

## Introduction

# On Poaching an Elephant

## *Calling the Shots and Following the Ricochets*



*During our tour, we found that an elephant was poached on the 24th July, 1998 between Chibale and Poison [sic] village. The act is believed to have been done by local people. All flesh was removed from the carcass leaving behind the ivory intact. Suspected persons were taken to Mpika Police. There was a buffalo in a snare the same day these people were skinning an elephant. An ambush was made but nobody came to check the snare. There is evidence of poacher of small species like impalas which is high. There are a lot of guinea fowl traps in Munyamadzi River about 100 meters from the unit headquarters. We removed some during our morning wash-up and we also witnessed one fowl in a snare.<sup>1</sup>*

This book is about how the issues involving and surrounding wild animals can separate people who value them for different reasons. For most northerners<sup>2</sup> and those living in the world's cities and farmlands, the realm of large wild animals, commonly referred to as "nature" or "environment," exists largely at a distance and external to their daily lives. An unlucky few may incur inconvenience if a deer runs into their vehicle on a highway or eats a valued shrub, or may suffer a more devastating loss if a child or relative is stalked and killed by a bear or cougar in a



suburban backyard or along a running trail. Many northerners may visit foreign places briefly as tourists on vacation or to study, yet they do not live entirely within or depend materially for their livelihoods upon what is cultivated and gleaned from their immediate domiciles. Overlooked, perhaps even dismissed, during their brief interludes to remote places are the complex cultural, political-economic, and social realities of people living within the lower latitudes and rural environments. Some of these residents may possess rich webs of local knowledge, practices, and ideas about neighboring biological resources, which have supported them and helped to maintain their environments for decades, their ancestors for centuries. Today their plights and livelihoods must become significant parts of any resolution to sustain these resource flows and habitats. For this reason, their recent histories and management practices are worth learning as they provide different perspectives on environments and wildlife and reveal the cultural limitations of northern management models and the current strategies to sustain them (Comaroff and Comaroff 2012). This book is about the life histories and wildlife management activities of a small group of Valley Bisa men who reside in Zambia's Luangwa Valley. Their households, villages, and fields are often visited by wildlife, as their homeland is surrounded currently by three national parks. In recent years, both Valley Bisa welfare and resident wildlife have declined through government inattention and mismanagement.

As a depiction of how an African people have coped with abundant wild animals in the past half century, this book searches for a different narrative in global wildlife conservation. The events in the epigraph occurred a decade after the Zambian National Parks and Wildlife Services (NPWS) initiated what it promotionally labeled as a "community-based" wildlife program in 1988. Backed by generous American and European subsidies, this program was a global response to the extensive killings of elephants, rhinos, and other wildlife after the Zambian economy imploded during the late 1970s and 1980s. Under this plan, cadres of enforcement scouts, drawn from local communities, were recruited and given brief military training. These scouts were paid to enforce new restrictive entitlements to wildlife based on regulations that criminalized customary uses and practices to protect the "game"



from residents within their homelands. Beyond employing local scouts as enforcers through its program, the NPWS promised to promote village development as well as protect local properties and lives against wildlife depredations. Among its pledges to residents for protecting wildlife was that they would accrue wealth by letting these wild animals be shot by safari hunters or be observed by others. The exchange was to work this way: “wildlife killed by local residents had only short-term value as meat for consumption (i.e., of no formal economic benefits); wildlife shot by safari hunters or observed by tourists was worth cash, its proceeds would be used for development, so everyone would benefit.” Beyond the initial elusive donor funding, revenues for community developments never materialized in the amounts promised, everything took more time than expected, and community funding was not dependable and diminished through time. In certain years, all funds were absorbed by the government regulatory agency while the rural communities received none. Yet materials and supports for “anti-poaching,” the visible essence and deterrent of centralized wildlife management and focus of donor attention, remained consistent and insensitive. Despite the initial pledges, twenty years later the program had failed miserably in its promise to enhance village welfare as well as achieve sustainable conservation.<sup>3</sup>

Rural people were not consulted about these procedures that perversely affected the very core of some identities and livelihoods within this chancy valley environment. The imposed rules made normative sense only within the limited frame of a wildlife narrative backed by centralized state power and supported by resources and experts from an unknown distance. Local residents learned the new rules painfully over time through harassment, imprisonment, and intimidation. Inhabitants were encouraged to comply; offers included meager incentives and promises, intermittent revenues for proscribed community “developments,” and, for a very few, engagements as casual laborers. The cultural and environmental worlds, which generations of residents actively created and from which some derived their livelihoods, became transformed into an alien landscape, a playground of fantasy and commerce for strangers who appeared periodically as hunting tourists. Some local people benefitted and helped to build por-



tions of this new world, a world that they could never master, but one that they might join as dependent subordinates. Their homeland, embedded with significant histories and identities, the wildlife and other resources that gave their lives meaning and sustenance as well as their flexible social institutions through which individuals mediated their conflicts and cooperation, were no longer theirs to husband or to extend. This book is about a world that was tragically lost, about a fork in the road of development, and sensibilities not taken by some perhaps well-meaning but ultimately insensitive distant others.

### On Official Accounts of Poaching Elephants

The wildlife officer's brief in the epigraph tells about his passage through this landscape, yet he and his entourage remain silent on many contextual issues about this place—its history, politics, and local culture. In his brief sojourn, he jumps to conventional, convenient conclusions, and he reinforces professional stereotypes that implicate local people in several criminal offenses. Yet who are these residents and why does he suspect them? What are their recent histories and backgrounds that put them at odds with and incur threats from this official and his wildlife agenda? Do these injunctions, represented in his authoritative voice, indicate any boundaries or limitations on his conceptions of wildlife, about life, about other people and their relations to resources? What are the relationships of these communities to the abundant wildlife surrounding them? How did residents sustain themselves in this place and what are their options now? This book is about more than just "poaching" an elephant, yet this large beast, imaginary, dead or alive, stands metaphorically at the heart of sustainable natural resource issues throughout Southern Africa as well as elsewhere.

The wildlife officer's report is bland reading, the kind of succinct and superficial script that we might expect from an itinerant official or journeyman. As a transient, he appears on a scene for a brief moment, inscribes a cursory account, and declares the infractions he witnesses resolved. He notes other activities out of place and passes these enduring problems along to attending



subordinates. Through such blips of pre-scripted observations recorded during brief mandatory expeditions from his office, everything seems explained and back in order within a single paragraph. After all, his audience includes his superiors and even those more distant who might be impressed with his verve and control. Such a narrow focus and lineal flattening is typical of outsiders who pass through landscapes created and inhabited by others, whose presence and memories these foreigners eventually seek to silence, if not to erase (Scott 1998). Yet local memories and identities persist and may be more sustainable in the long run than the impressions and visions of momentary strangers.

Within these supposedly officially silenced, vibrant spaces, life remains vigorously interconnected, difficult to keep within bounds or flattened on a page or two. Such life is multidimensional and persistent, with highs and lows, with inconsistencies and differences, with victims and victors, maybe even paradoxical with inconclusive evidence leading to more hesitant resolutions. Understanding these facets takes time and exposures, as people expend their lives in practices that itinerants cavalierly miss, dismiss, or judge by their own norms. This book has taken its own time, my lifetime and over half a century of intermittent observations and conversations with and by others, to connect the dots and meaningfully interpret this environment and its inhabitants. Its writing has required this time to find the appropriate words to express what has been learned and then unlearned even when inscribed. It has been edited and often rewritten in the long procedures of translating and communicating its connecting stories.

