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"Only the orangutans get a life jacket":

Uncommoning responsibility in a global conservation nexus

A B S T R A C T
In an era of mass extinction, who gets a life jacket, who is left to drown or swim—and on what basis? This article addresses these questions by analyzing how tropes and practices of responsibility are variously enacted, reworked, contested, and refused across the global nexus of orangutan conservation. Drawing on multisited, collaborative ethnography, we trace the mutually constitutive relation between multiple orangutan figures and commons imaginaries at different nodes of conservation—from environmental activism in the Global North to NGO-villager encounters in rural Borneo. In so doing, we "uncommon" international conservation's encompassing planetary imaginaries, showing how dominant portrayals of the orangutan as a global responsibility are translated and fragmented in different settings. We further contemplate what an analytic of responsibility might bring to ongoing discussions about the "commoning" planetary epoch in which conservation is increasingly embedded: the Anthropocene. [*commons*, *uncommoning*, *responsibility*, *orangutan conservation*, *the Anthropocene*, *Borneo*, *Indonesia*]

Di era kepunahan massal, siapa yang mendapatkan pelampung, siapa yang ditinggalkan untuk tenggelam atau berenang ke tepian—dan mengapa mereka harus bernasib demikian? Artikel ini berusaha menjawab pertanyaan-pertanyaan tersebut dengan mengeksplorasi bagaimana tanggung jawab dikiaskan dan dipraktikkan secara beragam, digarap ulang, diadu, dan ditolak di seluruh rangkaian pertalian global konservasi orangutan. Dengan menggunakan etnografi kolaboratif multi-site, kami menelusuri hubungan pokok antara beberapa figur orangutan dan imajinasi umum pada simpul-simpul yang berbeda di dalam konservasi—dari aktivisme lingkungan di kawasan Utara dunia, hingga pertemuan antara LSM dan anggota masyarakat di wilayah pedesaan Borneo. Dengan melakukan hal itu, kami konservasi internasional dengan tata imajiner yang "langka", menunjukkan bagaimana potret dominan orangutan yang menjadi tanggung jawab dunia diterjemahkan dan terfragmentasi dalam lingkungan yang berbeda. Lebih jauh lagi, kami merenungkan tentang sebuah tanggung jawab analitik yang dapat dibawa ke dalam diskusi yang sedang berlangsung mengenai "keumuman" epos yang kini semakin lekat dengan konservasi, yaitu: Antroposen. [*langka*, *keumuman*, *tanggung jawab*, *konservasi orangutan*, *Antroposen*, *Borneo*, *Indonesia*]

"It seems that only the orangutans get a life jacket," Bapa Dini comments sarcastically.[1] Together with a crowd of villagers, we observe a conservation organization prepare for an orangutan release in a National Park in Indonesian Borneo. With the help of men from the village, conservation workers load five heavy metal cages on local boats that will take them to the release site upriver. The orangutans are hardly visible. To protect them in case of an accident, floats are lashed to the sides of their cages. "Whether local people die or drown doesn't seem to matter," Bapa Dini continues. "I am confused about why they waste so much money just to save orangutans," another woman comments in disbelief. "Can you believe they pay 1 million rupiah (US$71) per boat? Four boats are departing, and that's not even including wages for the villagers looking after the orangutans." The villagers struggle to make sense of the release. "They [orangutans] belong to foreign countries that hire local people to take care of them," Bapa Dini reasons. "What is the benefit for local people?" another person asks, and continues laughingly, "Not bad, if they become a meal."

Schreer's field notes

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In the Global North, orangutan conservation is most visibly represented by the work of rescue and rehabilitation centers in Borneo and Sumatra. These centers save orangutans from captivity, wildlife trafficking, and human-wildlife conflict, then rehabilitate and train them to survive in the forest. Their eventual release into "the wild" is often celebrated as the rewarding conclusion of an arduous process, a small victory in efforts to save this critically endangered species from extinction.[2] Yet, as suggested by the above excerpt—written during Schreer and Thung's visit to an upriver village in Indonesian Borneo—such events may be viewed quite differently by those who live in or near release sites. That's because many of them see conservation as just another external player in a fraught, dynamic space—a space marked by regular resource conflicts; the socioeconomic, political marginalization of indigenous communities; and the erosion of indigenous people's customary rights (e.g., Li 1999; Tsing 2005). In recent decades a combination of state-led modernization and extractive capitalism has radically transformed the lives and environments of villagers like Bapa Dini and other inhabitants of one of Indonesia's key resource frontiers (e.g., Eilenberg 2014; Sanders et al. 2019; Schreer 2016). Thus, for these villagers, orangutan conservation is not a self-evidently worthwhile project but one that—like frontier development—raises concrete questions about rights, ownership, legitimacy, responsibility, benefit sharing, and justice (Howson 2018; Myers and Muhajir 2015; Sikor 2013). Who, they ask, is responsible for orangutans? Who has the right, duty, or authority to act for or against them, and who gains or loses in the process?

In this article, we examine ideas of responsibility that are widespread in international biodiversity conservation and that legitimize its policies and practices. Yet despite its pervasiveness and power, the trope of responsibility has yet to be fully unpacked. What conservation imaginaries, relations, and subjectivities do concepts and practices of responsibility produce? What are their on-the-ground effects? And how do they diverge from, intersect with, or coexist alongside other regimes of responsibility, ownership, legitimacy, and rights?

By exploring these questions in the context of orangutan conservation, we have three main aims. First, we take up Susanna Trnka and Catherine Trundle's recent invitation to think responsibility beyond dominant, individual-centered "neoliberal discourses of responsibilization" and to acknowledge the many "interrelational" ways that responsibility is conceived and enacted (Trnka and Trundle 2017, 3). Specifically, we examine the relationship between tropes or practices of responsibility and different imaginaries of the "commons" (e.g., planet, nation-state, local communities), a relationship that varies as it plays out across multiple nodes of orangutan conservation, from environmental activism to conservation bureaucracies to the experiences of Bornean villagers.

We ground our analysis in two key, overlapping processes: responsibilization and responsivity. *Responsibilization* refers to the social, structural, and affective means that produce self-governing, environmentally aware subjects—such as ethical Western consumers and rural communities—who *should* take responsibility for orangutans.[3] As we show, however, these mechanisms can also be used by their targets to deflect responsibility or to responsibilize others. Such moments underline that it is never straightforward to produce responsible environmental subjects and behaviors (e.g., Cepek 2011; Forsyth and Walker 2014; Singh 2013)—both individuals and entities are inevitably embroiled in multiple obligations and interdependencies (Trnka and Trundle 2017, 3). By contrast, *responsivity* captures the actions and processes through which different subjects react and adapt to each other and to a "multiplicity of responsibilities" (Trnka and Trundle 2017, 22).[4] This is especially visible in rural Borneo, where NGOs' attempts to responsibilize indigenous communities often give rise *and* give way to responsive interactions, whereby individual staff and villagers work around their own and each other's responsibilities, creating divergences and connections across uncommon grounds.

