

The Militarisation of Conservation and Occupational Violence in Sikumi Forest Reserve, Zimbabwe

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Abstract

Discussions around the militarisation of conservation have largely focused on violence meted out against subsistence and commercial poachers in, and around, protected areas. Overlooked is violence experienced by perpetrators of such violence. Using lived experiences of anti-poaching in Sikumi Forest Reserve—a state forest managed by Zimbabwe’s Forestry Commission—this article examines working experiences of paramilitary personnel. Empirical evidence shows that, in the process of implementing state militarised conservation practices, paramilitary personnel are subjected to violence perpetrated by the state through its authorities. I discuss this violence in the context of occupational violence and make two arguments. The first is that the range of victims of militarised conservation violence goes beyond local communities and commercial poachers to include paramilitary personnel perpetrating such violence. Related to this argument is the second argument that occupational violence has an exacerbating effect on everyday persistent violence. I conclude that aspects of occupational violence, such as displayed in Sikumi Forest Reserve, should be understood as part of broader green violence.

Keywords: forests, militarisation, conservation, occupational violence

INTRODUCTION

In January 2017, a forest guard employed by the Forestry Commission (FC) shot and killed a poacher in Pandamasue Forest Reserve in northwest Zimbabwe. His actions were celebrated during a military training passing out parade that followed in July 2017. He was recognised as a brave and courageous man, who had placed himself in the thick of a fight. Between April and July 2016, I had participated in anti-poaching activities conducted by forest guards in Sikumi Forest Reserve. During these four months, I experienced first-

hand what forest guards go through while implementing state military practices to save nature. It is against these experiences I realised that, the celebration of paramilitary personnel overlooks the many challenges they face. This article uses lived experiences of anti-poaching to illuminate the experiences of personnel engaged in implementing militarised conservation. It builds on literature examining the effects of militarised conservation on paramilitary personnel. An analysis of this literature argues that paramilitary personnel are, in themselves, targets of violence, leading to the questioning of the limited view that rangers are conservation heroes (Duffy et al. 2019). My point of departure in support of the perspective provided by Duffy and colleagues (ibid.) is a focus on experiences of paramilitary personnel perpetrated from within, and by, state conservation authorities. Unlike in existing studies, I discuss these experiences in the context of occupational violence.

I use occupational violence to refer to exposure to work-related violence. Beech and Leather (2006) show that what constitutes work-related violence has been widely debated. I will not delve into these debates because the purpose of

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this article is not to contribute to the theoretical framework on occupational violence, but rather to obtain an appropriate analytical tool for understanding the experiences of paramilitary personnel in the context of violence. I, therefore, follow Wynne et al. (1996), who have been widely cited by several scholars in addition to being adopted by the International Labour Organisation and the World Health Organisation. They refer to work-related violence as acts or threats of (physical, verbal, psychological) abuse to persons at work; such acts or threats that may place their safety, well-being and health at risk. This broad conceptualisation allows the inclusion of a wide range of behaviours, such as neglect and deprivation, which create a risk to the health and safety of workers (Krug et al. 2002). It also suggests that any explicit or implicit actions and threats that result in exposure of employees to any form of risk, or cause work-related psychological suffering, are conceptually an act of occupational violence.

Occupational violence comprises four categories: external, client-initiated, internal, and systemic violence (Mayhew and Chappell 2001; LeBlanc and Kelloway 2002). According to this literature, external violence is initiated by someone outside the workplace, for example, in the case of poachers or local communities on paramilitary personnel. Client-initiated violence is perpetrated by recipients of a service, while internal violence occurs amongst employees, for example, between paramilitary personnel themselves. Internal violence is also perpetrated between employers and employees—in this study, between the state authority and paramilitary personnel. The state authority here primarily refers to the FC, an authority of government with legislative and executive responsibility over management of forests in Zimbabwe. External forms of occupational violence constitute what extant literature has widely discussed as experiences of rangers. I will complement these external sources of work-related violence by focusing on internal employer-to-employee violence while recognising the role of systemic violence, that is, the economic climate that may cause employer-to-employee violence (Mayhew and Chappell 2001; Alexander et al. 2004). I recognise the usefulness of concepts such as green militarisation (Lunstrum 2014) and/or green violence (Büscher and Ramutsindela 2016), in examining experiences of forest guards. In this case, however, using the occupational violence conceptual framework is more relevant due to its specific focus on analysing and packaging paramilitary personnel work-related experiences in terms of violence. I will, in the sections that follow, show how occupational violence may, however, be located in broader theoretical framing such as green violence.

I begin with a description of methods, which will briefly include the case study context and background on militarised forest conservation in Zimbabwe. Next, I review literature on ranger experiences. Here, I acknowledge the debate on rangers as targets of violence, but also demonstrate my point of departure in support of the emerging debate. I then provide empirical material on the lived experiences of forest guards. Using the occupational violence conceptual framework, I demonstrate how such experiences unfold as employer-to-

employee work-related violence. In the process, I draw linkages between such violence and everyday hostile policing practices.

