



INTRODUCTION

Protecting Nature in Africa and Asia

Towards a Small-Scale Global History

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This book addresses two histories, both ongoing. The first may be followed over the course of its twelve chapters. These focus on different times and spaces, from the conservation of the imperial forests in Singapore to those in Ali Bongo's Gabon, from Captain Ritchie's colonial career in Africa and Asia to the postcolonial African itinerary of the agronomist Arthur Bunting, without forgetting the mythicised bestiaries of independent India and Tanzania. Each chapter thus acts as a gateway to the global history of tropical nature conservation from the late nineteenth through to the early twenty-first century – in other words, they are thirteen pieces of a far from complete puzzle.

But its pieces have not been positioned by chance. It would have been impossible to retrace these small-scale histories without also apprehending the African and Asian history in which they take place. That is the paradox of the discipline. One has to already know one's field of enquiry to formulate a plausible general hypothesis, but one needs to start from a solid hypothesis in order to correctly investigate one's field. In other words, 'to raise a historical question, one has to already be a historian.'¹ This first chapter therefore goes over a second history, that of our enquiry into global nature conservation in an area covering Asia and Africa. It addresses how it originated, the objectives pursued, the hypotheses envisaged, the resultant reflective framework and our initial findings – which, far from bringing our research project to a crowning close, mark the enthusiastic beginnings of our joint venture.

A Starting Point: From Histories of Encounters to Histories of Circulations

The starting point for this book took place in Ethiopia. It is the history of the 2,500 inhabitants of the village of Gich, who in 2016 were displaced by the wardens of Simien National Park. They settled with their livestock and finan-

cial compensation on the outskirts of the little town of Debarq, 32 kilometres west of the park. This brought the history of Gich to a close. But where did it start?

First, this displacement occurred during the very contemporary period of global nature governance. Consultants working for the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) and the WWF (World Wildlife Fund), operating under UNESCO mandate since the 1980s, argued on several occasions that agro-pastoralism posed a threat to the natural values of the Simien mountains, listed as a World Heritage Site. UNESCO thus downgraded the park in 1996, placing it on its List of World Heritage in Danger. Since then many conservation professionals – working for the African Wildlife Foundation based in Tanzania, the German development bank KfW (Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau), – or the IUCN – have worked to safeguard the place, providing the technical and financial support needed to displace populations ‘voluntarily’ and to preserve the *walia ibex*, an endemic species of wild goat. For Ethiopia’s leaders, this naturalisation of the places in the park was a way to boost its international profile, which it planned on leveraging to become a leading player in East Africa; it also stoked state capitalism fuelled by the tourist industry, making it easier to control a region of scrubland like Simien Park. Inhabitants’ reactions were mixed. On being stripped of the land they had maintained for decades, and deprived of their mutual support networks, most sank silently into poverty, though some sought to cling to the coat-tails of international heritage actors, a potential source of revenue, prestige and power within their community.

The displacement of the Gich villagers also reaches back to the more distant days of national parks. From the mid-1930s through to the late 1970s, the Ethiopian emperor, Haile Selassie, turned to European ‘advisers’ from neighbouring East African colonies, then to Western ‘experts’ sent by several international conservation institutions. These biologists, agronomists and ecologists helped create the Ethiopian national parks, including Simien Park. Their guiding principle was to save the Simien’s exceptional wildlife, flora and vistas. In an international context conducive to neo-Malthusian theories, this meant evicting populations: this is what East Africa’s colonial administrators and then Western experts told Haile Selassie, and it is a policy he sought to implement in the Simien mountains. But the inhabitants resisted. They regularly clashed, rifle in hand, with representatives of the empire; they even tried to kill every single *walia ibex*, whose disappearance would scupper any plans for a ‘national park’. The more the state drew on the global heritagisation of nature to build a centralised national administration, the more the inhabitants used nature to resist first the empire, then the nation state.

The displacement of the Gich villagers takes us back, lastly, to the time of game reserves. In early twentieth-century sub-Saharan Africa, the European

powers, working in league with colonial foresters and botanists, spread the myth of a *previously* untouched African ‘nature’ that had since been damaged. This myth legitimised the expropriation of the colonised and the colonial exploitation of resources. It was against this backdrop that Emperor Menelik II of Ethiopia called in German zoologists to create the Simien game reserve, a move serving various purposes. The Ethiopian administration was seeking to leverage international cooperation to obtain a seat at the table of the great powers of the period. Granting a monopoly on game rights exclusively to imperial military officers was also a way of signifying the administration’s superiority over the region’s local chieftains. To impose their power on Simien communities, the officers granted themselves a monopoly on trophy and game hunting; but it was the emergent nation’s representatives in Addis Ababa who henceforth determined land use.