Our second, related aim is to disrupt the hegemonic "commoning" claims that dominate international conservation thought and practice. We aim to do this by foregrounding the persistent *un*commonalities that pervade one conservation nexus. Here, we think with two disparate bodies of work. First, we describe and build on efforts by our interlocutors (in NGOs and villages) to make sense of, transform, refuse, or unsettle inter/national conservation's claims on orangutans and forests. As will become clear, these constitute forms of theorization, elucidation, translation, and disruption that inspire our ethnographic analysis. Second, we pick up the challenge that Marisol de la Cadena (2015) and her collaborators (e.g., contributors to Blaser and de la Cadena 2017a) have recently posed to the "commons" imaginaries invoked by governments, extractive industries, and environmental movements to frame their agendas and practices (Blaser and de la Cadena 2017b, 185). Such imaginaries are built on the assumption that humans and nonhumans inhabit a singular world, that they are ontologically distinct, and that humans can use, control, and contest access to nonhumans (186). These imaginaries leave little room for—and constantly neutralize or dismiss—alternative human-nonhuman configurations, such as the notion that "other-than-human" beings like animals or mountains can be persons or political agents (Blaser and de la Cadena 2017b; see also de la Cadena 2015). Against such models, de la Cadena and others highlight the analytical and political purchase of *uncommoning*: of making visible the "heterogeneous [human/nonhuman]

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assemblages of life" that are usually invisibilized by science, the state, and other hegemonic commoning agents. At the same time, they explore the possibility of building other commons that, far from demanding homogeneity, would be undergirded by divergence and uncommons (Blaser and de la Cadena 2017b, 192).

In a similar spirit, our article seeks to uncommon international conservation's commoning imaginaries and responsibilizing practices by tracing how they are variously engaged with, transformed, refused, and contested. Our point, however, is not simply to dismantle international conservation's commoning claims, lay bare their local irrelevance, or discredit the multifaceted concept of "the commons," which has been put to both hegemonic and counterhegemonic use over the years (e.g., Bodirsky 2018; Hardin 1968; Harvey 2011; Ostrom 1990). Rather, we also gesture toward how connections and commonalities can emerge across uncommon ontologies, values, and priorities—not only in rural Borneo but also in the so-called Anthropocene, the proposed term for a new geological epoch marked by human dominance over the planet's biogeophysical processes.

Our third aim, then, is to contemplate what an analytic of responsibility can bring to ongoing scholarly conversations about the Anthropocene, a powerful "commoning" figure that has increasingly reshaped biodiversity conservation's models and tropes of responsibility (Holmes 2015). Its influence is evident in orangutan conservation, which has recently been grappling with both Anthropocenic phenomena (e.g., climate change, forest fires, plantation expansion) and emerging Anthropocenic discourses—particularly regarding human-orangutan coexistence in anthropogenic landscapes (e.g., Hockings et al. 2015; Lee, Carr, and Ahmad 2019; Meijaard 2018; Spehar et al. 2018; Wich et al. 2015). As such, orangutan conservation constitutes a "problem space" (Moore 2016, 27) through which to think (about) responsibility in the Anthropocene.

We pick up on this point in the conclusion, where we make an ethnographically grounded case for thinking the Anthropocene *through* and *as* responsibility. Such an approach, we argue, uncommons the notion of the Anthropocene as an encompassing planetary condition, foregrounding instead the multiple relations and processes that constitute it and their differential impacts on the ground. Like Bornean villagers' responses to conservation, this move makes visible often occluded questions of legitimacy, accountability, (in)equality, and (in)justice, and it allows us to parse the different meanings of responsibility, asking both who/what is responsible for causing and perpetuating the Anthropocene and who/what is responsible for mitigating or redressing it. At the same time, this approach invites us to consider—as our interlocutors do—how to responsively forge connections, however small or brief, across uncommonality in the Anthropocene.

In what follows, we reveal how various ideals and practices of responsibility are defined, performed, and (re)configured in four key "domains" (Jensen 2017) of orangutan conservation: environmental activism (Chua), virtual orangutan adoption programs (Fair) in the Global North, national policies and discourses in Indonesia (Stępień), and the interactions among conservation NGOs, villagers, and orangutans in rural Borneo (Schreer and Thung). Each domain entails distinct orangutan figures; regimes of ownership, stewardship, or jurisdiction; and mechanisms through which responsibility is generated, attributed, claimed, contested, or distributed. While not representing all of orangutan conservation's sprawling, diverse operations, they are illuminating ethnographic nodes that, when juxtaposed, reveal how multiple commons imaginaries and questions of responsibility intersect, diverge, or act on each other. In this respect, we are not simply seeking to deconstruct conservation's discourses and power dynamics, but to use this juxtaposition to spark thought about un/commonality and responsibility in the Anthropocene.

Our ethnographic material was elicited through various methods and modalities—including village-based participant observation among various ethnic groups in the provinces of Central and West Kalimantan (Schreer and Thung), documentary and visual analysis (Chua, Fair, and Stępień), and interviews (all authors). The material is held together by an analysis that derives from talking and thinking with our interlocutors, as well as our own comparative discussions and cowriting processes. Rather than neatly triangulating data from different field sites, such collaborative, fractal scholarship allows us to synthesize material from different (uncommon, even) domains to interrogate certain shared, yet multifarious, analytics and concepts.

Orangutans as global responsibilities

In February 2020, climate activist Greta Thunberg led thousands in a Youth Strike for Climate march through Bristol, United Kingdom. Amid the crowds was an arresting sight: a black coffin featuring the white outline of a Bornean orangutan's face, alongside data about the species' population, key threats, and critically endangered status. This was complemented by placards of orangutans and other endangered species, featuring such lines as "Our voice for the voiceless in the face of climate and biodiversity crisis."[5]

The coffins embodied the spirit of performative grief characterizing recent climate activist movements and events, such as Extinction Rebellion's Funeral Marches "to mourn all the life [on Earth] we've lost, are losing and are still to lose."[6] Yet there is a long pedigree to the scalar logic and tropes of decline and responsibility they so theatrically invoked. Environmentalist movements have long revolved around "'declensionist' narratives" in which "the awareness of nature's beauty and value is intimately linked to a

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foreboding sense of its looming destruction" (Heise 2016, 7; see also Adams 2004; Sodikoff 2012). Since the late 20th century, these narratives have been embodied by iconic images of endangered megafauna such as orangutans, polar bears, and whales, which serve as synecdoches (Heise 2016, 22) of a larger entity—variously styled as "nature," "the environment," and "global biodiversity"—that is under existential threat.

