



# The Cecil Moment: Celebrity environmentalism, Nature 2.0, and the cultural politics of lion trophy hunting



Sandra G. McCubbin

Department of Geography and Planning, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada

## ARTICLE INFO

### Keywords:

Political ecology  
Cultural politics  
Celebrity  
Nature 2.0  
Conservation  
Trophy hunting

## ABSTRACT

In 2015 Cecil the lion's death sparked international furore over the practice of lion trophy hunting. Celebrities and everyday citizens, traditional news and social media alike were aflame around the globe, most notably after American celebrity Jimmy Kimmel expressed disgust in Cecil's death during a monologue on his late-night talk show. This paper explores the Cecil Moment as a case study of the cultural politics of the environment at the intersection of celebrity environmentalism and 'Nature 2.0' applications like Facebook and Twitter. The research asks: what can the Cecil Moment tell us about how celebrity and Nature 2.0 environmentalisms work and to what kind of conservation politics do they lead? Drawing on the celebrity environmentalism and Nature 2.0 literatures, I develop an analytic framework for analyzing the Cecil Moment which considers and evaluates the network of actors enrolled, the representations foregrounded and backgrounded, as well as the outcomes. Empirical insights are drawn from document and media review, and key informant interviews. I argue that the Cecil Moment operated through a more-than-human network which served to channel agency unleashed by Cecil's death to the already-empowered lion conservation actors, as well as mutable meanings that shifted Cecil Moment focus away from trophy hunting and toward lion conservation in general. Ultimately, the Cecil Moment operated to dismiss the anti-trophy hunting politics that sparked and fuelled it in the first place; yet, the momentum of the Cecil Moment was grasped and re-directed toward other lion conservation priorities. Critically, this re-direction was not neutral; rather, it shifted the politics of the Cecil Moment in a way that reproduced longstanding patterns of conservation injustice wherein blame for biodiversity loss is directed away from powerful forces onto the racialized, rural poor from the Global South.

## 1. Introduction

1 July 2015. Zimbabwe. An elephant carcass – bait – was dropped approximately 1 km east of Hwange National Park's unfenced boundary. A hide was set up, and the hunters waited. Jericho came to the bait first and fed for a full hour before Cecil arrived. They were waiting for him, they must have been. No hunter would turn down Jericho unless he knew something bigger was coming. Cecil. A gorgeous lion; a big, 13-year old male with a black mane. Walter Palmer, the now infamous dentist from Minnesota, had shot a lion before, but this time he wanted a record application for a bow hunt so he was after the biggest lion Hwange had to offer. Cecil arrived - *flick!* - spotlight on. Palmer shot Cecil around 22:00. Wounded, Cecil ran off. It is far too dangerous to wander after a wounded lion in the dark so the hunters returned to the hunt camp, likely drank a couple of whiskeys, and slept. Cecil lay wounded for 11 h. At 09:00 the hunters returned and finished him. When Walter Palmer saw the collar, he panicked. "What the hell is that!?" There was no lion on quota for the Gwaai area in 2015 but this

lion was dead, and trackable. "Don't panic! Don't panic!" The professional hunter, Theo Bronkhorst, took the collar off, hung it in a tree, and ran after his client to console him. While Palmer hurriedly left Zimbabwe, the collar was diligently moved for 2 days to mimic a lion's movement. It went to a waterhole, rested in the bush, then back to the waterhole. This was a ruse to confuse the researchers who were tracking him. It worked. It wasn't until July 7th that the trackers and skimmers from the hunting camp lead investigators to Cecil's skeleton. The hunters had taken his head and skin, the vultures had taken the rest. And now the story begins.

This is the story of Cecil the lion's death told by Brent Stapelkamp, the Field Researcher who knew Cecil intimately after nearly 10 years tracking him as part of the Hwange Lion Project of the Wildlife Conservation Research Unit (WildCRU) at Oxford University. As is typical of illegal events, it is difficult to triangulate the details of the hunt; however, WildCRU and the Zimbabwe National Parks Authority corroborated much of this story (see [Loveridge, 2018](#); [Macdonald et al., 2016a, 2016b](#)). It is worth considering the likely details of Cecil's killing

E-mail address: [sandra.mccubbin@queensu.ca](mailto:sandra.mccubbin@queensu.ca).

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2019.10.015>

Received 10 January 2019; Received in revised form 27 August 2019; Accepted 22 October 2019

Available online 13 November 2019

0016-7185/ © 2019 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

to give due attention to its violence and illegality.

Although the Cecil story gained media traction throughout July, it wasn't until American celebrity Jimmy Kimmel gave an impassioned monologue on his late-night talk show on 28 July that the story went viral (Macdonald et al., 2016a, 2016b). With WildCRU's website address on screen, Kimmel wept, expressing disgust in Walter Palmer, sadness for Cecil, and appealing to American patriotism. After encouraging viewers to donate money to WildCRU to "make something good come out of this disgusting tragedy" (Jimmy Kimmel Live, 2015), 4.4 million people visited WildCRU's website causing both it and Oxford University's websites to crash.

Interest in the Cecil story was spectacular. In the days after the Kimmel monologue, the story spread explosively on social media and dominated traditional news coverage (Macdonald et al., 2016a, 2016b). Over 13,000 individuals (most from North America) acted on Kimmel's appeal for donations to WildCRU and American philanthropist Thomas Kaplan announced a matching donation of \$100,000. Ultimately, the Kimmel appeal raised over \$1,000,000. Among numerous tributes, a photograph of Cecil was projected onto the Empire State Building; TY (toy manufacturer) produced a Cecil Beanie Baby; Cara Delevingne (fashion model) auctioned her wristwatch for Cecil; Aaron Blaise (animator of Disney's *The Lion King*) produced an animation dedicated to Cecil; a children's book titled *Cecil's Pride: The True Story of a Lion King* was published; and TIME magazine named Cecil the most influential individual animal in the world, wild or domestic. Oxford University considers the Cecil story its greatest engagement with the public in its 1000-year history (WildCRU, 2016b) and David Macdonald, Director of the WildCRU and renowned British conservationist, told *The Guardian* (2016), "I think Cecil is the biggest global wildlife story there has ever been".<sup>1</sup>

I investigate the Cecil story because it engaged both powerful actors and everyday citizens around the politics of lion trophy hunting and conservation; thus, it contributes to two distinct yet dovetailing discussions in political ecology. On the one hand is literature on the increasing prominence of famous, wealthy, and powerful individuals shaping global conservation politics (e.g. Brockington, 2009). On the other is literature on Nature 2.0; research which explores how digital and social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube are becoming a space where citizens, non-profits, and grassroots advocacy organizations engage environmental issues and speak back to previously inaccessible figures and powerful institutions (e.g. Buscher et al., 2017). Both literatures are concerned with the contemporary cultural politics of the environment, those power-laden processes through which environmental narratives, images, and meanings are constructed and contested across space and scale, involving assemblages of science, media, culture, nature and politics, as well as actors with various amounts of fame, wealth, and influence (Goodman et al., 2016; Hawkins and Silver, 2017). Research on celebrity environmentalisms and Nature 2.0 has mostly evaluated their consequences. There has been less empirical research examining *how* these environmentalisms work.

This study addresses this gap through a case study of the Cecil Moment. The research asks, first: what can the Cecil Moment tell us about how celebrity environmentalisms and Nature 2.0 work? That is, how are such environmentalisms produced or constructed, through what actors and discourses? Then, it asks: to what kind of conservation politics do they lead? Drawing on political ecological scholarship on celebrity and Nature 2.0, I develop a framework for analyzing the Cecil Moment. Through a document and media review and key informant

<sup>1</sup> I am aware that these are subjective, hyperbolic claims made by the institutions (Oxford University, WildCRU) that were in a position to benefit from the Cecil Moment. I use them in this paper to help demonstrate the magnitude of interest in the Cecil story, and to show that those in positions of power took the spectacular interest seriously and perpetuated its significance.

interviews, I show how the Cecil Moment operated to suppress the anti-trophy hunting sentiment that sparked and sustained it. I show how a more-than-human network operated to channel agency unleashed by Cecil's death toward already-empowered lion conservation actors and I argue that, due to the mutability of meanings in Nature 2.0, these actors were able to re-narrate the Cecil moment such that it aligned with their priorities, not trophy hunting. Crucially, the re-direction of Cecil Moment priorities was not neutral; rather, I argue that it shifted the politics of the Cecil Moment in a way that reproduced longstanding patterns of conservation injustice wherein blame for biodiversity loss is directed away from powerful forces and onto the racialized, rural poor from the Global South. Overall, findings reinforce existing arguments that the progressive potential of celebrity environmentalisms and Nature 2.0 is limited and that these modes of environmentalism should be closely scrutinized.