There are two possible interpretations of this Ethiopian history. The first is that of exceptionalism, according to which contemporary Ethiopia, as the only African country not to have been colonised, was following a singular trajectory as the continent’s first nation state. This hypothesis is not wholly wrong: each country does indeed follow its own path. However, the North–South circulations marking this Ethiopian history suggest we should consider a larger history: that of the (post)colonial space-times of global nature governance.² Rather than focusing on a *before* and *after* of colonisation, Ethiopia suggests we should envisage ‘interlocking’ time frames: far from emerging one after the other, the rationales for turning the land into a park accumulated on top of one another.³ Instead of seeing North–South relations solely through the prism of domination, it is more useful to think of power in terms of circulations, transfers arising from ‘perpetually extending the remote links binding ever more people together over an ever vaster space.’⁴ And to do that, it is of course necessary to expand the enquiry, that is, to move from individual work on Ethiopia to a group research project.⁵ The first stage was to call in three colleagues.

First, research by Mathieu Guérin has shown that throughout South East Asia, heritage invention was marked by worldwide encounters, whose chronology spills across the colonisation–decolonisation watershed.⁶ In Malaysia, for instance, nature management changed over the course of negotiations involving different protagonists: colonial administrators then leaders of the Federation of Malaysia, Malay sultans then regional leaders, and colonial conservation experts like Theodore Hubback, some of whom switched to being international experts in the wake of independence, such as James Hislop. From the 1930s to the early 1970s, these conservation practitioners debated, agreed or clashed, especially over the place populations were to have in protected areas.

Above and beyond these relations between (former) imperial metropolises and their colonies, historian Violette Pouillard has examined the circulation of

people and ideas within continents.⁷ At the turn of the twentieth century, the British hunter and game reserve advocate Edward North Buxton was active in Sudan, Uganda and Somaliland. Then from the 1970s to the 2010s, the British zoologist Kes Hillman Smith, an IUCN consultant employed by the Institut congolais pour la conservation de la nature, worked in parks in Congo, Kenya and Ethiopia. Whether at the beginning or end of the twentieth century, these conservationists seem always to have worked closely with the colonial then national authorities, with imperial then international conservation institutions, as well as with the wardens and inhabitants of protected areas.

Lastly, these nature professionals were at the centre of transcontinental circulations. Archives collected by Grégory Quenet show, for instance, that members of committees regulating hunting in Cochinchina (in southern Vietnam) in the 1920s took direct inspiration from earlier work by some of their members in French West Africa.⁸ Other archives indicate that the broad lines of forest conservation policy in Tanzania, the Seychelles and Suriname were all drawn up by John Procter, a British forester and ecologist, over periods stretching from ten years before these countries became independent to several years after.

These hypotheses, stemming from our initial comparison of our fields and archives, led us to devise a research project (PANSER, *PAtrimoines Naturels aux Suds: pour une histoire globale à Échelle Réduite*, or Natural Heritage in the Global South: For a Small-Scale Global History). This project ran from 2018 to 2022, with funding from the Agence française nationale de recherche, and was headed by Mathieu Guérin, Grégory Quenet and me. It sprang from three observations: first, in the twentieth century, nature professionals circulated in and between Africa and Asia; second, the time frames of these circulations followed a chronology other than that of colonisation–decolonisation; and third, these histories of global encounters always took place at the village level. It seemed to us that following the trajectories of these conservation professionals moving from one protected area to another offered a way of exploring the history of global environmental heritage interventions. Studying this history at the heart of the territories where it occurred – from Equatorial Africa to the China Sea – provided a way of envisaging, on the ground, the encounters, negotiations and conflicts that, over the course of the twentieth century, fashioned an Afro-Asian heritage area.

Our Objective: Placing the Global South in Its Specific World History

To produce a history of the Global South from its own perspective, we need to relinquish any opposition between ‘colonial’ and ‘postcolonial’ periods, and

also move beyond any separation into ‘international stakeholders’ and ‘local populations.’ The histories of science, of heritage and of the environment show how hard it is to encompass the various times and protagonists at work in conservation in the Global South in a single account. Concerning colonial times, certain works have revealed the role played by members of a genuine diaspora of scientists working in tropical nature heritagisation,⁹ while others have flagged the need to embrace the ways that nature policies are negotiated at a local scale.¹⁰ Conversely, concerning postcolonial times, while some historians have noted how ‘local forms of resistance and creativity’ may influence the social spaces of natural heritage in the Global South,¹¹ others have called for greater attention to the role played by the international professionals defining conservationist practices as they moved between North America, Europe, Africa and Asia.¹² The difficulty is thus to reconstitute a genuinely contemporary and truly global history. Doing so entails combining at least two approaches.

