *“We couldn’t even afford to buy a new set of clothes. We just wore what we had on that night.”* Her son Ramu, who worked as a truck driver, lost his driving license in the fire. As a consequence, he was unable to find work. The family income was further stifled. According to the family, Ramu ‘became mad’. Numerous consultations with local healers (*Ojas*) yielded no benefit. The family then took him to the local mental health services where he was diagnosed with an Acute Schizophrenia-like disorder. Ramu told me that he had become deeply worried *“as all our possessions were burnt down”*. Both his mother and aunt believed his illness was a result of his worry. His condition improved after medication, but the family’s problems did not. Ramu’s father, who at the time worked as a daily labourer in a neighbouring state, returned home with some cash reserves. Due to his own poor health, the family persuaded him to stay back. The family’s already-limited sources of income had further dwindled.

The subsequent trajectory of their lives, following the encounter with the herd, exposed the family to a range of institutional inequalities. To rebuild their home and pay for medical treatment, the family borrowed a sum of Rs. 2500 (US\$ 60) from a local moneylender at a very high interest rate of 10% a month. I later learnt from local informants that moneylenders charged such high interest rates in order to recover the original amount loaned. The poor were generally unable to repay the borrowed amount in one instalment. Families would often put their land on mortgage to repay debts. When I asked Mala why they had not applied for a government housing scheme that people below the poverty line were eligible for, she replied *“We don’t even have a ‘BPL’ [Below Poverty Line] card to show that we are poor. Who is going to make a card for us? When you go to the local office the first thing they do is ask for money.”* The family, being poor and from a low caste background, did not have the right social capital to access such schemes. That they needed to pay to get a certificate confirming their poverty was indeed deeply ironic.

The family was also eligible for compensation from the forest department under the Project Elephant scheme. Being illiterate, they asked the local tea labour student union leaders to help file a complaint in the local forest office. Forest and revenue department personnel had visited their home to verify damage. A year had already passed but there were no signs of compensation. Repeated travels to the local forest office were of no avail. They said they sometimes spent an entire working day just to meet with the concerned official, none of whom could confirm when the money would arrive. These efforts to pursue compensation added transaction costs and further aggravated their predicament. When Mala approached the local student union leaders, they retorted in anger and told them to “*mind your own business*”. The helpless family suspected that someone else had collected compensation under their name.

The lines through which these stories and lives issue forth are inherently entangled in fields of power. The vignette of Mala and her family illustrates what tracing stories have to offer if one is to write about the fraught politics of cohabitation. The elephant becomes a vector through which the family’s tracks moved over unequal terrain, intertwining with a host of other, often more powerful actors: healers, the clinic, moneylenders, students unions, and the postcolonial state. The new entanglements aggravated pre-existing poverty. Tracking stories of the subalterns brings to the fore voices that may not make their way to archives or may get downplayed when there is an overt emphasis on nonhuman ecology. But it also brings to life some of the travails one gleans from archives – the practices of coercion and control, rooted in (post)colonial histories. To story the world is to examine disenfranchisement in the everyday, in the context of people’s lives that are never outside a sticky web of connections with nonhumanity.

5.5. Discussion: landscape, dwelling and political ecology

This paper has brought the vitalist dispositions of more-than-human geography into conversation with strands of subaltern or postcolonial political ecology. The paper mobilizes conceptual resources from both disciplines through a triad of methodological interventions examining the vital and political connections between the *bio* (human, elephants) and the *geo* (landscape). I have termed these interventions *bio-geo-graphies* to reflect the more-than-human

nature of the project, articulated in conjunction with a retinue of nonhuman bodies, technologies and devices that interface with a lively earth. The ‘dwelt political ecology’ developed as a consequence of these interventions makes a number of contributions to wider literatures in the disciplines of political ecology and more-than-human geography. In this section I will briefly elucidate the main implications of this work and what it might offer for future scholarship.

First, the archival writing of human–elephant relationships speaks to the wider literature on South Asian environmental history and its concomitant subaltern political ecologies (Arnold and Guha, 1995; Gadgil and Guha, 1992; Rangarajan, 1996a). The critical examination of how histories of ordering human–elephant landscapes proceeded through Modernist processes of purification and inversion add a geographical sensibility to writings on environmental history (Gadgil and Guha, 1992; Rangarajan, 1999). Foregrounding the role of the subaltern, and emphasizing the political economies of resource use, adds to other nuanced histories of human–elephant relationships (Lorimer and Whatmore, 2009; Sivasundaram, 2005). More critically, the emphasis on translations brings in new perspectives on writing (post)colonial histories through the archives. Whilst subaltern studies historians have read archives against the grain of colonial and nationalist histories of India (Chakrabarty, 2002; Guha, 1982; Simeon, 2001), nonhumans and their agentic potential eludes critical enquiry. Histories of Indian environmentalism too seem to tidy up the actions and lifeworlds of the animals that populate their accounts (Gadgil and Guha, 1992; Rangarajan, 1996a, 2006). This paper, by foregrounding translations, shows how subaltern pasts and political struggles might have been shaped with and through elephants, or for that matter a retinue of nonhuman beings with which human lives are led.

Further, through the attempt to ecologize archival histories by tracking elephants on the ground, the paper opens up some difficult questions that strike at the heart of postcolonial environmental history. A concern that immediately comes to the fore is whether attending to the lifeworlds of elephants is a manoeuvre to examine histories against the anthropocentric grain of subaltern studies? There are indeed many subalterns, human and nonhuman, and even many more ways to be subalterns who cannot speak. Writing about nonhuman other is a difficult endeavour (Hinchliffe et al., 2005), let alone making them speak. Nonetheless, these concerns about speaking for the marginalized are shared by subaltern studies scholars (Spivak, 1988). It is

perhaps not a question of pitting posthumanist concerns against the postcolonial, as some posthumanists have sought to do (Wolfe, 2003), but about a critical engagement that does not delete the world. This paper shows how cohabitation in itself is a fraught endeavour, for both humans and elephants as they dwell in landscapes riven with conflict. More-than-human geography perhaps has a privileged vantage point in terms of addressing some of these concerns of how history or social life is always in excess of the human (Castree et al., 2004). Drawing it into further dialogue with postcolonial studies is likely to be an arena for much productive future scholarship.

Leading on from this, the second important contribution of this paper has been to revitalize political ecology. It takes as its point of departure two criticisms that have been levelled against the discipline. Firstly, the lifeworlds of animals are rendered inert such that they hardly appear in political ecology as anything more than animated cultural constructs (Hobson, 2007). Secondly, the landscape becomes a tabula rasa upon which contending knowledge claims are inscribed (Hinchliffe, 2003). Consequently, the material connections between human and animal bodies and a lively earth are reduced to a political remainder. As a corrective, this paper mobilizes a 'dwelt political ecology' where elephants are qualitatively present and landscapes are enfoldments emerging through the activities of humans and elephants. The 'dwelling perspective' deployed here is to work against the grain of inversion that delineates animals and landscapes as bound objects contained within a perimeter. This is a concept drawn from the work of Ingold and his reading of Heidegger's famous essay *Building, Dwelling, Thinking* (Heidegger, 2001; Ingold, 2000, 2011). Following Ingold, this paper shows how both elephants and humans are open to the creative traffic of the world. As sentient agents, the SP04 herd scapes spaces in conjunction with humans. They apprehend them in their own speeds, rhythms and distances. The elephants' prolonged inhabitation in the 'here' of society affects their ethologies. They become highly skilled in negotiating human presence, and learn how to break into houses or raid crops with ease. Similarly, people's lives get attuned to the movements and activities of elephants, sometimes even a sort of calibration as they stay up to guard crops or stand vigil. In other words, this dwelt geography ecologizes human-animal relations and views landscapes as a process unfolding through those very relations.

The contribution this paper makes to scholarship on dwelt geographies of animals (Johnston, 2008; Lorimer, 2006), has been to attend to the politics that emerges when dwelling rubs against institutional orderings and landscape design. Couched in its brand of Heideggerian romanticism, dwelling risks ‘conjuring up a haven of rest where all tensions are resolved, and where the solitary inhabitant can be at peace with the world – and with him or herself’ (Ingold, 2005; P.503). Through its recognition that human and animal lives are lived collectively within fields of power, especially through its analysis of the (post)colonial histories with which they proceed, the paper brings politics into dwelling. For instance, cohabiting with the SP04 herd is preceded by a legacy of state ownership and commodification of the elephant. The elephant is not a marginalized other, but a creature that has benefited from over a century of state protection and one used to legitimize control over resources in the landscapes the rural poor inhabit. The struggles, failures and defeat that come about when confronting state power manifests in everyday metaphors of elephants being ‘government dacoits’ or ‘animals carrying out evictions’. Elephants in fact may operate as vectors that aggravate pre-existing poverty or expose the poor to new spaces of inequality. The travails of Mala’s family, as they encounter unhelpful government departments, local politicians and moneylenders following the elephant attack, speak back to Heidegger.

Engaging with translations, and writing about the politics that emerges through the connections woven between the *bio* and the *geo*, demands methodological innovation that does not sit easily with the orthodox approaches of the interpretative social sciences. The third contribution of this paper has been to devise and deploy a method that enables articulations of history, politics and ecology in a way that does not tidy up the lifeworlds of nonhumans or silence the voices of the marginalized. This methodology cobbles together a variety of practices and sources: tracing material in online and institutional archives, tracking elephants and walking a sentient topography, consulting repositories of past local events and opening up political ecologies through people’s stories. In a more conventional sense, this is akin to a ‘between-method’ triangulation (Denzin, 2009), but without its bounded Cartesian loci and distinct positions. As the above accounts suggest, divisions are thinly drawn between the field and the archive, between ecology and story. Rather, it is akin to the ‘make-do’ methods deployed by some human

geographers (Lorimer, 2006, 2009), with a more implicit effort to conduct them ‘from below’, to tune them to colonial pasts and postcolonial presents.

Borrowing my field informants’ terminology, I have termed this endeavour ‘tracking’. As a metaphor and activity, tracking is a powerful way to engage with political ecologies in a symmetrical fashion. Tracks may be understood as the lines of movement or becoming through which human and nonhuman life flow (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987; Ingold, 2011). The entwining of these ever-extending tracks weave together a texture that one terms landscape: partly Proboscidean, partly human, never sealed or bound by a perimeter. Such tracks may also pass through multiple other bodies or institutions, giving rise to unexpected outcomes or political struggles. Methodologically, tracking allows for the calibration of ecology and ethnography (Lorimer, 2010a). Mapping the movements of the SP04 herd, drawing upon local archives of past conflict events and conducting ethnographic interviews of past encounters are a case in point. Historical research looking at animals is a labour of following the *traditions* animals are entwined in. The term tradition comes from ‘trade’, which originally meant ‘track’. Archival research thus becomes an activity that involves tracking creatures and their relations with people and institutions back through time (Sax, 2001). A subaltern reading, ‘from below’, is to bring these tracks closer to the ground, to the struggles and the defeats of quadruped imprints and bare feet.

The politics of human–elephant cohabitation elucidated here has implications for the emerging work of human geographers interested in the dynamics and distribution of life in the Anthropocene (Lorimer, 2012). Studies on intra-disciplinary or ‘lively’ biogeographies of Asian elephants have opened up new ways through which we might think about human–elephant relationships (Lorimer, 2010b). This work has been of a zoogeographic bent, but with a more sophisticated analysis. The work conducted in this paper restores some of the specificity that may be lost when analysis of human geography seeks to map onto that of the science of biogeography or macro-ecology. This relates to not just specific historical trajectories that forge the multiple modes of human–elephant cohabitation, but also the lived experiences of inhabitation of both humans and elephants in the shadow of institutional regimes. Furthermore, this paper, by attending to the sentient ecologies of the SP04 herd as they become—with a rural farmer community in a landscape with depleted resources, unpacks some of the different modes of being

subsumed under the appellative ‘elephant’. It provides some cues for mapping distinct ‘elephant cultures’ (Bradshaw, 2009) into conservation biogeographies of elephants (Sukumar, 2006). Scientists are now beginning to take this into consideration (Srinivasaiah et al., 2012). Here, we might want to ask whether, in the face of increasing deforestation and conflict across elephant ranges in Asia, elephants of the Anthropocene would become like the SP04 herd.

By renewing connections between the *bio* and the *geo* in a context where the modality of life is politically molten, a common ground between more-than-human geography and political ecology emerges. The dwelt political ecology developed here draws from both the vitalist dispositions of more-than-human approaches and the (post)colonial critiques of political ecology. It has sought to go beyond the humanist frameworks of political ecology, whilst retaining its analytical purchase for understanding human-animal relations as they unfold over asymmetric terrains. The associated methodology of tracking adds to the increasing repertoire of approaches seeking to conduct work across species spectrums (Kirksey and Helmreich, 2010; Lestel et al., 2006). There is considerable scope for future conversations and it is hoped that other geographers will join the fray.

5.6. References

- Agrawal A, 2005 *Environmentality: Technologies of Government and the Making of Subjects* (Duke University Press, Durham, NC)
- Anon., 1957, "Progress Report of Forest Administration in the State of Assam for the year 1949–50." (Assam Government Press, Shillong)
- Arnold D, Guha R, 1995 *Nature, Culture, Imperialism: Essays on the Environmental History of South Asia* (Oxford University Press, New Delhi)
- Behal R P, Mohapatra P, 1992, "'Tea and money versus human life': The rise and fall of the indenture system in the Assam tea plantations 1840–1908" *Journal of Peasant Studies* **19** 142–172
- Bist S S, 2006, "Elephant conservation in India – an overview." *Gajah* **25** 27–35
- Bradshaw G A, 2009 *Elephants on the edge: what animals teach us about humanity*. (Yale University Press, New Haven)
- Campbell A, 1869, "Notes on the mode of Capture of Elephants in Assam" *Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London* **37** 136–140
- Castree N, Nash C, Badmington N, Braun B, Murdoch J, Whatmore S, 2004, "Mapping posthumanism: an exchange" *Environment and Planning A* **36** 1341–1363
- Chakrabarty D, 2002 *Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago)
- Deleuze G, Guattari F, 1987 *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN)
- Denzin N K, 2009 *The Research Act: A Theoretical Introduction to Sociological Methods* (Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick, USA)
- Gadgil M, Guha R, 1992 *This Fissured Land: An Ecological History of India* (Oxford University Press, New Delhi)
- Gee E P, 1950, "Wild Elephants in Assam" *Oryx* **1** 16–22
- Gooch P, 2008, "Feet Following Hooves." in *Ways of Walking: Ethnography and Practice on Foot* Eds T Ingold, J L Vergunst (Ashgate, Farnham, Surrey) pp 67–80

- Gramsci A, 1971 *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (International Publishers, New York)
- Guha R, 1982, "On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India" *Subaltern Studies* **1** 1–19
- Guha R, 1990 *The unquiet woods: ecological change and peasant resistance in the Himalaya* (University of California Press, Berkeley)
- Gureja N, Menon V, Sarkar P, Kyarong S S, 2002, "Ganesha to Bin Laden: Human–elephant conflict in Sonitpur District of Assam." (Wildlife Trust of India, New Delhi) p 45
- Hammersley M, Atkinson P, 2007 *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*. (Routledge, London)
- Handique R, 2004 *British Forest Policy in Assam*. (Concept Publishing Company, New Delhi)
- Heidegger M, 2001 *Poetry, Language, Thought* (HarperCollins, New York)
- Hinchliffe S, 2003, "Inhabiting: landscapes and natures." in *The Handbook of Cultural Geography* Eds K Anderson, M Domosh, S Pile, N Thrift (Sage, London)
- Hinchliffe S, Kearnes M B, Degen M, Whatmore S, 2005, "Urban wild things: a cosmopolitical experiment." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* **23** 643–658
- Hobson K, 2007, "Political animals? On animals as subjects in an enlarged political geography." *Political Geography* **26** 250–267
- Hunter W W, 1879 *A Statistical Account of Assam* (Trubner & Co., London)
- Ingold T, 2000 *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on livelihood, dwelling and skill*. (Routledge, London)
- Ingold T, 2005, "Epilogue: Towards a Politics of Dwelling." *Conservation and Society* **3** 501–508
- Ingold T, 2011 *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description*. (Routledge, Abingdon, Oxon)
- Jepson P, Barua M, Ladle R J, Buckingham K, 2010, "Towards an intradisciplinary bio–geography: a response to Lorimer's 'lively biogeographies' of Asian elephant conservation." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* **36** 170–174
- Johnston C, 2008, "Beyond the clearing: towards a dwelt animal geography." *Progress in Human Geography* **32** 633–649