EXAMINING THE MILITARISATION OF CONSERVATION AND OCCUPATIONAL VIOLENCE

Examining the experiences of forest guards emerges from a broader study conducted between November 2015 and November 2016 that sought to examine military practices in Zimbabwe's protected forests and their effects on local people. The study used case study and qualitative research methods. It took place in Sikumi Forest Reserve in northwest Zimbabwe. Sikumi Forest is one of the 21 reserved forests in Zimbabwe managed by the FC. It is 54,400 ha in size. On its northwestern side, Sikumi Forest shares a permeable border with Hwange National Park (Hwange), on the northeastern side, with a vast continuum of local communities. The porous border between Sikumi Forest and Hwange de facto renders the reserve a national park, hence its inclusion in park management projects, such as the Kavango Zambezi (KAZA) Transfrontier Conservation Area project and WWF-Zimbabwe's Hwange Sanyati Biological Corridor Project (HSBCP). Sikumi Forest is, however, legally and administratively recognised as a protected forest under the Forest Act Chapter 19:05. Management activities and control of the entire forest are, therefore, exclusively vested in the state through its authority, the FC, and the sole employer of forest guards.

Anti-poaching is one of the key management activities in Sikumi Forest. It is in response to illegal resource access of timber and non-timber forest products by local communities, and ivory by commercial poachers. The forest's porous borders easily enable these illegal activities. In Sikumi Forest, anti-poaching is a militarised activity. This was, however, not always the case. Following the gazettement of forest reserves from 1930 to 1960, forest areas were physically demarcated with fences. Day-to-day forest monitoring, responsibility for which was given to civilian white forest officers, supported by patrol *boys*,¹ relied on the use of sticks and handcuffs to prevent evicted people from returning to their settlements (Kwashirai 2009). The liberation struggle of the late 1970s, and politically motivated post-colonial massacres, commonly known in Zimbabwe as *Gukurahundi* in the mid-1980s, significantly redefined the role of patrol 'boys.' During these two separate events, fences around protected forests were vandalised and taken down. White foresters relocated to safer regions of the country leaving patrol 'boys', whose name changed to forest guards after independence in 1980, to look after forests and state infrastructure. In addition to handcuffs and sticks, forest guards were equipped with guns for their safety. These guns were used throughout the liberation struggle and post-colonial massacres until after the Unity Accord in 1987 when the national army called for the return of all guns.²

The Unity Accord, however, coincided with a surge in armed poaching in Zimbabwe's nature reserves. Forest guards were now considered at risk of being shot by poachers, leading to the permanent repossession of guns for their safety. The FC stopped recruiting guards from local communities. It began recruiting

people with a security background and knowledge of firearms. The re-introduction of guns consequently required old and new forest guards to receive training in weaponry discipline, handling safety, and usage. In 1991, the FC hired a former Zimbabwe Republic Police Constabulary and war veteran to lead and restructure forest guards into a paramilitary guard force, called the Forest Protection Unit (FPU). Since 1991, daily management activities in Zimbabwe's protected forests are militarised. The FC officials argue that the militarisation of forest guards is necessary for their safety and welfare in the face of armed poachers.

Sikumi Forest has 13 male paramilitary forest guards. From April to July 2016, I became an additional member. During this time, I sought to understand how forest guards were prepared for militarised anti-poaching in terms of training, the anti-poaching procedure itself, equipment, techniques, strategies, and the prosecution protocol. We were organised into sticks³ of three or four guards. The members of each stick were permanently assigned, but I alternated between sticks to obtain perspectives from all forest guards, while also covering different parts of the forest. A typical day began with a review of the patrol from the previous day and setting out new goals. We then set out in our different directions. In a single day, it is possible that a single stick walked over 30 km. I kept field observations in a diary. These observations were recorded as text and photographs. Interviews and discussions were limited to the first few moments of the patrol and during resting times because the greater part of patrolling was done in silence. Sometimes, discussions with forest guards continued at their homes. Interviews were mostly open-ended and unstructured. I particularly used unstructured interviews due to their ability to support storytelling (Devine 2002). Storytelling enabled forest guards to share their experiences at length. Through storytelling, I was also invited into the perspectives of forest guards and guided in terms of the direction of the discussions. In addition, narration itself helped forest guards to recall past events in respect of their current situation (Riessman 2008). Discussions with forest guards continued until no new information was received (saturation). All interviews and discussions were conducted in the Shona language, voice-recorded, and then translated into English for presentation.

In addition to interviews conducted in Sikumi Forest, I interviewed five FC officials. These interviews were guided entirely by specific issues raised by forest guards and conducted in English. I also turned to the FC records office for secondary information and used working experience of over five years with the FC to analyse and validate issues arising from interviews. From August to November 2016, my work focused on local communities, which do not lie within the scope of this article. However, during this time, extending into 2017, I followed events related to the activities of the forest guards with in-person and telephone interviews. All information was analysed using thematic analysis, which focused on what was told, then organising this information into themes (Riessman 2008). Organisation into themes was done using the QSR NVivo computer application and required an ongoing analysis involving repeated coding. An extended

analysis also focused on how stories were told—structural analysis. Structural analysis focused on aspects such as tone of voice, emotions, and facial expressions, also how metaphors and analogy were used to explain experiences (Herman and Vervaeck 2005; Riessman 2008).

