

## BINGO complicity, necropolitical ecology and environmental defenders

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## Title Page

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**Title:** BINGO Complicity, Necropolitical Ecology & Environmental Defenders

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**Abstract:** Several big international non-governmental organisations (BINGOs) have been instrumental in increasing the attention brought to the lived experiences of environmental and land defenders and the atmospheres of violence they face. Among the many BINGOs who frame themselves as ‘supporters’ or ‘protectors’ of environmental and land defenders, several have been complicit in violence perpetrated by park guards and resource extraction companies. In this paper, we unpack the multifaceted nature of the role BINGOs play in shaping the atmospheres of violence with which environmental defenders contend. While BINGOs have acted as whistle-blowers and advocates providing legal assistance to at-risk defenders, they have also been complicit in ‘green violence’ perpetrated in the name of conservation, and more subtle relationships of ‘partnership’ with industries and specific corporations engaged in neo-colonial forms of extraction and violence against defenders. BINGO complicity with the violence against defenders replays the historical entanglement of some organizations with displacement and violence enacted in the name of colonial era conservation. We argue that BINGOs can, and must, work towards more radical forms of decolonial solidarity with environmental and land defenders who contend with atmospheres of violence shaped, in many cases, by conservation efforts and resource extraction activities with which BINGOs may be complicit, either directly, or through various forms of ‘partnership.’ [214 Words]

**Keywords:** BINGOs, environmental defenders, necropolitical ecology, partnership

## Introduction

Over the past decade, attention has been drawn to at-risk ‘environmental defenders’ by a host of multilateral organisations, BINGOs (Big International Non-Governmental Organisations) and solidarity networks. Notably, Global Witness has been documenting murders of environmental defenders since 2012. Environmental and land defenders face a myriad of forms of violence: unfolding ‘slow violence’ (Nixon 2011), threats of violence, forced displacement, criminalisation and even direct physical violence (Menton et al 2021). In all these forms, international actors have been complicit in violence against defenders. While extractive industries have frequently been highlighted as complicit in shaping the atmospheres of violence with which defenders must contend (Scheidel et al 2020, Le Billon 2021), these same industries have also been key strategic partners of numerous environmental BINGOs who profess solidarity with defenders. In this paper, we show how environmental BINGOs (CI, TNC & WWF) – through efforts to scale up conservation, and partnerships with extractive industry firms who help to fund conservation through offsetting – are complicit in a ‘necropolitical ecology’ whereby defenders are systematically exposed to increased risk of harm, violence and death. Such partnerships between BINGOs and extractive industry firms can facilitate the ‘greenwashing of violence’ that is perpetrated by those same companies. At the same time, BINGO efforts to establish a ‘Thin Green Line’ and militarise conservation create a precarious double-standard by valuing some lives while cultivating silence about the complicity of park guards in the deaths of others. It is not our intention to ‘throw stones from the sidelines’ and occupy the ‘comfortably radical’ role of *a priori* critiquing partnerships between extractive industry corporations and environmental BINGOs. Instead, we highlight the urgent need for action within the conservation community (Bille Larsen et al 2020) and for BINGOs to acknowledge their roles in this violence, and to realign their practices and priorities in order to stand in solidarity with environmental defenders.

## Necropolitical Ecology & the Thin Green line

‘Necropolitics’ as per Mbembe (2003) expounds on how authorities exercise the right to expose people to death, or the risk of death. Recently, political ecologists have taken up Mbembe’s work on necropolitics, noting its resonance with colonial ‘shoot on sight’ responses to poaching (Cavanagh and Himmelfarb, 2014: 59). Notably, one of the organizations discussed here (WWF – like the IUCN) had among their founders, members of the Society for the Protection of Wild Fauna of Empire, an organization explicitly concerned with criminalizing ‘poaching’ along racialized lines while maintaining license for colonists to hunt for ‘sport’. Here, as with

more contemporary shoot on sight responses to poaching, sovereign authority is exercised to expose certain people – often subsistence hunters criminalized as ‘poachers’ – to the risk of death.