- Kirksey S E, Helmreich S, 2010, "The Emergence of Multispecies Ethnography." *Cultural Anthropology* **25** 545–576
- Lahiri–Choudhury D K, 1989, "The Indian Elephant in a Changing World", in *Contemporary Indian Tradition: Voices on Culture, Nature, and the Challenge of Change* Ed C M Bordeon (Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington D.C.) pp 301–321
- Lahiri–Choudhury D K, 2006 *A Trunk Full of Tales: Seventy Years with the Indian Elephant* (Permanent Black, New Delhi)
- Latour B, 1993 *We have never been modern*. (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA)
- Lestel D, Brunois F, Gaunet F, 2006, "Etho–ethnology and ethno–ethology" *Social Science Information* **45** 155–177
- Lorimer H, 2006, "Herding memories of humans and animals." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* **24** 497–518
- Lorimer H, 2009, "Caught in the nick of time: Archives and fieldwork", in *The Handbook of Qualitative Methods in Human Geography* Eds M Crang, D Delyser, S Herbert, L McDowell (SAGE, London) pp 248–273
- Lorimer H, 2010a, "Forces of nature, forms of life: calibrating ethology and phenomenology", in *Taking Place: Non-representational Theories and Geography* Eds B Anderson, P Harrison (Ashgate, Farnham, Surrey) pp 55–78
- Lorimer J, 2010b, "Elephants as companion species: the lively biogeographies of Asian elephant conservation in Sri Lanka." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* **35** 491–506
- Lorimer J, 2012, "Multinatural geographies for the Anthropocene" *Progress in Human Geography* **36** 593–612
- Lorimer J, Whatmore S, 2009, "After the 'king of beasts': Samuel Baker and the embodied historical geographies of elephant hunting in mid–nineteenth–century Ceylon." *Journal of Historical Geography* **35** 668–689
- M'Cosh J, 1837 *Topography of Assam* (G. H. Huttman, Bengal Military Orphan Press, Calcutta)
- Nongbri N, 2003, "Elephant Hunting in Late 19th Century Northeast India: Mechanisms of Control, Contestation and Local Reactions." *Economic and Political Weekly* **July 26** 3189–3199

- Ogra M V, 2008, "Human–wildlife conflict and gender in protected area borderlands: A case study of costs, perceptions, and vulnerabilities from Uttarakhand (Uttaranchal), India" *Geoforum* **39** 1408–1422
- Paramasivan R S, 1961, "Progress Report of Forest Administration in the State of Assam for the year 1950–51." (Assam Government Press, Shillong)
- Peluso N L, 1995, "Whose woods are these? Counter–mapping forest territories in Kalimantan, Indonesia." *Antipode* **27** 383–406
- Rangarajan M, 1996a, "Environmental histories of South Asia: a review essay" *Environment and History* **2** 129–143
- Rangarajan M, 1996b, "The Politics of Ecology: The Debate on Wildlife and People in India, 1970–95" *Economic and Political Weekly* **31** 2391–2409
- Rangarajan M, 1999 *Fencing the forest: conservation and ecological change in India's central provinces 1860-1914* (Oxford University Press, New Delhi)
- Rangarajan M, 2006 *India's wildlife history: An introduction* (Orient Blackswan, New Delhi)
- Robbins P, 2001, "Tracking Invasive Land Covers in India, or Why Our Landscapes Have Never Been Modern" *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* **91** 637–659
- Robbins P, 2011 *Political ecology: A critical introduction* (Wiley–Blackwell, Oxford)
- Saikia A, 2005 *Jungles, Reserves, Wildlife* (Wildlife Areas Development and Welfare Trust, Guwahati)
- Saikia A, 2008, "Forest Land and Peasant Struggles in Assam, 2002–2007." *The Journal of Peasant Studies* **35** 39–59.
- Sax B, 2001 *The mythical zōo: an encyclopedia of animals in world myth, legend and literature* (ABC–CLIO, Santa Barbara, California)
- Simeon D, 2001, "Subaltern studies: Cultural concerns", in *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences* (London) pp 15241–15245
- Sivasundaram S, 2005, "Trading knowledge: the East India Company's elephants in Indian and Britain." *The Historical Journal* **48** 27–63
- Spivak G C, 1988, "Can the subaltern speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* Eds C Nelson, L Grossberg (University of Illinois Press, Chicago)

- Srinivasaiah N M, Anand V D, Vaidyanathan S, Sinha A, 2012, "Unusual Populations, Unusual Individuals: Insights into the Behavior and Management of Asian Elephants in Fragmented Landscapes" *PLoS ONE* **7** e42571 42571–42516
- Sukumar R, 1996 *Elephant days and nights*. (Oxford University Press, New Delhi)
- Sukumar R, 2006, "A brief review of the status, distribution and biology of wild Asian elephants *Elephas maximus*." *International Zoo Yearbook* **40** 1–8
- Talukdar B N, 2010 *Elephants in Assam*. (Forest Department of Assam, Government of India., Guwahati)
- Walker P A, 2005, "Political ecology: where is the ecology?" *Progress in Human Geography* **29** 73–82
- Whatmore S, 2002 *Hybrid geographies: natures, cultures, spaces*. (Sage, London)
- Whatmore S, 2006, "Materialist returns: practising cultural geography in and for a more-than-human world." *Cultural Geographies* **13** 600–609
- Wolfe C, 2003 *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory* (University of Chicago Press, Chicago)
- Zimmerer K S, Bassett T J, 2003 *Political ecology: an integrative approach to geography and environment-development studies*. (The Guilford Press, New York)

CHAPTER 6: VOLATILE ECOLOGIES

Abstract

Political ecology has had a long connection with matter, paging back to some of its canonical concerns. Yet matter is rendered inert with no capacity to mobilize situations or political action. Further, the influence of matter in wider ecologies of human–animal cohabitation is poorly acknowledged. This paper examines the role of matter in mediating people’s relationships with elephants in rural northeast India. Drawing upon ethnographic research and ethological studies of elephants, the paper shows that human–elephant conflict is not simply a linear outcome of interactions between elephants and people. Matter, in this case alcohol, plays a vital role. It binds people and elephants in unforeseen ways and generates socio–political outcomes that have deep impacts on the livelihood and wellbeing of the rural poor. This examination of social and political life through concerted interactions between humans, animals and matter ecologizes politics and makes it more attuned to the collectivities within which material lives are lived. The paper develops a political ecology that is symmetrical and goes beyond the discipline’s humanist frameworks. It concludes by discussing the future implications and potential of this approach.

6.1. Introduction

Certain events during the course of fieldwork unsettle our assumptions of the world. Two such events took place when I arrived in Sundarpur, a village in rural India, to study human–elephant relationships. One evening, whilst guarding crops in paddy fields, we heard firecrackers in the distance, an indication of elephants coming our way. My companion Bogai insisted that we take pre–emptive action. With a flashlight in hand, I followed him down a dark, undulating road. Shortly, the torch beam illuminated the body of a large elephant, heading

towards us. I shouted out to Bogai, now fifteen feet ahead of me, to come back. He remained adamant, shining his flashlight at the animal as it got ready to charge. I was startled, about to witness a man being trampled. In the nick of time, a group of villagers intervened. The burning torches they threw made the bull stop. Bogai was safe. I was relieved. He came back, mumbling that he was not afraid of elephants. Later on that evening another farmer, Budhu, told me *“Bogai acted that way because he was inebriated”*. I was shocked. Unknowingly, I had put our lives at risk by trying to confront elephants in the dark, unarmed and accompanied by a man under the influence of alcohol.

A few weeks later, on the wall of a villager’s house, I came across a poster printed by the conservation NGO World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), advising people to stop brewing alcohol at home. The poster depicted a man distilling *sulāi* or country spirits (Figure 1). A large earthen pot, potentially containing fermenting molasses stood on the side, next to which was a jerrycan, a utensil in which the intoxicant is usually stored. The most startling aspect of the poster was the two elephants. With accentuated and anthropomorphized eyes, they were shown breaking into the walls of the distillery, reaching out for the brew with their trunks. The caption in Assamese alerted people to stop constructing liquor distilleries as they would be susceptible to elephant attacks. Upon asking the villager what he made of this message, he told me *“Elephants are attracted to alcohol. You saw Sutu’s house that was damaged. That was because he was brewing sulāi at home. The animals got the scent of the brew and broke in.”*

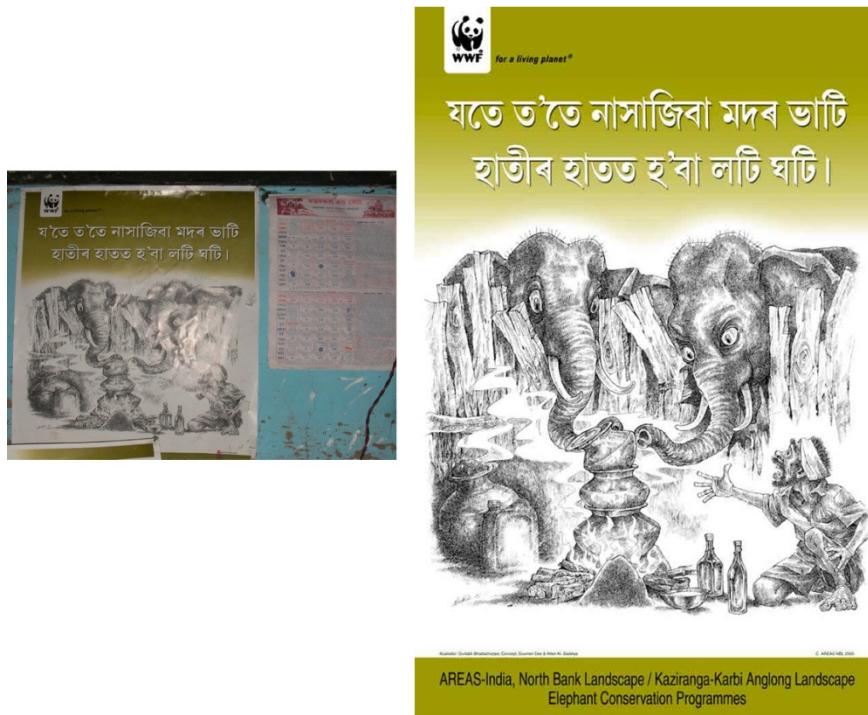


Figure 1: Poster printed by WWF warning people to stop brewing alcohol in their homes. Caption in Assamese state: “If you brew liquor any and every where, then for elephant harassment do prepare”.

I was still a novice when I arrived in Sundarpur to conduct research on the political ecology of human–elephant relationships. The village, located next to the Doiguring Reserve Forest in the Golaghat district of Assam in northeast India (Figure 2), was a site where people and elephants regularly interfaced. Crop–raiding and house damage by elephants, a phenomenon termed ‘human–elephant conflict’ (Barua, 2010), was on the rise. The academic literature had attributed much of this conflict to deforestation of elephant habitat proceeding through development projects, expanding agriculture and illegal encroachment (Sarma et al., 2008; Sukumar, 2006). My initial objective was to unpack the political drivers of deforestation and the ways in which uneven social and institutional relationships structured and reproduced human–elephant conflicts. However, the two events, illustrated above, forced me to consider other possibilities. What if there were hidden actors, besides the state, institutions and people, which influenced human–elephant relationships? How would these political ecologies unfold if we

seriously considered the role of matter, in this case alcohol, in mediating social and ecological outcomes? What bearings would this have on our understandings of the ways in which humans and animals cohabit and act in the world?

Matter, unsurprisingly, is relatively absent from scholarship on the geographies of human–animal relationships (Hobson, 2007; Lorimer and Srinivasan, 2013; Whatmore, 2002). It features more prominently within political ecology, and in fact has been the focus of enquiry in what could be termed some of the discipline’s canonical work (Blaikie, 1985; Zimmerer, 1993). However, these perspectives reduce matter to an inert material, moulded and acted upon by social collectives from without. They leave us with an impoverished analytical repertoire to interrogate how substances have political potential, intervene or mediate encounters between people and animals. In other words, they replicate a mode of politics from which the ecology of nonhumans is effaced (Vayda and Walters, 1999; Walker, 2005). More recently, human geographers have called for a different account of matter. They have emphasized the need to engage with how matter might pose questions in its own terms, and add or subtract from the differential relations that constitute social and political life (Braun and Whatmore, 2010; Tolia–Kelly, 2012). Generating a tension with political ecology (Neumann, 2011), this new materialism prompts us to entertain the possibility that things, fluids, or substances fashion the collectivities within which human lives unfold. Whilst a starting point that emphasizes situating the human in the middle of things, matter and its relations with other nonhumans receive less attention. Politics risks falling short of being ecological, in that many other becomings through which events unfold are potentially glossed over.

Working through some of the questions raised by the two vignettes above, this paper seeks to develop a symmetrical political ecology, one where not just humans and animals, but their relationships with matter, matter and influence socio–political outcomes. First, through an ethnographic enquiry into practices of crop–guarding and cohabiting with elephants, I examine how alcohol enters local political ecologies and mediates people’s encounters with elephants. These ‘more–than–human’ encounters, enacted between people, elephants and alcohol, have deep–seated impacts on the social life of a rural community. Further, as evoked by the second vignette above, alcohol may have the potential to draw elephants into habitation in ways that

exceed human design or control. I hence explore this vibrant potential of alcohol and interrogate how it might affect elephant bodies. Alcohol, through its entanglement with elephant ethologies, aggravates human–elephant conflict and has bearings on socio–political events. In conclusion, I offer up new engagements with geographies of human–animal cohabitation and discuss what such a symmetrical exploration could contribute to recent calls for bridging gaps between political ecology and more–than–human geography (Neumann, 2011).

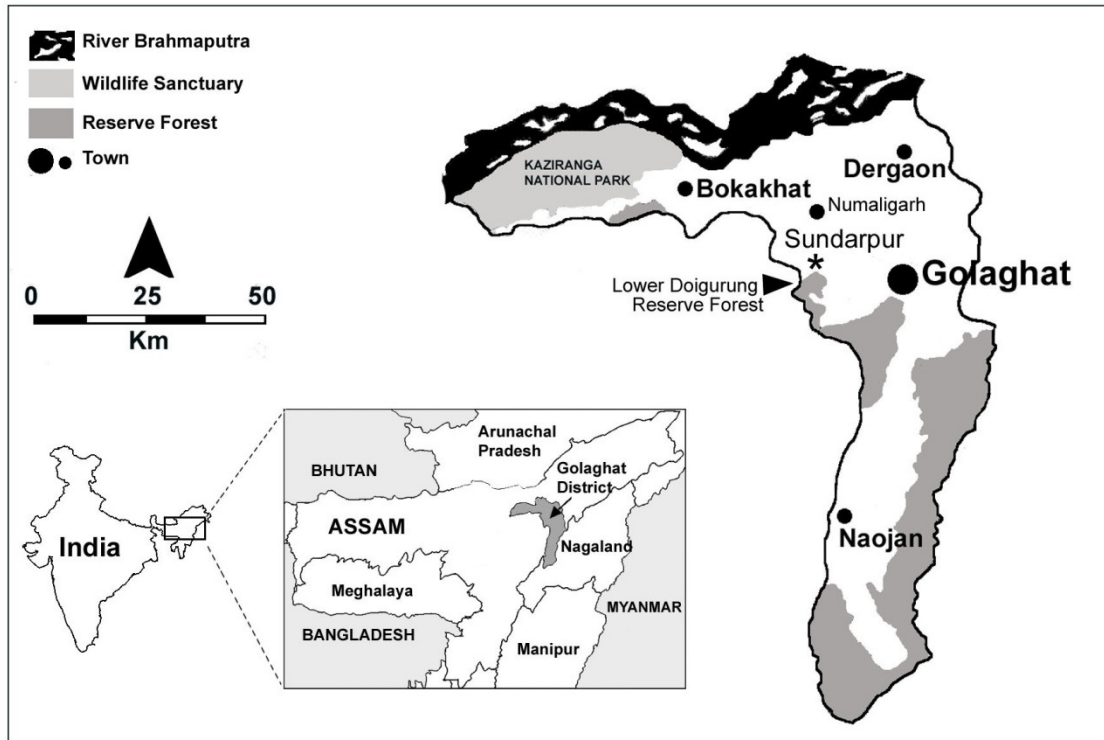


Figure 2: Study area showing location of Sundarpur, Golaghat district, Assam.

6.2. Crop-guarding

Bogai, whom we encountered in the opening vignette, is a temporary day–labourer in a tea plantation close to Sundarpur. A member of the *Adivasi* (tea–tribe) community, Bogai lives in a *kucca* (mud) hut with his wife and three children. The rice Bogai gets from the few *bighas*¹⁹ of

¹⁹ *Bigha* is a unit of land measurement in Assam, equivalent to 1337 m²

paddy land he owns is barely sufficient to last the entire year. Yet, it is a substantial part of the family income. Sundarpur, being a ‘conflict-affected’ village, had high rates of elephant depredation. A single herd of 35–40 elephants, and 4 lone bulls regularly forayed into paddy fields during the crop season between late August and November. To protect his source of livelihood, Bogai had to guard his fields from elephants every night. Together with his neighbours Budhu and Mangla, Bogai had set up a *tongi*, or crop-guarding shelter, at the edge of the village. Over the course of the six months I spent in Sundarpur, I regularly spent time at their *tongi* at night, conducting participant observations to try and understand how human–elephant relationships unfolded on the ground.