A first approach consists in focusing on the ‘assemblage vectors’ involved in constructing nature policies.¹³ One aspect is to examine how conservation knowledge was built up during missions to explore Africa and Asia, and then standardised in scientific institutions based mainly in the West. Another aspect is to analyse how nature professionals shared this knowledge (at international conferences) and how they disseminated it (through correspondence, scientific journals and official publications). Various works have emphasised the validity of this approach. Several French researchers have thus studied ‘imperial trajectories’ to throw light on a spatial history of colonial phenomena. This has enabled them to abandon the centre–periphery model to instead envisage colonial territories as functioning in a network, and so apprehend ‘the hybridisation of knowledge and of action rationales.’¹⁴ This approach, applied to the history of conservation, seeks to identify nature professionals and to map the networks they built up across Africa and Asia over the course of a long twentieth century.

This idea of hybridisation also encourages us to adopt a second approach. In building up knowledge to define right and wrong usages of nature, foresters, economists and ecologists conducted field studies. Admittedly, their findings were often shackled by their prejudices concerning tropical environments and their inhabitants. Nevertheless, these findings stemmed directly from their interaction with local agents.¹⁵ As several historians of the colonial period have shown, heritage expertise was far from being a closed system of ideas and practices, and we hence need to examine the ‘interactions and interpenetration of action and knowledge.’¹⁶ This second line of enquiry leads us to study how, during and after colonisation, heritage knowledge and norms were both imposed and negotiated, constructed and reconstructed on the ground. Conducting situated case studies, from Côte d’Ivoire to Malaysia, throws light on the contacts, negotiations and clashes making heritagised nature a place of

conflict and conflicts to build a territory, impose a representation and define rights to access and use resources.

To do this, we need to combine analysis of international archives with in-depth field studies. We hold that such an approach may help show that ‘the modern world was not simply born in Europe’, while also ensuring that the countries of the South have *their own* contemporary chronology: that of a lengthy twentieth century marked by the history of *their specific* world, driven by both exogenous and endogenous processes.¹⁷

Our Hypothesis: The (Other) Space-Times of an Afro-Asian Area

In 1950, the Society for the Preservation of the Fauna of the (British) Empire changed its name, becoming the Fauna Preservation Society (FPS). Several international conservation institutions did likewise; new organisations were also founded, such as the World Wildlife Fund. These all emphasised the need to reconcile development and conservation requirements in independent Africa and Asia. Several historians who have studied their statements and programmes argue that the 1960s marked a radical shift in global environmental policies: preservationism – isolating nature under a protective dome and driving out its occupants – is said to have given way to conservationism – protecting resources to use them sustainably.¹⁸ According to this account, the shift really got under way in September 1961, when the IUCN – with the support of UNESCO, the FPS and the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization) – held a ‘Conference for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources in Modern African States’ in Arusha (Tanzania). This was attended by international experts and leaders of independent African states, and resulted in the founding of the WWF, conceived of by several experts – such as Julian Huxley, the former head of UNESCO, and Max Nicholson, from the (British) Nature Conservancy – as a bank to finance conservation. According to them, and to certain historians, 1961 also marked the end of colonial preservationism and the beginning of developmentalist conservation, backed by international institutions.¹⁹

But field studies bring a different story to light.²⁰ International conservation institutions, with the enforced yet opportunistic cooperation of independent leaders, conducted projects in Africa planned by former colonial experts.²¹ Research conducted with Mathieu Guérin and Grégory Quenet further suggests that from Africa to South East Asia, similar heritage practices were conducted by the same heritage makers: scientists who had worked in colonies and switched to being international experts, some of whom retained their positions – and even their offices – through to the mid-1970s.