At the time of study, I was employed by the FC. The study itself was, however, conducted while I was on study leave and not financially supported by the FC. Because of my affiliation with the organisation I was better positioned than an outsider in terms of data collection permissions and access to information. My research positionality facilitated an easy working environment with forest guards and FC officials. Nonetheless, research was limited in two ways. First, assuming the role of a forest guard was not only risky, but physically challenging considering that I was not trained for this kind of job. Thus, I participated in daily patrol for three days a week. Second, being a woman, I was limited to daily anti-poaching patrols. Activities involving camping were not possible for ethical reasons related to gender. For example, I could not share a tent with male guards. The daily patrols, however, provided adequate empirical material needed to examine experiences of forest guards.

EXPERIENCES OF PARAMILITARY PERSONNEL: CONNECTING WITH THE GROUNDWORK

Interest in experiences of paramilitary personnel is increasing amongst scholars of the militarisation of conservation. One of the early studies by Duffy (1999) touches on what rangers endure while implementing militarised conservation in Zimbabwe's national parks. She describes how rangers can often be inadequately supported with appropriate equipment, and poorly remunerated, also the impact this has on their morale in the face of risk. By connecting inadequate support, ranger morale and risk, Duffy (ibid.) shows how rangers are exposed to operational challenges related to occupational risk. Much of this risk has been linked to death. For Timeslive South Africa, Mouton (2012: 1) writes that, "rangers ... could start dying along with the rhino," while Sean Willmore of International Ranger Federation is quoted thus: "[W]orldwide, about two rangers are killed every week" (Neme 2016: 1). These two perspectives illustrate not only the nature and extent of danger experienced by rangers at the hands of highly organised and sophisticated poachers, but also extend a message that the so-called unsung heroes, killed in the line of duty, are equally targets of the same violence they perpetrate, death. When rangers themselves do not experience death, it is the effect of killing a fellow human as part of their duties that then becomes a threat. Annecke and Masubelele (2016) review these effects in the context of psychological disorders affecting the quality of rangers' lives.

Apart from experiences and threats of death, Lunstrum (2014) highlights how rangers are negatively perceived and suffer dissociation in communities where they reside. Similarly, Norton (2014) shows how state marine compliance inspectors are subjected to mob attacks during their duties. She further illuminates the danger such inspectors and their families are

exposed to out of working hours, which also makes it difficult for them to integrate into the communities where they live and work. Community-driven negative experiences demonstrated by Lunstrum (*ibid.*) and Norton (*ibid.*) in South Africa, are further supported by Moreto et al. (2017), who provide evidence of community hostility characterised by heated verbal exchanges, labelling and animosity towards rangers in Uganda, particularly those deployed from other regions of the country. Massé et al. (2017) is also engaged in documenting law enforcement experiences of rangers.

Together, this literature is used to question the view that rangers are conservation heroes or “environmental sovereigns” (Massé 2020: 759), further to argue despite such perceptions, paramilitary personnel are, in themselves, targets of violence (Duffy et al. 2019). Marijnen and Verweijen (2016) and Duffy (2017) have analysed the notion of rangers as heroes. The context of their discussion does not specifically touch on ranger experiences in the manner discussed here. However, Duffy’s view (2017: 1) that “the appeals to the idea that rangers are a force for good...are unhelpful and even misleading because they obscure a range of important issues” provides an opening for exploring experiences of rangers. While Marijnen and Verweijen (2016) are concerned that focusing on rangers’ courage and self-sacrifice downplays violence towards civilians, Massé (2019: 4) specifically notes that “the narrative of the ranger as a hero selflessly working to protect threatened nature from the villainous poacher...obscures the realities of rangers.” In relation to ranger experiences, these realities have so far been discussed as mere experiences. To build on the argument presented by Duffy and colleagues that rangers are targets of violence, such experiences need to be packaged in the context of violence.

My contribution is, therefore, situated within the lenses of occupational violence, the conceptual framework of which, I provided in the introduction. I use occupational violence not only to bring experiences of paramilitary personnel into one broad classification of violence, but also to unpack the texture of such violence and how it unfolds. The literature discussed here focuses on what Mayhew and Chappell (2001) categorise as external occupational violence. In this article, I move beyond external to internal occupational violence with particular focus on employer-to-employee violence. The employer is the state represented by its authority, the FC. Having discussed existing literature and pitched my point of departure in support of the existing debate, I now turn to empirical materials for occupational violence in Sikumi Forest. In the process, I shall draw linkages between such violence and the ongoing perpetration of everyday hostile policing practices.