In this paper, we examine the ‘necropolitical ecology’ of the spaces in which environmental BINGOs conduct conservation activities, as well as the extractive zones in which their corporate partners operate. In both cases, we identify a reproduction of “deathly spaces, where certain people are more systematically assured of exposure to greater risk of bodily harm and death” (Margulies 2019, 152). We do not make claims about the *intent* of either environmental BINGOs or their corporate partners, but instead highlight their complicity in creating atmospheres of violence: zones where certain deaths are more likely, and only certain deaths are mourned; where rangers are granted the “formal and tacit authority and even responsibility to secure space and punish transgressors in the name of protecting the spaces and lives of the nonhuman” (Massé 2020: 178). In particular, we stress the significance of the notion of the ‘Thin Green Line’ in policing the deathly spaces of conservation and the role that corporate partnerships play in greenwashing violence by providing kudos to corporations who are linked to atmospheres of violence.

This paper builds on an analysis of the way the ‘Big Three’ conservation organisations - WWF, TNC and CI – position themselves in relation to environmental defenders. We focus equally on the complicity of environmental BINGOs in ‘green violence’ associated with militarized conservation, and on BINGO partnerships with extractive industry corporations, some of which are implicated in violence against defenders. The focus is on extractive industry corporations in particular for several reasons. Firstly, extractive industries positioned themselves as ‘first movers’ in the turn to Corporate Social Responsibility and partnerships with NGOs in the 2000s, and have developed sustained and longstanding partnerships with environmental BINGOs (Adams, 2017; Rajak, 2011; also Rainey et al. 2015). Secondly, several of the extractive industry corporations with whom environmental BINGOs maintain significant partnerships were identified by the Climate Accountability Institute (2019; Licker et al. 2019) as among the top twenty fossil fuel emitters collectively responsible for 35% of emissions (1965-2017) and 51% of ocean acidification (1965-2015).<sup>1</sup> Finally, we focus on partnerships with extractive industries because extractives are among the industries from which environmental defenders are at the most risk (Global Witness 2018), and the sector about which

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<sup>1</sup> These are BHP (TNC), Shell (TNC, CI, formerly WWF), Chevron (IUCN) and Exxon (CI)

complaints of human rights abuses are the most prolific (BHRRC 2015; Bernal Bermudez et al. 2016).

The organizations studied in this article have entered into partnerships with extractive industry firms while also explicitly engaging with discourse on environmental defenders. The Nature Conservancy (2016) has framed its partnerships with indigenous people in terms of relations with ‘nature’s first defenders’ based on a (perhaps belated) recognition that upholding forest community’s rights is associated with lower deforestation rates. Defenders here, however, are figured as protectors *of* nature for humanity as a whole, rather than those subjected to atmospheres of violence for defending their land, livelihoods and environment. This framing of defenders as protectors *of* a global nature forms part of the ‘Thin Green Line’ discourse which we examine in more detail below.

WWF has engaged more broadly with environmental defenders discourse than the other BINGOs. Representatives of their Governance Practice and SDG Hub, Ganapin and Osieyo (2019), draw attention to Frontline Defenders’ figures in order to argue for the significance of SDG 16 (on promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, providing access to justice, and building accountable institutions) for building the good governance needed for ‘protecting and restoring nature’. While this use of the defenders’ discourse most clearly echoes the now-dominant human rights-based framing of environmental defenders, at other times WWF representatives frame former ‘illegal loggers’ turned anti-poaching ‘game scouts’ as ‘forest defenders’ (Skinner et al. 2018). Yet, as we show in the next section on green violence, WWF in particular has demonstrated a rather different response when it comes to the deaths of eco-guards and park rangers, as compared to those who die or are assaulted *at the hands of* allegedly WWF-supported park guards. We argue that this reflects a form of necropolitical ecology, whereby the lives of those who died in the service of ‘protecting nature for all humanity’ are valued more than those who die at the hands of militarized conservation forces. By upholding a ‘Thin Green Line’ between park guards and those who die at the hands of park guards, render certain forms of slow violence invisible, and reproduce colonial forms of nature conservation that undermine prospects for decolonial solidarity with defenders. As we discuss in the subsequent section, prospects for decolonial solidarity are further undermined by Violent Partnerships with extractive industry corporations