In recent years, these creatures and their habitats have become embedded in an even more capacious imaginary: the planetary commons. An extension of earlier scholarly and environmentalist debates (e.g., Hardin 1968; Ostrom 1990) over how to manage "common pool[s] of resources" that are "equally accessible to everyone" (Blaser and de la Cadena 2017b, 186), the notion of the planetary commons conjures a singular world encompassing differently scaled, contiguous, mutually dependent components, such as the planet, ecosystems, nation-states, humanity, and individuals. Today, this commons imaginary undergirds the work of climate movements, such as Extinction Rebellion and Zero Hour, as well as more technocratic programs, such as the One Health Initiative and the Global Commons Alliance. In the latter's foundational document, for example, Nakicenovic et al. (2016, iv) describe the "Global Commons" as "the ecosystems, biomes and processes that regulate the stability and resilience of the Earth system." These, the authors assert, are "our common heritage and every child's birthright" (27), and it is thus humanity's "common responsibility to ensure that we have a resilient planet and resilient people" to weather the crises of the Anthropocene (27–28). Here, the ontological segues into the moral and the political, and a generic human "we" is exhorted to take responsibility for the planet.

This imperative to save the planet takes specific forms in orangutan-related activism. Orangutans have been an international conservation concern since at least the 1960s, when they were threatened mainly by logging and wildlife trafficking (Rijksen 1986). From the mid-2000s, however, "the plight of the orangutan" has been progressively reframed as a planetwide problem fueled by mass biodiversity loss and global consumption—notably of palm oil, whose cultivation has been highlighted by conservationists and the media as a key driver of deforestation and thus orangutan extinction in Borneo and Sumatra (e.g., Buckland 2005).[7]

This narrative about palm oil and orangutan extinction acts as a commoning device in two ways. First, it implicates individual, mainly Western consumers in the killing of faraway orangutans (Chua 2018, 882–85; Fair 2021). Second, it galvanizes these consumers into saving those apes, the rain forest, and "global biodiversity" by either boycotting palm oil or purchasing only "sustainable" products that contain palm oil. The narrative's responsibilizing logic is illustrated by Greenpeace's short animation, *Rang-tan: The Story of Dirty Palm Oil*, which gained UK-wide attention in late 2018. Comprising a dialogue between a girl and an orphaned orangutan whose rain forest has been destroyed by oil palm, *Rang-tan* ends with the girl promising to "fight to save your [orangutan's] home" and a final frame that reads "Dedicated to the 25 orangutans we lose everyday."[8] On the original website (now off-line), viewers could sign a petition to "tell big brands to stop using palm oil from forest destroyers"; later, the animation was used by many British schools as a resource, spurring students to respond by writing letters, making consumer decisions, and other individual acts.

Like the collective pronouns deployed in climate marches and discussions about the global commons, *Rang-tan*'s "we" enrolls its viewers in a common (human) project of environmental stewardship for one nonhuman, highly personalized species. This imaginary is generated, reproduced, and disseminated in various forms across mainstream media, digital platforms (Chua 2018), orangutan organizations' outreach, and environmental activism. Cumulatively, these form an aesthetic and affective infrastructure of "responsibilization," one that invokes a domain of planetary commonality, privileges specific scalar and causal relations (e.g., individual palm oil consumption → destruction of species and biodiversity), and produces particular subjectivities (e.g., human savior, orangutan victim). In this way, it establishes the obligation—and indeed the right—of orangutan lovers to take action to "save the orangutan." As the next section shows, one way for supporters in the Global North to do so is by participating in virtual orangutan adoption programs.

Orangutans as virtual kin

> I mean, I know he's not mine, but it felt like he's mine, like, "I have adopted him."
>
> Alex, UK-based orangutan adopter

US- and UK-based orangutan conservation supporters largely subscribe to the ideas of global and planetary commonality and individual responsibility described above. Yet, as suggested by Fair's interviews with 54 virtual orangutan adopters, they also experiment with different scales of responsibility and care, personalizing their relations of obligation to particular individual orangutans. In doing so, they depart from the subjectivity of the global "we," thereby refashioning international conservation's vision of a global/planetary commons by rendering it less abstract.

A sense of responsibility for the plight of the orangutan is both generated and exercised through acts of "virtual adoption," the process by which supporters (either for themselves or as a gift) donate money to help an individually named ape and receive regular updates about its

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progress. The orangutans offered for adoption are mostly young orphans being cared for in rehabilitation centers in Borneo or Sumatra, where they are taught the skills necessary to (hopefully) begin autonomous lives in the "wild" (Palmer 2020). Virtual adoption is directly underpinned by the affective media infrastructure discussed above; many supporters pinpoint nature documentaries or Greenpeace's *Rang-tan* commercial as the reason they decided to adopt.

Virtual orangutan adoption explicitly uses a language of ongoing responsibility, kinship, and relations. It avoids connotations of purchasing and property, and instead enacts a mode of stewardship for a nonhuman Other. Adoption thus performs a double rescaling of concern from the general to the individual. First, it moves away from the generalities of the orangutan as a species and as part of a global commons, and it particularizes the target of charitable concern through designating a single ape as a named adoptee. Second, it responsibilizes individual conservation supporters, specifying their unique relation to that ape. In interviews, adopters expressed a strong feeling of attachment to their particular adoptee, displaying its photo prominently in their home (often alongside family photos); avidly following its progress via social media; using the language of family, kinship, or spiritual connection; or simply declaring it "my orangutan."

This rescaling of responsibility highlights adopters' views of the relationship between attachment and financial commitment. For many of our interviewees, the act of donating was key to their responsibilization as individual wildlife supporters and how they took ownership of the orangutan's plight. Adopters felt that if they were to cancel their adoptions, they would be letting those individual orangutans down. If forced to reduce their spending, many said they would cease their direct debits to generic charitable causes before severing ties with their named adoptees—a choice that reflects the power of these affective attachments.

Although financial responsibility was integral to adopters' sense of connection with individual orangutans, it belied the tenuous, mediated, and symbolic nature of that connection. While engaging in a playful fantasy that the orangutan was "theirs" alone, adopters were often aware that each orangutan had many other adopters (more than 400 per orangutan in one charity's case), and consequently that their donations did not benefit one ape but contributed generally toward the charity's work. Through their donations, adopters thus take responsibility for each charity's collection of rehabilitant orangutans (not all of which are put up for adoption), as well as the wild orangutan populations that are also supported through charities' habitat conservation schemes. In this way, orangutan adopters simultaneously engage with formations of responsibility and concern at the scales of the individual, population, and species.

In interviews, adopters used various tropes to describe orangutans, ranging from wronged victims to playful children to resilient forces of wildness. Certain adopters used anthropomorphic and sometimes infantilizing terms to describe their adoptees, affectionately framing them as their "babies" or "furry bubbly bubs."[9] Yet adopters also often celebrated the rehabilitated orangutan's potential autonomy and freedom, highlighting the apes' (hoped-for) return to wildness as a key factor in their decision to support particular rehabilitation centers. This combination of affective attachment to adopted apes and the celebration of their imminent wild autonomy is reflected in regular updates about adoptees' rehabilitation journey and occasional uplifting reports about ex-adoptees that have been spotted in the forest after their release.