## 2. Celebrity environmentalisms and Nature 2.0

Famous and wealthy individuals are increasingly prominent actors within environmental campaigns and movements. By wielding funding and/or influence, they shape public understandings and responses to environmental challenges like climate change and biodiversity loss. Political ecologists have examined this trend, exploring celebrity, wealth, and philanthropy as they relate to environmental politics (e.g. Boykoff and Goodman, 2009; Boykoff and Olson, 2013; Brockington, 2009; Fletcher, 2015; Hawkins and Silver, 2017; Holmes, 2012; Prudham, 2009; Silver and Hawkins, 2014). Much of the literature on these powerful, celebrity environmentalisms focuses on its consequences. On the one hand are arguments that these activities "represent democratic movements by and for 'the people' and the public realm" or, on the other hand, "rather plutocratic, unique and extraordinary elite behaviours of distraction" (Boykoff and Goodman, 2009: 396). Recent scholarship is skeptical about celebrity environmentalisms' progressive potential. Specifically, research has revealed that celebrity conservation works well within elite circles and governance structures but fails to engage publics beyond shallow, short-term awareness- and fund-raising (Anderson, 2013; Brockington, 2008, 2014; Brockington and Henson, 2015; Jeffrey, 2016; Meyer and Gamson, 1995; Thrall et al., 2008). Notwithstanding these insights, overall, I tend to agree with Brockington (2015), that this literature has jumped ahead of itself evaluating and appraising the value of celebrities in conservation before fully understanding *how* they work; that is, through what actors and discourses do they construct environmental campaigns and movements.

Alongside these powerful, celebrity environmentalisms, digital and social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube are becoming a space where citizens, non-profits, and grassroots advocacy organizations engage environmental issues and speak back to previously inaccessible figures and powerful institutions. Political ecologists have examined this trend through the concept of Nature 2.0 (Buscher, 2013; Buscher et al., 2017) which considers new online media a *space* where Internet users can co-create, influence, and consume "(re) imaginations and understandings of (nonhuman and human) nature" (Buscher et al., 2017: 111). Like the celebrity environmentalisms literature, Nature 2.0 research has mostly focussed on impacts, with mixed conclusions. In some cases, Nature 2.0 can and does enable effective activism and empowerment of publics and marginalized actors (Hawkins and Silver, 2017; Checker, 2017), albeit sometimes with problematic and even violent consequences in the offline world (Lunstrum, 2017; Masse, 2018; Nelson, 2017). Others have found that Nature 2.0 activism falls flat against offline realities and gives Internet users a false sense of agency in the efficacy of their virtual activism (Buscher, 2017; Fletcher, 2017).

Recently, the relatively distinct celebrity environmentalism and Nature 2.0 literatures have begun to intersect and Hawkins and Silver (2017) have called for their continued "cross-fertilization" (122).

Indeed, the division between these literatures is perhaps tenuous as both are concerned with the contemporary cultural politics of the environment; that is, those power-laden processes through which environmental narratives, images, and meanings are constructed and contested across space and scale, involving assemblages of science, media, culture, nature and politics, as well as actors with various amounts of fame, wealth, and influence (Goodman et al., 2016; Hawkins and Silver, 2017). Both literatures are grappling with similar questions, namely how celebrity environmentalism and Nature 2.0 work and with what impacts? For example, Brockington (2015) writes of celebrity environmentalisms that “we need to step back and be more empirical, and context specific, asking who is saying what to whom and why. Then we will be in a better position to evaluate and appraise the contributions of celebrity advocates” (394). Likewise, Buscher et al. (2017) contend that scholars of Nature 2.0 need to ask “how are online nature 2.0 activist campaigns constructed, implemented, and contested, and to what type of conservation discourses and politics do these lead?” (111). I turn to the Cecil Moment with these questions in mind.

The Cecil Moment blurred the boundary between celebrity environmentalism and Nature 2.0 completely. It began as a locally grounded case of Nature 2.0, but quickly jumped scales and drew in celebrities, which in turn evoked an enormous, global Nature 2.0 reaction. The Cecil Moment is an ideal case to study how assemblages of culture, media, science, and nature work and with what effects on environmental politics, in this case, the politics of lion trophy hunting.

### 3. Research methods

#### 3.1. Analytical framework

This paper develops and employs an analytical framework based in literature on celebrity environmentalisms and Nature 2.0. These literatures have called for attention to actors, representations, and outcomes. First, to understand how celebrity and Nature 2.0 work within environmental politics, “we need to get to grips with the anatomy of how it is done” (Brockington, 2014: 46). Therefore, the first stage of the framework is to identify the actors enrolled in the case and document how they are connected. A notable feature of this stage is that it was inspired by actor-network theory (Bosco, 2015; Latour, 2005) which allowed me to consider the influence of nonhuman entities (e.g. animals, technologies) in the production of the Cecil Moment (Goodman and Barnes, 2011; Jepson et al., 2011).<sup>2</sup>

Second, understanding these environmentalisms demands careful attention to their discursive, symbolic, and affective contributions. Celebrity environmentalism and Nature 2.0 alike foreground and elicit particular narratives, images, and emotions that often work to simplify and obscure the complicated realities of environmental politics (Brockington, 2009; Doyle, 2016; Goodman, 2013; Goodman et al., 2016; Igoe, 2010; Masse, 2018; Nunn and Biressi, 2010; Silver and Hawkins, 2014). Brockington (2009) writes, “understanding celebrity’s influence on conservation requires knowing what is being hidden by all that is visible” (24); therefore, the second stage analyzes both foregrounded and backgrounded representations of the Cecil story.

Finally, it is important to understand the ways in which these environmentalisms come to matter; therefore, the third stage documents the outcomes of the Cecil Moment and evaluates its implications for conservation practice and politics. Applying this analytical framework

<sup>2</sup> Aware that some conceptions of actor-network theory could make tracing networks unmanageably inclusive, I follow Castree (2002), Jepson et al. (2011), and Cameron (2009) who favour a ‘weak’ or ‘soft’ form of actor-network theory which acknowledges that actors and entities in networks vary greatly in their powers to influence; therefore, I focus my Cecil Moment anatomy on some of the key human actors and non-human entities of significant consequence to the Cecil Moment.

to the Cecil moment reveals empirical insights to the literature on celebrity and Nature 2.0.

#### 3.2. Data collection and analysis

This paper is part of a broader research project exploring the dynamics of power that shaped the Cecil story and its impacts for lion conservation. Data gathered for the broader research project serves to support the findings and conclusions of this paper. I had been following the Cecil story for two years before conducting systematic data collection for this study. Because I was familiar with the story’s major events and actors, I determined *a priori* five actors and entities I wished to consider: Cecil; Jimmy Kimmel; the broadly defined “public” who reacted to Cecil’s death; the WildCRU; and Thomas Kaplan. An additional entity, Cecil’s satellite-GPS collar, emerged during the data collection process.

Data collection involved two methods: document and media review, and key informant interviews. I collected information about the Cecil Moment from online sources. Particularly useful was WildCRU’s News webpage where, after the Kimmel appeal, WildCRU published frequent updates about the Cecil Moment and linked readers to related publications. Beyond WildCRU’s News webpage, I also used Google and YouTube searches. Documents and media collected included: articles, opinion pieces, interviews, presentations, reports, academic papers, and books (n = 141). I kept track of these data by building a timeline of events in a Word document and a record of documents and media in an Excel spreadsheet. Any sources not in print were transcribed. Most of these data were collected July–September 2017, though I continued to gather data published into 2018. In September 2017, I conducted a preliminary round of discourse analysis (Phillips and Hardy, 2002). This initial coding pass was based on phrases related to the analytical framework (e.g. actors; representations; outcomes). It informed key informant selection and interview guide design.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants closely involved in the Cecil Moment. I requested the participation of 6 individuals and 4 agreed. Key informants were: (i) David Macdonald, Director of the WildCRU; (ii) Brent Stapelkamp, WildCRU Field Researcher at the time of Cecil’s death, (iii) Thomas Kaplan, American philanthropist; (iv) Goodwell Nzou, Zimbabwean author of *The New York Times* op-ed about Cecil. Interviews were conducted over telephone or Whatsapp and lasted 45–80 min. Interview questions were modified to suit the key informants’ unique role and probed the informants’ knowledge of Cecil Moment actors and their role(s) as well as their perspectives on the Cecil Moment and its outcomes. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed and these data were added to the document and media review data for further analysis. Subsequent coding passes probed broad analytical themes (i.e. actors; representations; outcomes) with greater specificity (e.g. representations: Cecil as a special, local favourite lion) and pursued new themes identified during the preliminary coding pass (e.g. actor: Cecil’s satellite-GPS collar). The remainder of this paper aligns the analytical framework described in Section 3.1 with the Cecil Moment.