Crop-guarding is an intense activity. The farmers stay up in their fields every night for almost four months of the year, from the time paddy is sown and until grain is harvested. Sleep is erratic as people have to be on constant vigil. Elephants are surprisingly silent animals. They often go undetected when they enter fields at night, leaving behind traces of trampled paddy and uprooted stalks to the dismay of farmers the next morning. My informants would get worried if elephants did not show up in the first hours of the night, as this meant having to be alert until the early hours. The labours of staying up were more acutely felt the next day. A feeling of tiredness would pervade our bodies. Whilst I had the luxury of resting in the afternoons, Bogai did intense labour in a nearby tea plantation during the day. Like many other villagers who shared his predicament, Bogai would often go to a local distillery in the evening to grab “*a quarter*”, a small bottle of distilled country liquor locally called *sulai*. *“It kills the tiredness. I am able to cope with the fatigue. The stuff helps me stay up and face the elephants.”*

Both Bogai and Mangla told me that drinking alcohol also enabled them to confront elephants at night: *“Elephants are very quick in moving through the paddy fields. In fact, when alarmed, they move like a bullet. You need courage when you are face-to-face with such large and powerful creatures. Having a drink or two gives you that courage.”* People often got very close to the elephants, armed only with firecrackers and burning torches. They would shout and create noise to drive the animals out of their fields and into the nearby Doigurung Reserve Forest. Although I initially thought these confrontations to be inane, I soon began to respect the risk the villagers were taking to protect their livelihoods. Incidents of retaliation by elephants were not infrequent. Under stressful

circumstances where forage is diminished, crops can become an important resource constituent of the diet of elephant herds that otherwise only raid opportunistically (Fernando et al., 2005). The district in which Sundarpur was located had lost more than 80% of its forest cover in recent years (Sarma et al., 2008). As a consequence, crop-raiding had increased. As one of the villagers put it, *“The elephants come here because they can’t get anything else to eat.”* Indeed, for both people and elephants, these were sentient encounters filled with fear and fought over sustenance.

Such encounters could even be fatal. The slippery and uneven paddy fields were difficult to run through in the dark. Unlike the villagers, my body and feet were out of tune with this landscape; I would run a short distance, slip and fall whilst trying to chase elephants. Budhu would often counterpose my precarious urban identity with his competence: *“You are from a place that has electricity. We on the other hand have dealt with elephants for ages. We don’t fall, even when the ground is uneven.”* Yet, high contents of alcohol can induce physiological effects that alter this skilful, corporeal negotiation of the nocturnal landscape. Alcohol alters the viscosity of the endolymph in the semi-circular canals of the human ear, leading to exaggerated and overcompensated movements of the body (Stockley and Saunders, 2011). By entering into a relation with the human body, by affecting it, alcohol posits a different trajectory of what the body can do (Deleuze, 1988). It could lead to impaired judgement, for in these circumstances the latter is more of a bodily craft enacted and performed through an immersion in the landscape than a technology of practice relying upon vision. During the course of my fieldwork, a farmer under the influence of alcohol was unable to escape in time. He was fatally trampled by a charging elephant.

The social impacts and consequences of such events penetrate far deeper than the immediacy of threats from elephants. The following vignette of a person I befriended in Sundarpur opens up some of the vulnerabilities that emerge after such fatal encounters. Kanu was a young man in his mid-twenties, who had lost both his father and brother-in-law to elephant attacks. He lived with his wife, small child, widowed sister and mother in a small *kucca* hut, right beside a track that elephants used when entering the village from the Doiguring forest reserve. Kanu narrated how his father, the principal bread-earner of the family, got trampled by an elephant whilst guarding crops in a *tongi* ten years ago. Kanu was only sixteen at the time. He

had to drop out of school in order to earn and help feed their family. Kanu began working as a daily labourer in a sand collection depot on the banks of the Doiguring River. His education and potential for getting a better-paid job in the future was severely compromised.

Two years ago Kanu's brother-in-law was killed by elephants. According to Kanu, the man had picked a quarrel with him that evening over the purchase of kerosene. Drunk on country liquor, he rushed off alone in the dark to buy kerosene from a shop on the outskirts of the village. A little while later, news came to their home that he had a fatal encounter with elephants on the way. Kanu said that as the man was inebriated, he failed to spot the animals and could not take evasive measures in time. Following his death, the entire burden of looking after the family of five now rested on Kanu. In the past ten years, their family home had been broken into four times by elephants. On one occasion, Kanu's mother was injured and suffered from a leg fracture. With no other men in the household besides Kanu, the family felt insecure about staying in their home. For nearly two years, they lived with relatives in another part of the village. This, however, was unfeasible and inconvenient. Kanu finally sold 2.5 *bighas* of land he inherited from his father to a nearby tea plantation owner in order to pay off debts and to get a trench dug around their home. *"Even if I lost a substantial part of my inheritance, I now feel safe. I can go to work or return home late without worrying what will happen to my family."*

The deaths had not only taken a toll on the family by disrupting education and income, but affected their farming practices as well. Kanu's mother spoke of their predicament: *"With my son-in-law and husband gone, Kanu has to do daily labour in the depot. There is no one to cultivate the few bighas of land we have left."* Upon asking her why they didn't give their land out for share-cropping, she said this was unfeasible as there were no male family members to guard their fields: *"Even if we give it out for share-cropping, Baba [elephant] comes and takes it all. I have grandchildren and a widowed daughter ... What will we eat?"* Her use of the reverential term 'Baba' when referring to crop-raiding elephants reflected their despair and difficulty in coping with the situation. Cohabitation with elephants generated deep ruptures in everyday activities, but the family had little in terms of alternatives to escape such circumstances.

In summary, this ethnographic enquiry into the practices of crop-guarding illustrates how alcohol can become an agent influencing relations within a social assemblage co-constituted by

both people and elephants. It is a hidden actor in local political ecologies of human–elephant conflict. Recurrent elephant presence and raiding of crop fields makes the rural poor strive hard to protect what is their most important source of livelihood. Crop–guarding, conducted for almost four months of the year, involves risk–taking and results in poor sleep. When coupled with intensive physical labour the following day, crop–guarding generates considerable fatigue and morbidity. The role alcohol plays in this ecology of relations is twofold. First, it gives people the courage to brave elephants at night and second, it enables them to cope with bodily fatigue. As a consequence, vulnerability to elephant attacks is increased. I would like to emphasize here that crop–guarding is not the sole cause of alcohol consumption in the landscape. As scholars have argued, there are a range of other imperatives such as social rites and traditional ceremonies, emotional reasons or leisure, as well as poverty or as a coping strategy (Jayne et al., 2008). However, this ethnography shows that there are links between crop–guarding and alcohol consumption and these are important. Practices and processes relating to alcohol are thus intrinsically linked to local ecologies. Alcohol consumption exceeds the envelope of purely human causality, as cause and action are deflected to a wider ecology of relations. In this case, the fraught labour of cohabiting with elephants plays a role. This drinkscape is not constituted by autonomous selves, but through modes of becoming that are more–than–human (Whatmore, 1999). To further develop this political ecology in a symmetrical fashion, in the following sections I turn to the vibrant and political potentials of alcohol and the ways in which it affects other nonhuman bodies.

6.3. Alcohol

The second vignette at the beginning of this paper gives us a foretaste of another trajectory through which human–elephant relationships unfold: the actions of alcohol as it affects elephant bodies. Both the poster and the event of the house being broken, startling as they are, generated a different awareness of this local political ecology. It provoked a need to shift the emphasis from viewing alcohol as a mere coping mechanism to deal with the burdens of cohabiting with elephants to an active agent, binding people and elephants in new and unforeseen ways. What the event prompted was the need to take seriously the affordances of alcohol and how they might

be realized by a creature like the elephant, with its specific physiology and sensory apparatus. In the months that ensued, I began to explore how one might approach the practice of brewing and the geographies of intoxication as a symmetrical ecology, where people, elephants and alcohol play a vital, if not volatile role.

Sulāi, the most commonly consumed local spirit, is a clear colourless alcohol brewed from fermented molasses, or occasionally, rice. Molasses, usually ‘reject quality’ or unrefined treacle obtained at low cost, are first fermented in a large vessel under anaerobic conditions. The distillation process then commences by heating the molasses for two to three hours in a cylindrical vessel or pot over a fire. A perforated container is placed above, containing a small metallic collector to gather the distillate which is called *sulāi*. A vessel containing cold water to facilitate condensation completes the distillation apparatus. Water in this condenser is replaced when it gets heated. The alcohol concentration in *sulāi* is higher when water is replaced fewer times. A rectified spirit that does not undergo multiple distillations, *sulāi* has a higher content of untreated alcohol, giving a person what my informant Budhu called a “*jhatka*”, an instant kick. The strong, pungent odour emanating from the distilling process was distinctive, often carrying a long way.

Ethological studies suggest that Asian elephants rely strongly on their sense of smell, especially whilst foraging (Rasmussen and Krishnamurthy, 2000; Sukumar, 2003). Olfaction may in fact regulate elephant behaviour (Rizvanovic et al., 2013). On maturity, elephants undergo a craniofacial morphogenesis, during which the cranial bones grow disproportionately to accommodate tusks. There is a concurrent development of large cranial sinuses, making them one of the most macrosmatic mammals in the world (Rasmussen, 2006). Elephants’ olfactory discrimination skills are comparable to humans. They are able to discern odours between structurally similar odorants – a process that is learnt quickly and retained as part of their excellent long-term odour memory (Arvidsson et al., 2012). Their capacity to discern smells is more acute than that of humans (Rizvanovic et al., 2013). Furthermore, taste is closely linked to olfaction. Elephants are known to have a sweet tooth and relish saccharides or carbohydrates (Rasmussen, 2006). Thus, the strong, pungent and far-reaching odour of fermenting molasses *affords* detection by a macrosmatic creature such as the elephant. Its high content of saccharide produces favourable sensations in Proboscidean gustation. Hence, the act of brewing for human

consumption is potentially open to elephants as well. As creatures with a high capacity for social learning and a powerful ability to remember effects and sources of food (Sukumar, 2003), the raiding of distilleries may indeed become a part of the skills elephants acquire when cohabiting landscapes with humans.

During my stint in Sundarpur, I became cognizant of how the local political economy of alcohol was intricately linked to this wider ecology of cohabitation. My informant Budhu sold *sulāi* at home in order to beef up the family income. He told me how difficult it was to make ends meet as a substantial proportion of his crops were lost to elephants every year. Budhu would buy alcohol in bulk from a distillery at the outskirts of the village, which he would then retail in used commercial beverage bottles in measures of a ‘quarter’ or a ‘half’. As brewing and retailing *sulāi* without an excise permit was illegal, villagers were cautious about what they disclosed or whom they sold alcohol to. However, precautionary measures were not just about being guarded should there be an excise or police raid: elephants too were a concern. Budhu stored the alcohol in a small room behind his house so that the family was not directly vulnerable if elephants broke in. A trench he had dug around the periphery of his compound was to thwart these animals from entering.

I occasionally accompanied Budhu when he went to buy alcohol from the distillery. The entire process of fermentation and distillation was done in a small *kucca* shed in the garden, a fair distance away from the house. Upon asking the owner why he did so, he replied “*Brewing sulāi in the house is a recipe for trouble. Elephants are attracted to the scent and will break into the house.*” I was unable to take photographs or question the owner further about his distillery, as the brewing unit was illicit. People were wary of ‘outsiders’ like me lest they filed a complaint. During the course of my ethnography, people brewing illicit *sulāi* were arrested by the police in another part of the district. In fact, it was only during the latter half of my stay in Sundarpur that I was able to witness such activities and have conversations on topics that people kept guarded. My partial enrolment into the local drinking culture and involvement in crop-guarding activities was integral to this access.

The illicit status of *sulāi* brewed and retailed without a permit made these ecologies inherently political. Processes of making locally-brewed alcohol illicit are rooted in colonial

history, paging back to the early 19th century when the imperial administration levied a tax against the sale of liquor brewed by indigenous communities (Goswami, 1987). This excise tax or *abkaree* was introduced to increase revenues of the East India Company and rationalized on the grounds that intoxication *'had become prevalent among many of the lower orders of people owing to the inconsiderable price at which they were manufactured and sold'* (Goswami, 1987; P.84). Three interrelated logics were introduced to govern the political economy of indigenous brewing. First, manufacture was regulated by the state. Individuals were allowed to set up liquor stills only if they obtained a license, operated within the confines of spaces designated as distilleries and supplied a fixed and specified quantity of spirits each day. Second, alcohol itself was classified and subjected to scrutiny and measurement. In 1856, the colonial government introduced the term 'country spirits' to define liquor brewed by 'the native process of distillation' as opposed to the 'English method' (Goswami, 1987; P.95). This reified social distinctions of *sulāi* being the liquor of *'lower orders of people'*, a stigmatizing distinction that continues to play out in the contemporary plantation milieu (Chatterjee, 2003). The state determined what levels of alcohol in spirits was acceptable. Prior to retail and distribution, the government made it mandatory that a district-level excise establishment tested spirit levels with a hydrometer. Third, brewing was subjected to regular surveillance. The excise establishment kept daily accounts of quantities manufactured and retailed from the distillery. The latter had to be open at all times for inspection by the excise officer in charge. Contemporary patterns of state governance of spirit production and distribution are a living inheritance of these earlier logics of rule (Chatterjee, 2003). These apparatuses of regulation, measurement and surveillance, allows the state to enter ecologies of brewing. *Sulāi* manufactured outside of its purview is deemed illicit, liable to be seized and the distiller prosecuted.

Illicit distilleries become new sites around which political ecologies of human–elephant cohabitation unfold. Reports of elephants entering villages in search of alcohol are pervasive throughout landscapes where their home ranges overlap with human settlement in India (Figure 3).²⁰ Accounts state that elephants have developed a *'dangerous drinking habit'* when they *'get the taste*

²⁰ A search in online elephant news databases (<http://www.elephant-news.com/>; <http://www.savetheelephants.org/elephant-news-service.html>) retrieved 52 news articles from India in the past ten

of liquor from the butts of the locals' (Sen, 2001). Liquor has been termed the main cause for elephants coming into human habitation in some parts of the country (Anon., 2011), the animals being attracted to a food source that is *'tastier, stronger-smelling and more nutritious'* than what they eat in the wild (Burke, 2010). Residents of a village not far from Sundarpur reported that a particular bull elephant had become *'an addict of country liquor'*, straying into habitation, especially tea estate labour lines, in search of spirits (Anon., 2008b).

Here alcohol has a clear agency as it binds people and elephants and amplifies conflicts. News reports, perhaps unwittingly, allude to the agentic potential of alcohol: *'the elephant was ... drawn to illicit alcohol stored in the victim's butt'* (Sen, 2001), *'liquor from nearby butts ... attracts them here'* (Sen, 2001), *'the sudden spate of elephant attacks is attributed to the local brew'* (Anon., 2008a), *'beer has been blamed for previous attacks'* (Anon., 1999). If we alter the emphasis of these statements, then alcohol can indeed be viewed as an actant that *draws* elephants. Its pungent odour and sweet taste *attracts* these creatures deep into human habitation. Whilst I did not witness elephants being intoxicated during my stay in Sundarpur, there are several accounts from across the country describing drunkenness in elephants, where they *'fall asleep hither and thither, throwing life completely haywire'* (Burke, 2010). Following instances of intoxication, elephants have been reported to run amok, damaging rows of houses, injuring or even killing people (Anon., 2009a, 2011). Alcohol is thus *attributed* with powers to elicit elephant attacks and becomes the agent *to blame*. By acting through elephant bodies, alcohol imposes as mattering aspects of situations that would otherwise be neglected.

The effect this has on the community is two-fold. First, most incursions occur after dark, coinciding with the time when people go to local breweries (Anon., 2008a). People are particularly vulnerable during such junctures. My informants in Sundarpur often cautioned me to take extra care if I was walking through the village alone at night. The magnitude of this vulnerability was in fact also sensed by WWF, who printed and distributed a second poster warning people not to roam alone in the dark when drunk for they could be susceptible to elephant attacks (Figure 4). Second, small-scale distillation units in remote villages that often escape detection are brought to the attention of the state. As some of these forms of distillation

years that mentioned links between human–elephant conflict and alcohol. The magnitude of these articles partially reflects the country-wide prevalence and significance of the issue.

have been rendered illicit, elephant incursions trigger public outcries and foster government initiatives to carry out eviction drives in liquor dens (Anon., 2009b, 2011). The need to regulate and govern distillation may hence emerge as an outcome of having to thwart elephant raids, rather than a concerted effort to curb bootlegging.



Figure 3: An example of a news report highlighting the role of alcohol in human–elephant conflict (The Telegraph, 3rd October 2009).