In sum, adoption responsibilizes faraway actors into responding individually to global problems of extinction and biodiversity loss. By creating symbolic, mediated philanthropic relationships between named individual apes—human and orangutan—people enact responsibility on a more personal and less abstract scale. In this multiscalar way, virtual orangutan adoption bridges individual conservation subjectivities and planetary-level imaginaries, enabling supporters in the Global North to feel responsible for orangutans as individuals, species, and members of a global commons. By aligning themselves with a narrative of planetary commonality, supporters undertake an expansive form of responsible stewardship that transcends the boundaries of the nation-state. Yet, as the next section suggests, this view is not widely shared by policy makers and politicians in Indonesia—one of only two countries (alongside Malaysia) where orangutans exist in the wild.

Orangutans as national assets

> There is a principle that must not be forgotten: that wildlife belongs to the state and must be protected and safeguarded by state administrators.
>
> Ir. Wiratno, director general of the Indonesian Natural Resources and Ecosystems Conservation Agency (Ditjen KSDAE), December 2019 (ForestHints.news 2019)

At first glance, Indonesia's stance on the management and conservation of orangutans seems clear: orangutans are the responsibility of the nation-state. A reaffirmation of national sovereignty, the abovementioned "principle" is rooted in the imaginary of the "national commonweal" enshrined in Indonesia's 1945 constitution, which authorizes the state to act as the owner and custodian of the national commons on behalf of its citizens.[10] The invocation of this national idiom delimits and disrupts international conservation's "idea of 'the world' as shared ground" (Blaser and de la Cadena 2017b, 186), privileging instead the

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nation-state's sovereign right to protect and use its own natural resources. This, however, is only part of the picture. As an analysis of Indonesia's conservation bureaucracy reveals, the state routinely mediates among various competing phenomena, including international ideas of planetary commonality and global responsibility for biodiversity, national-level concerns about sovereignty and development, and multiple regional demands and complexities.

Since 2007 orangutans in Indonesia have been subject to national species-level planning, in the form of the *Orangutan Conservation Strategy and Action Plan* (*SRAK*) *2007–2017* (Soehartono et al. 2007) and its successor, *SRAK 2019–2029* (Ditjen KSDAE 2019).[11] Here, we use *SRAK*'s second edition to examine how orangutans are rendered in national-level discourse and policy. *SRAK* defines orangutans as Indonesia's unique "umbrella species" (I: *spesies payung*),[12] a widely used term in conservation biology for a species that, if protected, can help safeguard other organisms in its habitat (Roberge and Angelstam 2004). *SRAK* furthermore asserts that orangutans play an important role in ensuring (I: *menjaga*) forests' regeneration (Ditjen KSDAE 2019, 5). This definition thus combines two popular conservation motifs and builds on the widespread conservation axiom that halting species extinction and habitat loss directly benefits human development and well-being (Cribb 2019). At the same time, the plan distances itself from imaginaries of planetary commonality or a generic "humanity," instead identifying the *Indonesian* state and its citizens as the primary beneficiaries of local ecosystem services. Accordingly, *SRAK* insists that the objectives of orangutan conservation must align with fair (I: *berkeadilan*) and sustainable (I: *berkelanjutan*) economic, social, and cultural development (Ditjen KSDAE 2019, 7). It thus encompasses orangutans within a definition of biodiversity as "an asset" and as the "basic capital of development," serving "to benefit the entire nation of Indonesia" (Darajati et al. 2016, VIII). Here, matters of orangutan conservation are entwined with, but subordinate to, national political and development agendas.

To achieve its goals, *SRAK* seeks to responsibilize companies, NGOs, scientists, local governments, and communities as stewards of orangutans and their habitats (Ditjen KSDAE 2019, 28–30, 32–34; see Figure 1). Acting through Ditjen KSDAE, the national government aims to identify and map all institutions and activities related to orangutan and habitat conservation, incorporating them into one management regime that will hold them accountable for implementing the plan. Central to this is an ideal of "partnership" (I: *kemitraan*)—identified as a key mechanism for successful orangutan conservation (Ditjen KSDAE 2019, 7)—which comes bundled with targeted assignments, success indicators, and evaluative devices.

SRAK may thus be described as a bureaucratic technology (Agrawal 2005) for extending the state's authority over and beyond the domain of orangutan conservation. As such, it serves as a powerful commoning device, drawing forests, orangutans, and conservation bodies into a framework of responsibilization and management built around an imaginary of the national commonweal. This nationalized framework, however, is also inflected and constantly tempered by the Indonesian government's responsiveness to international conservation's commoning imaginaries and politics. During the launch of the first *SRAK* at the Biodiversity Conference in Bali in 2007, for example, then president Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono stated,

> A key understanding that stems from this Action Plan is that to save orangutans, we must save the forests. And by saving, regenerating, and sustainably managing forests, we are also doing our part in reducing global greenhouse gas emissions, while contributing to sustainable economic development of Indonesia. Successful orangutan conservation is the symbol of responsible management of the earth's resources. (Soehartono et al. 2007, vii)

Embedding orangutan conservation in broader imaginaries of a planetary commons and planetary threats, this announcement reflected the Indonesian government's increasing responsiveness to international biodiversity conservation and climate change politics. For example, Indonesia has been a major player in REDD+ schemes (Wibowo and Giessen 2015), which secure substantial international funds and boost the state's reputation as a committed partner—even a "superpower" (ForestHints.news 2021)—in the global fight against climate change. But more than responding to international pressures, the Indonesian state has co-opted and rechanneled them. For example, by infusing climate change programs with national concerns over food and energy security and sea level rise, the state underscores the archipelago's "particular vulnerability" to climate change impacts, and thus the responsibility that high-carbon-emitting countries have to redress those impacts (e.g., MEFRI 2018, 15).

This insistence on holding developed countries accountable in programs to mitigate climate change was illustrated in September 2021, when Indonesia abruptly terminated its REDD+ partnership with Norway on the grounds that the latter had not fully met its obligations to provide "results-based payment[s]" to Indonesia for its achievements in reducing its greenhouse gas emissions (MFARI 2021). The Indonesian state thus asserted not only its stake but also its agency in international efforts to tackle planetary threats, reflecting a mounting ideology of assertive nationalism (Aspinall 2016), one that co-opts orangutans, biodiversity, and carbon as national assets. At the same time, these assertions reflect the state's responsivity to growing internal demands to boost Indonesia's international power and status and to push back against what is sometimes

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Figure 1. Signboards depict officially protected species at the entrance of an oil palm plantation in Indonesian Borneo, 2019. The orangutan is but one of these protected species, and for many local people the orangutan is not the most charismatic or important animal around. (Paul Thung) [This figure appears in color in the online issue]

styled as foreign criticism or meddling in the country's internal affairs (ERI 2019; ForestHints.news 2020).