THE MANIFESTATION OF OCCUPATIONAL VIOLENCE

In Sikumi Forest, occupational violence against forest guards primarily manifests in both structural and direct ways. I will show how such violence unfolds using five themes. But first, let me restate that the management and control of forest guards is exclusively vested in the state, through its authority, the FC.

Hence, the results demonstrated here focus on the FC as the sole employer of forest guards. In addition, references obtained in the emerging field data do not suggest or implicate any other organisation apart from the FC.

Violent training

Military training is a key requirement for paramilitary personnel. Upon recruitment, all forest guards must receive military training, which is then followed up by a series of refresher courses to continuously improve and strengthen their capacity to effectively protect themselves and natural resources.⁴ Military training involves drill and assault or obstacle courses, which are viewed by forest guards as overly violent. The violence on their bodies and minds during training is so intense that they often fail to describe the process. Most forest guards could not say anything beyond, “training *ine nyaya*.” Directly translated from the Shona language, these guards simply concluded, “training is quite a story” referring to their gruesome experiences. Those who were willing to talk about it especially detested excruciating punishments. For instance, failure to grasp drill instructions attracts physical beatings, forced running or denigrating verbal harassment. One guard recalled the training process with resentment, “imagine being asked to tell everyone that I am a fool because I have failed to recite rifle parts and their functions. It is degrading!”⁵ His story concurred with views of three forest guards, who took turns to explain thus:

The training is very painful. It is similar to police or military training. They abuse us. We do not get enough food, do hard exercises and punishments. You get punished if you fail to follow orders or fail to get the training right... Drills are very difficult. If you turn left instead of right, you can be asked to stand on your head for several minutes. In the past, others have run away from training. For others, hidden illnesses got exposed due to the level of harassment we experience during training.⁶

Agreeing with the above views, one of the guards chuckled “training is not for the weak,”⁷ while the third emphasised its intensity: “One can lose weight just from the announcement of a refresher course.”⁸ The intensity of training was confirmed by one of the training instructors who simply defended it as necessary to harden forest guards and to instil discipline.⁹ However, these expected outcomes also feed the militaristic mind. Forest guards explained how training affects their emotions. They leave the training as hostile beings in ways that influence how they conduct their daily duties as indicated by these views: “We go through a difficult training process, so when we see these illegal activities, it makes us very angry. We will beat them up so that they know this is not a place to enter anyhow.”¹⁰ and “After training, we are angry. With the kind of training we receive and the way we are treated, if I meet a person after training trying to be funny, I will kill him.”¹¹ Views of the latter forest guard do not necessarily mean that he will murder someone. It is an expression demonstrating the magnitude of violence forest guards will unleash on perceived illegal activities.

Importantly, these views show how training changes the

attitude of forest guards towards people, also how such training informs direct physical violence (Verweijen 2020). Secondly, they illustrate the very essence of military training the outcome of which is to de-civilianise and indoctrinate a violent culture in ways that produce an emotionally blunt individual who lacks empathy (Skjelsbaek 1979). Viewed in the light of the latter perspective, the deployment of violent tactics to indoctrinate and de-civilianise forest guards also needs to be read within the frames of what Büscher and Ramutsindela (2016) theorise as green violence. Clearly, the violent training process manifests as an exercise that the forest authority deliberately undertakes to achieve its broad forest conservation goals. Discussing military training in the context of occupational violence is challenging, particularly because it is justified as a job requirement. However, this job requirement is underwritten by physical, psychological and verbal violent experiences within the workplace. Therefore, I am inclined to discuss training of paramilitary personnel in the context of occupational violence, further to state that such violence consequentially becomes part of the broad theory on green violence.

Discipline as occupational violence

The fact that occupational violence perpetrated during the training process is defended on the basis of military discipline needs a moment. The FC has a record of using discipline as a tool to silence and dismiss its employees. Disciplinary hearings and actions are common. In the case of forest guards, discipline is in addition to the FC's code of conduct embedded in military culture. Military discipline often means that forest guards cannot question orders. For example, during a meeting on September 16, 2016, forest guards demanded an explanation for a delay of over six months in salary payments. When the atmosphere at the meeting became tense, the chief security officer issued a security order instructing all guards to return to work.¹² Because military discipline often requires that security orders not be questioned before the task is performed; an order to return to work without providing solutions meant that forest guards were prevented from questioning issues concerning their working conditions and welfare. A forest guard further elaborated how discipline works, also how it can often be linked to suffering in silence in order to save their jobs. He said:

Even when the situation is unfavourable, you have to report for duty. The kind of training we get forces us to follow orders. If your shoes wear out, you will buy new ones with your own money and report for duty. Sometimes you can be three guards for the whole station. After arriving from a daily patrol, you may be called to respond to a crime scene several kilometres away. You will immediately attend to the report, on foot. When you get to the crime scene you begin chasing a poacher who is full of energy... If you receive a message at midnight that things are bad, you will wake up and report for duty. As long as I am on duty, I will do as instructed[,] otherwise I will lose my job.¹³

The incident in September 2016 and information provided by the forest guard cited above confirm observations made in