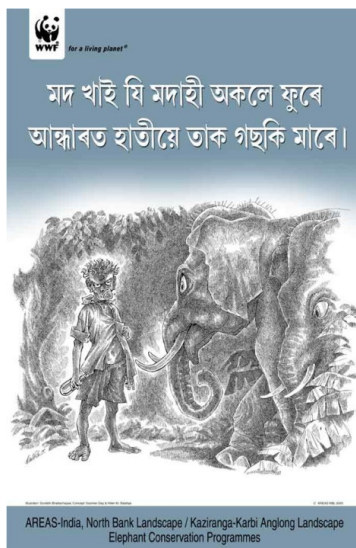


Figure 4: WWF poster warning people not to venture alone in the dark after consuming alcohol. Caption in Assamese states: “After a few drinks the drunkard in the dark roams alone, Elephants trample and crush his bones”

6.4. Ethologies

Two further questions arise once we consider alcohol to be an actant that draws elephants into human settlement and generates novel political ecologies. First, what physiological effects does alcohol have on these creatures? And more radically, if we suspend quibbles about anthropomorphism, do elephants actively seek intoxication? These questions have generated scientific interest and have not entirely slipped the leash of ethological enquiry. In the wild, elephants are known to be attracted to ethyl alcohol from ripened fruit of the Marula tree in Africa and the Durian in Asia (Fowler, 2006).²¹ Elephants travel long distances to make use of this food source. For some herds and individuals this may even get established as a tradition and become integral to their life history. Video footage, although presented with an anthropomorphic tilt, shows elephants appearing inebriated after consuming fermented Marula.²² Yet, others contend that the alcohol produced through these nonhuman assemblages is not durable enough to lead to intoxication (Morris et al., 2006). Whilst yeast, including *Saccharomyces*, occurs in Marula and Durian fruit, conditions are not sufficiently anaerobic to produce high alcohol content. For adult elephants to get intoxicated, fermentation will have to take place in the animal's stomach, sealed off from oxygen. As non-ruminants, elephants have relatively short gut passage times (Sukumar, 2003). Further, their stomachs culture symbiotic microflora that quickly metabolize sugars into volatile fatty acids. As a consequence, some have argued that it is not alcohol but other toxins such as nicotinic acid and poisonous beetle pupae present in such fruit are what generate overt effects (Morris et al., 2006). Nonetheless, there is consensus that elephants *like* the taste of alcohol and that frugivory in these creatures may be an evolutionary outcome from a predilection for ethanol in overripe fruits (Fowler, 2006; Morris et al., 2006; Sukumar, 2003).

²¹ The global commercial liquor 'Amarula', brewed from the Marula fruit, is branded and sold with an elephant logo on the bottle. This further links elephants to Marula and liquor in the popular imagination [see: <http://www.amarula.com>]

²² Two popular renderings on the internet video-sharing site YouTube include: "Drunk animals – marula fruit party!!" [<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Le9ufN5uEc>]; "Elephant Party in ADDO Park" [<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EyWd7ozjwbA>];

Alcohol stored in distilleries is produced through a different assemblage and has a separate ecology of brewing. Here, highly anaerobic conditions are created by humans for molasses to ferment. The alcohol content generated is significantly greater than that of wild fruit. Distillation further intensifies the quantity of ethanol in spirits, resulting in a brew that could potentially cause intoxication in elephants. My attempts to make sense of the media reports on intoxication and the stories villagers in Sundarpur told me took a different turn when I came across two studies by the ethologist Ronald Siegel, in which he examined the physiological effects of alcohol on captive elephants (Siegel, 2005; Siegel and Brodie, 1984).

Siegel's first experiment was on three Asian elephants, in which he posed the question whether elephants still drink alcohol if they are not hungry? Born and raised in captivity, the three animals had never tasted alcohol before (Siegel and Brodie, 1984). The creatures were presented the choice of alcohol in addition to their daily fodder of alfalfa, grain, fruit and water. Alcohol was provided in buckets containing ethanol solutions in concentrations ranging from 0 to 50 percent, reflecting the alcohol content of different beverages. All three elephants preferred the 7 percent solution, equivalent to the alcohol content of strong ale. They took to drinking the solution even when their regular diet was an available option. Higher concentrations were unpleasant, causing the elephants to twist their trunks in distaste. Even with the addition of one of their favourite flavours, mint, the animals would not drink anything stronger than 10 percent solution. The effects they displayed hinged on the dramatic: the animals started growling, a vocalization associated with arousal, and flapping their ears more than usual to regulate body heat. The elephants appeared inebriated, as they kept leaning, staggering or wrapping their trunks around themselves. One individual slipped and fell, but quickly got up again. The elephants had difficulty responding to the commands of their handler. In many ways, this experimental study mirrors media reports and people's stories of wild elephants intoxicated after drinking *sulāi* or consuming fermented molasses. Elephants' taste for alcohol corresponds to those of humans, and distilled liquor has clear physiological effects, inducing a state one might term inebriation.

At the end of this study, Siegel posed a further question: do intelligent animals such as elephants, under the stress of competition for food in the wild, intentionally seek intoxication? Whilst the intoxication from fermented fruit may be an accidental side effect, will elephants with

access to undisguised alcohol intentionally get inebriated? To answer this question, he conducted a second experiment with a herd of seven African elephants in a spacious California game park (Siegel, 2005). The animals ranged over two hectares with free access to a large freshwater stream, their diet maintained with hay, alfalfa, grain and fruit. The herd spent most of its time in a tightly compacted grouping. Pushing, shoving, and aggressive vocalizations were almost nonexistent. Siegel and his team placed large drums containing 7 percent unflavoured ethanol solution in a particular area of the park, and allowed each individual to drink all it wanted, one at a time, for a thirty–five minute period. Some elephants consumed as much as 75 litres, swallowing the solution and also spraying it about. The individuals were allowed to regroup with the herd, but rarely made it. Intoxication led to a reversal of normal behaviour: feeding, drinking and physical contact with others decreased, and some animals would lie down on the ground for prolonged periods. Alcohol also brought out the personality of each individual. The dominant bull and cow became more domineering, displaying aggression and threatening vocalizations to the rest of the herd. Submissive individuals became meek, avoiding physical and vocal encounters. When the entire herd was given collective access to alcohol, the dominant animals prevented submissive ones from drinking more than 6 or 7 litres each. The herd pressed against the ethologists' jeep, crushing its steel sides, and seeking to do the same to the smallest elephant. When attempts were made to rescue her, the dominant cow pinned Siegel to the jeep. The animals continued to fight one another. Alcohol had a major disruptive effect: individuals spread over the preserve area and the entire herd dissolved.

To induce a proxy for environmental stress and increased herd density, Siegel later confined the elephants to a smaller area in the reserve, which they shared with other savannah animals including rhinos, gazelles, zebras and ostriches. Alcohol intake increased when they were 'crammed' into this less than one hectare space (Siegel, 2005). Siegel (2005, P.122) observed that following alcohol consumption, *“individual elephants displayed the same range of reactions shown by people: some became boisterous and aggressive, trumpeting and attacking nearby animals, including the researchers; others became passive and lethargic; still others appeared amorous”*. Alcohol drinking apparently returned to 'normal' levels once the preserve was enlarged and 'bothersome' animals such as rhinos moved out. Although the animals were denied continuous exposure to alcohol that could have led to

alcoholism, months later when a construction crew was working in the game park, the elephants congregated in the area where alcohol was once available.

Although undertaken in captivity and in the second case, with African elephants, Siegel's experiments unsettle deterministic explanations of elephants' alcohol-seeking behaviour as a mode of opportunistic raiding or optimal foraging. Instead, he contends that under conditions of environmental stress, a creature as intelligent as the elephant may seek the comfort of intoxication (Siegel, 2005). The landscape where Sundarpur is located has lost over 80 percent of its forest cover in the last twenty years (Sarma et al., 2008), resulting in a serious depletion of foraging areas for elephants. The intensity of human–elephant conflict has increased, with over twenty–five elephants killed by people in the last decade (Sarma et al., 2008). The number of elephant deaths in Assam has doubled in the last ten years when compared to the previous decade (Talukdar, 2010). Such conditions are known to generate immense stress for elephants, inducing trauma or even a breakdown in social relations (Bradshaw, 2009). In the face of such conflict, one can no longer rule out the possibility that the quest for intoxication is in itself a reason why elephants break into village distilleries. Alcohol could well be a sedative that elephants seek in order to cope with an existence riven with trauma.

6.5. Discussion

By relocating the focus of enquiry to a vital assemblage rather than subjects in isolation, this paper presents a novel political ecology of human–animal relationships. Ethnographic research, coupled with ethological studies on elephants, shows that human–elephant conflict is not a simple linear outcome of interactions between people and elephants or structured solely through asymmetric social relations. Matter, in this case alcohol, plays a vital role. It makes its way into political ecologies and its volatile choreographies trouble routine explanations of whom or what generates and mediates conflicts.

Current causes of human–elephant conflict are attributed to alarming rates of deforestation, disruption of elephant movement routes or corridors and encroachment into protected areas reserved for elephants (Barua, 2010; Sukumar, 2006). These imply that elephants are running out of space, and conflict is the result of increased contact with humans as elephants

have to move through habitation or rely on cultivated crops in order to subsist. Whilst important factors, they fall short in explaining the widespread incursions of elephants into sites where alcohol is brewed and distilled. Such events force us to seriously consider whether landscapes riven with conflict induce stress in elephants and it is the tranquilizing and sedating effects of alcohol that these creatures seek. There is indeed a hint of anthropomorphism in the way such explanations may be mobilized, especially in the media or popular narratives. However, proximal engagements with elephants, particularly ethological experiments on inebriation (Siegel, 2005; Siegel and Brodie, 1984), and evidence of depression and breakdown (Bradshaw, 2009; Bradshaw et al., 2005), suggest that these ideas may not be as anthropomorphic as they seem. In fact, overt fears of anthropomorphism largely emanate from contexts such as the West, where animals have receded from public purview and the spaces of everyday life (Berger, 2009). Such fear should not stop us from careful considerations of the lifeworlds of elephants, their ability or even desire to affect and be affected by other (nonhuman) bodies and forces.

The relative absence of matter as a mattering concern in the geographies of human–animal cohabitation is also mirrored in much of the political ecology and animal geography literatures. These disciplines have largely sought to understand environmental conflict as a dialogic emanating from uneven social relations such as raced, gendered or classed struggles (McGregor, 2005; Philo and Wilbert, 2000; Robbins, 2011). Pertinent examples of how such social relations structure human–wildlife conflict include the role of race and masculinity in the extermination of wolves in the US (Emel, 1995), the marginalization of South Asian and African communities through protection afforded to animals under the project of colonialism (Jalais, 2010; McGregor, 2005), and the disproportionate impacts cohabiting with wildlife has on women in societies fissured by patriarchy (Ogra, 2008). This emphasis on the social serves well to articulate the politics of nature, a now well established argument that guards us from the fallacies of considering the latter as a realm bereft of human intervention (Cronon, 1996). Yet, animal geography and political ecology leaves us with an impoverished analytical repertoire to make sense of the collectivities through which cohabitation unfolds. The retinue of matter that conditions the vitality of human and nonhuman bodies and avails them to political calculability remain unaccounted for.

In contrast, this paper foregrounds a more symmetrical political *ecology*, one where the actions and relations between a diverse array of nonhuman entities matter, make humans act and craft social and political outcomes. It grounds the claim of new materialist theories in geography and political science that agency is dispersed across congregations of humans and nonhumans (Bennett, 2010; Braun and Whatmore, 2010). As the above ethnography suggests, social life in landscapes such as Sundarpur is never cleaved from the lifeworlds of elephants. The ethologies of these creatures affect human activity, sometimes imposing immense burdens on the poor. Farming practices and day-to-day life is ruptured. The fatigue and risk generated from guarding crops against elephants fuels liquor consumption, prising new trajectories through which alcohol enters local political ecologies. The corporeal relations that are composed when alcohol affects human bodies may lead to impaired judgement, consequently heightening vulnerability to elephant attacks. The narratives of Kanu and his family illustrate some of the deep impacts resultant fatality has on the lives of the bereaved. In fact, in an earlier study, the authors found that conflict-related mortality could lead to a rupture in kinship bonds, poor coping and mental health morbidity, as well as the aggravation of pre-existing poverty (Jadhav and Barua, 2012).

This deflection of agency to a wider ecology of relations forces us to rethink interventions that seek to thwart or curtail conflict. Mitigation strategies, by shrinking its gaze to a set of ecological variables and visible impacts such as crop loss or house damage (Davies et al., 2011; Gubbi, 2012), fail to grasp the role played by actants such as alcohol in mediating or influencing conflict. Further, the apparatus of conservation through much of which such work is mobilized, rarely acknowledges the full range of effects cohabitation with elephants has on the wellbeing of the rural poor (Barua et al., 2012). In the last decade over thirty people have been killed by elephants in the Golaghat district where Sundarpur is situated (Sarma et al., 2008). Whilst statistics were not available for the entire district, my interviews revealed that three out of the four people killed by elephants in Sundarpur were inebriated at the time of the fatal encounter. It is plausible that many of these conflict-related deaths were partly due to intoxication and that the issue is more widespread than just the local context. For instance, a recent study in rural Kenya revealed that a majority of people attacked by elephants were those who were under the influence of alcohol (Sitati and Ipara, 2012). Individuals who stayed out late in local drinking dens or

traditional ceremonies that involved alcohol consumption were more susceptible to being involved in fatal encounters.

In India, the number of people killed annually by elephants is over four hundred (Rangarajan et al., 2010). Further exploration of the role of intoxication in these fatalities is vital for designing effective measures to curb conflict-related deaths. Such an endeavour would entail starting from the middle of things, to cede to the fact that there is more to people and elephants than dreamt of in conservation. For it is only in this way can we be open to the possibilities of the environment and take seriously the concerns nonhumans impose upon us. It demands a difficult reorientation of the sanitized and selectively-ecologized gaze of wildlife conservation management, one that is steeped in particular institutional and disciplinary histories and proceeds through specific modes of operation (Adams, 2004). In a more pragmatic sense, it could entail conservationists engaging with the concerns of other disciplines such as agriculture and public health (Barua et al., 2012).

Opening up the volatile relations between people, elephants and alcohol also leads to a reorientation of politics in *political* ecology. Politics, broadly understood in the discipline as ‘the practices and processes through which power is wielded and negotiated’ (Walker, 2007; P. 363), remains centred on the human subject. Humans are given primacy in terms of the capacity to act, to alter or to liberate. In contrast, this paper shows that the human subject is no longer the central driver of political events. For instance, the local political economy surrounding alcohol production and retail may be influenced by the need to recover losses incurred from crops raided by elephants. Decisions to brew liquor are thus shaped by events that exceed human deliberation. Similarly, when elephants are drawn to village distilleries, illicit practices of distillation are rendered visible to the state. They prompt public outcries and excise raids. Alcohol, by virtue of its entanglement with district authorities, the excise and police departments, becomes a charged substance that can catalyze political events. Indeed, matter or nonhuman beings can become political actors: the sovereign human subject is no longer the sole source of political agency in the world (Connolly, 2011). The power to wield and negotiate is constituted *with* a whole retinue of other beings. Yet, it is important to keep in mind that these powers are not an inherent attribute of alcohol, but emerge through the ecology of relations it has with people and the state.

But neither is this agency gained solely through the relations matter forms with human subjects or institutions. As this ethnography suggests, relations between nonhuman beings and entities also matter. In fact, they have the capacity to pose questions on their own terms. The strong pungent odour of alcohol and its detectability by elephants, its sweet taste that lends itself to Proboscidean gustation, are a set of relations that exceed human authority and control. Both offer themselves as bodies to be acted on. Alcohol transforms elephant bodies and in turn its own effects are amplified. The event of intoxication is a new relation where elephants and alcohol recorporealize in response to each other: a becoming–alcohol of elephants and a becoming–elephant of alcohol. These new connections add dimensions and transform the very pragmatic identity of both that get connected. Such material connections are events, not derivations. The nonhuman agencies emerging from this vital materiality echo in the social, with multifaceted and deeply fraught effects. The damage of houses, human fatality and consequent social impacts on the lives of the poor are a case in point.

These becomings also spatialize: new zones to be nonhuman and radically other are prised open. Such spaces are not fissured into binaries of ‘us’ and ‘them’, ‘here’ or ‘there’, as in institutional cartographies of elephant conservation and management (Leimgruber et al., 2003), but folded into the very spaces of the social (Whatmore and Thorne, 2000). They rest close to the human and the ordinary, but also differ in terms of their phenomenological and physiological configuration (von Uexküll, 1957). To try and grasp this alterity is to take a risk, not just through the act of trying to write up what is radically other, but to put one into situations where events exceed deliberation and control. Guarding crops at night, or perhaps brewing alcohol in landscapes where elephants are present, are mundane but disturbingly concrete examples. These spaces of cohabitation constitute a convivium (Hinchliffe et al., 2005), but not in a cosy or companionate sense. Both humans and elephants are under considerable stress in one another’s presence and notions of accommodation are more often about struggle, failure and defeat. In extreme instances, people may demonize elephants (Barua et al., 2010). In turn, there is a distinct possibility that elephants too vilify people when modes of cohabitation generate stress (Bradshaw, 2009).