These real lives and the cultural differences between northerners and southerners are the “elephant within our room,” the boardrooms wherein executives make decisions, and in the living rooms where citizens make contributions affecting the lives of others, people they don’t know or even care to know existed. “Elephant in the room” is an idiom for something that so threatens privilege and presumption that it becomes impossible to ignore, except for a persistent conspiracy to discount, silence, or change its presence. This expression entails an assessment that the looming subject is significant and inevitably will imperil everything else around it.<sup>4</sup> Within these pages, this proverbial elephant becomes



the cultural soul and cultural differences of some who still live on the land with elephants and other wild animals.

As a youth coming of age in the Belgian Congo and nurtured by another group of rural Africans about wildlife, I began to suspect the existence of such an elephant. My experience as a youth immersed in three cultures with three separate languages (and worldviews) and as many biodiverse environments grounded me as I pursued my childhood intuitions later through formal education in animal ecology and anthropology.<sup>5</sup> Later, while a graduate student, I began tracking this metaphorical beast in the recently independent state of Zambia slightly southeast of where I had become aware of this creature's plausible existence.

Animal ecology taught me the conventional northern wisdom about wild beasts, about how they supposedly behaved, about how they should be managed and by whom. Anthropology sensitized me to the human side of that endeavor—to the meanings about and uses of animals as well as the silences inherent in any group's cultural consensus about them. Understanding one's own culture takes most of a lifetime. Insights into another society and its ways require a host of enthusiastic interpreters as teachers, attentive listening and familiarity with different activities, a receptive heart, and good fortune. Anthropology's gift is in its ability to distill some cultural knowledge from one group of people and make it available and interpret it reasonably for others. Preferably this analytical act takes place without losing essential information during the attempts to make it relevant for a new audience differently oriented. As one perceptively listens to indigenous plights and follows their leads, local constraints are found frequently in the channels of distant policies and in the power and profits of earlier intruders on their landscapes.

Myths, subliminal stories infused throughout a culture, form the architecture upon which empires are structured, demolished, and resurrected or reaffirmed. International wildlife conservation is one of the world's great myths. It is a compelling narrative, especially for those living in the Northern Hemisphere whose funding and writing promote its proactive scripts. They assume its messages and means have universal applications, bespeak a "global common good," offer "win-win" resolutions for everyone, and at least save the "game" for its promoters while its losers are silenced



or demoted from their “fields,” deposited on the rubbish heaps of archaic livelihoods and identities. Yet such precepts are beneficial mainly for a small minority who think they can afford to separate themselves from the plights of others throughout the rest of the world. The composition of these global conservation initiatives and wildlife narratives is really about some of us (northerners)—about our heroes, our needs and deeds, our careers, our histories, and how we spend our time. We immerse all these elements in our expectations that others aspire to become like us in all our different ways. We base our visions in northern imperial experiences with wildlife and in professional lives with its imaginations, “spirits” (intuitions), “demons” (capitalism), “rituals” (peer reviews, best methods), “sacred texts” (scientific publications, vocabularies), and membership (professional) behaviors. This vision has yet to incorporate the dreams and experiences of others, although we might wonder about their stories and practices.<sup>6</sup> We seldom position ourselves to hear alternative voices or place ourselves in situations to learn from or about them. They exist nonetheless, never as privileged as professional conventions and, some might say, overwhelmed by the cacophony and discursive imperatives of our ongoing environmental and extinction crises fueled by climate change. Like a fish that becomes aware of its limits only as it struggles out of its watery medium, most humans seem to muddle along within their cultural liabilities and routines. Expansions in understanding may come, if at all, from duress or after devastating failures. Thus our “elephant” has yet to metastasize or transform the discourse within the international chambers of conservation and “sustainable” development (Marnham 1987; Garland 2008).

Wild elephants in Africa are one of the great symbols of international conservation where they figure prominently in organizational efforts to protect them, particularly on someone else’s turf. Under the “umbrella species” promotion that supposedly protects elephant range habitats for all other wildlife, the survival saga of elephants is spun as a struggle between northerners’ expert knowledge [read science and technology] and the criminal greed [read degenerative] of insensitive (unspecified) men. The “unspecified” reference here is to unrestrained actors, mainly a generic African or Asian, given the characteristic pejorative



vocabularies through which most northerners describe “poachers.” These men occur in “gangs,” engage in “brutal” and “unlawful activities” (poaching), and sell products in “black” markets. The main middlemen and consumers of these products are crafty Asians in Africa and elsewhere. Forgotten in this context is that not too long ago, northerners and colonials were the main consumers of elephant products as status symbols (piano keys and ivory billiards) for an expanding middle class (Parker and Amin 1983; Spinage 1994). The main strategy for countering this world scourge has been a militaristic anti-poaching surge involving massive infusions of new technologies, funds, and expertise for surveillance and prosecution. During these military expeditions on the ground, local residents in wildlife areas suffer the worst effects in the short and longer term.

Despite the promotional and emotional appeals of such depictions, elephant slaughters continue to occur throughout most of Africa. There are other ways to comprehend these tragic narratives and other connections to make for us all. In some ways, these wildlife slaughters are about our demands as northerners [including some Asians] and about our failures to read between the lines of our press releases or even to learn from our histories. This book is about different relations with wildlife in a particular place, relations that have been silenced, if not covered over, by monolithic stories about wildlife wars of “rights” and “wrongs.” It is only one story among many that should be told.

## An Ethnographic Synthesis of Some Local Experiences

Missing from mass conservation appeals are the histories of people who have coexisted with large, dangerous beasts for ages, and how these residents have cultivated the environments where they and elephants currently live. African conservation texts remain mainly crisis and discursive narratives, constructed more to generate revenues for expanding imperial economic designs (incorporating technologies and various tourisms) than for crafting sustainable conservation practices in conjunction with those currently living with these animals. Rather than simple struggles between criminals and civilized men and women, these frontier



accounts reflect deeper political and economic tensions between the Northern and Southern Hemispheres as well as those within both hemispheres. For centuries, those in the North have sought and acquired the natural resources of Africa and elsewhere. When northerners entered as colonists, they arrived as strangers with designs to change the “nature” of Africa—to exploit and even to export its “natural resources” for material and financial benefits. In the process, the colonists sought to “(re)create” a world in which they were more familiar and comfortable. Those processes continue today, often in collusion with smaller enclaves of African beneficiaries, who themselves live behind walls separating them from the majority of their differently connected compatriots. Much of the power behind conservation’s incursions into this continental hinterland still originates in the passions, myths, technologies, strategies, and finances bearing northern imprints. These examples of landscapes, animals, and peoples bear the residues of a colonial world perpetuated now under the covers of newer vocabularies and priorities. Both the history of northern intrusion and the “looming elephants” of its effects remain linked in the industrial, commercial, and conservation boardrooms in New York, London, Paris, Beijing, Tokyo and in other northern cities where financial and strategic decisions are plotted.

I begin by unraveling “cultural processes” in which something that was not supposed to happen did happen, during which something hidden unexpectedly surfaced and then was forced to appear as if the disruption was resolved. Yet the repercussions from this particular real-life elephant’s demise rippled on for years, repeated itself later in a similar event, and affected people in ways that outsiders rarely imagine or hear. The event is the same elephant that the itinerant official in the epigraph cavalierly catalogued as “poached” before unilaterally indicting neighboring residents as the “criminals.”

This story originates with those who took their time to inform me of its particulars and is (re)assembled here from the diaries and accounts of five individuals, all of whom I knew.<sup>7</sup> This chronicle is about more than an illegal kill of an elephant, a protected species in Zambia, something that legally never should have happened. The account begins with some residents awakening abruptly into an indeterminate and unanticipated space. It continues with how



these individuals sought to position themselves in an uncertain world that constantly shifted as decisions made by distant outsiders drifted in along with rumors that impinged upon the broader dynamics of their daily lives. What do you think were the conservation messages delivered and received locally?