## Green Violence

As Fletcher (2018) finds, many States distinguish between green violence they deem legitimate (e.g. violence linked to anti-poaching) and ‘illegitimate’ green violence (e.g. environmentally oriented political violence in the form of sabotage by organisations like Earth First). Much of the literature around green violence focuses on the militarisation of conservation - the use of armed park guards to patrol national parks and combat poaching. It is important to note, however, that green violence also comes in the form of forced displacement of local people from protected areas (Ybarra 2017, Lunstrum and Ybarra 2018), restrictions on access to natural resources upon which local communities depend, criminalisation of traditional hunting and harvesting practices, and as well as symbolic and discursive violence. The militarisation of conservation has also transformed into a ‘war by conservation’ through alignment of conservation NGOs with global security projects that promote a ‘poachers-as-terrorists’ narrative (Duffy 2016). Many environmental NGOs and BINGOs frame conservation and anti-poaching efforts as a war, with Conservation International’s film *Hotspots* calling it ‘the mother of all wars’ (see Buscher and Fletcher 2018).

In 2019, *BuzzFeed* and the *Kathmandu Post* published a series exposing the apparent involvement of WWF-trained and –funded park guards in the torture and killing of local residents and indigenous people in Nepal, Cameroon and CAR (Warren and Baker, 2019a). Specifically, WWF was said to have celebrated the acquittal of guards connected to the death and torture of a Nepalese man (Shikharam) by Chitwan National Park guards, making unsubstantiated allegations that the victim was a ‘crime convicted individual’, and either hired or handed awards to park guards and soldiers accused of this and other offenses. In Cameroon, WWF was accused of suppressing findings that villagers in a proposed park site feared abuse by forest rangers, and elsewhere WWF-supported eco-guards were accused of numerous human rights abuses – of which WWF appears to have been aware at least one year prior to the *BuzzFeed* exposé (Baker and Warren, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c). Indeed, public reports of links between the WWF and park rangers accused of human rights abuses pre-date the *BuzzFeed* report by some years (e.g. Corry, 2015), as do allegations that WWF had been non-responsive when presented with evidence of abuses carried out by rangers and eco-guards (Survival International, n.d.). When WWF announced a review to be carried out by former UN Commissioner for Human Rights Navi Pillay, indigenous rights organisations expressed concern about the limitation of the review to the *BuzzFeed/Kathmandu Post* allegations when ‘these issues are endemic rather than isolated’, and many such abuses had been ‘reported to

WWF previously’ (Counsell et al. 2019; see also Report of the Independent Panel of Experts, 2020: 114-15).

The independent review, released in November 2020, found that WWF failed to follow-up on credible allegations of human rights abuses, and its human rights commitments were particularly weak in Congo Basin countries (report available in WWF 2020a). In response to the independent review, WWF management stated: “we recognize that allegations of human rights abuses have been made against rangers and other third parties not under WWF’s direct control. These allegations were raised in some of the most conflict-affected and insecure places where we work. The reported atrocities go against all the values for which we stand. Human rights abuses are never acceptable, and we feel great sorrow and sympathy for the people who have suffered” (WWF 2020b: 1). The response outlines actions WWF plans to take to better safeguard human rights in its work, yet the language used shifts the blame away from their own organisation. Greenpeace (2020) responded: “WWF needs to fully own their responsibility for abuses that are committed by rangers or ‘ecoguards’ working in the protected areas WWF manages or co-manages”.