### 4. The Cecil Moment

#### 4.1. Anatomy

In this section I provide an anatomy of the Cecil Moment. Findings show how both human actors and nonhuman entities participated in the Cecil Moment. I argue the Kimmel monologue, via this more-than-human network, served to channel agency unleashed by Cecil’s death to already-empowered actors within lion conservation and vitalized these powerful connections.

##### 4.1.1. Cecil

Cecil was a big male lion with a confident, encounterable nature,

and a magnificent black mane. He lived in the eastern borderland of Hwange National Park, Zimbabwe. Cecil's range encompassed seven photographic safari lodges which made him well habituated to people in vehicles. Brent Stapelkamp described that Cecil "made a great spectacle, and was so confident that even if you were right next to him, he'd ignore you and just do what lions do" (Africa Geographic, 2015), "you could get two or three photographs of him without him moving ... he was a total lion experience" (The Telegraph, 2015a). For local safari guides, "he was absolutely top of the list. If you could see Cecil with your clients, then all the pressure was off as a guide" (Stapelkamp, 9 January 2018). Moreover, Cecil's size and black mane made him "the absolute dream trophy for any hunter" (Stapelkamp, 9 January 2018). After Cecil died Stapelkamp admitted, "ultimately, we knew he would die like that because he was the biggest. That's what hunters are obsessed with – big, black-maned lions" (Cecil's Pride, 2016).

Cecil's relation to WildCRU began in May 2008. He was sighted alongside his brother at Mangisihole Pan (which translates to "Englishman's waterhole" or "white man's waterhole" in the vernacular). At five years old the brothers were unknown to WildCRU's Hwange Lion Project and were of an age when male lions are dispersing to look for a territory and a pride of lionesses. Thus, the sighting was recorded: the lions were photographed; their unique whisker spot patterns were logged; and they were given datacodes, MAGM1 and MAGM2 (MAG for Mangisihole, M1 for the larger male (later Cecil), M2 for the smaller). They were nicknamed the Mangisihole Boys. Later in 2008 when the brothers invaded the core of the study area, displacing the existing pride male and asserting control, Dr. Andrew Loveridge (Lead Researcher, Hwange Lion Project) darted and collared the larger of the two, naming him Cecil and his brother Leander.

Cecil was killed as a trophy by American hunter Walter Palmer on 2 July 2015. Shortly thereafter, he became a celebrity; that is, an individual who receives outsized media attention in proportion to their personal qualities (Turner, 2014). As WildCRU Director David Macdonald explained, "Cecil was actually in no way unusual. We have studied lions for about 20 years in Hwange National Park ... and many, many lions have met at least similar fates to Cecil but what was unusual was the way the world's media grasped this issue" (ABC, 2017).

#### 4.1.2. Jimmy Kimmel

On 28 July 2015, American late-night talk show host, Jimmy Kimmel, became emotional on screen while recounting Cecil's death in a monologue. Kimmel said he happened upon the story in the news. After explaining Cecil's death, noting he was particularly distraught after learning Cecil's killer was American, making jokes about the dentists' need to assert his masculinity, and characterizing trophy hunting as "just vomitus", Kimmel appealed to his audience to make good from the event:

I think it is important to have some good come out of this disgusting tragedy. So, this is the website for the Wildlife Conservation Research Unit at Oxford – wildcru.org – these are the researchers who put the collar on Cecil in the first place, they track the animals and study them. If you want to do something, if you want to make this a positive you can – sorry [chokes up], okay I'm good – you can support them. At the very least maybe we can show the world that not all Americans are like this jackhole [a reference to Walter Palmer] (Jimmy Kimmel Live, 2015).

Here, Jimmy Kimmel engaged in celebrity advocacy, "work by famous people in service of some cause other than themselves" (Brockington, 2014: xxii). Notably, Kimmel's appeal was emotional, pitched within a charitable frame (i.e. giving money = action), and its goal (i.e. "have some good come out of this") was vague. Kimmel and WildCRU had no connection prior to this broadcast. In fact, WildCRU Director David Macdonald admitted to never having heard of Kimmel previously (The Telegraph, 2015b). "I would like to refer to Jimmy Kimmel's voice having become a roar in lionine terms," Macdonald said

in an interview, "because he took the trouble to find out about us. I don't know about him - I mean, completely unprompted - he took the trouble to find out about our website. I think it is a wonderful thing he did" (Minnesota Public Radio, 2015). The connection between Kimmel and WildCRU was, in part, a consequence of the technology Cecil wore around his neck.

#### 4.1.3. Satellite-GPS collar

Cecil wore a satellite-GPS collar: a large, leather collar consisting of a battery unit, hard drive, and satellite antenna. Using this technology, or similar, WildCRU had "followed his movement every minute of every day since 2008" (Mongabay, 2016). Brent Stapelkamp explained the process of tracking Cecil in the following way:

Even in Zimbabwe these days I can get onto a 3G network and I can check where that lion is. His collar is taking a GPS location every 2 h. If his last point was at 10 min past 08:00, I can log on at 11 min past and I am 1 min behind that lion. I can see him on a satellite image; I can just see a little blue dot that represents where Cecil was. So every morning, I am having coffee with my wife, checking where the lion is (Youth 4 African Wildlife, 2016)

The satellite-GPS collar was as a significant entity in the Cecil Moment; it shaped the moment by making details about Cecil's hunt accessible and directing the beneficiary of Kimmel's appeal. First, the technology made important data about Cecil's hunt accessible to investigators. Cecil's satellite-GPS collar sent locational data via satellite to the Internet; therefore, although Cecil's collar has never been recovered (presumably destroyed as often happens when a study animal is killed illegally) investigators were able to use the data, alongside evidence gathered through interviews, to quickly piece together details of Cecil's hunt. These details, in part, helped fuel the spread of the story (Loveridge, 2018; Oxford University, 2015; Stapelkamp, 9 January 2018). More significantly, the collar linked Kimmel to WildCRU. It signified to the media, including Kimmel, that Cecil 'belonged' to WildCRU as a study animal. Thus, when Kimmel grasped for a place to direct his appeal, WildCRU was proximal. Without the collar, it is not clear the Cecil story would have become the viral moment it did, nor that WildCRU would have been the beneficiary of Kimmel's appeal.

#### 4.1.4. Local to global reacting publics

The global public reaction to Cecil's death has roots in what was initially a localized reaction in Hwange (Loveridge, 2018; Stapelkamp, 9 January 2018). Cecil's death sparked anger amongst the photographic safari guides to whom Cecil, as an encounterable lion, was a mainstay of their businesses. As Stapelkamp explained:

because of [Cecil's] fame, the local people just realized enough is enough, we've lost too many lions we depend on for our living ... they just said, "no it is not happening again"... And then, you know, suddenly we had the technology to share that information so some of those guides were Tweeting and putting things on Facebook (9 January 2018)

"RIP, Cecil" was the first Facebook post about Cecil's death, made by a safari camp manager in Hwange (Loveridge, 2018; Stapelkamp, 9 January 2018). Simultaneously, professional hunters could be overheard locally on two-way radio congratulating professional hunter Theo Bronkhorst on the big lion his client had "taken" (Loveridge, 2018). "This often deliberately defiant and sometimes goading braggadocio further incensed photographic safari guides and conservationists, provoking in turn strong and vociferous reactions about the practice of hunting lions on the boundaries of national parks" (Loveridge, 2018: 218).

While Zimbabwe-based safari guides initiated online discussion of Cecil's death, an increasingly global public joined the reaction later in July. Loveridge (2018) credits a National Geographic blog post and subsequent article with stimulating international media attention.



Citizens and celebrities alike weighed in via Twitter expressing mostly sadness, anger, and disgust at the incident. Once Cecil's killer was identified by name, place, and occupation on 27 July, protesters spilled out from the Internet and onto the steps of Walter Palmer's dental office in Bloomington, Minnesota. Stuffed animals were placed on the stoop and posters reading "Cecil you will always live in our hearts," "ROT IN HELL" and #CATLIVESMATTER were taped to the door.

While media attention was increasing prior to the Kimmel appeal, the 28 July monologue precipitated a viral explosion of the Cecil story on 29 July (Macdonald et al., 2016a, 2016b). In terms of high levels of interest and geographical scope, reaction to the Cecil story was indeed global. A media analysis determined that "the story appears to have spread synchronously across media channels and geographically across the globe over the span of about two days" (Macdonald et al., 2016a, 2016b: 1). Because of Kimmel's monologue, the global public's attention to the story was directed toward WildCRU. On the night of Kimmel's appeal, 4.4 million people visited WildCRU's website causing the collapse of both it and Oxford University's website. By 25 September 2015, WildCRU had received \$1.06 million from 13,335 donors (most from North America) (Macdonald et al., 2016a, 2016b). Evidently, the Kimmel monologue played an instrumental role channelling the emotion and agency unleashed by Cecil's death toward WildCRU, empowering them.