In sum, national-level policies and mechanisms of orangutan conservation entail juggling acts between national pressures and aspirations, conservation concepts and politics, and international imaginaries of orangutans as planetary concerns. Orangutans serve as important "interscalar vehicles" (Hecht 2018) for this process: embraced as national assets by international bodies, the state, and NGOs, they generate capital that is simultaneously material, ecological, symbolic, and political (see also Lowe 2006; Margulies 2019).

Such capital, however, does not always translate smoothly into provincial and local government interventions. *SRAK*'s implementation is complicated by Indonesia's internal ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity, a fraught history of center-periphery relations (Haug, Roessler, and Grumblies 2007), and a profusion of power struggles, competing interests, and fluctuating rivalries and alliances (Gallemore et al. 2015; Sahide and Giessen 2015) in Indonesian bureaucracy on levels both vertical (e.g., between ministries) and horizontal (central-provincial-district). Moreover, orangutan conservation's on-the-ground frameworks of responsibilization are constantly reshaped by various state and nonstate actors, who often responsively shift their own protocols, visions, and moral accounts to form brief or long-term alliances. Such work usually happens in the shadows, out of view of distant publics, partners, and funders. Yet, as suggested by the following exploration of village-NGO-orangutan interactions in Borneo, it is precisely this responsivity that makes conservation doable on the ground.

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Working across uncommons in rural Borneo

"Orangutans work well internationally, but they don't work here in Indonesia," Jonni explained as we discussed the challenges of orangutan conservation. Jonni manages the Indonesian branch of one of the world's biggest organizations dedicated to saving orangutans from extinction. The tension he alludes to pervades the work of local NGOs. The image of the orangutan as part of a planetary commons and a cornerstone of global biodiversity works well to gain attention and raise funds in international circles. It does not, however, necessarily appeal to Indonesian government representatives, business stakeholders, and rural villagers, who may have different understandings of orangutans and the forest, and may differently envisage and form relations of obligation, duty, and care.

In this section, we describe how questions of responsibility, ownership, and legitimacy are negotiated and contested in rural Indonesian Borneo, where Schreer and Thung have conducted fieldwork since 2009 and 2018, respectively. Like most indigenous Bornean societies, these communities combine rice farming, fishing, and hunting with collecting forest products, cultivating cash crops, logging, and small-scale mining. In recent decades, they have also grappled with the new livelihood opportunities and legal-bureaucratic regimes introduced by infrastructural expansion, plantations, corporate mining, local government apparatuses, and conservation projects (Arenz et al. 2017; De Koninck, Bernard, and Bissonnette 2011; Padoch and Peluso 1996). Here, we look more closely at how these recent developments have shaped interactions between local conservation workers, villagers, and orangutans. Thinking *through* these interactions and *with* our interlocutors, we foreground the uncommonalities that pervade conservation encounters on the ground.[13] At the same time, we show how orangutan conservation results not in the top-down production of responsible "environmental subjects" (Agrawal 2005), nor in straightforward resistance to conservation, but in ongoing acts of responsivity and adjustment.

Defining and delimiting responsibility

Over the last decade, orangutan organizations in Borneo have broadened their activities to include orangutan rehabilitation and release, human-orangutan conflict mitigation, forest regeneration, firefighting, patrolling, research, community development, outreach and education, and wildlife trade investigations. Such diversification is partly motivated by the increasing incidence of anthropogenic threats to orangutan habitat (e.g., forest fires, plantation expansion), and partly by the growing recognition that orangutan conservation in the Anthropocene cannot be isolated from social factors (e.g., Spehar et al. 2018). In practice, however, organizations lack the capacity to carry out all this work—a challenge exacerbated by the competing demands of state actors, donors, and villagers. All this gives rise to ethical, political, and practical dilemmas (Palmer 2020), and puts local conservation workers in complicated mediatory positions. To bridge the gap between their limited capacities and heavy workloads, conservation organizations constantly (re)define the scope and limits of their own responsibilities vis-à-vis other actors, thereby finding their own ways to uncommon inter/national conservation imaginaries. Here, we focus on NGOs' relations with the communities living near orangutan-release sites.

In their community outreach, organizations frequently portray themselves as mere facilitators helping local people to become economically independent, modern citizens (Schreer 2016) and responsible environmental subjects. Similarly, these organizations style themselves as merely supporting the government in fulfilling its responsibility to manage orangutans by facilitating activities such as rehabilitation, release, translocation, and confiscation. Consequently, they firmly reject villagers' occasional suggestion that NGOs own orangutans. Rather, NGOs generally depict orangutans as both part of a global or planetary commons and a national asset, which *all* Indonesians have an obligation (I: *kewajiban*) to protect.

This self-portrayal allows conservation organizations to not only delimit their own responsibilities and responsibilize others, but also to gloss themselves and their activities as apolitical. For example, members of an organization saw it as their obligation to monitor and care for rehabilitated apes after they were released inside a national park—a responsibility that the state was unwilling or unable to take on. Yet this same organization denied (causal) responsibility for the subsequent increase in coercive measures to protect the released orangutans, such as patrols, hunting prohibitions, evictions from ancestral lands, and the confiscation and destruction of locals' mining equipment. Instead, conservation staff maintained that government agencies were responsible for these activities, referring to state laws, maps, and other official documents. In this way, they invoked powerful structures and bureaucratic devices to delimit their rights and obligations (Sanders et al. 2019) and legitimize their postrelease work, making highly contested activities appear politically neutral.

NGOs also responsively navigate their responsibilities in their efforts to mitigate conflicts between humans and orangutans. Organizations generally argue that only the government, as the rightful owner of orangutans, has the responsibility and authority to compensate villagers for damage caused by orangutans (e.g., crop raiding or property destruction). Yet, given the government's limited capacities to deal with human-orangutan conflict, NGOs often assist with the practicalities of this work. For instance, although organizations do not take responsibility (I: *tanggung jawab*) for the actions of wild orangutans, they sometimes

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compensate villagers for damages wrought by "their" released orangutans. Such compensation, which includes cash or in-kind replacements, is depicted not as reparative but as a sign of NGOs' care (I: *kepedulian*) and compassion (I: *kasihan*). In these accounts, compensation becomes framed as moral commitment and goodwill. But NGO-community relationships are not simply marked by one-sided dependence; they are equally dependent on local people's goodwill and cooperation.