The *BuzzFeed* articles and the independent review reveal that WWF had prior knowledge of alleged human rights abuses and violations attributed to park rangers and eco-guards that they have funded and/or trained. The absence of prior action on these allegations sits at odds with WWF’s concern over park rangers and eco-guards who have lost their lives in the course of their work. In partnership with the Australian Thin Green Line Foundation, WWF have compiled a database of the number of park rangers who have lost their lives in the line of duty since 2009, totalling 871 by 2018. Reporting on the 2018 survey, WWF (2018) report that ‘forty-eight rangers of the 107 lost this year were murdered at their place of work whilst protecting wildlife that we all care about.’ Narratives from friends and colleagues of murdered rangers are included along with the figures, memorialising their service in the protection of wildlife for all. Yet, read alongside the studied silence that has surrounded persistent and endemic allegations of human rights abuses *on the part of* rangers, their celebration by WWF and the Thin Green Line shares much with the discourse surrounding the reactionary ‘Thin Blue Line’ rhetoric that has proliferated in the USA as part of a violent backlash to Black Lives Matter.

As Wall (2019) notes, the notion of the Thin Blue Line acts as a ‘fiction of legitimate violence’ designed to ‘render state violence as always defensive in nature while marking unruly populations as not merely transgressors of positive law, but as *hostis humani generis*: “enemies

of all mankind”.’ Here we see the Thin Green Line – both the organization and the concept as reflected in the memorialisation of rangers over those killed by rangers – operating as a fiction of legitimate violence that renders *green* violence as always defensive, and frames ‘unruly’ populations as enemies of wildlife ‘that we all care about’. This necropolitical approach to conservation dovetails with a studied silence regarding the atmospheres of violence produced by the actions of extractive industry corporations who maintain partnerships with environmental BINGOs.

### The Violence of Partnership

Over the last twenty years, environmental BINGOs have steered themselves away from what WWF ambassador and management guru John Elkington (1999) termed the ‘Polarizer’ role of fighting against businesses, towards engaging with business as ‘Integrators’. Critical NGOs are now hardly welcome at Corporate Social Responsibility and Ethical Business events, where a clear delineation is made between ‘partners of choice’ for business actors, and “reckless NGOs who destroy brand and reputation with unfounded accusations” (Rajak, 2011: 17; Gilbert, 2015; see Cousin, 2014). Representatives of the ‘Big Three’ environmental BINGOs have spoken out to defend partnerships with large corporations representing extractive industries that critics depict as predicated on environmental and social harm (Benson and Kirsch 2010).

Peter Seligmann, founding CEO of CI, epitomizes this antipathy towards ‘Polarizers’ and embrace of partnership with large transnational corporations. He declared that it is “simply not sufficient to throw stones from the sidelines... We believe that often the biggest improvements to environmental conservation and human well-being can come from effecting change amongst those who have the biggest impact” (Seligmann 2011; see also Foster, 2014: 254). A similar inducement towards working with the largest (and perhaps the most harmful) corporations came from Peter Kareiva, Chief Scientist at TNC, following criticism about TNC’s partnership with BP in the wake of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill (see also Ottaway and Stephens, 2003). Kareiva declares: “Look, I know that energy extraction is sometimes environmentally damaging, just as roads, ports, biofuels and even desert solar panels can be. In fact, Conservancy scientists engage with the energy industry *precisely because* that industry often does harm the environment” (Kareiva, 2010). Jason Clay and Rob Soutter of WWF likewise insist that working with the largest and most impactful corporations ensures that “when they improve, everyone else in the sector will follow suit”, and that “power lies with the corporations. We can only achieve something by working with them” (Huisman, 2014: 13-16). Reflecting the widespread legitimation of partnership with harmful industry players, and



hostility to critical or oppositional modes of engagement among environmental BINGOs, IUCN Patron of Nature Jon Stryker (2018) has written of the need for “teaming up with `nature’s enemies`...[and the] need to become more pragmatic about choosing collaborators.”