Some unknown person shot an elephant in the neighborhood of a cluster of villages during the evening of 24 July 1998. The fatally wounded beast bled profusely as it wandered through the villages, crossed the Munyamadzi River, and expired near Chifukula stream opposite the villages of Paison and Chibale.<sup>8</sup> Early the following morning, women collecting water and washing at the river noticed blood along the riverbank and vultures circling nearby. They returned to their homes and reported the scene to their headman. In accordance with his responsibilities, Headman Paison proceeded immediately to Kanele Wildlife Camp, some five kilometers away, to inform the scouts of the incident. In the meantime, other villagers hastened to the dead elephant “to keep the vultures away” and proceeded to flay the carcass.

On his way to the wildlife camp, Paison passed the school where he found the Community Conservation Project supervisor and senior counselor, Mr. Njovu, who informed him that the chief, accompanied by the wildlife unit leader, was in Lusaka. The deputy unit leader was also off post and on patrol with the warden and others from Mpika (the district’s administrative center). With the chief away, Mr. Njovu, as “self-ascribed acting chief,” called a special meeting of the Munyamadzi Sub-Authority Wildlife Committee to deal with this quandary. He sought a consensus to explain the circumstances to outside authorities, who he suspected would eventually hear about this elephant’s demise.

On the same evening that the elephant expired, Mumbwa, the pastor of several Pentecostal Holiness churches as well as Paison’s grandson and acting headman in an adjacent settlement, officiated over the wake and funeral of a nephew. Because most surrounding villagers had heard of the elephant and the windfall of meat it provided, only six men and sixteen women attended the burial the following morning. Before his departure for the wild-



life camp, Paison instructed Mumbwa to inform those assembled at the elephant carcass not to butcher or take away any meat until the wildlife officers arrived to examine the site.

After concluding the funeral about noon, Mumbwa crossed the river and encountered people carrying meat to their homes. They shunted past as Mumbwa informed them of his grandfather's message. At the carcass site Mumbwa faced an unreceptive audience, even those who were his kith and kin. The butchers remained inattentive as they flayed and distributed the meat. Perplexed, Mumbwa recrossed the river where, not finding his grandfather at home, he jumped on a bicycle and rode in the direction of the wildlife camp. He found his grandfather, Mr. Njovu, and other local authorities at the school debating the slaying of the elephant and its likely consequences. In the meantime, Paison learned that all the wildlife scouts at the camp were out on patrol.

Mr. Njovu commanded Paison and Mumbwa as headmen to collect elephant meat as tribute from each household in their respective villages. Upon his return from Lusaka, the chief, as traditional "custodian of the land," would find tangible evidence that his subjects had respected him and, in his absence, his office. Mr. Njovu assumed that this traditional tribute might provide some cover for the scrambled butchery prior to the official inspection to determine the cause of the elephant's death. As instructed, Mumbwa returned, solicited meat, and noted the names of donors on a sheet of paper. A few days later while taking a fifty-kilogram bag of smoked elephant flesh as tribute to the chief's palace, Mumbwa encountered Kanele Wildlife Camp's deputy unit leader in the company of another scout. They were returning from several days in the bush allegedly searching for poachers. Mumbwa informed them what he was doing and why, who had instructed him, and ended by mentioning his recent appointment to the local Wildlife Sub-Authority committee. The scouts asked him to accompany them to Kanele Wildlife Camp so they could write a report on the incident. Upon their arrival at the camp, the scouts arrested Mumbwa and charged him with possession of elephant meat, a government entity illegally taken from a mammal classified within Zambia as a protected and endangered species. He was further charged with flagrant disrespect for the office of the president, as all wild animals were vested in this sovereignty.



The scouts demanded that Mumbwa take them to the kill site. While there, they recovered the ivory still attached to the skull. After prolonged and sometimes violent discussions between these two parties, the scout allowed Mumbwa to return to his village on the condition that he give them a list of the households that had butchered the carcass and had provided tribute.

At midnight, the wildlife scouts knocked on Mumbwa's door and ordered him outside to reveal his list. Mumbwa pleaded with the scouts that they return during the daytime when he could assist them. They refused and began beating and abusing him. Other households in the village heard the commotion, and their men quickly ran out and disappeared into the dark night. In the ensuing melee, the scouts captured a young man, one of Paison's sons, who confessed to donating meat to the chief. Scouts escorted both Mumbwa and the young man to Kanele Wildlife Camp. The captives remained handcuffed for days, were repeatedly beaten and interrogated as the scouts waited for transport to carry the accused to the magistrate's district court in Mpika, some 140 kilometers away and on the plateau.

Mumbwa's mother went to see Mr. Njovu, a close relative. She assailed him for allowing these arrests as Mumbwa was following Mr. Njovu's instructions. To console her, Mr. Njovu proceeded to the wildlife camp where he intended to obtain the immediate release of his nephew by bellowing accusations. Among other things, Mr. Njovu allegedly shouted that he, as "acting chief," had the authority to send Mumbwa on his mission. Further, he threatened to dismiss all village scouts, including all civil servants, as they only brought trouble. Among his alleged quotes were, "You people from the plateau come here very poor, like water monitors [large lizards] with tails, and, when you become rich after getting our money, you start doing what you want. If you don't release Mumbwa, I will do something to you [a veiled curse of intending witchcraft]." Although Mr. Njovu's outburst resulted in Mumbwa's release, the deputy unit leader was compelled to report these happenings and the "poached" elephant to his warden of the Bangweulu Command.

By coincidence, the warden was then on tour in the valley along with a member of Parliament and some national administrators from the NPWS. While surrounded by this company, the warden



directed the deputy unit leader to proceed with his investigations. Therefore, upon his return to camp, the deputy rearrested Mumbwa and Paison's son, trucked them up the escarpment, and placed them in prison at Mpika. At the police compound, Mumbwa retold his version of how Mr. Njovu involved him with scavenging tribute and delivering messages. The police kept Mumbwa and Paison's son in prison to await their arraignment in court. In the meantime, three Mpika wildlife police officers (WPO) with three local wildlife scouts commandeered a vehicle from the Wildlife Unit, left Mpika in the late afternoon, and made plans for arresting Mr. Njovu. The vehicle arrived outside of Mr. Njovu's door in the valley shortly after midnight.

The men surrounded Mr. Njovu's house and ordered him to come outside. Mr. Njovu responded by asking if the order implied "war." When the scouts' rejoinder was negative, he opened his door and appeared on the front step. The scouts ordered him to clothe himself for a trip to Mpika, as he was being investigated for killing an elephant. Mr. Njovu gave money to his young granddaughter to support her in his absence; she reminded the officials to respect and not beat her grandfather. The scouts ordered Mr. Njovu into the open back of the vehicle rather than to his normal space within the enclosed canopy next to the driver. They refused Njovu's request to pass at the chief's palace, as they suspected the chief would order his immediate release. On their way up the escarpment, the officials derided Mr. Njovu about his presumption of chiefly authority, as they knew he was not of the royal clan, and about his monopolizing the important positions of all major community committees.

When the party reached Mpika in mid-morning, they encountered a party of ten villagers awaiting transport to the valley. Among them were two local civil servants, both of whom Njovu vociferously accused of tattling on him to the wildlife authorities. He accused them of spreading rumors about his incessant demands and assumed prerogatives. They admonished him for his assumed authority and for threatening their dismissals from government service. After these exchanges, the WPOs remained with their ward for the rest of the day until they had delivered him into the custody of the Zambian police. Intimidated by Mr. Njovu, the Mpika wildlife staff granted the privileges he demanded, but



once incarcerated, the police treated him like everyone else, as a prisoner for eleven days.