Acknowledging this alterity shifts registers of analysis to a different ontology, one in which the capacities to act and be acted upon are modulated by the relations afforded by a heterogeneous milieu across a multiplicity of scales (Deleuze, 1988). It provokes geographers interested in the dynamics and politics of life to examine human–animal relationships and the vibrancy of matter in conjunction, as part of an ecology of relations, rather than as discrete phenomena unfolding along independent pathways. This paper posits ways in which we might engage in such a project. Such interventions methodologically entail practicing a ‘more–than–human’ ethnography (Whatmore, 2003), where the sovereign subject or a society composed of humans is no longer the epicentre of ethnographic enquiry. Rather, ethnography is reoriented towards and reconfigured by the collectivities within which human, animal or material lives are lived. This effort chimes with recent calls to chart eth(n)ological relations between humans and animals (Lestel et al., 2006), and attempts to conduct multispecies ethnographies that cross species divides (Kirksey and Helmreich, 2010), but without hinging on their restricted focus on living organisms, human or nonhuman. Instead, it seeks to traverse through the rhizomatic trajectories of people’s lives, the corporeality of elephants and the affordances of alcohol as they issue forth through a world of material becoming. The politics it maps and articulates is machinic (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987; Guattari, 1995), fabricated through connections between bodies across an assemblage that is ontologically heterogeneous.

These manoeuvres have implications for the future practice of political ecology. As this paper has illustrated, placing the vibrant potential of matter and its ecology of relations with (non)human bodies and social institutions in our analysis from the start, could help address calls to gain from the ‘productive tension’ that exists between the discipline and versions of human geography, particularly geographies that are non–representational, posthuman and vitalist (Neumann, 2011). This enables us to account for how asymmetric social relations ascribe meanings to conflict and mould political ecologies, but without reducing nature to a *tabula rasa* upon which social relations are inscribed (Hinchliffe, 2003). At the same time, it allows for factoring in more cognate and social concerns that at times have been deemed lacking in newer modes of human geography slanting toward affect, performance and skill (Lorimer, 2008). For instance, this paper makes evident how the state’s control and regulation of alcohol distillation

bears upon the local political economy and has consequences for those who brew liquor illegally. Yet, the pungent aroma of alcohol and the somatic responses it elicits in nonhuman bodies cannot be overlooked in the constitution of political events (Thrift, 2003). Similarly, crop-guarding may be viewed as an additional labour cost for the disenfranchised, arising from having to tolerate Asian elephants, a species afforded total protection by the state. However, guarding is also a bodily practice performed through an uneven ground where elephants have an upper hand. The materialities and sensibilities with which we see matter (Wylie, 2006), for aberrations can result in fatality and consequently affect the socio-economic conditions of a family. Indeed, neither perspective is a replacement for the other but their mutual exclusion is a moot point.

Considering the graveness of some of the events recounted here, this paper has perhaps been written in an overly optimistic vein. This optimism perhaps emerges from the possibilities that are prised open when we take a risk with nonhumans, conceptually or through vital encounters. The first set of such possibilities include re-examining some of the canonical work in political ecology in a more symmetrical vein. The political economy of soil erosion (Blaikie, 1985), is a case in point. What would our understandings of the politics of land degradation be if we took seriously the intra-actions of organic matter, microbes and invertebrates that compose soil? What new political participants, besides people and institutions, would emerge and how might we map their agency and dispositions? The second, graver, set of possibilities would be to look at how more-than-human approaches could be written into postcolonial presents. South Asian political ecologists have described India as a 'fissured land', torn by uneven and extractive political economies of resource use (Gadgil and Guha, 1992). This has led to subaltern, sometimes violent, political struggles. The concomitant depletion of elephant habitat, fragmentation of herds, and deepened conflict in the shadow of the postcolonial state could indeed be traumatic for elephants (Bradshaw, 2009; Lorimer, 2010). Perhaps intoxication is what elephants seek to salve this situation? What might we make of postcolonial struggles if protest was to be understood not just in terms of a subaltern response to coercive Modernity, but as that of a milieu inhabiting fissured ecologies? Politics and ecology can indeed come together in many different ways, and sometimes in a fashion that unsettles our assumptions of the world.

6.6. References

- Adams W M, 2004 *Against extinction: the story of conservation* (Earthscan, London)
- Anon., 1999, "World: South Asia Drunken elephants trample village", http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/482001.stm
- Anon., 2008a, "Death by elephant again in north Bengal (India)", <http://www.savetheelephants.org/news-reader/items/death-by-elephant-again-in-north-bengal-40india41.html>
- Anon., 2008b, "Hurt elephant falls prey to its own herd", http://www.telegraphindia.com/1081120/jsp/northeast/story_10136272.jsp
- Anon., 2009a, "Elephant kills 5, locals live in terror (India)", <http://www.savetheelephants.org/news-reader/items/elephant-kills-5-locals-live-in-terror-40india41.html>
- Anon., 2009b, "Herd kills labourer", http://www.telegraphindia.com/1091124/jsp/northeast/story_11776063.jsp
- Anon., 2011, "Illicit liquor attracting wild elephants", http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2011-01-06/mysore/28358168_1_illicit-liquor-wild-elephants-tamed-elephants
- Arvidsson J, Amundin M, Laska M, 2012, "Successful acquisition of an olfactory discrimination test by Asian elephants, *Elephas maximus*" *Physiology & Behavior* **105** 809–814
- Barua M, 2010, "Whose Issue? Representations of Human–Elephant Conflict in Indian and International Media" *Science Communication* **32** 55–75
- Barua M, Bhagwat S A, Jadhav S, 2012, "The hidden dimensions of human–wildlife conflict: Health impacts, opportunity and transaction costs" *Biological Conservation* **157** 309–316
- Barua M, Tamuly J, Ahmed R A, 2010, "Mutiny or Clear Sailing? Examining the Role of the Asian Elephant as a Flagship Species." *Human Dimensions of Wildlife* **15** 145–160
- Bennett J, 2010 *Vibrant Matter: a political ecology of things*. (Duke University Press, Durham)
- Berger J, 2009 *Why Look at Animals?* (Penguin, London)
- Blaikie P, 1985 *The Political Economy of Soil Erosion in Developing Countries* (Longman Scientific and Technical, New York)

- Bradshaw G A, 2009 *Elephants on the edge: what animals teach us about humanity*. (Yale University Press, New Haven)
- Bradshaw G A, Schore A N, Brown J L, Poole J H, Moss C J, 2005, "Elephant breakdown" *Nature* **433** 807
- Braun B, Whatmore S, 2010 *Political matter: technoscience, democracy, and public life*. (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN)
- Burke J, 2010, "Elephants on drunken rampage kill three people", <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/dec/03/elephants-drunken-rampage-india>
- Chatterjee P, 2003, "An Empire of Drink: Gender, Labor and the Historical Economies of Alcohol" *Journal of Historical Sociology* **16** 183–208
- Connolly W E, 2011 *A World of Becoming* (Duke University Press, Durham NC)
- Cronon W, 1996, "The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature." *Environmental History* **1** 7–28
- Davies T E, Wilson S, Hazarika N, Chakrabarty J, Das D, Hodgson D J, Zimmermann A, 2011, "Effectiveness of intervention methods against crop-raiding elephants" *Conservation Letters* DOI: 10.1111/j.1755-1263X.2011.00182.x
- Deleuze G, 1988 *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy* (City Light Books, San Francisco, USA)
- Deleuze G, Guattari F, 1987 *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN)
- Emel J, 1995, "Are you man enough, big and bad enough? Ecofeminism and wolf eradication in the USA." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* **13** 707–734
- Fernando P, Wikramanayake E, Weerakon D, Jayasinghe L K A, Gunawardene M, Janaka H K, 2005, "Perceptions and patterns of human–elephant conflict in old and new settlements in Sri Lanka: insights for mitigation and management." *Biodiversity and Conservation* **14** 2465–2481
- Fowler M E, 2006, "Toxicology", in *Biological, Medicine, and Surgery of Elephants* Eds M E Fowler, S K Mikota (Blackwell Publishing, Iowa, USA) pp 415–429
- Gadgil M, Guha R, 1992 *This Fissured Land: An Ecological History of India* (Oxford University Press, New Delhi)

- Goswami S, 1987 *Aspects of Revenue Administration in Assam, 1826-1874* (Mittal Publications, New Delhi)
- Guattari F, 1995, "On machines" *Complexity: Journal of Philosophy and the Visual Arts* **6** 8–12
- Gubbi S, 2012, "Patterns and correlates of human–elephant conflict around a south Indian reserve" *Biological Conservation* **148** 88–95
- Hinchliffe S, 2003, "Inhabiting: landscapes and natures." in *The Handbook of Cultural Geography* Eds K Anderson, M Domosh, S Pile, N Thrift (Sage, London)
- Hinchliffe S, Kearnes M B, Degen M, Whatmore S, 2005, "Urban wild things: a cosmopolitical experiment." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* **23** 643–658
- Hobson K, 2007, "Political animals? On animals as subjects in an enlarged political geography." *Political Geography* **26** 250–267
- Jadhav S, Barua M, 2012, "The Elephant Vanishes: Impact of Human–Elephant Conflict on People's Wellbeing" *Health & Place* **18** 1356–1365
- Jalais A, 2010 *Forest of Tigers: People, Politics and Environment in the Sundarbans* (Routledge, New Delhi)
- Jayne M, Valentine G, Holloway S L, 2008, "Geographies of alcohol, drinking and drunkenness: a review of progress" *Progress in Human Geography* **32** 247–263
- Kirksey S E, Helmreich S, 2010, "The Emergence of Multispecies Ethnography." *Cultural Anthropology* **25** 545–576
- Leimgruber P, Gagnon J B, Wemmer C, Kelly D S, Songer M A, Selig R A, 2003, "Fragmentation of Asia's remaining wildlands: implications for Asian elephant conservation." *Animal Conservation* **6** 347–359
- Lestel D, Brunois F, Gaunet F, 2006, "Etho–ethnology and ethno–ethology" *Social Science Information* **45** 155–177
- Lorimer H, 2008, "Cultural geography: non–representational conditions and concerns" *Progress in Human Geography* **32** 551–559
- Lorimer J, 2010, "Elephants as companion species: the lively biogeographies of Asian elephant conservation in Sri Lanka." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* **35** 491–506

- Lorimer J, Srinivasan K, 2013, "Animal Geographies", in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Cultural Geography* Eds N C Johnson, R H Schein, J Winders (Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford) pp 332–342
- McGregor J, 2005, "Crocodile crimes: people versus wildlife and the politics of postcolonial conservation on Lake Kariba, Zimbabwe" *Geoforum* **36** 353–369
- Morris S, Humphreys D, Reynolds D, 2006, "Myth, marula, and elephant: an assessment of voluntary ethanol intoxication of the African elephant (*Loxodonta africana*) following feeding on the fruit of the marula tree (*Sclerocarya birrea*)" *Physiological and Biochemical Zoology* **79** 363–369
- Neumann R P, 2011, "Political ecology III: Theorizing landscape" *Progress in Human Geography* **35** 843–850
- Ogra M V, 2008, "Human-wildlife conflict and gender in protected area borderlands: A case study of costs, perceptions, and vulnerabilities from Uttarakhand (Uttaranchal), India" *Geoforum* **39** 1408–1422
- Philo C, Wilbert C, 2000 *Animal spaces, beastly places: New geographies of human-animal relations*. (Routledge, New York)
- Rangarajan M, Desai A, Sukumar R, Easa P S, Menon V, Vincent S, Ganguly S, Talukdar B K, Singh B, Mudappa D, Chowdhary S, Prasad A N, 2010, "Gajah: Securing the future for elephants in India." (Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India., New Delhi)
- Rasmussen L E L, 2006, "Chemical, Tactile, and Taste Sensory Systems", in *Biological, Medicine, and Surgery of Elephants* Eds M E Fowler, S K Mikota (Blackwell Publishing, Iowa, USA) pp 409–414
- Rasmussen L E L, Krishnamurthy V, 2000, "How Chemical Signals Integrate Asian Elephant Society: The Known and the Unknown" *Zoo Biology* **19** 405–423
- Rizvanovic A, Amundin M, Laska M, 2013, "Olfactory Discrimination Ability of Asian Elephants (*Elephas maximus*) for Structurally Related Odorants" *Chemical Senses* **38** 107–118
- Robbins P, 2011 *Political ecology: A critical introduction* (Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford)

- Sarna P K, Talukdar B K, Baruah J K, Lahkar B P, Hazarika N, 2008, "A Geo-Spatial Assessment of Habitat Loss of Asian Elephants in Golaghat District of Assam." *Gajah* **28** 25–30
- Sen A, 2001, "Drink drives elephant to kill", http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/1721442.stm
- Siegel R K, 2005 *Intoxication: The Universal Drive For Mind-Altering Substances* (Inner Traditions, Rochester, Vermont)
- Siegel R K, Brodie M, 1984, "Alcohol self-administration by elephants" *Bulletin of the Psychonomic Society* **22** 49–52
- Sitati N W, Ipara H, 2012, "Indigenous Ecological Knowledge of a Human–Elephant Interaction in Transmara District, Kenya: Implications for Research and Management" *Advances in Anthropology* **2** 107–111
- Stockley C, Saunders J B, 2011, "The Biology of Intoxication", in *Expressions of Drunkenness (four hundred rabbits)* Eds A Fox, M MacAvoy (Taylor & Francis, New York) pp 13–17
- Sukumar R, 2003 *The living elephants: evolutionary ecology, behaviour and conservation*. (Oxford University Press, Oxford)
- Sukumar R, 2006, "A brief review of the status, distribution and biology of wild Asian elephants *Elephas maximus*." *International Zoo Yearbook* **40** 1–8
- Talukdar B N, 2010 *Elephants in Assam*. (Forest Department of Assam, Government of India., Guwahati)
- Thrift N, 2003, "All nose", in *The Handbook of Cultural Geography* Eds K Anderson, M Domosh, S Pile, N Thrift (Sage, London) pp 9–14
- Tolia–Kelly D P, 2012, "The geographies of cultural geography III: Material geographies, vibrant matters and risking surface geographies" *Progress in Human Geography* DOI: **10.1177/0309132512439154**
- Vayda A P, Walters B B, 1999, "Against political ecology." *Human Ecology* **27** 167–179
- von Uexküll J, 1957, "A stroll through the worlds of animals and men", in *Instinctive Behaviour* Ed C Schiller (International Universities Press, New York) pp 5–80
- Walker P A, 2005, "Political ecology: where is the ecology?" *Progress in Human Geography* **29** 73–82

- Walker P A, 2007, "Political ecology: where is the politics?" *Progress in Human Geography* **31** 363–369
- Whatmore S, 1999, "Hybrid Geographies: Rethinking the 'Human' in Human Geography." in *Human Geography Today*. Eds D Massey, J Allen, P Sarre (Polity, Cambridge) pp 22–40
- Whatmore S, 2002 *Hybrid geographies: natures, cultures, spaces*. (Sage, London)
- Whatmore S, 2003, "Generating materials", in *Using social theory: thinking through research* Eds M Pryke, G Rose, S Whatmore (SAGE Publications Ltd, London) pp 89–104
- Whatmore S, Thorne L, 2000, "Elephants on the move: spatial formations of wildlife exchange." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* **18** 185–203.
- Wylie J, 2006, "Depths and folds: on landscape and the gazing subject" *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* **24** 519–535
- Zimmerer K S, 1993, "Soil erosion and social (dis)courses in Cochambamba, Bolivia: Perceiving the nature of environmental degradation" *Economic Geography* **69** 312–327

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION: THE ENCOUNTERS, SPACES AND POLITICS OF HUMAN-ELEPHANT RELATIONSHIPS

7.1. Introduction

At the outset, this thesis had three broad aims. The first pertained to examining what an emphasis on the inventiveness of life and the agency of nonhumans could contribute to understandings of how planning, policy and politics are structured in practices of conservation. The second aim was to critically look at spatial dimensions of human–animal relationships through a symmetrical lens in order to develop intra–disciplinary bio–geographies in postcolonial contexts. Through these two aims, the third objective of the thesis was to ecologize the politics of conservation and make contributions to both fields of more–than–human geography and political ecology.