This embrace of collaboration over critique on the part of environmental BINGOs also involves a highly particular approach to corporate personhood. BINGO representatives appear unwilling to attribute specific harms to corporate bodies as a whole, or comment on how operations in one jurisdiction might be more harmful than operations carried out as part of ongoing conservation partnerships (e.g. Huismann, 2014: 58). In 1997, WWF Canada nominated Shell for a British Columbia Minister’s Environmental Award. This nomination took place two years after the killing of Ken Saro-Wiwa and the Ogoni 9, following their campaigning against Shell in the Niger Delta. Pegi Dover, Director of Communications for WWF Canada wrote in response to criticism that the nomination “is not an overall endorsement of their environmental practices...WWF has not commented on the overall environmental record of any of the [nominees] and does not anticipate doing so.” While environmental BINGOs might be reluctant to cast their partnerships in terms of relations with (or endorsements of) entire corporations, many of the corporations they partner with are happy to present their collaborations in this way - and the ability to identify an accountable corporate person is a vital part of seeking redress for corporate human rights abuses (Gear and Weston 2015).

Critical political ecologists have framed this relation between environmental BINGOs and corporations with questionable human rights and environmental records as a form of ‘Faustian Bargain’ whereby BINGOs accept market-based approaches to conservation and the notion that capitalism can be fundamentally sustainable (Adams, 2017). The result is a shared interest in ‘scaling up’ conservation and ‘offsetting’ extractive operations, enabled through the framing of nature as ‘natural capital’ that is fundamentally substitutable – both for other *units* of natural capital and for other *forms* of (economic, social) capital (Adams, 2017: 246; Chapin, 2004: 22; Kirsch, 2010: 91).

Nonetheless, there is little definitive evidence that corporations who partner with environmental BINGOs reduce their impact or enhance biodiversity conservation and the maintenance of ecosystem services (Robinson, 2011). While mining companies are ‘leaders’ in the setting of ‘no net loss’ or ‘net positive impact’ biodiversity conservation goals, most of these goals “have advanced little beyond definition” (Rainey et al. 2015: 6). Against this absence of clear evidence that corporate-BINGO partnerships produce conservation gains

serious questions need to be asked about the consequences of partnership with industries that are often complicit in producing the atmospheres of violence to which defenders are subjected, and the degree to which such partnerships are themselves a feature of ‘necropolitical ecologies’ whereby some environmental defenders are systematically exposed to more risk of harm, violence and death.

### [BHP: The Nature Conservancy & Conservation International](#)

BHP, a multinational mining company listed in London and headquartered in Melbourne, has embarked on a number of partnerships with BINGOs. BHP provides funding to TNC-led conservation activities in Australia, and in 2011, CI launched a global alliance to preserve high conservation value areas in regions where the multinational mining company BHP is active. BHP’s partnership with CI extends to an initiative to develop ‘Forest Bonds’, as well as projects that focus on ‘compensatory actions’ and the ‘mitigation hierarchy’, a clear example perhaps of Adams’ (2017) ‘Faustian Bargain’ through which environmental BINGOs have embraced the language of market-based solutions and the logic of offsetting to enable the pursuit of growth and scalable conservation in tandem (see Chapin 2004; Kirsch 2010). CI’s Marielle Weikel, speaking to *Mining Technology* magazine in 2019, praised the \$50m that BHP has invested in conservation over the course of their partnership, protecting “16 species and enhancing 2500 livelihoods” (Evans 2019). For Weikel, CI’s partnership with BHP can be understood from the standpoint that “we simply will not reach the goals of the Paris Agreement without harnessing nature as a climate solution...CI believes that there is both a need and an opportunity for the private sector to invest in and support natural climate solutions to help nature realise its full potential as a climate solution” (ibid.).