#### 4.1.5. WildCRU

WildCRU is a conservation research institute based at Oxford University, founded in 1986 by David Macdonald who remains its Director today. WildCRU's mission is to deliver "evidence-based conservation policy, solving practical problems with world-class science" (WildCRU, 2018). WildCRU and David Macdonald have a high degree of fame in conservation circles including numerous prestigious honours (e.g. Commander of the British Empire for services to science (2010); Queen's Anniversary Prize for Higher Education (2011); third in BBC's Wildlife Power List (2015)). WildCRU's scope of work is global and biodiverse with a longstanding specialization in wild carnivores. Presently, WildCRU is developing a special focus on felids in partnership with Panthera (felid conservation organization) and with support from the Recanati-Kaplan Foundation (see following section). WildCRU began research on lions with the Hwange Lion Project in 1999. Ironically, it was a British hunter, Lionel Reynold, who persuaded Macdonald and Loveridge to establish the project and conduct research relevant to the trophy hunting industry (The Telegraph, 2015b; Loveridge, 2018).

Despite WildCRU's global scale, breadth of projects, and notoriety, Macdonald describes WildCRU as existing "hand-to-mouth" (WildCRU, 2015b). Following the Kimmel appeal, Macdonald profusely thanked donors for their support given that "WildCRU has no institutional funds and relies heavily on philanthropy" (WildCRU, 2015b). Indeed, WildCRU is entirely dependent on grants and donations. Macdonald (5 October 2017) explained:

Over time [30 years] our funding model has ... changed from one where we were predominantly seeking research council funding or government department funding to an increasing emphasis on corporate funding, supplementing those through charities, family charities, and individual philanthropists. At the moment, our main flow of money comes from philanthropists and family charities.

Evidently, the Cecil Moment empowered an already-empowered (i.e. globally successful, notorious, influential) conservation organization. Moreover, the significance of Kimmel's appeal makes sense within a broader neoliberal context; as state funding has been rolled back and wealth has become more concentrated, celebrity and philanthropy have become increasing sources of conservation funding and fundraising (Brockington, 2009; Fletcher, 2015; Goodman, 2013; Holmes, 2012; Littler, 2015). In this context, a significant WildCRU donor is American philanthropist Thomas Kaplan who also influenced the Cecil Moment.

#### 4.1.6. Thomas Kaplan

American philanthropist Thomas Kaplan influenced the Cecil Moment by announcing a matching grant during the Kimmel appeal and prompting the Cecil Movement by encouraging the Cecil Summit. Yet, Kaplan was already an important figure to WildCRU prior to the Cecil Moment; as Kaplan said of himself and his wife, Daphne Recanati Kaplan, "we came to the Cecil story being, as it were, part of the family" (Kaplan, 23 May 2018).

Thomas Kaplan is an eminent supporter of WildCRU and felid conservation broadly, most notably as Founder and Chairman of big cat conservation organization, Panthera. David Macdonald considers Kaplan "the greatest felid philanthropist in history" (WildCRU, 2016b), though he has several titles including "billionaire king of cats" (Ebeling, 2013) and "gold's evangelist" (Kelly, 2010). Oxford-educated Kaplan (he has a doctorate in military history) is indeed a billionaire who has made his fortune investing in natural resources. He is also passionate about big cats, thus philanthropy in felid conservation is his way of returning his career success back to his passion. As Kaplan writes, "if my avocation has been history and my vocation natural resources, conservation has remained my first love. It is my privilege that I can apply the lessons I have learned in other fields, and indeed the important contacts that my professional life affords me, to drive a highly aggressive environmental agenda" (Panthera, 2018).

In the mid-2000s, WildCRU secured its first "transformative" (Macdonald, 5 October 2017) grant from the family charity of Thomas Kaplan and his wife, the Recanati-Kaplan Foundation, which has supported WildCRU ever since. The donations have enabled WildCRU to endow the running costs of their property, develop a diploma in practical conservation management, and support a global research program on cat conservation.

Kaplan and Recanati-Kaplan emerged on the scene of the Cecil Moment on 31 July, 3 days after the Kimmel appeal, pledging a challenge grant of \$100,000 to match donations as a stimulus toward achieving WildCRU's ambition that the Kimmel appeal would reach L500,000 (WildCRU, 2015c). They were motivated by the viral spread of the Cecil story and sought to "add fuel to the fire" and "make sure that as the interest tapers off, it spikes back up again" (Kaplan, 23 May 2018). The timing of the challenge grant was strategic. As Kaplan (23 May 2018) explained, "We waited with David [Macdonald]... we were watching the algorithms ... and when it started to wane, we thought, 'okay, let's give it a boost'".

Thomas Kaplan was also instrumental in propelling the momentum of the Cecil Moment. On 31 August 2015, WildCRU and Panthera jointly announced the Cecil Summit, a meeting of lion conservationists and other experts to discuss the future of lion conservation in honour of Cecil. As Kaplan (23 May 2018) described:

In the same way as we'd taken a strategic approach to the matching grant, I said, we need to plan for the post-Cecil world and not allow the enthusiasm and the full-throated vigour of the outage to go unfulfilled. We need to be able to capitalise on that for lions... I reached out to David [Macdonald] and Luke Hunter [Chief Conservation Officer, Panthera] and basically said, guys, we need to do a Cecil Summit ... and the purpose of this is to discuss what we can leverage from this moment in order to point out the dire straits in which the lion finds itself.

The Cecil Summit was held from 4 to 7 September 2016 at Oxford University and operated as a brainstorming think tank that concluded with a list of five priorities that might usefully shape the future of lion conservation (see Section 4.3; McCubbin and Hovorka, 2019; WildCRU, 2016a).

In sum, this Cecil Moment anatomy reveals the more-than-human network through which Cecil's death became a local, then global concern. We see how Cecil's satellite-GPS collar played an active role shaping the direction of the Cecil Moment, causing celebrity Jimmy Kimmel to direct his appeal to WildCRU. Ultimately, Kimmel's appeal

empowered WildCRU and vitalized its connection to philanthropist Thomas Kaplan as these already-empowered actors in lion conservation were emboldened to leverage the Cecil Moment.

#### 4.2. Representations

In this section I explore representations of the Cecil Moment foregrounded and backgrounded. I argue Cecil Moment narratives simplified and concealed complexity and that actors empowered by the moment shifted its meaning such that it aligned with their interests and priorities, not trophy hunting.

##### 4.2.1. Cecil as a special, local favourite lion

The Cecil Moment foregrounded a representation of Cecil as a special lion, a local favourite in Zimbabwe. I argue this dominant representation concealed complexities, controversies, and the mundaneness of Cecil's story.

Cecil as a "local favourite" lion appeared repeatedly in media representations. For example, in his monologue, Jimmy Kimmel described Cecil as, "a local favourite among tourists and guides" (Jimmy Kimmel Live, 2015). Cecil was indeed "an absolute favourite" (Stapelkamp, 9 January 2018) among tourists and guides in Hwange, but "the media portrayed that he was well known in Zimbabwe which wasn't really the case" (Stapelkamp, 9 January 2018). This representation distorts the complexity of *who is local*. Cecil was a favourite among safari tourists, guides, and, to some extent, the researchers who studied him. Certainly, the guides are aptly described as being local, but the tourists are predominantly wealthy, white, temporary visitors on holiday and WildCRU who studied Cecil is based in the UK. Completely obscured from this representation are the Zimbabwean people who live in villages just beyond the park boundary who "wouldn't have known Cecil in the slightest" (Stapelkamp, 9 January 2018).

Second, the representation of Cecil as a "local favourite" concealed an underlying controversy about Cecil's namesake; that is, whether Cecil was named after colonialist Cecil Rhodes. Recall from Section 4.1 that Cecil had a brother named Leander and that they were first spotted at Mangisihole Pan or "white man's waterhole" or "Englishman's waterhole". Early in the Cecil Moment (28 July) *The Telegraph* (2015a) interviewed Brent Stapelkamp and reported "the siblings were named after famous white men: Cecil, after Cecil Rhodes, and Leander – named after Leander Starr Jameson, a pioneer in southern Africa and a colleague of Rhodes" in recognition of their first sighting at "white man's waterhole". Later (3 August) *WildCRU* (2015a) recounted different story, namely that "he was named 'Cecil' a quintessentially English name in recognition of his origins (at least in our records) at the 'Englishman's waterhole'" (see also Loveridge (2018)). Cecil Rhodes and Leander Starr Jameson were British colonialists of Southern Africa. Cecil Rhodes is a particularly well-known and controversial figure who led the colonization of Rhodesia, the territory renamed Zimbabwe after independence from Britain in 1980. During the Cecil Moment, the notion that Cecil the lion was named after Cecil Rhodes caused unrest among some local actors in Zimbabwe.