These broad objectives were mobilized through empirical investigation, especially ethnographic fieldwork conducted in India, and to a lesser extent the UK. The four papers in this thesis have specifically examined the different modes of human–elephant encounters, ranging from charisma to conflict, on the ground in India to urban spaces in London. They elucidate the role played by the animate, ecological and affective dimensions of interspecies encounters in constituting practices and politics of elephant conservation. This is an important addition to the literature and contributes to how social organization occurs. Through a multi–sited ethnography of the circulation of elephants, and site–bound ethnographic enquiry into human–elephant relations, the thesis shows how humans and elephants cohabit with and against the grain of conservation planning and spatial design. It critically appraises how divisions between the *bio* and the *geo* are entrenched through turbulent power relations, and narrows this gap by re–animating landscapes and modes of collective inhabitation. This furthers conversations between bio– and human geographers and enhances the project of developing intra–disciplinary bio–geographies. The thesis opens up analysis of human–elephant relationships to broader ecologies and unpacks a diverse set of material relations both humans and elephants are entangled in. Whilst retaining the

analytical purchase of political ecology, the thesis goes beyond the discipline's humanist frameworks.

The findings and specific contributions to the political ecology and more-than-human geography literature that this work makes have already been discussed in each of the four papers presented in this thesis. In this conclusion, I will briefly reiterate some of the key findings and synthesize them in order to highlight what contributions the thesis makes as a whole. Arguments are organized here under three themes that run through each of the papers, viz. encounters, spaces and politics of human–elephant relationships. These three dimensions are critical constituents of the political ecology of human–elephant relationships, and have bearings upon wider understandings of how we engage with human–animal relations and account for them. At the time when I completed fieldwork and had begun drafting this work, a paper by Neumann made a prescient call to geographers, prompting them to work more productively with the ‘tensions’ between political ecology and more-than-human or posthuman geographies (Neumann 2011). The symmetrical examination of the encounters, spaces and politics of human–elephant relationships in this section harnesses this tension constructively. In conclusion, this synthesis of the thesis’ contributions is then opened up to some future questions about studying human–animal relations and potential implications for elephant conservation practice.

7.2. Theme I: Encounters

Animals often appear in political ecology as no more than cultural constructs, operating as political symbols (Hobson 2007; Knight 2000), or creatures mobilized to serve some human end (Jalais 2008; Proctor 1998). This has perhaps stemmed from the Levi–Straussian tradition in anthropology that considers animals as embodiments and carriers of human thought (Lévi–Strauss 1969; Tambiah 1969), but also from Marxist political economy that treats the animal as a commodity and therefore subsumed by capital to become a medium of exchange (Duffy and Moore 2010; Marx 1970; Moore 2011).²³ Through such approaches, we learn little about what

²³ On several occasions Marx writes about the sensuousness of the commodity, but stops short in seeing them as ‘eventful’ or exceeding a humanist teleology. See: Shotwell A 2011 *Knowing otherwise: race, gender, and implicit understanding*. Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pennsylvania

the sensuous commodity or the animal can do. The lives animals lead outside of their being signifiers of meaning or fetishes embodying the logics of capital are rendered invisible and inert to geographical enquiry. Taking up conceptual resources offered by more-than-human geography (Lorimer 2007), and the currents it shares with posthumanism (Bennett 2010; Despret 2004; Haraway 2007), this thesis shows what enlivening human–elephant encounters can offer to understandings of the political economies of conservation.

Methodologically, enlivening encounters entails examining them in a symmetrical fashion. Symmetry implies that encounters are co-constituted by all parties involved, rather than a one-way activity of humans who gaze upon animals and read their own meanings into them. As this thesis has shown, neither humans nor nonhuman animals have a monopoly over encounters. However, it is aware that claims to ownership of outcomes of these encounters are less symmetrical. Elephants, and their material representations, afford a range of thoughts, actions and practices to humans, and at the same time hinder or constrain others (Gibson 1986). Similarly, human practices too afford elephants a number of things that may shape their social organization, behaviour and becomings. Nutrition afforded by crops or the allure of alcohol brewed in distilleries are pertinent examples. Bull elephants that are otherwise solitary may form small herds to minimize risks when foraging into human habitation in search of these substances (Sukumar 1990).

A more coherent explanation of how such encounters contribute to understandings of the political economies of conservation is through the concept of ‘encounter value’ that this thesis deploys and further develops. Drawn from the work of Haraway, encounter value is that form value takes when the sensuousness of a living commodity is restored (Haraway 2007). As living, breathing, things nonhuman animals afford humans a range of affects and emotions. They enable many different practices that cannot be encapsulated through notions of use and exchange. The encounter is thus value-forming for Haraway, a trend of analysis that also echoes in the later materialist thought of Althusser (Althusser 2006). The encounter precedes forces of material production. It is only through lasting encounters between different bodies, human or nonhuman, that materialism and even meaning that we associate with structure arises (Althusser 2006). Encounter value thus encapsulates a range of more-than-human agencies and affects that comes

to the fore when the material lives and spaces of animals are given due attention. It is an under-analyzed axis of political economy (Haraway 2007) that enables accounting for the diverse roles animals play in co-constituting planning, policy and practice in conservation.

We might understand the constitutive role of encounter value in political economies of conservation in at least two different ways. The first pertains to its ordering role in conservation. For instance, the effectiveness of elephants as flagship species for fundraising, or in the words of the WWF representative, then ‘earning biodiversity conservation’, is illustrative of how conservation capital is generated through encounter value. Conservation NGOs may also choreograph and mediate encounters, as in the case of conservation campaign films or images and messages in websites.²⁴ As Althusser has argued, such choreography and repeated presentation of encounters makes them attain a certain currency with a value (Althusser 2006). Similarly, in processes of circulation and contact, interspecies encounters may play a crucial role in forging connections across difference. For example, Mark Shand’s encounter with Tara opens him up to a common world; one that he realizes is cohabited by many more beings with their own concerns and anxieties than initially conceived in his romantic imagination. This is followed by his mobilization of resources to set up a conservation charity that seeks to help save the Asian elephant. The charisma and affects of elephants are channelized, and these are imperceptibly fused with the planning and policy imperatives of the NGO. In fact, Shand’s charisma, constituted in part through his personality, in part through social connections and his travels with an elephant, too plays a role. Charisma in this case may cross porous bodies. Further, aesthetic representations of elephants, in the form of vibrant fibreglass sculptures, are another way through which encounters with elephants are orchestrated. In turn, encounters with such material representations enable people to get in *touch* with the elephant, for these evoke a sense of curiosity and enchantment. Encounter value leads to the assembly of novel publics that want to participate in the charity’s activities.

Second, this thesis shows how encounter value may take a very different trajectory in situations of human–elephant conflict. The very term ‘conflict’ (*con-* together + *fligère* to strike)

²⁴ In such mediums, there is little symmetry as animals are not materially present. They are therefore stripped of their capacity to challenge humans in the same ways a living animal would.

implies an encounter. The sustenance and taking–hold of such encounters, as in the case of particularly aggressive animals, gives rise to cultural vilification of elephants. This is witnessed in instances of elephants being named ‘Bin Laden’ (Gureja et al. 2002), and the stories about elephant demons that permeate Hindu mythology (Banerjea 1956). Similarly, the unwillingness of conservation charities to screen films showing the ‘dark side’ of elephants prior to fundraising events is reflective of what conflicting encounters can do. Ways in which human–elephant conflict jeopardizes conservation goals is well documented (Barua et al. 2010). Haraway comes close to accounting for this negative dimensions of encounter value when she cursorily mentions the regimes of terror that have come about through the deployment of dogs to terrorize detainees in Abu Ghraib (Haraway 2007). Terror is accentuated through the circulation of images and stories about the atrocity. It is not dissimilar to charisma choreographed to generate value, except that it heightens affects of fear and unfolds along another trajectory.

Yet, elephants live a life outside of their affordances to humans. Hence, a symmetrical exploration of encounters must involve looking at what animals might afford one another and how they sense and apprehend such affordances. One way in which this thesis has sought to engage with this possibility has been through the lens of charisma and leadership in elephants. Drawing the work of Weber and von Uexküll into conversation (von Uexküll 1957, 2010; Weber 1978), it explores how leadership qualities in bull elephants may indeed be a key feature for herd organization, especially in landscapes fraught with conflict, scarce resources and high predatory risk. Tara–1’s leadership of the SP04 herd is a case in point, where his influence and ability to negotiate risky environments makes younger bulls seek his company. Such encounters are value–forming for elephants. They contribute to social organization in these animals. Here value should not be interpreted in some form of human currency or defined by a humanist standard of equivalence. It is akin to what von Uexküll terms ‘*Ton*’, or quality, that is meaningful in terms of a nonhuman organism’s own perceptual world (von Uexküll 2010). In this case, encounter value emerges when a being or entity is drawn into relations fostered by the creature’s own activities (Ingold 2011). In a similar symmetrical vein, one could argue that it is the ‘*ton*’ of alcohol for elephants that builds up conflicting encounters. This unsettles the humanist frameworks of political ecology, precisely because it is *ecological*. Future endeavours to write

symmetrical political ecologies could garner considerable purchase from this articulation of encounter value.

Finally, this unpacking of the diverse modes of human–elephant encounters foregrounds ways through which more–than–human geographies and political ecology may be linked. Taking encounters seriously, in all its lively, refractory and productive forms, enables us to understand how nonhuman agency contributes to the political economies of conservation. Two further examples illustrate the organizing potential of encounter value. First, human geographers have referred to a ‘conservationist mode of production’ where conservation is converted into a commodity for consumption through ecotourism, television and video documentaries (Brockington and Scholfield 2010). Nature (and therefore capital) is indeed produced through these practices. However, the desire to consume the commodities hereby generated stems from animals being dynamic vehicles of affect, of them being sensuous rather than listless commodities. Censoring the diverse encounter values produced in conjunction with animals leaves us with an impoverished analytical repertoire for understanding the complex dynamics of conservation practice. Second, a considerable body of literature on human–wildlife conflict views conflict to be ultimately mediated by raced, gendered or classed struggles (McGregor 2005; Ogra 2008; Robbins 2011). In contrast, Chapters 3 and 6 of this thesis has shown that when conflicting encounters between people and aggressive elephants are sustained, it can generate deep economic impacts. This may be through the loss of crops, property or human fatality. Crop–guarding in landscapes where humans and elephants cohabit can have impacts on employment opportunities (Barua et al. 2012). Fatality following encounters with elephants can generate significant ruptures in kinship bonds, besides generating poor maternal health and morbidity (Jadhav and Barua 2012). Here, nonhuman agency serves to amplify pre–existing social inequality. Examining political economies of rural livelihoods through social registers alone fails to account for the wider ecologies through which social outcomes are shaped: encounter values arising through human–elephant interactions play an important role. Together, this development of the concept of encounter value helps us ease the ‘false antithesis’ that seems to divide structural and relational approaches in human geography (Castree 2002).

7.3. Theme II: Spaces

This thesis' symmetrical exploration of how human–elephant encounters take place has contributed to geography's critical engagements with the study of human–animal relations. In fact, this engagement becomes an inherently geographical project if we put an emphasis on the taking *place* of encounters, where they unfold and how they spatialize. The second theme pervading this thesis has been to critically engage with spatial planning imperatives of conservation and how they order human–elephant relationships. By paying close attention to elephants' lifeworlds and the ways in which they cohabit with humans, the thesis interrogates these cartographies of conservation. It raises some important questions through which subaltern political ecology and more–than–human approaches to understanding landscapes can be brought into conversation.

Social orderings of space through conservation landscape design have direct bearings upon human–elephant relationships. This thesis has argued that the project of colonial control operated through a Modernist cartographic politics, a process by which nature was purified from society, and divisions between the two entrenched into the landscape (Latour 1993; Robbins 2001). A second schism contributed to this project, that between inhabitation and occupation. The anthropologist Tim Ingold has referred to this schism as 'the logic of inversion' (Ingold 2011). With inversion, beings originally open to the world are sealed by boundaries that cut them off from the traffic of interactions with their surroundings. In India, purification and inversion proceeded through the constitution of protected areas, perhaps the most durable conservation institution in the country (Gadgil and Guha 1992; Rangarajan 1999). Enacted through practices of mapping, fencing and legislation, landscapes were parcelled into separate domains of nature (for elephants) and society (for humans). Further, the constitution of the 'Elephants' Preservation Act' in 1879 made the elephant state property (Nongbri 2003; Sivasundaram 2005), whereby the creature was no longer an inhabitant of the landscape but a commodity and an occupant. Elephants served as a powerful vehicle through which vast tracts of land could be partitioned and controlled. The cartographies of Modernity were further entrenched in the postcolonial period by Indian elites (Rangarajan 1996), and state protection towards Asian elephants intensified (Lahiri–Choudhury 2006).

This two-fold manoeuvre had deep implications on human–elephant cohabitation. As archival readings suggest, elephants came to be perceived as denizens of forests reserved for them by the state. Transgressions of reserve boundaries by these animals resulted in frequent complaints from the local populace, followed by repeated attempts by the government to prevent elephants from coming into habitation. Incursions into human habitat made elephants ‘out of place’ (Douglas 2002), i.e. a violation of the social and spatial orders of purity established through inversion and purification, and therefore often rendered as ‘problem animals’. Ethnographic material presented in this thesis suggests that this logic has been internalized over the years by local subjects who have inherited these (post)colonial histories.²⁵ Elephants were associated with the state apparatus, and several people in the sites I conducted fieldwork believed that they should only inhabit forest reserves. Incursions into human habitation led to elephants being referred to as ‘government dacoits’ or creatures ‘carrying out evictions’. The evocation of these spatial and political metaphors reflects how Modernist cartographies have had a lasting impact on postcolonial subalterns. The strong focus on spatial aspects of human–animal relationships, especially how Modernist conservation cartographies fissure landscapes, adds an important and perhaps overlooked geographical dimension to South Asian environmental history (Gadgil and Guha 1992; Rangarajan 1999).

Whilst this subaltern reading of political ecology shows how colonial pasts and postcolonial presents inform the ways in which humans and elephants cohabit, this thesis has argued that other approaches are needed to bring such readings into conversation with more–than–human geography. Subaltern studies scholars have read archives against the grain of colonial and nationalist histories of India (Chakrabarty 2002; Guha 1982; Simeon 2001). South Asian environmental historians have done so against the ‘arrogance of anti–humanism’ of authoritarian conservation to critique its coercive cartographies (Guha 1997). This thesis has shown how a

²⁵ Arun Agrawal describes a similar process of internalization of state control over forest resources in South Asia as ‘environmentality’ [Agrawal A 2005 *Environmentality: Technologies of Government and the Making of Subjects*. Duke University Press, Durham, NC.] Drawing upon Foucault, Agrawal argues that technologies of self and power lead to internalizing conservation, whereby (post)colonial subalterns became ‘environmental subjects’ who took it upon themselves to preserve forest resources. In the contexts described in this thesis, people were not environmental subjects. Their participation in state–led elephant conservation was not like that of the communities studied by Agrawal.

reading of human–elephant relations in the archives brings to light what Latour terms ‘translations’ (Latour 1993), i.e. the proliferation of hybrids of nature and society, a process that occurs simultaneously with Modernist purification. As the material presented show, archives come to life through these translations. Complaints about elephant incursions by the local peasantry, elephant capture and shooting events are but a few examples. As I have argued, postcolonial political ecology falls short of ecologizing such translations (Arnold and Guha 1995; Bryant and Bailey 1997; Guha 1990). This thesis in a sense reads archives against the grain of subaltern studies and its concomitant political ecologies. Scrutinizing the overlooked translations and deploying ecological methods in the field to ‘triangulate’ archival accounts unsettle the humanist frameworks of this scholarship. In place, (post)colonial histories are ecologized, making us cognizant of the nonhumans with whom subaltern pasts have been co–shaped.

This thesis has brought the vitalist dispositions of more–than–human geography into readings of (post)colonial landscapes through the ‘dwelt political ecology’ that it has developed. Further extending Ingold’s ‘dwelling perspective’ (Ingold 2000, 2011), and Hinchliffe’s seminal essay on inhabiting landscapes (Hinchliffe 2003), through an examination of how human and animal lives are collectively lived and dwelt within fields of power, the thesis builds a symmetrical political ecology. It takes as its starting point a careful consideration of how humans and nonhumans inhabit, rather than occupy, landscapes. Humans and elephants cohabit with and against the grain of political design. The movements and sentient ecologies of the SP04 herd outside protected areas in Sonitpur, their interactions with local inhabitants and the resultant socio–political events, illustrate this. The thesis has argued that landscapes, and the concomitant politics of cohabitation, are best understood as enfoldments in the lives of persons and animals as they encounter one another. Modernist cartographies of conservation, its purifications and inversions, are unsettled. Landscapes are not first laid out and then inhabited; humans and elephants do not occupy socially constructed domains. This thesis contributes to the burgeoning scholarship on dwelt animal geographies (Johnston 2008; Lorimer 2006), by extending it to (post)colonial contexts to show how dwelling becomes political when it confronts Modernist cartographical arrangements. It further argues that people and animals are intertwined with institutions that wield power. The dimension of power that this thesis brings into analysis is vital

for drawing more-than-human geography into a meaningful conversation with third world political ecologies.