BHP has simultaneously been criticised for its membership of a lobbying group advocating for expansion of coal. Even following CEO Andrew Mackenzie’s celebrated speech in 2019 committing BHP on a course towards net zero emissions, shareholders voted to remain in the Minerals Council of Australia, a lobbying group accused of working against the Paris targets and with ‘pro-coal’ advertising campaigns (Hume 2019). As noted above, serious questions have been raised about the contribution that firms such as BHP - and the other extractive industry corporations partnering with the BINGOs at the centre of this article’s analysis - have and continue to make to global carbon emissions and ocean acidification (Licker et al. 2019). But the ‘harmony ideology’ (Foster, 2014) underpinning partnerships between extractive industry corporations and environmental BINGOs does more than paper over the biophysical impossibility of sustainable ‘growth’ premised on continued resource extraction (Ward et al.

2016). It also detracts attention away from the continued allegations of human rights abuses made towards BINGOs' corporate partners, and undermines efforts to build solidarity with defenders who are attempting to hold corporations like BHP to account.

Leaving aside various historical scandals (see Kirsch 2014), BHP remains embroiled in allegations of human rights abuses. A £3.9 billion class action suit was put before the UK's courts in April 2019, attempting to hold BHP to account for its part in the Samarco tailings dam collapse which result in the death of 19 people and the toxification of the Doce river and surrounding land (Miller 2019). Environmental and other human rights defenders from Latin America have travelled to the UK to address BHP at shareholder meetings, expressing concern about delayed reparations at Samarco, and the lack of housing built since 2015 - as well as raising concerns about displacement of indigenous communities at the (part-BHP owned) Cerrejon mine and the impact of the mine on vital water sources (James 2019b). Representatives of the Tabaco Relocation Committee have expressed concern that after 18 years, Cerrejon has not met its obligations to provide relocation, reparations or productive land (James 2019a), allegations which Cerrejon (2019) displaced back on to the community it saw as 'impeding' its progress. Without wishing to be reductive about the complex organization of both environmental BINGOs and their corporate partners, neither of which can be attributed unitary motives or intentions, it is perhaps unsurprising that defenders might not perceive BINGOs to be their allies when they partner with corporations whose shareholders vote to continue undercutting the Paris goals, rather than the defenders who attempt to secure land, livelihoods and environment in the face of extractive harm.

#### [Royal Dutch Shell: The Nature Conservancy & \(formerly\) WWF](#)

BHP is but one among many mining and oil 'supermajors' who partner with leading environmental BINGOs. Shell's long history of 'partnership' with WWF has been well documented (Huisman 2014: 89-93), and they have been in partnership with TNC since 2009 and IUCN since 2003. As with CI's relationship with BHP, there is a focus on the 'mitigation hierarchy', and the reduction of net carbon footprint through offsetting: Adams' (2017) Faustian Bargain once more in action. Meanwhile, concerns have been raised by UNEP over Shell's failure to clean up oil spill sites, and its use of discredited and misleading information to attribute oil spills in the Niger Delta to sabotage or theft (Amnesty International & FOE 2014; Amnesty 2014). There are haunting parallels between internal memos that appear to show Shell requesting support from the Nigerian military, and paying honoraria as a 'show of gratitude' for the 'sustained favourable disposition' shown by military commanders implicated

in killings of Ogoniland civilians (Dummett 2019; see Zalik 2004), and the WWF's displays of gratitude towards park guards accused of abuses and murder in Nepal. If environmental BINGOs continue to uphold the 'Thin Green Line' through their own practices, and partner with extractive industry corporations who attempt to evade accountability for their own complicity in creating atmospheres of violence it is difficult to see how meaningful or decolonial solidarity with defenders can be cultivated.

### Conclusion: Decolonizing Solidarity

*"I will not waste my time working with [environmental BINGOs]. They are in bed with the very people we are fighting against, with the same people who are killing us and destroying our waters"* - environmental defender from Ecuador, August 2018.