This is illustrated by the case of a farmer who was recruited by an NGO to help mitigate human-orangutan conflict in his village, and who fell asleep while guarding a wild orangutan earmarked for translocation. The orangutan used the opportunity to feast on another farmer's jackfruit tree. The tree's enraged owner demanded compensation from the NGO, which had a policy of not paying compensation for wild orangutans' activities. Despite these constraints, the field staff gradually reestablished good relations with the owner, taking time to explain conservation and the scope of their responsibilities, and being respectful and generous in their daily interactions. Moreover, they put extra effort into protecting the man's garden by ensuring that the orangutan stayed in adjacent, untended gardens. Eventually, the owner accepted the limits of the NGO's capacities. In this way, both parties reached a mutual understanding without fully resolving the initial problem. Their interactions were marked by responsivity—a process of mutual attentiveness, improvisation, and adjustment that generated neither responsibilized environmental subjects nor outright resistance to conservation. As we now show, however, these interactions can be complicated by both the physical, animate agencies of orangutans and local frameworks of rights, ownership, and responsibility.

Animate apes: Can orangutans be responsible?

In popular Western depictions, orangutans often appear as peaceable, gentle, blameless victims. In Indonesian conservation policy and management, their animacy is flattened by population figures that enable the governance of their lives and deaths. Yet, as Juno Parreñas (2018) reveals, and as villagers and conservation workers are aware, orangutans have their own agencies that they exercise in unpredictable ways. Arboreal, agile beings, they move easily across legal, political, and customary boundaries, heedless of ownership, rights, or jurisdiction (cf. Margulies 2019; Youatt 2008). Ecologically adaptive (Ancrenaz et al. 2015; Meijaard 2018), they can survive in anthropogenic landscapes such as degraded forests, plantations, and farming areas, sometimes damaging trees, crops, and equipment. Their encounters with humans may lead either party to be injured or killed—and in some cases, young orangutans to be captured as pets or trafficked (Freund, Rahman, and Knott 2017; Nijman 2005).

Figure 2. Harvested durian, Indonesian Borneo, 2018. The seasonal, spiky fruit is popular among both human and nonhuman inhabitants, particularly orangutans. (Paul Thung) [This figure appears in color in the online issue]

Such conflicts reflect the fact that human-orangutan encounters in rural Borneo have historically been fleeting, infrequent, and characterized by mutual avoidance or antagonism. Unlike some other more-than-human contexts (e.g., Locke and Buckingham 2016; Münster 2016), landscapes of wild orangutan conservation have not been shaped by histories of human-orangutan entanglements. Rather, as deforestation and other anthropogenic pressures push humans and orangutans into ever-closer contact, governments and NGOs have increasingly sought to keep them apart. Yet these measures are never watertight; they are dogged by both wild and released orangutans' free-roaming, unpredictable, and not entirely controllable agency. Although rehabilitation aims to boost orangutans' capacity to survive independently—that is, to be responsible for themselves—it is difficult to "responsibilize" orangutans. They can only be monitored, protected, and responded to.

The agency of orangutans is articulated in various ways by Bornean villagers. Some indigenous groups share special relations with orangutans—retelling myths about how, for example, orangutans performed vital services to their ancestors by teaching them to safely deliver babies (Yuliani et al. 2018, 159; see also Rubis 2020; Sidu et al. 2015).[14] But most rural Borneans, including our interlocutors, do not see orangutans as particularly special or personalizable (Chua et al. 2020, 50). Rather, they relate to orangutans as one of many agentive, other-than-human subjects that—like plants, rivers, rocks, and other animals—possess particular characteristics and can be held responsible for their actions (e.g., Sellato 2019; Sidu et al. 2015).

For example, a villager shot a female orangutan that he had found in a durian tree (see Figure 2) and took her baby to keep in a small cage. When asked whether he felt

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sorry for the baby, the villager replied that he didn't "have such thoughts." He explained that orangutans are among the "most mischievous" (I: *paling jeraka*) animals, pointing out that when they found durian trees, they did not only eat the ripe fruits but also threw the unripe ones to the ground, where they rotted. So when he saw orangutans near his durian trees, he would shoot them. By contrast, he said, he would think twice about shooting other animals, such as gibbons, which had much more decent eating habits.

In other cases, orangutans' fates may be shaped by their behavior and specific circumstances. For instance, some villagers described how orangutans that had been pets for many years could suddenly attack their owners. Two such cases ended fatally for both orangutans and pet keepers. Our interlocutors did not entirely blame the orangutans for killing humans, explaining, in one case, that the fault lay not with the orangutan but with the people who did not raise her well. Nevertheless, they also agreed that it was right to kill the orangutans afterward. Even if the orangutans were not fully responsible for their own actions, they should still be held accountable and punished for their actions. In other cases, however, the actions of orangutans become linked to those of orangutan organizations, resulting in a messy interplay between different regimes of ownership, rights, and responsibility.

Who owns orangutans?

Most villagers in our field sites see wild orangutans as belonging to anyone or no one—unless they are shot as game, captured for sale, or cared for as pets. Unlike international conservation's global or planetary commons imaginaries, ownership for indigenous Bornean communities is not an abstract notion. Rather, in an inherently social, dynamic multispecies environment, ownership of land, animals, and plants must be established and sustained through practices of care and nurture, everyday labor, and past and present mobility (see, e.g., Peluso 2005; Schreer 2020). This connection between ownership and care is encapsulated by various local tropes, such as the Dayak Ngaju term *ayun*, which means "to have/own" and implies "to care for" when applied to nonhuman animals.[15]

This understanding of ownership as constant affective and material investment inflects our interlocutors' perceptions of rehabilitant orangutans. As the opening vignette reveals, villagers tend to read the money and care (e.g., rehabilitation, feeding, postrelease monitoring) invested in rehabilitant and released orangutans as signs of ownership and responsibility. Just as Swedish hunters may see wolves as pets of an urban conservation class (von Essen, Allen, and Hansen 2017, 161), our interlocutors view released orangutans as "pets" or "kept" animals (I: *binatang dipelihara*) belonging to rehabilitation centers and foreign countries that pay villagers to take care of them. Most villagers living near release sites thus expect something in return for "hosting" NGOs (and their orangutans) on their ancestral lands, as well as compensation for problems caused by those orangutans.

Such expectations reflect widespread indigenous Bornean ideas about reciprocity. NGOs' responses to these are seen as signs of care for local needs and acknowledgment of and respect for people's values and norms. The responsive maneuverings that can ensue at this interface are illustrated by a case recounted to us by Sahir, the head of an NGO's conflict mitigation team. Sahir recalled how some villagers affected by his NGO's release activities heard about another rehabilitation NGO providing compensation for damages caused by "their" released orangutans after being sued by a local community on the basis of *adat* (customary) law. Inspired by this, the villagers decided to also sue the orangutans released by Sahir's NGO for damaging crops and equipment. They based their claims on local *adat* regulations—which treat orangutans as agentive subjects that can be held responsible for their misdeeds—and sent the orangutan's "owner," that is, the NGO, a set of compensation requests, demanding financial and ritual payments (including animal sacrifices) amounting to 70 million rupiah (US$5,100).