The wildlife vehicle carrying the ten villagers returned to the valley from Mpika and made the customary initial stop at the palace to greet the chief. The driver presented a letter to the chief from a former provincial officer containing information on Mr. Njovu's plight and on the seriousness of the pending case. The chief angrily told the driver to inform the unit leader to return immediately to Mpika and return with Mr. Njovu. A few days later, the chief was present when Mr. Njovu appeared in court. The chief prevailed upon the warden, who intervened before the magistrate on behalf of the chief's senior counselor. Since the scouts had little evidence to prosecute, the court released both Mr. Njovu and Paison's son without compensation and without an apology for their hardships. In contrast, Mumbwa spent twenty-one days in prison, faced the magistrate alone, and had his case dismissed "innocent and up to date." Before returning to his pastoral duties, his village, and his household, he proceeded "into the bush to fast and to pray" [his words].

A special meeting took place at the palace on the afternoon of 10 November 1998. Its attendees included the warden, the unit leader, the chief, Mr. Njovu, and some members of the Wildlife Sub-Authority, including Mumbwa. Among the issues discussed was why Mr. Njovu had been "under the hands of the wildlife scouts and taken to prison." The warden formally apologized to both Mr. Njovu and Mumbwa. They said nothing about the other innocent victim, Paison's son. Instead, all the blame fell on the unit leader who had failed to follow protocol, as the local committee should have sorted out the case initially before taking it to the district.

The chief agreed that the unit leader had not followed his advice, but remained angry over a national radio broadcast that held him responsible for beating members of the unit leader's family as a consequence of Njovu's arrest and imprisonment. When both the chief and Mr. Njovu stated that the local wildlife scouts accused the unit leader [an outsider] of torturing them and that the unit leader could no longer work "to the satisfaction of the community," the unit leader responded that his wife had been beaten and her clothes torn off. As a distant chief's relative



allegedly had assaulted the unit leader's family, he desperately sought transfer elsewhere.

A month later, wildlife scouts arrested a "notorious poacher," Kazembe, whom the wildlife officials had employed as a village scout in order to reform him. Although several others were accused as well of illegally killing another elephant, scouts detained Kazembe and sent him to prison.<sup>9</sup> After his release from prison, Kazembe, because of his reputation for fierceness and bravery, continued his employment as a wildlife scout. The new unit leader depended on him "to control" (kill) specific elephants, buffalos, lions, and crocodiles that had damaged human lives and livelihoods.

In March 2000, both the chief and Mr. Njovu fell sick simultaneously from malaria and suffered other complications. Residents suspected something ominous, as both men were inseparable within the local political sphere. Although not fully recovered, Mr. Njovu "felt compelled" to travel to Mpika as the chairman of the chief's Malaila (a recently resurrected "traditional" ceremony) to consult with committee members there. After arriving at Mpika on the plateau, Mr. Njovu succumbed and died within the day. After securing a coffin and making arrangements with the warden for transport, the committee brought Mr. Njovu's body back to the valley for burial. Hundreds of mourners, including a member of Parliament, district officials, and police officers, were in attendance at the funeral.

The night before Mr. Njovu's burial, elephants trumpeted in the bush near the chief's palace. Everyone who heard these noises became apprehensive. In the morning, they found an elephant dead within the shadow of the Kanele Wildlife Camp. A large bullet wound proved its unnatural death. Members of the funeral procession consumed this windfall of elephant flesh, but the beast's assailant remained unknown. Some mourners associated this incident with the elephant killed two years earlier and Mr. Njovu's imprisonment and demise.

The day after Mr. Njovu's funeral, wildlife scouts arrested a local hunter and Mr. Cottoni, a retired soldier who had arrived the evening before the elephant's death. They accused Mr. Cottoni of providing the bullets to the local resident as part in a "business venture" [an informal contract for the resident to secure ivory].



Wildlife scouts handcuffed both suspects and handed them to the authorities among the official mourners returning to Mpika. After spending some time in prison before their court appearance, the police released both men as no evidence linked them to the alleged criminal acts. Having endured repeated beatings by scouts and police, Mr. Cottoni allegedly extorted a large sum of money from the arresting scouts as compensation for his suffering.

"I was arrested by the scouts allegedly for shooting an elephant, which died near my house," the local hunter told me in 2006 as he reflected upon this ordeal. "The elephant was shot by some unknown person—somewhere! Somehow! The elephant only got tired and died near my place. I was taken to Mpika where I remained in detention for two weeks. I was released on free bail, tried, and found innocent by the court. During my arrest, I was really annoyed, angry for them [the scouts] taking me as an accused person, arresting me only on rumor."

## A Cultural Introduction to Some Enduring Conservation Issues

This synthesis of conversations, notes, observations, letters, and storytelling was, for me at least, something of a symbolic Rubicon passage, a tangible crossing of a cultural watershed into a different world. Although I had traversed this ethnic threshold in some ways before, some residents were now revealing more intimate details of how their daily lives intermingled with mine and how they were profoundly influenced by the murky decisions and policies from beyond local horizons. Something new had surfaced in our conversations as their voices and feelings became more audible, reflective, and personal.

There was no compelling evidence that any specific resident was connected criminally with the killing of either elephant, yet many of them bore the brunt of the state's prosecutorial fist. Some paid a very heavy price in time and labor lost by arrest and imprisonment, in suffering, and in beatings. In his annual report that same year, the wildlife official quoted in the epigraph further elaborated on his initial report about what he had detected and inferred. Unlike what he had observed elsewhere in other valley



GMA, snaring and poaching at Nabwalya were infrequent events as “only one buffalo was snared and one elephant was killed using a gun.” His indicator that local people were involved was that they had removed only the meat and left the tusks behind. This behavior suggested to him that hunger was the motivation behind their action; this elephant was, in his report, “poached for nutrition purpose [*sic*].” The white professional hunter had reported that trophy animals were easy to find within this hunting tract and that he was happy with this local community’s commitment to wildlife protection.<sup>10</sup>

To my knowledge, neither case was resolved. Both cases were dropped as soon as it was safe to do so. The real perpetrators were never pursued or arraigned; outsiders implicated insiders, yet insiders knew differently. Most probably, the first elephant was fatally wounded by an outside gang of commercial poachers, who, together with dozens of carriers, weekly descended the Muchinga escarpment from the adjacent plateau searching for bushmeat and ivory within the Luangwa Valley’s expansive national parks and GMAs. These groups minimize their time within this vastness and typically seek large mammals, quickly flay the carcasses of those killed, punctually load their carriers with trophies and meat, and retreat back to the plateau. Once there, they offload their wares to other businesspeople, who carry the meat to markets within Zambia’s cities. These gangs still persist [as of 2015] as few are captured and successfully prosecuted. Elephants fatally wounded during these incursions wander and persist for days before succumbing near a river or village. The first elephant apparently fell victim to this circumstance before being butchered by the villagers shortly after its demise.

The second elephant kill seems to have been contrived quickly as a customary tribute, an insider’s scheme with outside supporters (or perhaps the reverse), during the unexpected passing of a significant dignitary. In this sense the elephant’s demise became a “respectful” [if only a “traditional”] means for hosting and feeding a large party of residential mourners and regional celebrities, the latter swarming to celebrate Nabwalya’s image as a “wild and different place” with plenty of bushmeat. Marginal culprits became the temporary scapegoats to protect this “expanded community” against the possibility of an official judicial proceeding should



powerful and distant persons inquire and require more about this elephant's death.