The other implicit mode of accounting for the spaces of human–elephant relationships in this thesis has been through a multi-sited ethnography of elephant conservation. This strand of enquiry has focused on what happens when elephants and their landscapes are set in motion through trans-national networks of conservation. As a spatial project, this work too unsettles the parochial localization of animals in Modernist landscapes. It opens up the spaces of human–elephant encounters from a cordon of exteriority to the multiplicity of flows, exchanges and circulations that pervade contemporary life. This investigation shows how conservation cartographies of elephants are not just parceled into domains of nature and society, but unfold through a dynamic and fluid ecology of networks (Whatmore and Thorne 2000). This brings about a reorientation of political ecology narratives that view conservation as a linear trajectory of the imposition of Western ideas upon postcolonial subalterns (Guha 1989; Jalais 2008). Rather, as this thesis has shown, it is enacted in multiple sites, across cultural and human–nonhuman difference, with both shared concerns and antagonisms. These ambiguities are also embodied by the researcher, as one traverses different domains. Similarly, contemporary environmental governance issues forth through an ontologically heterogeneous assemblage, constituted by the state, both Indian and Western NGOs, networks of wealth and capital, not to mention the diverse representations and ecologies of elephants themselves. This thesis offers a sort of corrective to trends in postcolonial political ecology that pit the West against the rest in a rather naive and methodologically convenient way (see Campbell 2008), a tendency for which subaltern studies of South Asian history have also been subjected to criticism (Simeon 2001).

Finally, the dwelt political ecology developed in this thesis configures landscapes as relational achievements, spun between human and nonhuman bodies and a lively earth. The practice of political ecology becomes a *bio-geo-graphy*, a form of writing with the political interactions between people, elephants and the landscape. This thesis adds to developments emerging from the recent interest amongst human geographers to look at the dynamics and distributions of life and to craft intra-disciplinary bio-geographies (Jepson et al. 2010; Lorimer 2010b; Spencer and Whatmore 2001). Most significantly, this has been through a symmetrical

enquiry that gives both elephant ethologies and human ethnologies credit in shaping the landscapes and political dynamics of cohabitation. Unlike work that is of a more zoogeographic bent (Lorimer 2010b), the bio-geo-graphies elucidated in this thesis does not evacuate the bodily presence of people, elephants or the researcher from the analysis. There indeed are epistemological tensions between strands of more-than-human geography that seek to write nonhuman difference into spatial distributions of life, and the bio-geo-graphies articulated through an Ingoldian dwelling perspective where the landscape is not ‘out there’ but emerges through an unfolding of the activities of human and nonhuman organisms.²⁶ Epistemological differences between a naturalistic frame of reference and a personalistic one cannot easily be sidestepped. This will perhaps continue to haunt the discipline, more so when comparative methods of the former seem to have come under flack from phenomenological and nonrepresentational geographies that hinge on the latter. However, working with these tensions could lead to productive scholarship in the future.

7.4. Theme III: Politics

A final theme running through this thesis has been to look at the politics of elephant conservation. Conservation is an inherently political endeavour. Critics have done well to interrogate how practices of conservation, among other things, have marginalized the subaltern (Guha and Alier 1997), led to large scale displacement and resettlement (Adams and Hutton 2007), and aggravated poverty and hunger (Adams et al. 2004). These criticisms come mainly from political ecology, an umbrella term that I use, perhaps unfairly, to encapsulate what are diverse and transdisciplinary views. Politics in fact is so central to political ecology that Robbins,

²⁶ In fact, a split between dwelling and distribution comes about with Ernst Haeckel’s coinage of the term ‘chorology’ at the same time as he coined ecology. Chorology is ‘the entire science of the spatial distribution of organisms, their geographical and topographical distribution over the planet’s surface’ [Haeckel E 1866 *Generelle Morphologie de Organismen. Allgemeine Grundzüge der organischen Formen-Wissenschaft, mechanisch begründet durch die von Charles Darwin reformirte Descendenz-Theorie.* Verlag Von Georg Rimer, Berlin, p.287]. Chorology has its roots in the Greek word *Χώρα*, which Haeckel translates as *der Wohnort* or dwelling. Haeckel describes the science of chorology to be about patterns of spatial distribution, based on Darwinian theories of evolution, rather than the ‘chorological facts’ about where organisms dwell and what they do.

in his classic textbook on the topic, characterizes its definition as an ecological practice counterpoised to ‘an apolitical one’ (Robbins 2011). In much of political ecology, politics is taken to mean ‘the practices and processes through which power, in its multiple forms, is wielded and negotiated’ (Paulson et al. 2003). A central commitment of political ecologists has been to apply their methods and findings to address social–environmental concerns.

In a relatively recent review of the discipline, Walker provocatively asked whether ‘by its own definitions of the word ‘politics’, political ecology fully lives up to its promise to take politics seriously’ (Walker 2007, P.361). Walker was of course referring to politics as give and take in an exclusively human club. Nevertheless, if ecological concerns remain the staple of political ecology, what about the retinue of nonhuman animals and entities that make humans act and avail them to political calculability? What political role do the very bodies, with which political ecologists practice their craft, play? Or, as Latour asks, is it simply a matter of juxtaposing ‘ecology’ and ‘politics’ without a thorough thinking of how these terms relate (Latour 2004)? This thesis has been entangled in these questions in the context of elephant conservation. The above syntheses of human–elephant encounters and spaces hint upon how politics is inherently ecological, unfolding in concert with a wide array of nonhuman beings. In this section, I will provide a brief discussion as to how this thesis ecologizes politics and brings more–than–human concerns into the frameworks of political ecology.

Firstly, the diverse agencies performed by elephants matter. They lead to the co–constitution of socio–political outcomes. For instance, this thesis makes evident how elephant may be actants in practices of biodiversity conservation, influencing outcomes or stalling them. Conservation organizations choreograph and mobilize encounters in a way that accentuates their charisma and endangered status. Whilst successful, other modes of encounter with elephants that are continual crop–raiders, or even become rogues and killers, can jeopardize conservation interventions. People who otherwise revere elephants and are enchanted by their ethological and aesthetic affordances, may be unwilling to conserve these creatures (Barua et al. 2010). In fact, it could even lead to protests against conservation interventions. Elephants may thus object, not through intention, but by giving rise to situations that go against the grain of conservation design.

Furthermore, this thesis shows how people may act in concert with nonhumans to protest, negotiate or wield power. As the vignette on conservation corridors in Assam suggests, farmers were cognizant of the *political effect* thwarting elephant movement in the area would have. The corridor project would potentially be stalled and people would retain their land. Enrolled in this way, elephants thus gain political agency. They may in fact become the weapons of the weak. Nonhuman agency matters, not just in terms of another trite reiteration of the liveliness of animals, but how it enables us to achieve political outcomes. Such subtle acts of subversion, at times a bane for conservationists, are perhaps some of the few documented examples of how subaltern political struggles occur with and against animals. Such action is something that we might term a subaltern ‘cosmopolitics’ (Stengers 2005), i.e. political action ‘in the presence of’ a wide array of actants, moving forward not with intentional design, but through what happens when heterogeneous beings come together. It is subaltern in the sense that such a political *ecology* is not the product of ivory-tower speculation, but one of those who cohabit with elephants and who run the risk of being dispossessed of their land.

Secondly, this thesis formulates an ecological politics by showing that human–animal relationships are not always a linear outcome of the interactions between people, animals and the institutions governing such relationships. Rather, these relationships may be mediated by a range of other nonhuman entities that are entangled in humans’ and elephants’ ecologies. For instance, the role of alcohol in binding people and elephants in novel ways, amplifying conflict by making people vulnerable to elephant attacks, is a compelling example. By making visible the political role of matter, this thesis makes important contributions to the wider literature on the animal question in human geography (Hinchliffe 2007; Philo and Wilbert 2000; Whatmore 2002; Wolch and Emel 1998), and political ecology (Hobson 2007; Ogra 2008; Robbins 2011). If the agency of elephants and the diverse encounter values they generate makes us question as to what extent the politics of human–animal conflict can be explained through asymmetric social relations of race, colonialism or gender (Emel 1995; Jalais 2010; McGregor 2005; Ogra 2008), then bringing hidden actants such as matter into the equation makes the humanist frameworks of political ecology seem even more limiting. Matter is now beginning to make an entry into how more–than–human geographers’ and social scientists’ accounts of politics (Bennett 2010; Braun and

Whatmore 2010). The contribution this thesis makes to this literature is to show how matter mediates human–animal relationships and the bearings it has for social life in postcolonial landscapes fraught with conflict. I will make a brief elaboration of these points here.

To practice a symmetrical political ecology, i.e. paying heed to how ecology is politicized and simultaneously recognizing politics as an ecology constituted of relations involving human and nonhuman bodies, we need to go beyond a restricted analysis of nonhumans' encounters with humans or social institutions. Much work demonstrating the inventiveness of life seems to unfold along such unidimensional axes (Braun 2008). True, humans are never outside of a 'sticky web of connections or an ecology of matter' (Whatmore 2006, P.603), but we need to extend our analysis to encompass the relations *between* nonhumans as well. Only in this sense can politics be truly ecological, an opening up of nonhuman worlds unto themselves as well as in the way they open up to us. This thesis shows how relations elephants form with alcohol is eventful, as both bodies recorporealize in response to one another. The nonhuman agencies emerging from this vital materiality echo in the social, with multifaceted and deeply fraught effects. The cascade of house damage, human fatality, followed by socio–economic impacts on the lives of the poor are a telling point. Similarly, illicit alcohol, made visible through its encounter with elephants, triggers excise raids and public outcries. This is not due to some inherent property of alcohol, but a product of its ecologies of entanglement with state apparatuses of liquor regulation. A symmetrical political ecology would imply shifting gear to a different ontology, one where the capacities to act and be acted upon are modulated by the relations afforded by a heterogeneous milieu and across a multiplicity of scales (Deleuze 1988). In such an ontology, the sovereign human subject is no longer the sole actor wielding power, or the source of political agency in the world (Connolly 2011).

We might also be able to write this posthumanist understanding of political agency into postcolonial presents. South Asian political ecologists have described India as a 'fissured land', torn by uneven and extractive political economies of resource use (Gadgil and Guha 1992). The discontent and trauma inflicted by such fissures have led to subaltern, sometimes violent, political movements across the country. The concomitant depletion of elephant habitat, the scattering and fragmentation of herds, and deepened conflict with humans under the shadow of the postcolonial

state could indeed be traumatic for elephants (Bradshaw 2009; Lorimer 2010b). Perhaps intoxication is what elephants seek, like Eugène Marais' baboons, to 'ease the pain of [postcolonial] consciousness' (Siegel 2005). What might we make of postcolonial struggles if political protest were to be understood not just in terms of a subaltern response to a coercive Modernity, but as that of a milieu inhabiting fissured ecologies? Reading nonhumans with, and against subaltern history in the archives, may be a productive ground for future scholarship in historical geography. However, moving toward an *ecological* understanding of such political struggles could move us into new terrain. Gadgil and Guha's proclamation that South Asian Marxist histories of resource use are not material enough is precisely the point. Not just in the way they proclaim about its lack of consideration of the ecologies in which a materialist base is embedded (Gadgil and Guha 1992), but in its failure to recognize the *ecological politics* that proceed with and through materials.

Ecologizing politics also brings more-than-human and other vitalist strands of geography into close conversation with political ecology. By exploring the role of encounter value in political economies of conservation, I have already argued how the 'tension' between these fields might be harnessed generatively (Neumann 2011). Further common ground is opened up when we consider the political ecologies of human-elephant conflict. Deploying a political economy lens, we might understand such conflicts as products of (post)colonial state orderings of landscape. The state's quest for maximizing forest revenue results in the purification of space and gives rise to conflict when elephants transgress into human habitation. Similarly, its desire to gain from liquor distillation leads to certain practices of alcohol production being rendered illicit. Elephants' incursions into illicit breweries draw breweries to the state's attention. Yet, the dispositions of elephants, their olfactory and gustatory sensibilities, the vibrant properties of alcohol and the somatic responses it elicits in both human and elephant bodies cannot be edited out. Through this symmetrical analysis presented in the thesis, we may be able to draw upon geographies that emphasize what is more-than-representational (Lorimer 2005; Thrift 2003, 2007), and yet gain from the analytical purchase of political economy frameworks on conflict (Ogra 2008; Proctor 1998). Similarly, one could explain the social impacts of conflict through economies of labour, where sustained crop-guarding poses additional costs for the disenfranchised and aggravates their

poverty (Ogra 2008; Walker 2012). However, the bodily practice of that labour, performed in the dark over uneven ground, the material sensibilities through which we see (Wylie 2006), are equally determining effects. Lapses or aberrations could result in fatality, triggering socio-economic downturns in the families of the bereaved. Indeed, further exploration through this common ground has much to offer in terms of advancing human geography as a discipline. Both politics and ecology matter. They are not just two words juxtaposed together.

7.5. Conclusion: moving forward

The animal question represents an important concern for human geography and the broader social sciences. This thesis builds on geography's strong disciplinary history of engaging with nature-society relations and the politics of nature. Focusing on elephant conservation, it has drawn the two fields of political ecology and more-than-human geography into an important, and overdue, conversation. The thesis shows how the inventiveness of life interfaces with and contributes to the ordering of political economies of conservation. Through its engagements with the encounters, spaces and politics of human-animal relationships, the thesis adds to the nascent literature on intra-disciplinary biogeographies. The postcolonial context in which the work was largely conducted provides elements for a conceptual vocabulary that can be shared between subaltern political ecologies and more-than-human geography.

Looking forward, this thesis raises a set of questions that have much to offer in terms of further developing understandings of the animal question and for moving human geography forward as a discipline. The first pertains to a more nuanced understanding of the commonality and tensions between posthumanist and postcolonial ontologies. If posthumanism is an endeavour to go beyond the human, to transcend the anthropocentrism of Modern Western ontology, it is equally important to keep in mind that *Anthropos* is constituted in many different ways. What notion of *Anthropos* is being challenged by posthumanism? What would posthumanism be for the postcolonial subaltern, and in what way is posthumanism different from his or her worldview? Further, looking at animals in India's own trajectory of modernity, the extent to which it maps and differs from that of European Enlightenment (Chakrabarty 2002), would bring about other understandings of the animal question, particularly of its hallmark explorations of human-animal

cohabitation in urban spaces (Philo 1998; Wolch 2002). The methodological innovations carried out in this thesis, particularly reading translations through and against archives, put in place conceptual and analytical tools for approaching these questions.

Secondly, developments at the intra-disciplinary interface between human and biogeography demand more sustained attention. There are discrepancies between the ways in which links between the *bio*, *geo* and *Anthropos* have been apprehended through an approach that is to some extent comparative (e.g. Lorimer 2010b, 2012), and the personalistic endeavours of this thesis or that of other human geographers (Lorimer 2006, 2010a). Comparison is necessary if conversations between human and biogeographers are to be fostered. Perhaps we might want to think about what the units or methods for comparison would be for future work? Further methodological innovation is required here. This could potentially involve multi-sited, more-than-human ethnographies examining nonhuman organisms in conjunction with the biogeographers who study them. It could entail using the units that biogeographers deploy, but writing in the ‘mess’ and the entourage of nonhumans with which research is co-produced, but generally edited out from the finished academic product (Law 2004). These propositions are of course speculative: we cannot entirely be certain what methodological practice can do.

Third, findings from ethnographic research conducted in this thesis suggest how human wellbeing may be affected by situations of human-wildlife conflict. In an associated study leading on from ethnographic fieldwork, conducted in collaboration with a cultural psychiatrist, I explored the mental health consequences cohabiting with elephants had on the rural poor in India (Jadhav and Barua 2012). The links between health, development and more-than-human geographies made by this work offer much scope for future exploration. Examining ecologies of wellbeing in the future would potentially entail an investigation into both human and animal health. Studies are beginning to show how morbidity might also be a feature of animals, such as elephants, sometimes driven by conflicts within human domains (Bradshaw 2009; Bradshaw et al. 2005). A symmetrical ecology of wellbeing could indeed move into new ground in human geography.

This thesis has throughout interfaced with issues of elephant conservation practice. Some of the potential conservation implications of this work will perhaps be evident in the four papers

presented in the thesis. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to translate the implications of a symmetrical political ecology developed here into a set of practical or policy instructions. However, certain analytical insights from this thesis have policy bearings and are therefore briefly outlined. This pertains to at least three areas.