As we argue above, environmental BINGOs are frequently complicit in shaping 'necropolitical ecologies' and atmospheres of violence around sites of conservation and/or extraction. It is unsurprising that many environmental defenders do not see BINGOs as allies when they side with extractive corporations and 'enemies of nature' rather than the defenders who attempt to secure land, livelihoods and environment in the face of extractive harm. The greenwashing of violence resulting from BINGO partnerships with extractive companies and their complicity in green violence carried out in the name of conservation, reflect a holdover from the colonial past (and present) of conservation. While growing efforts to support environmental defenders are commendable, BINGOs and other actors need to consider the implications of their wider remit of activities and partnerships, many of which contribute to creating the very spaces and atmospheres of violence that threaten environmental defenders. Silence in the face of necropolitics, in the face of human rights violations, and complicity in greenwashing companies responsible for slow violence and other violences, is inexcusable.

Given the increasing number of accusations and reports that point towards their complicity, BINGOs cannot claim ignorance and need to take concrete actions to counteract the human rights violations and violence with which they have been complicit. Recent signs are not promising in this regard. As Dominguez & Luoma (2020) note in their 'alternative executive summary' of WWF's Report of the Independent Panel of Experts published in November 2020, WWF's claim that the Independent Review found 'no evidence' that WWF staff 'directed, participated in or encouraged' human rights abuses is not upheld by the Report's findings. In fact, the Independent Review found that WWF had knowledge of alleged human rights abuses and provided support to eco-guards despite knowledge of alleged human rights abuses in protected areas in Cameroon, DRC, ROC, Nepal and India. Resurgent enthusiasm among

BINGOs and business leaders for expanding protected areas under the rubric of a ‘New Deal for Nature’ is equally concerning, in the face of failures to address recent human rights abuses. While defenders attempt to hold transnational corporate persons to account through legal mechanisms, we must ask whether BINGOs are still content to distance themselves from extractive corporations’ activities beyond the narrow confines of their partnerships.

We argue for a decolonial approach to conservation, for a “vision of human life that is not dependent upon or structured by the forced imposition of one ideal of society over those that differ” (Mignolo 2007, p459). In essence, a transition towards ‘convivial conservation’ which Buscher and Fletcher (2019) describe as a “post-capitalist approach to conservation that promotes radical equity, structural transformation and environmental justice and so contributes to an overarching movement to create a more equal and sustainable world.” A transition away from the creation of ‘deathly spaces’ (Margulies 2019) and the ‘atmospheres of violence’ that put environmental defenders at risk (Menton et al 2021). Many INGOs have begun to engage in discourse around decolonial approaches and ‘shifting the power’ away from INGOs based in the North towards NGOs and grassroots movements in the South. Such a shift would allow for more effective change but also would lead to a drastic change in the structure of these organisations and has been slow to materialise.

As Doane (2019) noted recently, for “all the lofty words about ‘shifting the power,’ many INGO staff and board members still seem unable to let go of a model that values technocrats over movement builders, and which places a higher value on their own Northern white role.” Environmental BINGOs are no exception. It is time to move away from a focus on Centers for Environmental Leadership (CI) and One Planet Leader Academies (WWF) that further amplify the voices and perspectives of personnel from BINGOs’ corporate partners. Instead, we need to foreground the voices of defenders, listen to the narratives of those who live in atmospheres of violence, and take care before entering into partnerships with the “bewilderers” who turn the slow progression of environmental violence into doubt and inaction (Nixon 2011: 40). Decolonizing BINGO solidarity with environmental defenders requires structural change, but perhaps more critically bravery on the part of BINGOs to recognise their complicity and begin to build decolonial, respectful and equitable relationships with grassroots movements and communities that fight to protect lands, forests and waters from invasion by extractive industries and thereby protect the wildlife and ecosystems that BINGOs aim to conserve.

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