This led us to abandon the chronology that tends to be used to describe societies in Africa and South East Asia: the imperial construction of colonial

states through to the 1960s, followed by the formation of nations, then, after the 1990s, the federal recomposition or collapse of neoliberal states. The history of conservation brings a different chronology to light, that of *game reserves* (the 1900s to the 1930s), *national parks* (the 1940s to the 1980s) and *community conservation* (the 1990s to the present day). We shall return to this chronology, but for the moment let us note that it has the advantage of leading us away from a Eurocentric approach. When former colonies acceded to independence, this undeniably marked a historical watershed for imperial metropolises: they lost their empire, and with it the resources and networks bolstering their wealth and power. But any such historical break was less clear-cut for the colonies. Colonised independentists became postcolonial leaders, who both reconfigured and perpetuated policies and power structures, and the ‘issue of “colonial legacy” became that of the context of action shaped by the colonial past.’²²

This intermingling of colonial and postcolonial times is common to all societies in Africa and South East Asia. Interdisciplinary studies have shown how the conservationist model devised at the beginning of the twentieth century was reproduced from country to country,²³ before being generalised by international institutions during the 1950s.²⁴ However pioneering this approach may be,²⁵ and though still relevant,²⁶ it does not explain why policies drawn up in a colonial context continued to be implemented after independence. Yet by following the trail of nature professionals, we may place this Afro-Asian area in the history of the specific world of which it is a part. Whether called ‘scientists’ (the 1900s to the 1930s), ‘experts’ (the 1940s to the 1980s) or ‘consultants’ (the 1990s to the present day), nature professionals were omnipresent; this may well explain why, after decolonisation, conservationist practices continued to be globalised, a phenomenon that in fact only intensified. But because no single scheme can encompass the singularities of the socio-environmental dynamics in, say, Mozambique, the Seychelles or Vietnam, we need to relinquish the dream of a ‘totalising’ global history,²⁷ to instead try to conduct a ‘small-scale global history.’²⁸

A Reflexive Framework for Apprehending Global Encounters

This project would not have been feasible without the extensive body of literature in which to immerse ourselves. Practitioners of the human and social sciences have noted that ‘nature’ is both an object of study and a way of studying societies: ‘Because parks are supposed to be, but aren’t, the antithesis of how nature is treated in the rest of society, they end up being very clear expressions of that society.’²⁹ From this perspective, conservation areas need to be viewed as one of those topics that, though seemingly ‘wholly minor, even slightly derogatory’, in fact reveal dynamics that cannot be otherwise apprehended.³⁰ By

studying how public authorities use the governance of natural things to organise their governance of people, our ultimate purpose is to apprehend how nature is made, and thereby how the colonial then national state was built.

Environmental history has contributed to this history for the United States,³¹ Canada³² and then Britain's former empire in Africa and Asia.³³ We now need to further explore lines of enquiry opened up for Kenya and Tanzania, for example. We also need to expand the field to countries that have been little studied either because they were colonised by a power other than Great Britain (Algeria, Mozambique, Syria and Vietnam) or because their archives are little known (the Seychelles and Malaysia). The purpose of this dual approach is hence also theoretical. As stated earlier, we need simultaneously to examine whether the Afro-Asian area actually forms a single whole, and to look at the continued existence of colonial nature policies in postcolonial times.

A convenient explanation of this would be neo-imperialism conducted by Western institutions. This would however postulate the reproducibility not of a model but of situations, thereby setting to one side the dynamics driving transnational yet always locally grounded circulations.³⁴ That is why it is important to view conservation agents as mediating between different natures: nature became progressively decontextualised from its inhabitants, and so a single universal and borderless nature emerged, which thereby needed protecting. How could such a definition of nature coexist with solidly rooted social realities? Only because of certain arrangements, and because of a dialogue between European powers, international organisations, (formal and informal) public authorities and local communities making a living from (and living in) the environment. Though asymmetrical, these relations had to benefit several groups in order to last. We thus need to study these connections from the bottom up to detect the transactions and oppositions binding together all those involved in producing nature: agronomists, biologists and ecologists turned administrators, experts and consultants; nature journalists and film-makers; agro-pastoralists, tourist guides and local development brokers; local officials and regional or national leaders. And to do so, we need to go back to the chronology.