The first relates to the deployment of elephants as flagship species. The thesis views Asian elephants to be ‘multinatural’ (Latour 2004; Lorimer 2012), i.e. there are multiple natures subsumed within the appellative ‘elephant’ and multiple ways in which they are sensed and valued by humans, or nonhumans for that matter. For instance, the SP04 herd, aggressive bulls vilified as ‘Bin Laden’, Shand’s companion Tara, or animals involved in logging and forestry operations, to pick a handful, have very different biographies and ethologies. In parallel, there are diverse cultures, groups, institutions that configure elephants in their own ways: as charismatic and affectionate creatures, as vehicles of terror, as draught animals or as commodities, to name but a few. Conservation mobilization of elephants as flagships may be very different if this multinatural condition was embraced, rather than reified into a fixed set of attributes. Conflict generated through flagship deployment and failures in their effectiveness arise when ‘other’ elephants and other people’s configurations of the creature collide with those of conservation. Strategic conservation planning would benefit from a multinatural perspective. Furthermore, conservationists argue that uses of flagships should be defined and the desires of the ‘target audience’ evaluated prior to floating a flagship for strategic campaigns (Barua et al. 2011; Veríssimo et al. 2011). As events in the London Elephant Parade suggest, elephants or their material configurations *convene* publics rather than address target audiences. Publics may convene around the creature but not always for the reasons conservation organizations desire and design. The formation of the group ‘Gerald’s Groupies’ following encounters with a sculpture removed from public display is a case in point. We might think about designing flagship species differently if this perspective was taken on board.

The thesis also has implications for spatial planning in conservation. The non-dualist cartographies this work opens up chimes with conservation biogeography’s move away from the island–sea analogy of MacArthur & Wilson’s equilibrium model in the context of terrestrial ecosystems. In Asia, there is now a strong emphasis on conservation in the ‘non-reserve matrix’,

i.e. zones of human habitation and agriculture that surround protected areas and in which species' habitats are embedded (Daily et al. 2001; Watson et al. 2005). Certain biogeographers have called for developing 'reconciliation ecologies' as a means through which biodiversity could be conserved in human-dominated landscapes (Rosenzweig 2003a; Rosenzweig 2003b). Reconciliation ecology seeks to devise ways that will 'diversify anthropogenic habitats so that they harbour a wide variety of wild species' (Rosenzweig 2003b, P.201). In the context of elephant conservation, reconciliation ecology would mean not just enhancing matrix permeability for these creatures, but also paying heed to elephant difference and sensitivity to cultural and political dimensions of human–elephant cohabitation. We might take cues from recent work that maps elephant difference across populations in fragmented habitat (Srinivasaiah et al. 2012). Elephant herds show distinct foraging behaviours. Decisions at population levels are influenced by gender, age and composition of herds. At individual levels ethology and dispositions are critical, with a high degree of malleability and adaptability. Anthropogenic activity and interactions with humans also play a vital role in foraging decisions. Future practice might seek to map this difference into local forms of knowledge, paying heed to vernacular understandings of movement patterns, relations with 'problem' animals, cultural configurations of elephants and most critically the needs and dilemmas of the poor who cohabit with elephants. Integrating this into spatial planning exercises may be a starting point for a reconciliation ecology of elephant conservation.

The final aspect of conservation practice links to reconciliation ecology and to the areas for future scholarship on the animal question identified above. Wellbeing is increasingly being considered to be an important area for conservation to link with (Adams 2012; Redford and Adams 2009). In two papers associated with the work conducted in this thesis, I have shown what health and economic impacts human–elephant conflict has (Jadhav and Barua 2012), and why policy makers should pay more heed to the hidden transcripts of such conflict (Barua et al. 2012). Engaging with health, livelihood security and other components of wellbeing would potentially enhance conservation, and is perhaps even essential if a reconciliation ecology of elephant conservation is to be attempted. In parallel, health policies need to be sensitive to local cultures and ecologies (Jain and Jadhav 2008). In the future, this might entail developing coordinated conservation and health policies sensitive to local geographies. People's relationships

with animals matter, and will continue to do so. Geography as a discipline has a privileged vantage point for engaging with these issues, especially through preceding scholarship, its interdisciplinarity and its experiments. There is tremendous scope for further innovation and work on human–animal relations. The future remains open.

7.6. References

- Adams W M 2012 Feeding the next billion: hunger and conservation. *Oryx* 46: 157–8
- Adams W M, Aveling R, Brockington D, Dickson B, Elliott J, Hutton J, Roe D, Vira B and Wolmer W 2004 Biodiversity Conservation and the Eradication of Poverty. *Science* 306: 1146–9.
- Adams W M and Hutton J 2007 People, Parks and Poverty: Political Ecology and Biodiversity Conservation. *Conservation and Society* 5: 147–83
- Agrawal A 2005 *Environmentality: Technologies of Government and the Making of Subjects*. Duke University Press, Durham, NC
- Althusser L 2006 *Philosophy of the Encounter: Later Writings, 1978-1987*. Verso, London
- Arnold D and Guha R 1995 *Nature, Culture, Imperialism: Essays on the Environmental History of South Asia*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
- Banerjea J N 1956 *The Development of Hindu Iconography*. Calcutta University Press, Kolkata
- Barua M, Bhagwat S A and Jadhav S 2012 The hidden dimensions of human–wildlife conflict: Health impacts, opportunity and transaction costs. *Biological Conservation* 157: 309–16
- Barua M, Root–Bernstein M, Ladle R J and Jepson P 2011 Defining Flagship Uses is Critical for Flagship Selection: A Critique of the IUCN Climate Change Flagship Fleet. *Ambio* 40: 431–5
- Barua M, Tamuly J and Ahmed R A 2010 Mutiny or Clear Sailing? Examining the Role of the Asian Elephant as a Flagship Species. *Human Dimensions of Wildlife* 15: 145–60
- Bennett J 2010 *Vibrant Matter: a political ecology of things*. Duke University Press, Durham
- Bradshaw G A 2009 *Elephants on the edge: what animals teach us about humanity*. Yale University Press, New Haven
- Bradshaw G A, Schore A N, Brown J L, Poole J H and Moss C J 2005 Elephant breakdown. *Nature* 433: 807
- Braun B 2008 Environmental issues: inventive life. *Progress in Human Geography* 32: 667–79
- Braun B and Whatmore S eds 2010 *Political matter: technoscience, democracy, and public life*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN

- Brockington D and Scholfield K 2010 The Conservationist Mode of Production and Conservation NGOs in sub-Saharan Africa. *Antipode* 42: 551–75
- Bryant R and Bailey S 1997 *Third world political ecology*. Routledge, London
- Campbell B 2008 Environmental Cosmopolitans: Introduction. *Nature and Culture* 3: 9–24
- Castree N 2002 False Antitheses? Marxism, Nature and Actor–Networks. *Antipode* 34: 111–46
- Chakrabarty D 2002 *Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago
- Connolly W E 2011 *A World of Becoming*. Duke University Press, Durham NC
- Daily G C, Ehrlich P R and Sanchez–Azofeifa G A 2001 Countryside Biogeography: Use of human–dominated habitats by the avifauna of Southern Costa Rica. *Ecological Applications* 11: 1–13
- Deleuze G 1988 *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*. City Light Books, San Francisco, USA
- Despret V 2004 The Body We Care For: Figures of Anthro–zoo–genesis. *Body and Society* 10: 111–34
- Douglas M 2002 *Purity and Danger: An analysis of concept of pollution and taboo*. Routledge, London
- Duffy R and Moore L 2010 Neoliberalising Nature? Elephant–Back Tourism in Thailand and Botswana. *Antipode* 42: 742–66
- Emel J 1995 Are you man enough, big and bad enough? Ecofeminism and wolf eradication in the USA. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 13: 707–34
- Gadgil M and Guha R 1992 *This Fissured Land: An Ecological History of India*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
- Gibson J J 1986 *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*. Taylor & Francis, New York
- Guha R 1982 On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India. *Subaltern Studies* 1: 1–19
- Guha R 1989 Radical American Environmentalism and wilderness preservation: A Third World critique. *Environmental Ethics* 11: 71–83
- Guha R 1990 *The unquiet woods: ecological change and peasant resistance in the Himalaya*. University of California Press, Berkeley
- Guha R 1997 The Authoritarian Biologist and the Arrogance of Anti–Humanism. *The Ecologist* 21: 14–20

- Guha R and Alier J M 1997 *Varieties of environmentalism: essays North and South*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
- Gureja N, Menon V, Sarkar P and Kyarong S S 2002 *Ganesha to Bin Laden: Human-elephant conflict in Sonitpur District of Assam*. Wildlife Trust of India, New Delhi 45
- Haeckel E 1866 *Generelle Morphologie de Organismen. Allgemeine Grundzüge der organischen Formen-Wissenschaft, mechanisch begründet durch die von Charles Darwin reformirte Descendenz-Theorie*. Verlag Von Georg Rimer, Berlin
- Haraway D J 2007 *When species meet*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN
- Hinchliffe S 2003 Inhabiting: landscapes and natures. in Anderson K, Domosh M, Pile S and Thrift N eds *The Handbook of Cultural Geography*. Sage, London
- Hinchliffe S 2007 *Geographies of Nature: Societies, Environments, Ecologies*. Sage Publications, London
- Hobson K 2007 Political animals? On animals as subjects in an enlarged political geography. *Political Geography* 26: 250–67
- Ingold T 2000 *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on livelihood, dwelling and skill*. Routledge, London
- Ingold T 2011 *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description*. Routledge, Abingdon, Oxon
- Jadhav S and Barua M 2012 The Elephant Vanishes: Impact of Human–Elephant Conflict on People's Wellbeing. *Health & Place* 18: 1356–65
- Jain S and Jadhav S 2008 A Cultural Critique of Community Psychiatry in India. *International Journal of Health Services* 38: 561–84
- Jalais A 2008 Unmasking the Cosmopolitan Tiger. *Nature and Culture* 3: 25–40
- Jalais A 2010 *Forest of Tigers: People, Politics and Environment in the Sundarbans*. Routledge, New Delhi
- Jepson P, Barua M, Ladle R J and Buckingham K 2010 Towards an intradisciplinary bio–geography: a response to Lorimer's 'lively biogeographies' of Asian elephant conservation. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 36: 170–4
- Johnston C 2008 Beyond the clearing: towards a dwelt animal geography. *Progress in Human Geography* 32: 633–49
- Knight J 2000 *Natural enemies: People-wildlife conflicts in anthropological perspective*. Routledge, London

- Lahiri–Choudhury D K 2006 *A Trunk Full of Tales: Seventy Years with the Indian Elephant*. Permanent Black, New Delhi
- Latour B 1993 *We have never been modern*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA
- Latour B 2004 *Politics of Nature. How to Bring the Sciences into Democracy*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts
- Law J 2004 *After Method: Mess in social science research*. Routledge, London
- Lévi–Strauss C 1969 *Totemism*. Penguin, London
- Lorimer H 2005 Cultural geography: the busyness of being 'more–than–representational'. *Progress in Human Geography* 29: 83–94
- Lorimer H 2006 Herding memories of humans and animals. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 24: 497–518
- Lorimer H 2010a Forces of nature, forms of life: calibrating ethology and phenomenology. in Anderson B and Harrison P eds *Taking Place: Non-representational Theories and Geography*. Ashgate, Farnham, Surrey 55–78
- Lorimer J 2007 Non–human charisma. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 25: 911–32
- Lorimer J 2010b Elephants as companion species: the lively biogeographies of Asian elephant conservation in Sri Lanka. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 35: 491–506
- Lorimer J 2012 Multinatural geographies for the Anthropocene. *Progress in Human Geography* 36: 593–612
- Marx K 1970 *Capital, Volume I*. Lawrence and Wishart, London
- McGregor J 2005 Crocodile crimes: people versus wildlife and the politics of postcolonial conservation on Lake Kariba, Zimbabwe. *Geoforum* 36: 353–69
- Moore L 2011 The neoliberal elephant: Exploring the impacts of the trade ban in ivory on the commodification and neoliberalisation of elephants. *Geoforum* 42: 51–60
- Neumann R P 2011 Political ecology III: Theorizing landscape. *Progress in Human Geography* 35: 843–50
- Nongbri N 2003 Elephant Hunting in Late 19th Century Northeast India: Mechanisms of Control, Contestation and Local Reactions. *Economic and Political Weekly* July 26: 3189–99

- Ogra M V 2008 Human–wildlife conflict and gender in protected area borderlands: A case study of costs, perceptions, and vulnerabilities from Uttarakhand (Uttaranchal), India. *Geoforum* 39: 1408–22
- Paulson S, Gezon L L and Watts M 2003 Locating the political in political ecology: an introduction. *Human Organization* 62: 205–17
- Philo C 1998 Animals, Geography and the City: Notes on Inclusions and Exclusions. in Wolch J and Emel J eds *Animal Geographies: Place, Politics, and Identity in the Nature-Culture Borderlands*. Verso, London
- Philo C and Wilbert C eds 2000 *Animal spaces, beastly places: New geographies of human-animal relations*. Routledge, New York
- Proctor J D 1998 The Spotted Owl and the Contested Moral Landscape of the Pacific Northwest. in Wolch J and Emel J eds *Animal Geographies: Place, Politics, and Identity in Nature-Culture Borderlands*. Verso, London 191–217
- Rangarajan M 1996 The Politics of Ecology: The Debate on Wildlife and People in India, 1970–95. *Economic and Political Weekly* 31: 2391–409
- Rangarajan M 1999 *Fencing the forest: conservation and ecological change in India's central provinces 1860-1914*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi
- Redford K H and Adams W M 2009 Payment for Ecosystem Services and the Challenge of Saving Nature. *Conservation Biology* 23: 785–7.
- Robbins P 2001 Tracking Invasive Land Covers in India, or Why Our Landscapes Have Never Been Modern. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 91: 637–59
- Robbins P 2011 *Political ecology: A critical introduction*. Wiley–Blackwell, Oxford
- Rosenzweig M 2003a *Win-win Ecology: How the Earth's Species can Survive in the Midst of Human Enterprise*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK.
- Rosenzweig M L 2003b Reconciliation ecology and the future of species diversity. *Oryx* 37: 194–205
- Shotwell A 2011 *Knowing otherwise: race, gender, and implicit understanding*. Pennsylvania State University, University Park, Pennsylvania

- Siegel R K 2005 *Intoxication: The Universal Drive For Mind-Altering Substances*. Inner Traditions, Rochester, Vermont
- Simeon D 2001 Subaltern studies: Cultural concerns. *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, London 15241–5
- Sivasundaram S 2005 Trading knowledge: the East India Company's elephants in Indian and Britain. *The Historical Journal* 48: 27–63
- Spencer T and Whatmore S 2001 Bio–Geographies: Putting Life Back into the Discipline. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 26: 139–41
- Srinivasaiah N M, Anand V D, Vaidyanathan S and Sinha A 2012 Unusual Populations, Unusual Individuals: Insights into the Behavior and Management of Asian Elephants in Fragmented Landscapes. *PLoS ONE* 7: e42571 1–16
- Stengers I 2005 The cosmopolitical proposal. in Latour B and Weibel P eds *Making things public*. MIT Press, Cambridge, MA 994–1003
- Sukumar R 1990 Ecology of the Asian Elephant in Southern India. II. Feeding Habits and Crop Raiding Patterns. *Journal of Tropical Ecology* 6: 33–53
- Tambiah S J 1969 Animals are Good to Think and Good to Prohibit. *Ethnology* 8: 423–59
- Thrift N 2003 All nose. in Anderson K, Domosh M, Pile S and Thrift N eds *The Handbook of Cultural Geography*. Sage, London 9–14
- Thrift N 2007 *Non-Representational Theory: Space, Politics, Affect*. Routledge, London
- Veríssimo D, MacMillan D C and Smith R J 2011 Toward a systematic approach for identifying conservation flagships. *Conservation Letters* 4: 1–8
- von Uexküll J 1957 A stroll through the worlds of animals and men. in Schiller C ed *Instinctive Behaviour*. International Universities Press, New York 5–80
- von Uexküll J 2010 *A Theory of Meaning*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN
- Walker K L 2012 Labor costs and crop protection from wildlife predation: the case of elephants in Gabon. *Agricultural Economics* 43: 61–73
- Walker P A 2007 Political ecology: where is the politics? *Progress in Human Geography* 31: 363–9

- Watson J E M, Whittaker R J and Freudenberger D 2005 Bird community responses to habitat fragmentation: how consistent are they across landscapes? *Journal of Biogeography* 32: 1353–70
- Weber M 1978 *Economy and Society*. University of California Press, Berkeley
- Whatmore S 2002 *Hybrid geographies: natures, cultures, spaces*. Sage, London
- Whatmore S 2006 Materialist returns: practising cultural geography in and for a more-than-human world. *Cultural Geographies* 13: 600–9
- Whatmore S and Thorne L 2000 Elephants on the move: spatial formations of wildlife exchange. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 18: 185–203.
- Wolch J 2002 Anima urbis. *Progress in Human Geography* 26: 721–42
- Wolch J and Emel J 1998 *Animal Geographies. Place, Politics, and Identity in Nature-Culture Borderlands*. Verso, London
- Wylie J 2006 Depths and folds: on landscape and the gazing subject. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 24: 519–35