Western Cape, South Africa, that the state does not only control resource users but also the law enforcement agents by "employing bureaucratic methods to control their freedom..." (Norton 2015: 3). Norton's observation (*ibid.*) illuminates the kind of authoritarianism that state agents are subjected to in the course of conducting state duty. Picking on her insights, I take discipline as an example of such bureaucratic methods, the character of which can be further understood in the context of structural violence. By structural violence, I refer to the institutional systems and structures that indirectly expose people to violence. Within the FC, structural violence manifests as conservation laws, policies and practices governing resource access and its management. Militarisation is inherently an example of such policies and practices. It is already in itself, a systematised culture of violence (Skjelsbaek 1979; Dandeker 2013) and discipline (Gage 1964; Moskos Jr 1977). As we see in Sikumi Forest, discipline is not simply about order and obedience. It is also a policy and system of control founded on intimidation. It is used by the forest authority to govern without anarchy and trouble (Galtung 1990). Thus, discipline provides a legitimate basis for punitive control often meaning that forest guards cannot question orders or strike against working conditions.

While I do not dispute the importance of discipline in any establishment, the concept can turn out to be an unjust, commanding and coercive management approach that serves as domination in the workplace. Following Franz Fanon's conceptualisation of violence as analysed by Frazer and Hutchings (2008), the violent nature of discipline can, like violence itself, be conceptualised as an instrument for achieving the power to rule. In the case of Sikumi Forest, such power to rule is not necessarily exercised in a co-operative but exploitative and oppressive manner. Within the state, discipline may, however, be easily justified by claims of legitimate use of forceful control measures. For example, Dusza (1989: 76) demonstrates how Weber identifies the state "as an administrative and legal order which claim[s] binding authority not only over the members of the state, the citizen, but to a large extent over all actions taking place within its area of jurisdiction." However, in militarised conservation, the authoritarian nature of the state through its authorities, and the repressive character of discipline characteristically become an act of structural occupational violence against forest guards that reduces the so deemed environmental sovereigns and conservation heroes to victims of violence. Discipline consequentially becomes another example of violent tactics consistent with green violence, the aim of which is to produce a disgruntled militarist with hostile policing tendencies (Skjelsbaek 1979). The basis of this argument is founded upon the reasoning that oppressed people will often likely resort to direct violence (Winter and Leighton 2001), and further, on the assumption that "violence breeds violence" (Galtung 1990: 295). Frazer and Hutchings (2008) elaborate Galtung's perspective by explaining how violence is energy analogous to physical laws where the imposition of force provokes a reaction. Discipline as occupational violence, therefore, certainly extends the list of factors driving physical violence identified by Verweijen (2020).

Obsolete equipment and exposure to occupational risk

Apart from training and discipline, occupational violence manifests in Sikumi Forest through the state authority's general lack of support for forest guards' activities. For example, the historical development of militarised forest conservation shows how firearms have become today's primary tools for militarised anti-poaching in Sikumi Forest. This history also demonstrates how the forest authority defends the use of guns by forest guards as a measure taken for their safety during state duties. However, while forest guards are armed, the nature and condition of guns often compromises their safety. Forest guards use the 1942 Lee-Enfield British rifle commonly called the three-oh-three (303) rifle. The gun is a manual bolt-action, magazine-fed, repeating rifle with a 10-round magazine. Its firing rate does not match automatic rifles used by armed poachers. The senior forest guard in Sikumi Forest complained that the 303's firing rate and its obsolete condition make it inadequate for anti-poaching operations. He further described how, for a long time, he has appealed to his seniors to reconsider the working conditions of forest guards by equipping them with modern and more capable automatic rifles similar to those used by rangers in neighbouring Hwange.¹⁴

In addition to his explanation, I observed that the capacity of guns to protect forest guards is further hindered by the lack of regular servicing. According to the FC security manual, firearms should be serviced every quarter. The last available record of servicing from the records office at the head office located in Harare was, however, in March 1992.¹⁵ Other records could have been absent from the records office at the time of study, but the senior forest guard in Sikumi Forest also could hardly remember when firearms under his charge were last serviced. The firearms being used by forest guards were, thus, not in their best operational state, just like the armoury itself¹⁶ (Figure 1).

The incapacity of guns to protect forest guards is aggravated by inadequate ammunition. Although the rifle's capacity is ten rounds of ammunition, guards in Sikumi Forest often patrol with one round each. Thus, a stick of three guards will likely have three rounds of ammunition to respond to all forms of attack during a patrol of 30 km, or more. An incident that occurred on April 28, 2016, shows how forest guards patrol with inadequate ammunition as much as it demonstrates the consequent exposure to occupational risks and threat to life arising from being inadequately equipped. On this day, we ran for our lives following an encounter with elephants. The elephants were trumpeting and sounding disturbed. Without opting to investigate, the stick leader ordered a change of patrol direction. As we changed direction, the elephants trumpeted more and louder, as though they were right behind us. The stick leader then instructed everyone to run to a more visible area. When we got to a relatively safe area, I asked why we resorted to running away without establishing why the elephants were sounding disturbed. My thinking was, if the elephants were in danger, forest guards needed to investigate the situation as part of their anti-poaching duties.