Confronted with these requests, Sahir started studying *adat* law. *Adat* leaders and lawyers in the local town agreed that, as wild animals rather than humans, orangutans "cannot be sued" (I: *ngak bisa dituntut*). The *adat* leader (*damang*) in the release area, however, held that "orangutans can be fined." Sahir responded that if this was his position, the NGO would seek to go on trial in a state court at the regency level, "because this is national, an international case." This strategic invocation of inter/national responsibility for orangutans frightened the *damang*, who helped Sahir convince the villagers that their requests were too high. This gave Sahir a means to settle the conflict. Such cases, however, pose a long-term challenge for the NGO. Because it lacks a regular budget and a formal mechanism to settle disputes, each case requires creativity and improvisation to solve. This was not a permanent solution but a momentary dis/agreement that was briefly made negotiable across an uncommons.

Such NGO-villager negotiations—and the tactical deployment of *adat* law and official legal frameworks—foreground the crucial point that equivocations across uncommons often take place across asymmetrical fields (Blaser and de la Cadena 2017b, 190). The disagreement between the NGO and villagers was not just a surmountable clash between cultural perspectives (as conservationists sometimes view it), but a conflict between fundamentally uncommon social and conceptual regimes with concrete, immediate implications. Here, the depoliticized, abstract, "commoning" claims that international conservationists and faraway supporters make on orangutans and their

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habitat have little meaning; they can only be questioned, refused, ignored, fragmented. Recourse to *adat* law is one possible way of uncommoning conservation claims. Yet, as Sahir's account revealed, this equivocating device can be weakened by more powerful, encompassing legal frameworks.

The local illegibility of conservation's commoning imaginaries, however, has not led villagers to completely reject conservation (cf. Myers and Muhajir 2015). Rather, their willingness to engage often depends on whether conservation actors succeed in building relationships of reciprocity, acknowledgment, and care. As our closing example suggests, such processes often involve creative, improvised forms of responsivity that enable connection across uncommonality. For this, we return to the orangutan release mentioned in the introduction.

Collapsing the commons

One evening during the orangutan-release operation, we (Schreer and Thung) joined a village "socialization" meeting about the rehabilitation NGO's community development work. Community engagement is one means of producing responsible environmental subjects and legitimizing NGOs' (and released orangutans') presence in the area. A small group of 10 men gathered in the home of a villager. Low village attendance and engagement in "participatory" meetings are a common problem for conservation NGOs in the area. The NGO worker welcomed the villagers, then introduced himself and the work of his organization, which started releasing rehabilitated orangutans in the area a few months earlier. Speaking the national language, Bahasa Indonesia, he emphasized that the organization did not own the orangutans but was only helping the government fulfill its role of managing the national commons. In an interview with us later, he explained that by delimiting responsibilities and ownership, he sought to avoid false perceptions and expectations among the villagers.

The villagers listened quietly. For most people there, the effort and money spent on orangutans was baffling. The village still lacked electricity, running water, basic health care, and communications. The NGO worker continued discussing the community development program, consisting of environmental education, human-orangutan conflict mitigation, livelihood support, and participatory rural appraisal. It would show, he said, that the organization "cares not only about orangutans but also about local people." Questions were invited. As the men kept quiet, the NGO worker encouraged us to ask something. "How long will the program run?" one of us asked. It would finish in four months, he explained, quickly adding that the funding would be extended if the donor evaluation worked out. The villagers looked disappointed. During five years of development work in adjacent villages, there hadn't been any long-lasting economic benefits, the NGO worker admitted during our interview.

The atmosphere was tense. Someone asked how many orangutans would be released in the area. A figure of 120 circulated. The villagers expressed concerns about livelihood impediments, pointing out, for example, that because their swiddens were close to the release site, "our paddy will be gone" (D: *lepah parei itah*). The NGO worker struggled to connect with the villagers. But suddenly the young man's rhetoric and language shifted. In the local language, he began to joke that the orangutans would "become a meal" (D: *jadi balut*). The villagers erupted into laughter. The idea of orangutans as planetary or national assets, for which Indonesians should take responsibility, collapsed.

By momentarily relinquishing his conservation responsibilities, the young man responsively uncommoned conservation's commoning claims on orangutans and their forests. In so doing, he gave himself and the villagers room for maneuver, opening up new possibilities for connection that did not hinge on shared values or priorities. The question of who would gain and lose from all this, however, remained unresolved. "What's the benefit of the release for the villagers?" we asked the man during our interview. "Bingung" (lit. "confused," i.e., unsure what to say), he replied, manifestly at a loss for words. His answers remained vague throughout the rest of the interview. What, then, do we make of his joke about orangutans becoming a meal? Was it simply an ice-breaking attempt? An acknowledgment of the uncommonalities between community development and villagers' expectations? Recognition of local conventions and concerns? A bid to build a relationship on nonconservation terms? Rather than trying to explain away the young man's actions, we too leave our analysis—and the possibilities emergent from that brief moment of connection—open.

Uncommoning the Anthropocene

In her call to "'provincialize' the Anthropocene," Elizabeth DeLoughrey (2019, 2) contemplates how the "universalizing figure of the Anthropocene might be grounded by engaging specific places." In the same spirit, this article has aimed to provincialize the encompassing conservation imaginaries of planetary and global commons that shape one Anthropocenic "problem space" (Moore 2016, 27). Through the ethnographic and analytical lens of responsibility, we have shown how orangutan conservation is shaped by a spectrum of un/common(ing) tropes and practices, in which multiple orangutan figures—planetary or global concerns, virtual kin, national assets, wild animals, pets, NGOs' property, culpable social agents—are invoked and make their presence felt, sometimes literally. These overlap with divergent regimes of ownership, stewardship, jurisdiction, and care, as well as multiple "competing responsibilities" (Trnka

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and Trundle 2017, 3), engendering varied forms of what we have termed responsibilization and responsivity.

These two terms—the first structural and often top-down, the second more improvisatory and mutually reactive—encapsulate the diverse dynamics and processes through which responsibility is defined, enacted, negotiated, or refused in orangutan conservation. Their analytical and conceptual implications could, however, extend beyond this ethnography. As mentioned earlier, biodiversity conservation has been increasingly reshaped by Anthropocenic ontologies and discourses that embed it in new, encompassing imaginaries of planetary commonality. These developments have been paralleled by a rush of scholarship that elucidates and challenges the homogenizing, monolithic nature of the Anthropocene concept (Chua and Fair 2019). Some scholars highlight the historico-political fault lines fracturing its apparent universalism (e.g., Malm and Hornborg 2014; Nixon 2013; Yusoff 2018); others use it to speculate about alternative planetary futures (e.g., Haraway 2016; Latour 2012; Tsing et al. 2017). Still others fragment and recast the Anthropocene, fleshing out its particular manifestations or experimenting with new optics for apprehending it (e.g., Hecht 2018; Moore 2016). In closing, we take our cue from the third body of work, and ask, What might an analytic of responsibility bring to scholarly engagements with the Anthropocene?