Locally, particularly on the property where Cecil was shot and the neighbouring properties, all of that land was redistributed by Mugabe to political cronies, if you will; people that already had maybe ill-feeling toward their colonial history. So the minute the story broke they very quickly highlighted the fact that this lion, not only was he bringing the country all this bad press, but he was named after a famous colonial (Stapelkamp, 9 January 2018).

Yet, despite local reverberations of this controversy the politics of Cecil's supposed namesake did not impact the narrative which circulated globally.

Third, Cecil's representation obscured the reality that his death was far from unique; rather, lion trophy hunting is a widespread practice

and many lions have been killed in similar circumstances. Indeed, there have been several lions bearing nicknames, wearing tracking collars, shot both legally and illegally. As Macdonald et al. (2016a, 2016b) report:

From 1999 to 2015, approximately 65 lions were hunted on the land surrounding the Protected Area, 45 of them were equipped with tracking devices. None of these deaths attracted much attention from the world's media, including two other satellite collared lions, both also bearing nicknames, killed by trophy hunters in 2015 (2).

Altogether, the foregrounded representation of Cecil as a special, local favourite concealed complexity, controversy, and mundaneness. I argue these representations functioned to make the Cecil story a consumable, sharable narrative with popular appeal because they made outrage over Cecil's death legitimate, meaningful, and apolitical.

##### 4.2.2. The global public reaction

The Cecil Moment foregrounded a monolithic "global public" reaction to Cecil's death despite divergent reactions. The dominant reaction to Cecil's death was outrage over trophy hunting. As Loveridge (2018) wrote, "there are, of course, also many supporters of trophy hunting, but the reactions of proponents of hunting over the killing of Cecil were at best muted and were eclipsed by the outrage expressed but those who viewed hunting with distaste" (228). Moreover, Macdonald et al. (2016a, 2016b) found, "there was overwhelming distaste for trophy hunting of a big cat, and a sense that this approbation was fuelled by moral indignation at the act" (9). Overwhelming anti-trophy hunting sentiment thus foregrounded a monolithic "global public" reaction while concealing spatial and racial contours.

Spatially, there were differences in the North American versus Southern African reaction. One notable expression of this difference was an op-ed published in *The New York Times* titled *In Zimbabwe, We Don't Cry for Lions*. Its author, Goodwell Nzou, a Zimbabwean living in America was motivated to bring a Zimbabwean perspective to the American reaction and add complexity to the anti-trophy hunting response. Nzou (2015) wrote:

In my village in Zimbabwe, surrounded by wildlife conservation areas, no lion has ever been beloved, or granted an affectionate nickname. They are objects of terror. The killing of Cecil hasn't garnered much more sympathy from urban Zimbabweans, although they live with no such danger. Few have ever seen a lion, since game drives are a luxury residents of a country with an average monthly income below \$150 cannot afford... .... The American tendency to romanticize animals that have been given actual names and to jump onto a hashtag train has turned an ordinary situation ... into what seems to my Zimbabwean eyes an absurdist circus. ... We Zimbabweans are left shaking our heads, wondering why Americans care more about African animals than about African people.

Other interviewees described similar reactions of Zimbabwean surprise at the Western response, and indifference toward or celebration of Cecil's death (see also Dube, 2019; Mkonzo, 2018).

There were also racial contours to the "global public" reaction backgrounded relative to the anti-trophy hunting response. Many black Americans expressed frustration that predominantly white Americans seemed to care more about the death of one lion overseas (#CatLivesMatter) than systemic racism killing black Americans in America (#BlackLivesMatter). Among several tweets in this vein Roxanne Gay (black American writer) wrote, "I'm personally going to start wearing a lion costume when I leave my house so if I get shot, people will care" (29 July 2015). Other writers voiced that the violence done to black lives and animal lives are linked, upheld by structures of inequality and disavowal that serve to empower white men at the expense of other lives (Berlatsky, 2015; Gruen, 2015).

Despite these spatial and racial contours, reaction to Cecil's death was commonly characterized as a singular "global public" response. I

argue the idea of a global public reaction functioned to subsume racial and spatial differences, signalling instead one cohesive mood which gave the moment more clarity and made it easier to leverage than a politically complex (i.e. racially and spatially contoured) reaction would have been.

#### 4.2.3. *The global expression of care for lions in general*

The actors empowered by the Cecil Moment foregrounded a particular representation of the global public reaction, namely that it *transcended* concern about trophy hunting, and represented a global expression of care for lions, even wildlife, in general. The following statement by David Macdonald (WildCRU, 2016c) exemplifies this narrative:

I believe that the global attention given to Cecil transcends interest in one, admittedly beautiful and fascinating lion, or indeed distaste at one illegal hunt: rather, this global reaction ... reflects a much deeper concern throughout society for lions, indeed for wildlife, and for how humans in the Twenty-First century should live alongside nature.

This representation is markedly different from the dominant anti-trophy hunting response. The meaning of the moment, interpreted by the actors empowered by it, is changed. Specifically, the meaning is diffused and re-scaled such that it is no longer narrowly focussed on the death of an individual lion by trophy hunting, but rather a broad concern about the fate of all lions, perhaps all wildlife, co-existing with humans. I argue this changed narrative functioned to bring the Cecil Moment momentum in line with the priorities of the actors empowered by it and, as I detail in Section 4.3, served to dramatically alter its politics.

The research revealed several explanations for *why* those empowered by the Cecil Moment were motivated to interpret and shift its meaning away from trophy hunting and toward general lion conservation. First, although Jimmy Kimmel's monologue was emphatically anti-trophy hunting, his appeal's charitable frame and vagueness ultimately left it open to interpretation. In an interview, David Macdonald (5 October 2017) explained that he understood the global public as signalling care for lions or wildlife in general because this interpretation aligns with WildCRU's mission statement on its website which is where Jimmy Kimmel directed his appeal. Macdonald (5 October 2017) said of donors:

I don't think any of these people should be dismissed as just interested in one episode, I think they were signalling a general concern about a wider aspect of how humanity is going to live alongside nature in the Twenty-First century. They might not have articulated it in that way but that's how I interpret their enthusiasm.

Second, WildCRU takes objective conservation science as its fundamental logic. After Cecil's death WildCRU members distinguished between their personal and professional views on trophy hunting refusing to take a stance but reiterating, for example, "our position is to understand the facts and therefore the probable consequences of actions and to support the authorities in enforcing the law" (Nature, 2015). It was argued that Cecil Moment outcomes ought to be driven by rationality rather than emotion, and that lion populations should be privileged over individuals (McCubbin and Van Patter, forthcoming). Moreover, WildCRU expressed concern that if Cecil's death resulted in a ban on trophy hunting without an immediate replacement for the financial incentive for that land, the land would be lost. Thus, WildCRU argued it would be wise to "favour a journey rather than a jump" toward that outcome (Macdonald et al., 2016a, 2016b: x).

Third, some interviewees suggested trophy hunting is simply too sensitive an issue in African lion range states for conservation scientists to address directly without risk of losing their research permits. Indeed, this is a possibility. In 2014, renowned lion biologist Craig Packer lost permission to conduct research in Tanzania after exposing corruption in

the lion trophy hunting industry (Packer, 2015) and in 2006 the Hwange Lion Project briefly had its research permit revoked after revealing evidence of unsustainable lion trophy hunting in Zimbabwe (Loveridge, 2018). It is likely the explanation for the Cecil Moment's shift away from trophy hunting toward general lion conservation is a combination of the above.

#### 4.3. *Outcomes and evaluation*

Finally, I turn my attention to the question: to what kind of politics did the Cecil Moment lead? I document the outcomes achieved (and not achieved) by the Cecil Moment and investigate whose interests were served (and not served) by these outcomes. Though the Cecil Moment led to divergent outcomes (e.g. airlines banned shipment of animal trophies; governments reformed policy and passed legislation on animal trophy imports (Carpenter and Konisky, 2017; Mkono, 2018; Schroeder, 2018)), I focus on those that resulted directly from the Kimmel appeal. I show that the Cecil Moment operated to silence the anti-trophy hunting politics that sparked and fuelled it in the first place; yet, the momentum of the Cecil Moment was captured and re-directed toward other lion conservation priorities. Critically, this re-direction was not neutral; rather, it shifted the politics of the Cecil Moment in a way that reproduced longstanding patterns of conservation injustice wherein blame for biodiversity loss is often directed away from powerful forces (i.e. trophy hunting and wealthy, white, Western trophy hunters) onto the racialized, rural poor from the Global South (i.e. threats posed by rural African livelihoods). I examine three outcomes of the Cecil Moment to make this argument.

First, WildCRU used Kimmel appeal donations to support its strategic plan, "a plan that includes the study of the ecology and conservation of lions such as Cecil but is much broader in scope" (Buhmester et al., 2018: 6). As Macdonald (5 October 2017) said, "we have absolutely meticulously and punctiliously used those donations to foster evidence gathering and associated training not only about conservation in general but specifically in that region so we have been very, very careful (not that we were required to, by the way) but we have chosen to use all of those particular donations to support our work in Zimbabwe and Botswana". Evidently, the donations from the Kimmel appeal were used to support a broad program of lion conservation action rather than targeted at the issue of trophy hunting.