Understanding how members of a local community encountered, interacted with, suffered from, and endured events that are unexpectedly thrust upon them is just the beginning in discussions of conservation dilemmas in Africa. These events, generated externally, rupture local routines, cause a bustle of activities and reciprocal accusations, and provoke ground swells of questions, many of which remain unanswered and unresolved, especially at the local level. Such provincial conservation difficulties are not resolvable exclusively by applying additional force ("anti-poaching"), although this force may be necessary if deployed as a protective envelope for GMA biodiversity and residents against the destructive exploitation both by foreign and commercial gangs of bushmeat traffickers. Governmental intransience, the presumed privileges of its officials, and the untold instances of corruption by its agents on "wildlife frontiers" have produced deep distrust of government initiatives and promises. Within these distant if only mythical Southern sites, additional speculative links may fade beyond the local horizons into the consuming markets of the Northern Hemisphere, where the appearance of valuable commodities and promoted tourist fantasies appear without acknowledging their origins or burdens. Both local environments and their residents are intertwined and influenced by outside national and global groups, who in turn respond, or are driven, by demands for minerals, protein, energy, or fabled journeys and adventures. Consequently, a plausible resolution necessitates a broader vision and more extensive consensus before these dilemmas and their complex interconnections are appropriately described or witnessed. Such resolutions require commitments across a wide range of disciplines, worldviews, and states: "all at once, a matter of culture/power/history, nature" (Biersack (2006: 27). Hence this dilemma's elephantine dimensions and the requirement of a new arena of sobering thoughts and plausible activities.

How actors and practices play through time are respectively socially significant aspects of their successes or failures. An extended time frame assists a researcher to capture and link several episodes of an ongoing cultural process and its theatrics. Attributing meaning to such events also requires an interpretive



and investigatory lens. When George Orwell wrote on shooting an Asian elephant, the narrator in his narrative responded within the expectations of his colonial class in Burma and of the supposed stance of his spectators. Orwell's narrator was conscious of his official role as a representative of an oppressive imperial power and its local, visible authority, and as such he felt compelled to act in prescribed ways. The Burmese hated the narrator as an imperial police officer and baited him, as Orwell explored this cultural baggage that the officer carried on his lapels. The story of how this subject came to shoot a magnificent animal "to avoid looking like a fool" was perhaps an emblematic straw on the "camel's back" of Orwell's colonial duties and compelling consciousness. Such a perceptive story may have been instructive later as Orwell became a critical observer and sensitive writer of his own society and culture (Orwell 1936).

In his role as the European game ranger stationed at Mpika in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) during the late 1940s until the mid-1950s, Maj. Eustice Poles shot many elephants in the Luangwa Valley. Yet to my knowledge he never crossed such an intercultural or introspective boundary as I suspect Orwell and I did. During his posting, Poles had responsibilities that included overseeing the "colonial wildlife estate" in the Central Luangwa Valley (including the Valley Bisa homeland) and supervising the African Elephant Guards stationed there. Killing two large-tusked elephants each year was an official privilege for supplementing his official salary. In March 1956, while serving as host to a distinguished visiting scientist, Poles shot a large bull elephant across the Munyamadzi River near Paison Village, close to the site where the initial elephant in our narrative expired in 1998.<sup>11</sup> Having successfully pursued "his" elephant for personal remuneration, Major Poles summoned Chief Nabwalya to his camp and explained to him the changing colonial policy regarding elephants raiding "gardens."

The colonial state, as represented by Major Poles, pursued its monetary interests in elephants in the name of "conservation". Henceforth, Major Poles instructed this chief [Kabuswe Mbuluma] that the shooting of "garden-raiding elephants" was the responsibility of "the government's elephant control guards" and no longer a right by which local residents could protect their proper-



ties or themselves.<sup>12</sup> Poles sanctioned this new policy with a severe penalty: should a local person kill an elephant subsequently while defending his crops (“flagrant shooting of an elephant on the pretext that they were raiding gardens” is how Poles expressed the offense in his official report), the chief must oversee that carriers ferried all the cured meat and ivories to district headquarters, a five to eight days on foot and up a steep escarpment. The ivories and protein were colonial properties and were not to remain in the valley.

In reports to his director, Major Poles confessed reservations about the legitimate claims of his elephant control guards and that they misconstrued his orders when killing these large, supposedly marauding beasts. Many kills were never confirmed as “crop raiders.” In particular, the activities of Sandford Njovu [no relation to the Mr. Njovu previously mentioned; see below] concerned Major Poles, for this guard expended a lot of ammunition and killed many elephants. In his reports, Poles expressed his official displeasure with Njovu’s “indiscriminant shooting,” suggesting that the loss of so many immature elephants would cut “into our capital.”<sup>13</sup> Yet in describing the “resource” (elephants) in this way, Poles missed the point of Njovu’s strategic and cultural objectives (or cultural game).

Sandford Njovu was a contender for the Bisa chieftaincy in the Luangwa Valley. Years earlier in claiming an economic stringency, the British South Africa Company government subordinated his descent group of the chief’s lineage (Kazembe), as well as those of several other small chieftaincies west of the Luangwa River, to that of the reigning and appointed Valley Bisa chief at Nabwalya. The contending currency in the ensuing political contest between two chiefly lineages for official recognition and dependents, culturally coded “respect” (*mucinshi*), was animal protein and protection for clients, not ivory. Sandford Njovu was well aware of his responsibilities in reference to his employment and with respect to ivory. He knew that any compromising behavior, if it appeared in “official light,” might cost him his existing role together with his anticipated goal of one day becoming the important valley chief, rather than a descendant of his rivals. Sandford’s strategy to secure the chief’s title was a long shot, for, although he was younger than the incumbent, he had to wait for the older chief’s



death before he could advance his candidacy. The incumbent chief reigned for fifty-one years.

Unlike George Orwell, Major Poles never saw beyond his own interests and role, beyond his employment, nor glimpsed the motivations within a different cultural world, even one that he presumed to manage.<sup>14</sup> Neither did Sandford Njovu when he sought the Nabwalya chieftainship title upon the death of its incumbent in 1984. Sandford Njovu lost his competitive edge by limiting his spatial alliances to valley clients and district-level patrons where, as some stories have it, in addition to using the meat from the large number of elephants which he officially killed as a protector of the properties and as a provider of bushmeat for the many matrilineages throughout the central Luangwa Valley, he greased the palms of local politicians and district officers with ivories and other wildlife products. The eventual successor to the valley (Nabwalya) chieftaincy had lived for years on the Zambian Copperbelt and possessed a wider range of significant contacts as well as resources that enabled him to outmaneuver Njovu politically on the national level. When the dispute between the two chiefly contenders was brought to the Zambian High Court, the judges confirmed the precedence of the earlier colonial state.<sup>15</sup>

Like it has also done to Asian cultures through the phenomenon of "Orientalism," the western world of scholarship, development, and popular media has also characterized the societies and cultures of Africa as alien and different through the use of specific vocabularies that isolate and widen the gaps between "us" and "them." This discourse depicts African culture and Africans as devoid of complexity and agency (Said 1978).<sup>16</sup> In such texts, Africa and its people become a political foil where nothing seems to work, at least in a deterministic western, northern, and rational way (Chabal and Daloz 1999; Ellis and Haar 2004). Africa becomes the "dark continent" yet again, full of mysteries, despair, and chaos as the media and some experts continue to describe its people in pejorative terms such as "magic," "superstition," "tribes," "chaos," and "corruption." Through such depictions, all Africans clearly lack all the civilized attributes that make northerners the superior world citizens we assume. To ditch such facile descriptors and deceptive representations involves developing another vocabulary of ideas and identities, as well as the use of more



nuanced ways to converse about human differences and values (Klein 1996; Kohn, 2013; Das, Jackson, Kleinman, and Singh 2014).