As we have shown, focusing on responsibilization and responsivity allows us to uncommon and disrupt the commoning claims and imaginaries of orangutan conservation. In the same vein, we suggest that anthropologists can use an analytic of responsibility to uncommon the widespread view of the Anthropocene as an encompassing *condition* to be interrogated, reimagined, or dismantled, and to foreground instead the relational dynamics and politics through which Anthropocenic spaces emerge, as well as the problems of legitimacy (in)equality, accountability, and (in)justice that infuse them. Put differently, rather than asking what the Anthropocene is or isn't, we might ask (as various parties do of orangutans): Who/what is responsible for the Anthropocene? Who/what are they responsible to? Who/what takes, refuses, or diffuses responsibility (and for whom/what), and who/what gains or loses from all this?

These questions are not simply prompts to play an Anthropocene blame game (Rudiak-Gould 2015). Rather, they highlight the value of parsing the multifarious meanings and implications of responsibility—as cause, liability, capacity, obligation, ownership, stewardship, accountability—and considering their constitutive significance to the current planetary moment. Thinking through their different configurations means not only thinking about responsibility *in* the Anthropocene but also thinking the Anthropocene *as* responsibility—or more specifically, as a multiplicity of responsibilities (variously defined). Rather than viewing the Anthropocene as a common condition, then, we propose approaching it in processual terms, as a set of intersecting relations of care and (ir)responsibility that illuminate historical inequalities, injustices, and power imbalances across uncommon terrain. To return to our opening vignette, this means asking not only what is at stake in an era of mass extinction, but also who/what gets life jackets, who/what makes these decisions (and on what grounds), who/what manages these processes, and who/what is left to drown or swim.

Yet, more than laying bare "life jacket" dynamics, an analytic of responsibility highlights their contingency and *evi*tability—the fact that such dynamics and their outcomes were and are not foregone conclusions, but can be challenged and reworked. It is here, perhaps, that we might learn from the NGO workers and villagers that we encountered earlier, and take "responsivity" as an ethic for working across, through, and with an Anthropocenic uncommons. In contrast to the unidirectionality of "responsibilization," responsivity affords various parties—nation-states, NGOs, faraway supporters, villagers, orangutans—room for maneuver by foregrounding their capacities to make, break, refuse, or transform connections with each other in various contingent, productive ways. The corollary to all this is the imperative to consider what comes next: to figure out how the Anthropocene-as-responsibility/ies can be addressed, redressed, or transformed, and how it can be lived in, with, or indeed without.

Importantly, however, this should not simply be a thought experiment or matter of creative, broad-brush speculation. To be responsive in the Anthropocene is not only to attend to historical and contemporary inequalities, but also to keep seeking new connections and lifelines—however small or impermanent—across its shifting, uncommon terrains. After all, as our Bornean interlocutors are all too aware, the question of who gets a life jacket is historically and politically charged, with concrete implications for both present and future.

Notes

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1. All personal names in this article are pseudonyms.

2. As Alexandra Palmer (2020) notes, there exists a vast range of professional opinion on the ethics and conservation value of orangutan rehabilitation. This is not, however, captured in popular depictions, which portray rehabilitation as a one-way journey to freedom for individual apes.

3. The term *responsibilization* merges two Foucauldian renderings of "governmentality" popular in critical analyses of environmentalism and conservation. The first (Foucault 1991) underpins explorations of "environmental governmentality"/"environmentality" (Agrawal 2005; Luke 1995)—the technologies that produce environmental issues and environmental subjects (e.g., Rutherford 2011). The second centers on the manipulation of autonomous individuals, which Michel Foucault (2008) identified as a feature of neoliberal governmentality (Fletcher 2010; Trnka and Trundle 2017, 2–10). In orangutan conservation, the two often overlap through a combination of disciplinary governance and conservation NGOs' incentivizing programs.

4. This should not be conflated with the similar-sounding "response-ability," which Donna Haraway (2016, 105) valorizes as an open-ended "praxis of care and response" and ethical disposition (2, 16, 28, 35, 56, 105). As Eva Haifa Giraud (2019, 69–75) notes, "response-ability" has a cosmopolitan commitment to openness that can itself be exclusionary, foreclosing certain worlds and avenues of action—including, we suggest, those of some of our research interlocutors. As we shall see, responsivity is often pragmatic, improvisational, and not always voluntary—a means of not only acting on but also refusing, limiting, and reworking multiple responsibilities.

5. Film Strike for Climate, "Greta Comes to Bristol," Facebook album, February 29, 2020, accessed March 25, 2020, https://m.facebook.com/pg/FilmStrikeforClimate/photos/?tab=album&album_id=199178748090625.

6. Extinction Rebellion, "Funeral March," n.d., accessed June 21, 2021, https://extinctionrebellion.uk/event/funeral-march/.

7. Greenpeace UK, "Have a Break?," posted March 17, 2010, https://vimeo.com/10236827; Greenpeace International, *Rang-tan: The Story of Dirty Palm Oil*, posted August 13, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TQQXstNh45g; WWF International, "Consumer Choices Affect Wildlife," posted September 10, 2010, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w-1DQwaauwE.

8. Greenpeace International, *Rang-tan*.

9. Most, though not all, organizations are more wary of using such language (Chua 2018).

10. This imaginary has been variously extended, downplayed, and questioned over the years, in tandem with Indonesia's experiments in political centralization and decentralization, and the dynamics of local and regional rights claims (Li 2021). In practice, it has also allowed for elite profit from industrial exploitation (McCarthy and Warren 2009).

11. *SRAK 2019–2029* was published in April 2019 and revoked for revisions in September 2019. Here, we refer to its initial version. While this was still under modification at the time of writing, it broadly reflects the Indonesian government's position on orangutan populations and their conservation.

12. In this article, *I* refers to words or phrases in Bahasa Indonesia, the national language of Indonesia, while *D* refers to the Dayak Ngaju language, in which much of Schreer's fieldwork was conducted. All translations are our own.

13. Rather than treating uncommonality as a static condition of difference between distinct ontologies (e.g., "local" vs. "Western"/"conservation"), we approach it, following Blaser and de la Cadena (2017b), as a dynamic, constantly contested and improvised, relational process to which divergence is central.

14. Orangutans are one of many nonhuman animals with which indigenous communities might share special mythical-historical connections; others include snakes, hornbills, and crocodiles (Chua et al. 2020, 50).

15. The Dayak Ngaju are the main indigenous group in the province of Central Kalimantan, Indonesian Borneo, where parts of this ethnography are set.

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