What, then, are the lion conservation actions to which Kimmel appeal donations and the broader momentum of the Cecil Moment were directed? A second direct outcome of the Cecil Moment was the Cecil Summit, a meeting of largely Western, white, male experts (McCubbin and Hovorka, 2019) at Oxford University (hosted by WildCRU and Panthera) held 14 months after Cecil's death. Its purpose was to turn the Cecil Moment into the Cecil Movement by identifying innovative lion conservation strategies to prevent the extinction of lions in Africa (Macdonald and Chapron, 2017). The threats to lions identified during the opening remarks to the public session of the Cecil Summit were: (1) human-lion conflict; (2) bushmeat poaching; (3) human encroachment; (4) trophy hunting; and (5) lion poaching (Panthera et al., 2016; WildCRU, 2016b). Though identified among the threats to lions, discussion of trophy hunting was largely absent from public sessions of the Cecil Summit (McCubbin and Hovorka, 2019). When trophy hunting was mentioned, it was significantly downplayed as a threat, often presented with a caveat such as, "experts agree certainly at a national and regional scale that trophy hunting ranks low among the threats to lions and that it can perhaps counterintuitively have a positive impact through habitat protection and funding" (WildCRU, 2016b). Rather than trophy hunting, the threats to lions discussed at the Cecil Summit were those posed by rural African lives and livelihoods; namely, human-lion conflict, bushmeat poaching, human encroachment, and lion poaching (McCubbin and Hovorka, 2019). In fact, the focus on threats posed by rural African livelihoods is made explicitly in a report titled *Beyond Cecil: African's Lions in Crisis* which was prepared by



Panthera, WildCRU and WildAID and drawn upon extensively during the public sessions of the Cecil Summit. The report states:

“The proliferation of human and livestock populations in Africa over the past 25 years and the accompanying loss of lion habitat to agriculture are the underlying factors that give rise to all major threats to lions. Lions struggle to co-exist with people, especially the rural poor”.

In this way, I argue, the Cecil Summit captured the momentum of the Cecil Moment yet clearly pivoted its focus *away* from the threat of trophy hunting and *toward* threats posed by rural African livelihoods.

The Cecil Moment's shift away from trophy hunting was further entrenched by the *Report on Lion Conservation with Particular Respect to the Issue of Trophy Hunting* which was commissioned by then UK Under Secretary of State, Rory Stewart, and prepared by David Macdonald. This is the third and final outcome of the Cecil Moment I trace in this paper. The aim of the report was to evaluate how trophy hunting impacts lion conservation to inform the UK's decision on whether to ban trophy hunting imports. Ultimately, the report does not recommend a ban; instead, it argues that trophy hunting benefits lion conservation by providing financial incentive to maintain lion habitat that might otherwise be converted to non-wildlife land uses. The report was controversial both within and without the lion conservation community. Some viewed it as coming down gently, if not positively, on trophy hunting. One Cecil Summit participant described the report as “extolling the virtues of sport hunting for lion conservation” and argued the report “came out sounding far more pro-hunting than there was any reason to have done so” and “minimized any potential problems with trophy hunting” (12 May 2018). The report was the final major outcome of the Cecil Moment to date; though a second Cecil Summit was planned, it has not occurred.

In sum, the Cecil Moment operated to steer the consequences of public outrage over Cecil's death away from trophy hunting and toward threats posed by rural African livelihoods. I argue that this significant change in the target of Cecil-inspired action reproduces a longstanding form of conservation injustice wherein blame for biodiversity loss is too often directed away from powerful forces, onto the racialized poor from the Global South. Recall for a moment that in the wake of Cecil's death, Walter Palmer, the American trophy hunter who killed Cecil, was ruthlessly villainized (e.g. *The Washington Post*, 2015). Mostly, the public was outraged that a wealthy, white, American trophy hunter showed such callous disregard for the life of a lion (Macdonald et al., 2016a, 2016b). Yet 14 months later, at the Cecil Summit, the villain of the Cecil story had changed. The main threats to lions identified at the Cecil Summit were human-lion conflict, bushmeat poaching, human encroachment, and lion poaching. In other words, those empowered by the Cecil Moment grasped the outrage over Cecil's death but diverted its momentum away from trophy hunting (an activity of predominantly wealthy, white, foreigners to African landscapes) and re-directed it toward the black, rural African poor.

## 5. Some good? Drawing conclusions from the Cecil Moment

What are we to make of the Cecil Moment, and what can it tell us about celebrity environmentalisms and Nature 2.0 broadly? Returning to the aims of this paper, I have asked how did the Cecil Moment work and what impact did it have on the politics of lion conservation?

The Cecil Moment shows us several things about *how* celebrity and Nature 2.0 environmentalisms work. First, the anatomy of the Cecil Moment was more-than-human; an animal (Cecil the lion) and technology (satellite-GPS collar) significantly shaped how the moment unfolded, who was empowered, and what happened. Cecil's role resonates with research which has noted the phenomenon of animal celebrity (Blewitt, 2013; Giles, 2013), its significance for conservation practice (Doubleday, 2017), and its common influence in Nature 2.0 (Buscher et al., 2017; Nelson, 2017). More novel is the role of Cecil's satellite-

GPS collar, which, through its relations to Cecil and WildCRU, significantly directed the politics of the moment by channelling the agency unleashed by the reaction to Cecil's death toward WildCRU. In this sense, though Cecil's collar did not ‘act’ on its own volition (rather its consequences resulted from its connections to Cecil and WildCRU) the collar served to “intensify agency in particular directions” (Jepson et al., 2011: 232) by “marshalling” the outrage over Cecil's death toward WildCRU. Tracking technologies are increasingly used to study the lives of animals but their effects are not well understood (Adams, 2017; Collard and Gillespie, 2015). Scholars of celebrity and Nature 2.0 environmentalisms should be alert to tracking technologies that may be actively shaping the networks and politics they study, specifically, the ways in which they channel power and intensify the agency of the actors that deploy them.

Second, the Cecil Moment empowered and vitalized ties among already-empowered actors in lion conservation. This finding aligns with Brockington's (2014) argument that “celebrity advocacy flourishes in elite circles and with elite governance; it reproduces and reinforces the power of those elites” (153). The Kimmel monologue channelled agency unleashed by Cecil's death to WildCRU; WildCRU then used the momentum to support its mission. As David Macdonald told *The Guardian* (2016), “Cecil the lion will be a standard bearer for *our* cause” [emphasis mine]. Moreover, the Cecil Moment vitalized the already strong relationship between Thomas Kaplan and WildCRU. Kaplan's suggestion to hold the Cecil Summit resonates with existing knowledge that agenda-setting is among the primary contributions of these actors in conservation (Holmes, 2012; Littler, 2008; Rothkopf, 2008).

Third, the Cecil Moment illuminates how celebrity and Nature 2.0 environmentalisms work through in/visible and mutable narratives. That celebrity and Nature 2.0 environmentalisms work through simplified, depoliticized narratives that obscure complexity is well understood (Brockington, 2009; Masse, 2018; Meyer and Gamson, 1995). What stands out in the Cecil Moment is the way these environmentalisms work through shifting representations. Hawkins and Silver (2017), drawing on Rose (2015), refer to this as the mutability of Nature 2.0, the “changeability, creative possibility, and interactive discussion that digital mediations and Web 2.0 make feasible and fast” (117). Whereas Hawkins and Silver (2017) show the progressive potential in mutability, I argue the Cecil Moment reveals its oppressive potential. Because Nature 2.0 and celebrity environmentalism narratives, images, and meanings are mutable, those empowered by the Cecil Moment were able to shift its meaning in a way that dramatically altered its politics.

Finally, what does the Cecil Moment tell us about the kinds of politics to which celebrity environmentalisms and Nature 2.0 lead? Can we say the Cecil Moment led to “some good”? In short, my argument is that the Cecil Moment led to an elite-driven politics that operated to reproduce conservation injustice by re-directing the momentum of the moment toward the livelihoods of the rural African poor. Therefore, this paper reinforces existing arguments that the progressive potential of celebrity and Nature 2.0 environmentalisms' is limited.

Despite the engagement of a broad citizenry via Nature 2.0 (first locally, then globally) largely around anti-trophy hunting sentiment, ultimately those empowered by the Kimmel appeal captured its momentum, altered its meaning, and re-directed its impacts. The moment, which began as a politics of anti-trophy hunting, resulted in lion conservation status quo where already-empowered lion conservation actors shaped the moment to their preferences, dodging the attack on trophy hunting and, instead, positioning rural African livelihoods as the source of lion decline. Of particular concern is the way in which anti-trophy hunting sentiment was silenced yet the momentum of the Cecil Moment was leveraged, but channelled toward other priorities, priorities that reinscribe longstanding patterns of shifting blame for biodiversity loss from powerful forces to the racialized poor from the Global South.