Northern discourse further follows the Cartesian tradition of separating humans from other life forms, cartelizing the webs of life and thereby mystifying our intricate relations with the rest of the world, which is sanctioned further by the silences in our religious spheres (Connolly 2013; Uhl 2013). This dichotomous order is expressed in the geography of our lives, in the distances between where we live and work, in our language, and in our play. Our (in)sensitivities expose other forms of life to exploitation by some, as they are enabled to extend their reach as their access enhances differences in health and welfare between neighbors and those further afield. Prodigious northern contributions to protect charismatic megafauna, such as elephants and rhinos, in sanctuaries and national parks along with the promotion of egregious wildlife policies such as blatant anti-poaching campaigns and shoot-to-kill suspects on African homelands further separate human communities and minds. By immediately accepting superficial and promotional discourses on “poaching” and “poverty” at face value as the local cause of wildlife decreases, rather than searching for how these local activities and adverse conditions might connect to more distant demands, we erode capacities in other life and in others’ lives as well as in our own. Our worldviews and livelihoods further distance northerners from other peoples. Labeled benignly as “resources,” elephants and other forms of life become tourists’ cherished momentary vistas and wealthy sport hunters’ trophies. Other sojourners crave environmental products from beyond their own limits. Life forms are turned into revenue-generating objects by weak postcolonial states and rent-seeking agents dependent upon foreign financial venality. Silenced in the newer vocabularies, or falling between northern bounds of perception, are the histories, wisdom, plights, and values of rural residents; the “others” who cope daily with these creatures as well as with their detractors on very uneven political and economic playing fields.

Deep fissures and contradictory divides abound in these “African gardens of Eden,” not just within national parks or adjacent geographies (game management areas) but also significantly between residents living within them and all others. I venture



no romantic return to the past or any exclusive vision for the future; neither do I suggest a future sequenced exclusively of “indigenous” origin, but rather one in which these two ideas play a creative and enabling part. I imply that we have a lot to learn from and about others in order to escape our own narcissisms. Conservation as an ideology and as practice must begin with what’s on the ground and in residents’ minds. Blending and negotiating “the local with the outsiders’ ideal” is largely the option of the residents. I imagine a future grounded in culturally meaningful ways as rural residents are incorporated within conservation efforts and other global links as respected and respectful actors, as privileged players sustaining their identities while creating their own futures in association with the rest of us.

For such a world to materialize, outsiders seeking to conserve significant areas must extend their cultural boundaries, experiences, and vocabularies. These expansions demand that they assume roles of listening and learning instead of imposition, becoming, in William Easterly’s terms (2007) “searchers” rather than “planners.” Planners advocate chauvinistic cultural approaches with “good” self-directed intentions, work to develop global plans centered within the hegemony of those who employ them, think they know the questions and the answers, and flourish in situations where they remain largely unaccountable for their actions. Consequently, their worlds become increasingly one-sided, uncertain, and unstable. Searchers seek alternative and adaptive approaches in variable conditions. As agents of change, these mediators accept responsibility for their interventions; they never privilege *a priori* knowledge but acknowledge the complexities of living within local and global environments. Searchers willingly negotiate, experiment, listen attentively, and iteratively incorporate what they learn. They recognize the durability of homespun commitments and livelihoods rather than those leveraged from afar. Such individuals may seem idealistic, yet the label assigned to them is intended to project the progressive, incorporative attitude of an active verb rather than a static assumed noun of passive delivery. At the moment, I can imagine no sustainable world without striving for greater equality and social justice.

This book is a contribution to a reasoned discussion linking conservation in the social and life sciences as well as in the



humanities in Africa. It elaborates upon life-long processes of learning about human interests in wildlife, about different cultural histories, about divergent livelihoods and the environmental processes of a people residing in a small, yet significant place. Therefore, I write for the reflective, general reader and questioning professional hopeful of an interdisciplinary renewal within and outside of academia as well as practical and real-world resolutions incorporating a future vision for us all. I also write for rural residents, for they were active parties in my own transformative processes, and their livelihoods, identities, and prospects remain crucial concerns at risk within a harsh world bereft of soul.

### The Present Book

I begin chapter 1 by describing the *identities* of those who constitute themselves today as the Valley Bisa. Their myths do not translate readily, leaving much still unknown and perhaps unknowable to outsiders; yet shadows of their past history and heroes are etched within their landscapes and inscribed in the shadowy texts of foreigners. In their dynamic and often tragic past, itinerant strangers often became their patrons, captors, or fates—symbolized as “mother” in the chapter’s epigraph.<sup>17</sup> For colonials, the central Luangwa Valley was a “wilderness” of unknowns, which they sought to reconstruct in an image of expansive wildlife sanctuaries that obliterated earlier histories and entitlements. For residents, this landscape remains full of memories and meanings—a thicket of diverse spiritual, social, political-economic and ecological insights that each generation of residents porously bounds as they remake and blend portions into their daily livelihoods.

Chapter 2 dismisses some of the *images* and *ideas* employed by outsiders to convey aspects of Valley Bisa social organization and life. Static terms convey neither an understanding of residents’ interconnections nor of their embedded values. I describe the basic architecture of clans, lineages, and leadership to show how these categories appear in the daily lives and activities of residents. Persons, both gendered and generational, have used their



environments as places to reproduce and sustain themselves, as places from which they acquire food and collect materials while working through their differing aims and claims with others. Based upon protracted observations during one agricultural season, I followed the daily routines of several women and men as they reveal “respect” within their work, with the land, and with each other.<sup>18</sup> Extended and briefer snapshots of these same participants in later chapters describe how some of these actors have fared in subsequent years. Individual activities affect how they perceive, ponder, and exploit the “goods” that surround them in the village, within their fields, and within the nearby bush. Valley Bisa society is not without its endemic conflicts and struggles; therefore, I discuss some age and gender inequalities, together with witchcraft.

That Valley Bisa society is (or has been) isolated and removed from the rest of the world’s activities is an *illusion*, often cited by outsiders to convey their difficulties of getting there and to depict the “dismal” human lives and conditions they encounter upon arrival. Yet the people living within Zambia’s central Luangwa Valley always were connected to and intertwined with their neighbors as transients in good as well as traumatic times. As in the past, wildlife is the major entity attracting outsiders today. It is also an important “good” upon which residents have depended for survival. In the recent past, local people largely managed wildlife in their interests; now their entitlements and endowments have been rescinded by the state in its own interests. Today, state wildlife management remains linked to the technologies of colonial domination expressed in the perception of the central Luangwa as “wilderness,” its wildlife as a “resource,” and its residents as “cheap labor.” Each of these labels as “properties” is assessed and expressed primarily in “economic” units and in calculations of value. Outsiders never recognize this landscape as intricately bound to the identities of its inhabitants, as embodied in their beliefs about ancestors, or as the repository of their cultural memories. Chapter 3 describes some hazards of the Valley Bisa as primarily hoe cultivators living side by side with large wild mammals, of outsiders’ ventures with wildlife representing foreign interests, and of state plans to dispossess residents of their land and of practices that enabled them to prosper in the past.