Figure 1

Armoury at Sikumi Forest Reserve. Source: Field Picture

The stick leader smiled in despair as he explained his decision. The two rifles available on this patrol had one round of ammunition each. Thus, in total, we had two bullets. It was, therefore, risky to investigate the situation without being fully equipped for a counter-attack. If elephants were disturbed by armed poachers, part of or the whole team would likely be injured or killed in the event of an exchange of fire, or if the poachers panicked and fired shots. Otherwise, if one elephant ran wild and in an attempt to control it the two bullets available missed it, it could kill a team member, two or all of us. There was also a possibility that the firearms would fail to discharge altogether due to lack of servicing. What this incident proved is that guns used for anti-poaching in Sikumi Forest cannot protect, but rather expose forest guards to life-threatening danger.

The reality of danger was often displayed by how forest guards responded to gunshot reports. Three gunshots were reported to forest guards during the time of study. Forest guards deliberately did not respond to these gunshots in time. They used delaying tactics so that by the time they arrived at the suspected crime scene, suspects had left. For example, a gunshot reported to forest guards on May 8, 2016, was only attended to five days later. It was a case of armed ivory poaching because, during that patrol, we discovered an elephant carcass with two bullet wounds, its tusks removed, and already in a decomposing state. Such delaying tactics demonstrate that exposure to occupational danger is an everyday reality that forest guards are compelled to evade to remain safe. But, by not providing capable firearms and adequate ammunition during what are usually dangerous anti-poaching activities, the subsequent exposure of forest guards to safety and health threats becomes consistent with acts of occupational violence perpetrated by the forest authority.

Protective clothing

Just as in the army, protective clothing is a requirement in militarised conservation activities. It may not necessarily guarantee health and safety at the workplace, but mitigates

associated risks. The FC recognises the importance of protective clothing and specifies in its security manual that forest guards must be provided with jungle green short/long-sleeved cargo shirts with shoulder titles designating rank, and gold-crowned FC logo. They must also be provided with cargo trousers, military caps or berets, webbing jackets, combat patrol boots and woollen stockings. However, forest guards in Sikumi Forest did not display the stated dress code during patrols. Some wore military green overalls, while others dressed in trousers, shirts, and cardigans, all in a worn condition. Most guards worked without caps or hats to protect them from the hot savannah sun and head injuries. The few guards that had hats explained how they had sewn them from old trousers and shirts. They further explained how FC management provides an incomplete set of uniform, promises to provide the remainder, but hardly honours such promises.¹⁷

In April 2016, forest guards had spent over five years with an incomplete and old set of uniform.¹⁸ Out of 13 guards, 11 received a pair of canvas ankle boots from Elephant Eye Safari Lodge, a private eco-tourism concession operating in Sikumi Forest. Of the two that were yet to receive boots, one wore worn leather ankle boots, while the other used his dress shoes, inappropriate for field purposes (Figure 2). The latter complained thus: “How do you chase after poachers in these shoes? When you return your feet are sore and with blisters ... if you pursue a poacher in these kinds of shoes, when you finally catch them, you are not going to be kind.”¹⁹

In 2009, senior security personnel requested the FC management to consider the appearance of forest guards. They brought the issue to the attention of the Human Resources Department citing an occasion when forest guards attended a national security meeting with worn-out uniforms, and the embarrassment that it had caused the FC in the presence of senior police and army officers.²⁰ Seven years later, the purchasing of uniforms and protective clothing for forests guards was still not regarded as a priority. In their current appearance, forest guards were concerned that they could easily be mistaken for poachers. Once they were perceived as such, they risked being shot and

killed by the national army and Support Unit, a specialised paramilitary unit of the Zimbabwe Republic Police. The army and police are other state authorities whose legislative and executive national security functions engage with responding to illegal poaching in Zimbabwe. Unlike in Kaziranga National Park in India, where inter-institutional competition has been observed (Dutta 2020), the security and policing functions of the police and army in Zimbabwe are aligned with those of conservation authorities through joint national anti-poaching operations. At the time of study, the army and Support Unit, however, operated exclusively in Hwange, their activities only involving Sikumi Forest when suspected poachers caught in the national park decided to use the forest as their escape route. It is during such pursuits that forest guards without recognisable protective clothing were at risk of being confused as poachers. Beyond this risk is the low priority given to the needs of the forest guards, the effect this has on their well-being and policing attitude such as expressed in the remarks of the quoted forest guard.