At first blush, one might conclude that by steering the consequences of the Cecil Moment away from anti-trophy hunting sentiment those



empowered by the Cecil Moment acted to uphold conservation justice, holding back the tide of largely Western anti-trophy hunting sentiment and operating to preserve the trophy hunting industry which African lion range states and local communities largely support. Yet, as this paper has shown, this was not the case. Those empowered by the Cecil Moment dismissed anti-trophy hunting sentiment, but did not elevate African voices and viewpoints. Rather, those empowered by the Cecil Moment grasped and leveraged its momentum to elevate their voices and serve their agenda which targets the rural African poor as the source of lion decline and brings the momentum of the moment to bear on rural African livelihoods.

Previous research has noted the lack of alignment and accountability between the kinds of emotions, interests, and politics that spark and fuel celebrity environmentalism and Nature 2.0 and their outcomes (Brockington, 2014; Buscher, 2017; Fletcher, 2017). This paper illustrates the danger in the way that momentum around celebrity environmentalism and Nature 2.0 can be channelled toward other issues. As the Cecil Moment demonstrates, these environmentalisms may, upon shifting, reinscribe familiar patterns of conservation injustice that political ecologists have written about for decades: global environmental politics too often directs attention away from structures of white, male, elite, Western power driving crises like biodiversity loss and toward the racialized, rural poor from the Global South. Scholars and citizens alike should closely scrutinize the actors, narratives, and outcomes emboldened by celebrity and Nature 2.0 environmentalisms.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the research participants for sharing the time and information that made this research possible. I would also like to thank Alice Hovorka, Marcus Taylor and the anonymous reviewers for sharing their insights and constructive feedback on previous drafts of this paper. This research was supported by a Vanier Canada Graduate Scholarship and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

## References

- ABC, 2017. The continuing legacy of Cecil the Lion, 11 July. Available at: <https://www.abc.net.au/radio/perth/programs/wa-afternoons/cecil-the-lions-legacy/8698672> (last accessed 4 January 2019).
- Adams, W.M., 2017. Geographies of conservation II: Technology, surveillance and conservation by algorithm. *Progr. Human Geogr.* 1–14.
- Africa Geographic, 2015. The aftermath of Cecil – Interview with lion researcher, Brent Stapelkamp, 28 October. Available at: <https://africageographic.com/blog/aftermath-cecil-interview-lion-researcher-brent-stapelkamp/> (accessed 27 October 2017).
- Anderson, A., 2013. "Together we can save the arctic": celebrity advocacy and the Rio Earth Summit 2012. *Celebrity Stud.* 4 (3), 339–352.
- Berlitsky, N., 2015. Black lives matter, lion lives matter, and they're both in jeopardy for the same brutal reason. *Quartz*, 30 July. Available at: <https://qz.com/468181/black-lives-matter-lion-lives-matter-and-theyre-both-in-jeopardy-for-the-same-brutal-reason/> (last accessed 29 November 2018).
- Blewitt, J., 2013. What's new pussycat? A genealogy of animal celebrity. *Celebrity Stud.* 4 (3), 325–338.
- Bosco, F.J., 2015. Actor-network theory, networks and relational geography. In: Aitken, S.C., Valentine, G. (Eds.), *Approaches to Human Geography: Philosophies, Theories, People and Practices*. Sages Publication Ltd, London, UK, pp. 150–162.
- Boykoff, M.T., Goodman, M.K., 2009. Conspicuous redemption? Reflection on the promises and perils of the 'Celebrization' of climate change. *Geoforum* 40, 395–406.
- Boykoff, M.T., Olson, S.K., 2013. 'Wise contrarians': a keystone species in contemporary climate science, politics and policy. *Celebrity Stud.* 4 (3), 276–291.
- Buscher, B., 2013. Nature 2.0. *Geoforum* 44, 1–3.
- Buscher, B., 2017. Conservation and development 2.0: Intensifications and disjunctions in the politics of online 'do-good' platforms. *Geoforum* 79, 163–173.
- Buscher, B., Koot, S., Nelson, I.L., 2017. Introduction. Nature 2.0: new media, online activism and the cyberpolitics of environmental conservation. *Geoforum* 79, 111–113.
- Brockington, D., 2008. Powerful environmentalisms: conservation, celebrity and capitalism. *Media Cult. Soc.* 30 (4), 551–568.
- Brockington, D., 2009. *Celebrity and the Environment: Fame, Wealth and Power in Conservation*. Zed Books, London.
- Brockington, D., 2014. *Celebrity Advocacy and International Development*. Routledge, London.
- Brockington, D., 2015. *Celebrity advocacy: international and comparative perspectives*. *Celebrity Stud.* 6 (4), 393–398.
- Brockington, D., Henson, S., 2015. Signifying the public: celebrity advocacy and post-democratic politics. *Int. J. Cultural Stud.* 18 (4), 431–448.
- Buhrmester, M.D., Burnham, D., Johnson, D.D.P., Curry, O.S., Macdonald, D.W., Whitehouse, H., 2018. How moments become movements: shared outrage, group cohesion, and the lion that when viral. *Front. Ecol. Evol.* 6 (54), 1–7.
- Cameron, E., 2009. *The Ordering of Things: Narrative Geographies of Bloody Falls and the Central Canadian Arctic*. Queen's University Graduate Theses and Dissertations.
- Carpenter, S., Konisky, D.M., 2017. The killing of Cecil the Lion as an impetus for policy change. *Oryx* 1–9.
- Castree, N., 2002. False Antitheses? Marxism, Nature and Actor-Networks. *Antipode* 111–146.
- Checker, M., 2017. Stop FEMA Now: social media, activism and the sacrificed citizen. *Geoforum* 79, 124–133.
- Collard, R.-C., Gillespie, K., 2015. Doing critical animal geographies: future directions. In: Gillespie, K., Collard, R.-C. (Eds.), *Critical Animal Geographies: Politics, Intersections and Hierarchies in a Multispecies World*. Routledge, pp. 203–212.
- Cecil's Pride, 2016. Brent Stapelkamp – Cecil 2016 Rally [video file], 1 August. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IXOXhnek5xc>.
- Doubleday, K.F., 2017. Nonlinear liminality: human-animal relations on preserving the world's most famous tigress. *Geoforum* 81, 32–44.
- Doyle, J., 2016. Celebrity vegans and the lifestyle of ethical consumption. *Environ. Commun.* 10 (6), 777–790.
- Dube, N., 2019. Voices from the village on trophy hunting in Hwange district, Zimbabwe. *Ecol. Econ.* 159, 335–343.
- Ebeling, A., 2013. Tom Kaplan: Billionaire King of Cats. *Forbes Life*, 8 October. Available at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/ashleabeling/2013/10/08/tom-kaplan-billionaire-king-of-cats/> (last accessed 16 August 2018).
- Fletcher, R., 2015. Blinded by the stars? Celebrity, fantasy, and desire in neoliberal environmental governance. *Celebrity Stud.* 6 (4), 457–470.
- Fletcher, R., 2017. Gaming conservation: Nature 2.0 confronts nature-deficit disorder. *Geoforum* 79, 153–162.
- Giles, D.C., 2013. Animal celebrities. *Celebrity Stud.* 4 (2), 115–128.
- Goodman, M.K., 2013. Celebritus politicus, neoliberal sustainabilities and the terrains of care. In: Friedell, G., Konings, M. (Eds.), *Age of Icons: Exploring Philanthrocapitalism in the Contemporary World*. University of Toronto Press, Toronto, pp. 72–92.
- Goodman, K., Barnes, C., 2011. Star/poverty space: the making of the 'development celebrity'. *Celebrity Stud.* 2 (1), 69–85.
- Goodman, M.K., Littler, J., Brockington, D., Boykoff, M., 2016. Spectacular environmentalisms: media, knowledge and the framing of ecological politics. *Environ. Commun.* 10 (6), 677–688.
- Gruen, L., 2015. Samuel Dubose, Cecil the lion and the ethics of avowal. *Aljazeera America*, 31 July. Available at: <http://america.aljazeera.com/opinions/2015/7/samuel-dubose-cecil-the-lion-and-the-ethics-of-avowal.html> (last accessed 29 November 2018).
- Hawkins, R., Silver, J., 2017. From selfie to #sealfie: Nature 2.0 and the digital cultural politics of an internationally contested resource. *Geoforum* 79, 114–123.
- Holmes, G., 2012. Biodiversity for billionaires: capitalism, conservation and the role of philanthropy in saving/selling nature. *Develop. Change* 43 (1), 185–203.
- Igoe, J., 2010. The spectacle of nature in the global economy of appearance: anthropological engagements with the spectacular mediations of transnational conservation. *Critique Anthropol.* 30 (4), 375–397.
- Jeffreys, E., 2016. Translocal celebrity activism: shark-protection campaigns in mainland China. *Environ. Commun.* 10 (6), 763–776.
- Jepson, P., Barua, M., Buckingham, K., 2011. What is a conservation actor? *Conserv. Soc.* 9 (3), 229–235.
- Jimmy Kimmel Live, 2015. Jimmy Kimmel on the Killing of Cecil the Lion. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sAHGvxFxhE0&t=8s> (last accessed 2 January 2019).
- Kelly, J., 2010. Gold's Evangelist. *Bloomberg Businessweek*, 26 August. Available at: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2010-08-26/golds-evangelist> (accessed 4 April 2017).
- Littler, J., 2008. "I feel your pain": cosmopolitan charity and the public fashioning of the celebrity soul. *Social Semiotics* 18 (2), 237–251.
- Littler, J., 2015. The new Victorians? Celebrity charity and the demise of the welfare state. *Celebrity Stud.* 6 (4), 471–485.
- Loveridge, A., 2018. *Lion Hearted: The Life and Death of Cecil and the Future of Africa's Iconic Cats*. Regan Arts, New York.
- Latour, B., 2005. *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK.
- Lunstrum, E., 2017. Feed them to the lions: conservation violence goes online. *Geoforum* 79, 134–143.
- Macdonald, D.W., Chapron, G., 2017. Outbreeding ideas for conservation success. *Oryx* 51 (2), 206.
- Macdonald, D.W., Jacobsen, K.S., Burnham, D., Johnson, P.J., Loveridge, A.J., 2016a. Cecil: a moment or a movement? Analysis of media coverage of the death of a Lion, *Panthera leo*. *Animals* 6, 1–13.
- Macdonald, D.W., Dickman, A., Loveridge, A., Jacobsen, K., Johnson, P., O'Kane, C., du Preez, B., Kesch, K., and Perry, L., 2016b. Report on Lion Conservation with Particular Respect to the Issue of Trophy Hunting.
- Masse, F., 2018. Anti-poaching's politics of (in)visibility: representing nature and conservation amidst a poaching crisis. *Geoforum*.
- McCubbin, S.G., Hovorka, A.J., 2019. Visioning African Lionscapes: securing space, mobilizing capital, and fostering subjects. *Nature and Space, Environ. Plann. E*.
- McCubbin, S.G., Van Patter, L., forthcoming. Trophy Hunters and Crazy Cat Ladies: Exploring Cat Conservation and Management through Intersectionality. *Gender,*