A society's environmental knowledge and practices reflect how people understand the world and their places within it. These appraisals change as people cope with novel experiences and develop new technologies. As the main passion of some Valley Bisa men, hunting is a significant way in which they connect to life around them, both in the village and in the bush. Chapter 4 introduces some of the ways in which residents (notably a local cohort of hunters) perceived, ordered, and ritualized their world in terms of prey and space. Hunters' prey metaphorically shares many attributes with their pursuers. In addition, prey may act either on their own or as surrogates of maligned humans. Yet no cultural catalogue remains the same for long, as the depository changes with the times and with the experiences of its carriers. As the understandings and exposures of residents have broadened, so have their contentions and uncertainties.

Local knowledge constitutes a wealth of proficiency and strategies that seems to work in this unpredictable African environment. Its shifting contents become momentarily tangible as local actors think and perform in ways that often overwhelm northern categories and academic divides. Such know-how is constantly evolving, developing through personal practice, shaped through contacts and events, altered in responses to local happenings and affiliations, as well as reactive to outside political and economic interventions. As an open-ended, unpredictable encounter, hunting accumulates fluency and practice with fellow humans and other sentient creatures; the latter are aware of being pursued and may respond with evasion, deception, and even dangerous confrontations. Hunting is about learning and honing skills at every stage, beginning with its preparations and ending with sharing as well as exchanging its products for other essentials of well-being. As actors in environmental and social processes, hunters are aware of their dependencies and relations with others and concerned with their standing in their respective lineages as well as further afield. Information on three generations of hunters, their lives and accomplishments for over half a century, comprises the materials in the next five chapters.

Chapter 5 explores the cultural history of the twentieth century through the life histories, contributions, and memories of three generations of local hunters. These individuals were more than



just informants; they were also friends, whom I accompanied in the bush and came to trust on occasion, even with my own life. For these individuals the quest began with a dream, developed into a vision, blossomed into social wealth through performance and patronage (or not), leaving memories and a legacy. Their histories show how individuals achieved their local identities, how they absorbed, tested, improvised, and expanded their repertoire of skills in the bush and in the villages, or were overwhelmed by the assets or social maneuvers of their competitors and kin. When these local roles became criminalized as “poaching,” state prosecutions challenged the culture of their craft, their traditions, their husbandry, and their identities. Although the identities and practices of those depicted have now become largely history, their spirits remain in local memories, resurrected, remembered, and valued as needed.

Chapter 6 captures some of the excitement of learning and sharing as I follow an articulate hunter on two hunts during different seasons. This tutor anchors history and stories spatially while traversing his accustomed terrain in the nearby bush. In addition, I track local knowledge about a major prey species, the buffalo, as its structures and roles have changed its practices and goals over several decades. Gathered from informal conversations, local records, and participant observation, this practical knowledge and its deployment manifests in a small group of hunters in a particular place (the Nabwalya Study Area) and time (1966–93). Such information is porous, constantly changing with the experiences, ages, and circumstances of its practitioners. It is no panacea, but rather a litmus test of identity, action, and shifting goals, which are later clarified quantitatively and chronologically for this assemblage of hunters and their associates in chapter 9.

The customary products of local hunting by a few men were protection against dangerous beasts and the anticipated delivery of a steady supply of meat to kin and clients. Their yields complemented the agricultural activities of related women and the wages of other lineage men, who participated in labor markets elsewhere. Chapter 7 examines dimensions of local hunters’ decisions while in the bush, facets of others’ powers to influence their successes and failures while afield, and what these hunters brought back to share and to distribute as “goods.” A number of factors acting in



synergy changed earlier orientations in the targeting of species and the disposal of its proceeds. These causes included a deteriorating national economy combined with outside pressures on local practices and products. As bushmeat acquired increasing monetary value beyond local “lineage” worth, some residents and many outsiders capitalized upon the cash values of bush products in the wider national market. As law enforcement increased, residents largely shifted from firearms to previous more (re)sil(i)ent technologies [snares] and from taking the larger species (buffalo) to smaller game (impala, warthogs), whose carcasses were easier to hide. Subsequently, buffalo became the privileged focus of licensed safari hunters and local elites and the extralegal targets of many others.

Chapter 8 chronicles how the technologies of destruction, particularly muzzle-loading firearms, became intricately woven into the customary fabric of Valley Bisa society as metonyms of lineage affiliation and identity. Guns turned into a potent symbol of a gendered stronghold of power and authority, as well as a representation of its vulnerabilities. These weapons connected groups of related people to the productivity of their land and symbolically served as mediators in the social links between the living and the dead (spirits). As special properties vested in relationships among people, ancestors, and wildlife, some guns were beyond sale.

Chapter 9 describes the efflorescence of the “traditional” hunting system through tracking iteratively the accomplishments, qualitatively and quantitatively, of all local residential hunters between 1950 and 2000. My narrative follows the political fortunes of young men with their patrons as they engaged in the politics of provisioning protection and animal protein. Changes brought about by national economic declines, through education, and by shifting demographics, together with an imposed “community-based” wildlife program, turned this world on its head beginning in the 1990s. This latter intervention shifted the local currency of “respect” (*mucinshi*) for lineage seniority and meat to money and goods (*goot milile*), a moral economy where “wealth in people” still mattered. Local employment and the unparalleled accumulation of things and cash by a few prominently placed men, who challenged the earlier matrilineal boundaries by accumulating fungible wealth, allowed different options. This gathering



of flexible wealth permitted Big Men to diversify their business undertakings, to purchase urban supplies, and to sell or distribute these products on credit while accumulating clients, dependents, and wives. As this new social development gathered momentum, many younger entrepreneurs found meaning in the powerful symbols and religious practices of Pentecostalism rather than in the power of the ancestors and the astuteness of elders. Serving as the upholders of a universal faith, these successful entrepreneurs also parlayed their wealth and influence into status within the ranks of these rapidly expanding local churches. Tensions between the new and older forms of wealth brought a plethora of witchcraft allegations to the surface as leaders mobilized their clients during repetitive and enduring generational conflicts. The local saying that serves as this chapter's epigraph conveys some of the "community-based" wildlife program's tragic effects on local welfare, identities, and livelihoods. This adage, "In killing a buffalo, the game guard likens it to his mother," cautions wildlife scouts to avoid sacrificing the welfare of their local heritage in their enthusiasm for employment and their deployment in outside interests.

Chapter 10 reveals that much more was at stake in the inception of the "community-based" wildlife program within Zambia than improving rural community welfare or promises of restoring rural management and entitlements to wildlife. A review of national documents and political decisions to initiate this program in the late 1980s and to renew it in the late 1990s shows that the program's priorities included expansive national agendas and the control of the lucrative wildlife traffic through an alliance between public institutions and some in the private commercial sectors. As a consequence and despite its promotions, sustainable conservation of wildlife and improvements in village welfare never were primary concerns. The reoccurrence and interpretation of two events witnessed in 2006, an altercation over land boundaries and the killing of a prominent village elder by an elephant, indicate the continuing depth of the dilemmas and distrust between the state and local authorities as well as the jeopardy of living with large, dangerous mammals. They also reveal the despondency, dependency, and poverty felt by many residents, especially among those who remember the earlier times. All these



topics and concerns remain interrelated and must be recognized and reconciled with an unfortunate past before any sustainable future becomes plausible. Their effects impinge upon the futures of us all even if we remain unaware of their claims and imprints.