Provisions on duty

One of the major challenges for forest guards during state duty is food and water. The senior forest guard in Sikumi Forest explained that, during deployment of forest guards for anti-poaching related camping, food and water must be provided.²¹ However, when forest guards were deployed for anti-poaching camping on April 13, 2016, for example, food was not provided, forcing forest guards to bring provisions from home. This was difficult for forest guards, who explained on different occasions that they were already struggling to feed their families on a meagre salary often not paid on time. Forest guards had once received a bush allowance to provide for their deployment needs. This bush allowance was, however, discontinued around 2014.²² The bush allowances were ceased due to financial challenges within the organisation, a crisis linked to the national economic recession.²³ Water was only supplied when a vehicle was available to transport guards to their camping sites. Additional water was not often provided during camping days due to lack of transport. According to the senior guard, the transport problem was primarily because the FPU was not allocated vehicles like other departments within the FC. His view suggested that he felt their activities were overlooked in relation to other departments within the organisation.

Provisions are also an issue for forest guards during military training. Providing inadequate food, like training, is often defended as part of hardening the forest guards.²⁴ The hardening process, however, appears to be more than what forest guards can endure as displayed by their actions on July 27, 2017. Forest guards expressed their frustration and threatened to boycott a passing out parade ceremony for going through 30 days of military training without adequate food supplies. Despite the training being funded by WWF-Zimbabwe, forest guards had to supplement insufficient provisions with food from their homes and did not receive training allowances. The situation was embarrassing for security officers. They were training



Figure 2
Forest guard in inappropriate patrol shoes. Source: Field picture

instructors, yet they had to be fed by their subordinates. What particularly infuriated the forest guards is that, on the day of the passing out ceremony, which also typically became a political gathering, FC management brought truckloads of food to feed guests. They also brought brand new T-shirts, wellington boots and dustcoats specifically purchased for guests and to market the FC during the event. Forest guards, on the other hand, were given uniforms scouted from existing old stock, most of which were not their correct sizes. Realising that the situation had become volatile and could easily humiliate the FC, the General Manager immediately ordered the Finance and Human Resources Departments to disburse training allowances.²⁵ The planned boycott was an immediate reaction to long-standing hostile working conditions. It was directed at the FC management, but working without adequate provisions also influences everyday hostile policing attitudes. A scenario shared by a group of forest guards summarises how frustration from such working conditions often turns to anger, and anger to hostile policing.

Imagine going to work hungry then coming across illegal activities in the forest, the person runs away and you have to chase them for more than 2 km of hard running. Maybe you are tired because you have already walked 20 km in the heat with no food, no water and poor shoes. Tell me what is going to happen when we finally catch that person. We will teach him a lesson.²⁶

The issue for discussion is not necessarily about the type and condition of firearms, inadequate food provisions or protective clothing. It is rather the broader structural issues related to the general low priority given to paramilitary personnel, which is not unique to Sikumi Forest. In Korup National Park, Cameroonian forest guards work with out-dated equipment and, as a result, are exposed to the risk of injury and death while on duty (Ndimuh 2016). According to Ndimuh, rangers in Korup National Park have demanded that the state, as the primary authority over forest resources, take full responsibility for their conditions. Such demands suggest that, rangers in Korup National Park view their government as not prioritising them. Low priority for rangers has also been reported in countries such as Democratic Republic of Congo and Tanzania. In Zimbabwe, such reports show how the Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority placed a tender for supply of new vehicles for Directors while rangers had not been paid for three months (AEL 2016; BBC 2016). I witnessed the same during my time at the FC. Managers upgraded their vehicles, went ahead to demand their contractual benefits while operations lacked basic equipment.

Examples abound, but the few picked here are instructive. They show how state institutions implementing militarised conservation policies often neglect and deprive paramilitary personnel of favourable working conditions by simply not prioritising their needs. Neglect itself has been identified as a form of violence often defined as circumstances where a person or an authority responsible for providing care or assistance does not do so (Krug et al. 2002). Deprivation is also recognised by the World Health Organisation as a typology of violence. I have demonstrated how such neglect and deprivation unfolds, and how forest guards are consequently exposed to life-threatening

physical violence. The emotional suffering of forest guards, has also not been overlooked. Frustration among forest guards is common in Sikumi Forest and I have demonstrated the linkage between such emotional response and hostile policing. The actions that forest guards threaten to take can be compared to the analysis of deprivation by Crosby (1979). Crosby argues that, when a person is deprived, they may become extra punitive. To Crosby's view, Galtung (1990: 295) adds that "needs deprivation is serious, one reaction is direct violence." These two perspectives help us view state neglect and deprivation in the workplace as occupational violence, in addition, to understand the concomitant effect of such violence in light of ongoing everyday violence against the policed.