- Place, Cult.
- Meyer, D.S., Ganson, J., 1995. The challenge of cultural elites: celebrities and social movements. *Sociol. Inquiry* 65 (2), 181–206.
- Mkono, M., 2018. The age of digital activism in tourism: evaluating the legacy and limitations of the Cecil anti-trophy hunting movement. *J. Sustain. Tourism* 26 (9), 1608–1624.
- Minnesota Public Radio, 2015. A Beautiful World: This is a Moment in History – The Silver Lining of Cecil the Lion, 2 August. Available at: <https://soundcloud.com/abeautifulworld/cecil-the-lion-macdonald> (last accessed 9 January 2019).
- Mongabay, 2016. Studying Cecil: development and deployment of lion-tracking technology, 2 February. Available at: <https://wildtech.mongabay.com/2016/02/studying-cecil-development-and-deployment-of-lion-tracking-technology/> (last accessed 9 January 2019).
- Nature, 2015. Charismatic lion's death highlights struggles of conservation scientists, 29 July. Available at: <https://www.nature.com/news/charismatic-lion-s-death-highlights-struggles-of-conservation-scientists-1.18101> (accessed 27 October 2017).
- Nelson, I.L., 2017. Interspecies care and aging in a gorilla 2.0 world. *Geoforum* 79, 144–152.
- Nzou, G., 2015. In Zimbabwe, We Don't Cry for Lions. *The New York Times*, 4 August. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/05/opinion/in-zimbabwe-we-dont-cry-for-lions.html> (last accessed 9 January 2019).
- Nunn, H., Biressi, A., 2010. 'A trust betrayed': celebrity and the work of emotion. *Celebrity Stud.* 1 (1), 49–64.
- Oxford University, 2015. The Lion, the Web, and the WildCRU 2, 1 September. Available at: <https://medium.com/oxford-university/the-lion-the-web-and-the-wildcru-2-1d018d09f6b4>.
- Packer, C., 2015. *Lions in the Balance: Man-Eaters, Manes, and Men with Guns*. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Panthera, 2018. Panthera. The Basics: Chairman Q & A (accessed 24 January 2018).
- Panthera, WildAID and WildCRU, 2016. Beyond Cecil: African's Lions in Crisis. Report.
- Phillips, N., Hardy, C., 2002. *Discourse Analysis: Investigating Processes of Social Construction*. Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Prudham, S., 2009. Pimping climate change: Richard Branson, global warming, and the performance of green capitalism. *Environ. Plann. A* 41, 1594–1613.
- Rose, G., 2015. Rethinking the geographies of cultural 'objects' through digital technologies: interface, network and friction. *Progr. Human Geogr.* 40 (3), 334–351.
- Rothkopf, D., 2008. *Superclass: The Global Power Elite and the World they are Making*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York.
- Schroeder, R., 2018. Moving Targets: the 'Canned' hunting of Captive-Bred Lions in South Africa. *African Stud. Rev.* 61 (1), 8–32.
- Silver, J.J., Hawkins, R., 2014. "I'm not trying to save fish, I'm trying to save dinner": media, celebrity and sustainable seafood as a solution to environmental limits. *Geoforum* 84, 2018–2227.
- The Guardian, 2016. Cecil the lion's legacy: death brings new hope for his grandcubs, 28 June. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/jun/28/cecil-the-lions-legacy-death-brings-new-hope-for-his-grandcubs> (accessed 19 September 2017).
- The Telegraph, 2015a. Cecil the lion's final photograph, 28 July. Available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/zimbabwe/11768872/Cecil-the-lions-final-photograph.html> (accessed 19 September 2017).
- The Telegraph, 2015b. 'Cecil the lion will be a standard bearer for our cause'. 1 August. Available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/zimbabwe/11776473/Cecil-the-lion-will-be-a-standard-bearer-for-our-cause.html> (accessed 19 September 2017).
- Thrall, A.T., Lollo-Fakhreddine, J., Berent, J., Donnelly, L., Herrin, W., Paquette, Z., Wengliniski, R., Wyatt, A., 2008. Star power: celebrity advocacy and the evolution of the public sphere. *Int. J. Press/Politics* 13 (4), 362–385.
- Turner, G., 2014. *Understanding Celebrity*. Sage, London.
- The Washington Post, 2015. PETA calls for Walter Palmer to be 'hanged' for killing Cecil the lion, 30 July. Available at: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2015/07/30/peta-calls-for-walter-palmer-to-be-hanged-for-killing-cecil-the-lion/?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.c957a5c1c41a](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2015/07/30/peta-calls-for-walter-palmer-to-be-hanged-for-killing-cecil-the-lion/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.c957a5c1c41a) (last accessed 9 January 2019).
- WildCRU, 2015a. A message from David Macdonald to Cecil's supporters – now for some biology: Andy Loveridge and I repeat our thanks to all those who have donated to the appeal, 3 August. Available at: <https://www.wildcru.org/news/cecil-real-biology/> (last accessed 9 January 2019).
- WildCRU, 2015b. When it comes to gratitude, we have long memories at WildCRU, says David Macdonald, August 11. Available at: <https://www.wildcru.org/news/macdonald-long-memories/> (last accessed 9 January 2019).
- WildCRU, 2015c. Amazing news about Cecil Appeal, 4 August. Available at: <https://www.wildcru.org/news/cecil-funding-news/> (last accessed 9 January 2019).
- WildCRU, 2016a. Cecil Summit. Available at <https://www.wildcru.org/cecil-summit/> (last accessed 4 January 2019).
- WildCRU, 2016b. WildCRU – Cecil Summit Live Public Outreach. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sWCxTDkLho0&t=1715s> (last accessed 15 August 2018).
- WildCRU, 2016c. Cecil is the most influential animal in the world (wild or domestic) says TIME magazine, 25 April. Available at: <https://www.wildcru.org/news/cecil-most-influential-animal/> (last accessed 7 January 2019).
- WildCRU, 2018. The Creation of the WildCRU, 16 October. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Czt3VYh0uWY> (accessed 28 November 2018).
- Youth 4 African Wildlife, 2016. The Truth About Cecil's Death and The Future of Africa's Lions, 1 October. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zf9tSO3af14&t=4s> (last accessed 9 January 2019).