## Notes

1. Unit Inspection Report for the Munyamadzi Game Management Unit, 23 August 1998; prepared by the Nyamaluma Institute for Community-Based Resource Management.
2. “Northerners” is a term I use to differentiate people currently residing in the Northern Hemisphere, mainly within Western Europe and North America, as well as those typically urban dwellers. “Southerners” refers to the inhabitants of the Southern Hemisphere, many of whom still live in rural villages and small towns in Sub-Saharan Africa. That the South also has its very large cities as well as large concentrations of refugees is not denied.
3. The inception of this “community-based” wildlife program at Nabwalya in 1988–89 and its imprint on the people involved there in 2006 is described in Marks (2014: 238–74).
4. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/elephant\\_in\\_the\\_room](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/elephant_in_the_room); referenced August 15, 2007.
5. My parents were southern Presbyterian missionaries in the former Belgian Congo from 1948 to 1961. My father, a dentist, and my mother, a nurse, together with others, established a medical and dental institution to teach some Congolese (Lulua) how to become health workers, and aspire to live a “Christian” (if not Presbyterian) lifestyle. The boundaries of their work and engagements were defined two generations earlier in a court trial between a despotic monarch, Leopold II, and the pioneering efforts of an earlier generation of Presbyterian missionaries, particularly Dr. William H. Sheppard, an African American, and William M. Morrison. See also Benedetto and Vass (1996); Hochschild (1999); Kingsolver (1998); Kennedy (2002).
6. Examples of these stories, tragedies, and ideals are presented in the Ken Burns film, *The National Parks: America’s Best Idea*, shown on Public Broadcasting Stations beginning in 2009. Rosaleen Duffy (2010) describes some tragic and draconian practices of international wildlife conservation and NGOs in the developing world.
7. Conversations with other residents at various times helped to clarify these events and the connections within the written accounts. I use



- a writer's license to shorten the story and resolve some less tangible elements, and I elaborate upon some nuances within endnotes.
8. The protocol by which villagers could obtain meat from such found carcasses demanded that they first report the carcass position to the nearest wildlife camp and wait while the scouts investigated the scene. Once they completed their investigation, scouts often required villagers to butcher the meat and carry it to their camp. For these villagers, the unexpected disposition of such a large carcass in their midst was a treasure trove from which a distant bureaucracy might seek to disenfranchise them. Their hurry to flay the carcass indicated their delight in this find; their subsequent behavior showed their anxiety over its consequences. The reference to where this elephant carcass lay, between Chibale and Poison [*sic*] village, was probably not only a misspelling of Paison but a Freudian slip given the normative vocabularies used by game officials to denigrate GMA residents' behaviors.
  9. Although the sentencing of Kazembe seemed to "officially" settle the earlier poaching incident, it remained unclear if Kazembe was the actual killer. Kazembe had a reputation as a local "elephant slayer," for he had several prior convictions as a "poacher." According to the people who knew him best, Kazembe's deployment never showed any signs of transformation toward becoming a "conservationist" (see his reappearance in chapter 10, endnotes 19 and 23).
  10. Community Development Officer, Evaluation and Monitoring Reports for 1998, ADMADE Units for Mwanja, Nabwalya, Chitungulu, Chifunda, and Chikwa (period 14/08/1998–05/09/1998), typed report in author's possession.
  11. Both Fraser Darling [an imminent British ecologist that the Northern Rhodesian Game and Tsetse Control Department engaged as a consultant to help them strengthen their case for more funds and new policies during 1956–57] and Eustice Poles describe these events in their field notes. See John Morton Boyd (1992: 40–41). In describing the local Africans, including chief Nabwalya, encountered on this safari, Fraser Darling absorbed many of the prejudiced attitudes of his host, Eustice Poles. Upon learning of the death of this large elephant shot by his host, Darling (1960) revealed that his more cosmopolitan sentiments about wild animals were "poles" apart from that of the provincial ranger.
  12. The colonial government recognized the right of local owners to kill wildlife (*damage feasant*) in the defense of life and properties (see Faunal Conservation Ordinance CAP 241 [1964 edition], section 26). Once killed, the carcass and trophy theoretically belonged to the



state for disposal. Given the distance from Mpika and difficulties of travel, the latter provisions were rarely enforced in the central Luangwa during earlier periods [as explained later in chapter 1 and 3]. In his few recorded interactions with Chief Nabwalya, Poles sought to strengthen his department's status as the agency for killing raiding elephants, thereby assuring possession of the ivories as state properties. Under indirect rule, the native authorities retained considerable power as to which game violations they prosecuted within their territories.

13. Eustice Poles, "Report of a Tour of the Munyamadzi Controlled Area, Report 1/1947, under Annexure 1—Elephant Control Guards, Duties and Responsibilities 1 March 1947" (copy of report, typescript). In this report, Poles records that Sandford Njovu killed twenty-one elephants in 1946 and five more in January 1947. Poles had no idea about other game that Sandford Njovu might have shot, nor did he understand what "game" he was playing. Poles had "no complete records" of the ammunition Njovu possessed in 1946, but that the latter was known to possess "a balance 110 rounds of ammunition" on 1 June 1946 and had withdrawn subsequently another 72 rounds. More information in endnote 15.
14. While I was studying in London in 1965–66 preparatory to fieldwork, some retiring Zambian officials with whom I corresponded suggested that I write to Major Poles, then retired and living in England, to seek his advice for living in the Luangwa Valley and review his extensive and personal records. I wrote him an introductory letter telling him of my intended studies and inquired if it would be convenient for me to visit him. As he preferred fishing in Ireland, he declined to meet me. Instead he offered the following advice: "News out of Africa percolates to me from time to time and I am led to believe that the inhabitants of this part of the Luangwa Valley eschewed cannibalism since their final supper party with the white P. A. [provincial administrator]. You should therefore be reasonably safe. Also I understand they have acquired the dubious blessings of Christian superstition and education. Whether or not these changes in their environment make them more or less interesting for study must remain a matter of personal taste; doubtless it has enhanced their natural cunning and added to their notorious rascality. In my time communication with this area consisted only of a native path but I am told than [*sic*] an all weather motor road has since been constructed which makes your mission easier, safe and more agreeable." (Personal letter to author dated 30 March 1966).



15. The eventual ascendancy of the Nabwalya lineage of the Ng'ona clan as the sole recognized Valley Bisa chieftaincy between the Luangwa River and the Muchinga escarpment was undoubtedly a product of its central location, adjacent to the site of an early colonial post (see chapter 1). In this region, the colonial state had recognized previously at least eight Bisa chiefs, but the main rival to Nabwalya was always Kazembe—and the district initially bore the name of Kazembe. As the main contender in the Kazembe line, a younger Sandford Njovu, the elephant control guard, contended with the chief by attracting clients and by solidifying this patronage with protection and with wild meat. The chieftainship was sanctioned by the state, and its occupant, also a renowned hunter, possessed material wealth that made him attractive to women (and their lineages) in all sections of his “enlarged” chiefdom. That Njovu outlived the chief (who died in 1984) and the four-year interregnum before the state appointed the new chief in the Nabwalya line is testimony to the strength of the Njovu’s strategy.
16. In his influential book, Edward Said (1978) portrayed and critiqued “Orientalism,” which he depicted as an assemblage of false assumptions and romanticized images informing western attitudes and writings about Asia and the Middle East. He argued that the western experiences of colonialism and political domination distorted these images and attitudes in unflattering ways, reducing their complexity and agency while continuing to serve as implicit justification for expansive and military ambitions. Westerners also wrote these histories and constructed their identities in which the West was the norm from which the foreign and exotic them deviated. Said was likewise critical of Arab and Oriental elites, many of whom had internalized these “Orientalist ideas”. While engaging and profound, Said’s ideas are not without their detractors and critics. I initially took his perspective to reexamine my engagements in Southern Africa and those of colleagues.
17. Translation: “An important traveler may become your mother.” Meaning: You can ask anything of important strangers, as it is through showing appropriate “respect” that one might find new connections, knowledge, and challenges to enlarge one’s world of opportunities.
18. For details and analysis of these studies see Marks (2014: 72–114).