I do, however, recognise that low priority for paramilitary personnel, the consequential neglect and its linkages to everyday hostile policing practices cannot be disconnected from the broader socio-political or socio-economic conditions experienced by most African countries. Zimbabwe has experienced economic crisis since independence in 1980 (Mushonga 2018). Because of national economic challenges, the environment sector receives low priority compared to other government portfolios, such as health and agriculture,²⁷ and this has been ongoing for years, affecting environmental institutions, such as the FC. So, prioritisation is a nationwide challenge given the prevailing economic climate, which is worth engaging in this discussion. However, in the case of the FC, I argue that economic challenges cannot be used to justify occupational violence against forest guards. I will support this argument by turning to the mandate of the FC. The Forest Act Chapter 19:05 mandates the forest authority to look after all forest resources through several specific guidelines exclusive to the FC. In the national forest policy, the FC specifies that its role is to manage, conserve and sustainably utilise forest resources. It then further clarifies in its mission statement that it will do so through effective regulation, thus, placing the work of forest guards at the very core of its national mandate. The few financial resources available must, therefore, be seen to prioritise key issues of the organisation's mandate. In my considered view, failure to provide efficient and safe working conditions for forest guards becomes not a matter of the national economic crisis or insufficient financial resources, but an issue of prioritisation. Similar to how the government prioritises important areas like health and education; individual state authorities need to, likewise, prioritise key areas of their functions. By not prioritising forest guards, the FC is not just neglecting its personnel but also the very definition of its work. So, while it is useful to acknowledge the broader economic conditions of African countries in assessing working experiences of rangers and forests guards, the risk is also that occupational violence will be easily justified.

CONCLUSION

By tracing the working conditions of forest guards in Sikumi Forest, I have shown how paramilitary personnel are subjected to occupational violence. The dimensions of occupational violence evidenced here distinctively fall within structural and

direct violence. Structural aspects of occupational violence are fundamentally defined by institutional systems, policies and practices that, in hidden ways, subject paramilitary personnel to physical and emotional threats, and suffering at work. They also include the systemic effects of the broader political economy often used to justify unfavourable working conditions. Direct violence is demonstrated in the manner in which the bodies and minds of paramilitary personnel are exposed to physical and emotional suffering as a result of adverse working conditions. These direct effects cannot be disconnected from structural issues.

I have used occupational violence to package experiences of paramilitary personnel in terms of violence, in order to meaningfully contribute to the argument that paramilitary personnel are, despite being celebrated as conservation heroes, subjected to violence. In contrast to existing literature, I make the point that the violence experienced by paramilitary personnel does not only arise from the risk of dying in line of duty, or resentment from communities where they live and work. An overlooked source of this violence is perpetrated by employers in deliberate, systematic and direct ways. Against such findings, occupational violence connects the militarisation of conservation, violence and welfare of paramilitary personnel in the same manner connections between conservation, violence and social justice have been developed.

The second point I make is that the range of victims of militarised conservation transcends local communities and commercial poachers, to include perpetrators of conservation violence. What I find useful in this conclusion is that, first, it responds to the wider question on who can be categorised as victims of conservation violence. Second, it speaks to the broader importance of understanding the scale, nature and texture of conservation violence. Such understandings provide for sufficiently engaging with the militarisation of conservation and its far-reaching consequences. Like other scholars, I believe that any analytical and useful discussion on alternative conservation practice will rely on an extended and far-reaching engagement with the militarisation of conservation.

Lastly, I posit that aspects of occupational violence such as witnessed in Sikumi Forest should be understood as part of violent instruments and tactics used by state authorities to sustain coercive conservation, which Büscher and Ramutsindela (2016) frame as green violence. Occupational violence must, therefore, be seen as a typology of green violence with exacerbating effects on everyday violence. Viewed in this way, occupational violence goes further than helping us understand work-related experiences of paramilitary personnel in terms of violence, to complementing existing analytical frameworks critically engaging with the militarisation of conservation, its broad intersections and corollary effects.

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NOTES

1. In colonial Zimbabwe, *boy* was a term used to describe all black male servants.
2. Chief security officer April 6, 2016.
3. A military term used to describe a group of forest guards on patrol.
4. Chief security officer April 6, 2016.
5. Forest guard, stick three May 12, 2016.
6. Forest guards, stick four May 17, 2016.
7. First forest guard, stick four May 17, 2016.
8. Second forest guard, stick four May 17, 2016.
9. First security officer and training instructor September 12, 2016.
10. Group discussion with forest guards (not specific sticks) in May 2016.
11. Forest guard, stick three May 12, 2016.
12. Chief security officer November 30, 2016.
13. Forest guard, stick two April 12, 2016.
14. Sikumi Forest senior guard August 10, 2016.
15. Internal memorandum. Forestry Commission records; interview, chief security officer April 6, 2016.
16. The two rifles on the right are FN rifles belonging to duty police officers of the Zimbabwe Republic Police. They were in the area to investigate a reported poaching crime scene.
17. Forest guards, stick one April 09, 2016.
18. Forest guards, stick two April 21, 2016.
19. Forest guard, stick one 17 April 2016. There is no distinction between commercial and subsistence poachers. In this particular case, the forest guards referred to people from villages adjacent to Sikumi.
20. Internal memorandum from security officer to the Human Resources Manager March 3, 2009, FC records.
21. Senior forest guard in Sikumi Forest April 13, 2016.
22. Forest guards, stick one April 17, 2016.
23. FC official June 1, 2016.
24. First security officer and training instructor June 5, 2017.
25. Second security officer and training instructor August 5, 2017.
26. Forest guards, Stick two May 20, 2016.
27. Concept note on Zimbabwe's national forestry programme submitted to FAO in 2008.

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