The era of game reserves started in the early twentieth century. The Germans were the first to create a reserve in German East Africa, in 1896, followed by the British in the neighbouring colonies, then other European colonial powers. They all convened in London in May 1900 where they drew up the Convention for the Preservation of Wild Animals, Birds and Fish in Africa. The practice of placing wildlife in reserves subsequently spread from colonies in Africa to those in Asia. And in each empire, the process involved hunting elites, botanists or foresters, and colonial officials, as well as colonised subjects. It would be easy to view the former as quite naturally allying against the latter. But quite frequently colonists' interests diverged. Hunters generally sought to

appropriate then dominate nature. Many naturalists were inspired by a dual representation, that of a nature that had been lost in Europe and (re)found in the tropics, and that of inhabitants who would destroy this still untouched Eden. As for colonial administrators, they could be convinced both of the benefits of their 'civilising mission' and of the need to govern by force. Shaped by these various contexts and circumstances, alliances were built up around nature. Some viewed it as a tool for controlling unruly spaces,³⁵ others as a place of knowledge and preservation of the wilderness,³⁶ and others still as a territory for collecting trophies and becoming a sportsman.³⁷ And so in Asia and Africa from 1900 to the late 1930s, the rise of game reserves meant that inhabitants were increasingly expropriated and criminalised. This process thus needs to be studied in the light of the institutionalisation of sciences within the state, the invention of an Edenic tropical nature and the role of so-called 'native' protagonists: on what endogenous nomenclature of nature did the authorities draw to learn about and (re)name the landscape and animal species? And did the inhabitants clash with the new wildlife managers, or did they negotiate how to use their territory? These questions provide a way of shedding light on how all these protagonists played a part in the colonial construction of nature, in a context of intensifying contacts between ever closer worlds.

Then the second era started, with reserves being converted into national parks. Once again, the destroyers were also the protectors. The beginnings of colonisation had triggered or at least accelerated deforestation and a drop in wildlife specimens, prompting European and North American hunters to call for game reserves. Faced with the exponential collapse in big game, these hunters-turned-'penitents' urged the colonial states to create wildlife sanctuaries.³⁸ And once again, the European authorities used nature the better to control inhabitants and exploit the land. Some also truly sought to protect gorillas and large herds of savannah herbivores. The first park was created in the Belgian Congo in 1925 when two game reserves were merged. Then in 1926 the South African Transvaal reserve became Kruger National Park; in 1928 Western conservationists circulating between empires created the International Office for the Protection of Nature (IOPN); and then in 1933, once again in London, the Convention Relative to the Preservation of the Fauna and Flora in their Natural State was drawn up.³⁹ Since then, in both colonial and postcolonial contexts, heritagisation has led to the introduction of national parks and socio-ecological models to help manage humans and nature, mainly in lands home to semi-nomadic peoples, 'ethnic' minorities or mountain dwellers, all of whom tend to oppose ruling powers.⁴⁰ Once again, these spaces were largely outside the states' hold, and nature there was considered less 'spoiled' by mankind. Paradoxically, states therefore set about extending their grasp over these lands so as to protect them. As for the narrative underpinning the process, it was mainly conveyed by the agronomists, ecologists

and ethologists who succeeded the botanists and foresters. Dreading erosion in the 1930s, and then alarmed at the prospect of overpopulation in the 1960s, nearly all of them were convinced of the need to expel or at least constrain the occupants of tropical nature, viewed as *previously* untouched but *now* under threat. These men of science thus helped turn these colonies into an experimental laboratory. Then, after independence, they became advisers to national leaders who reappropriated their “Foucauldian” discourse of degradation and turned it to their own ends. Both before and after independence, protecting nature was thus also a way of wielding power.⁴¹

Lastly, the 1980s saw the beginning of the era of community conservation. In terms of texts, this period is symbolised by great international charters, such as the 1980 World Conservation Strategy drawn up by the IUCN, the WWF, UNESCO and the FAO, or the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity ratified in Rio in 1992. The spirit behind this new conservation was thus based on sacralising the twin principles of ‘parks for people’ and ‘local community’ representation. Local people were cast as saviours who would convert the ‘preservationist fortresses’ of national parks into zones for protecting biodiversity and boosting economic development.⁴² And, alongside ecologists who were still active in protected natural areas, international consultants now played a central role. Trained in ‘development’, ‘international cooperation’, ‘participatory governance’ and ‘participatory economics’, they asserted their capacity to ‘drive the circuits of power where normative frameworks were produced, knowledge conveyed, and resources distributed.’⁴³ Given the increasingly technical nature of conservation, we need to examine how consultants’ actions responded to the societies in which they intervened: were they instrumentalised by the public authorities, with the occupants of protected areas being increasingly coerced by wardens? Or on the contrary, did inhabitants and consultants form mutually beneficial alliances to profit from the heritagisation of nature, perhaps at the expense of national authorities? Answering these questions provides a way of exploring the recent history of ‘global green governmentality’.⁴⁴ This stems from multiple factors: the recent articulation between the state, society and the market; accelerating contact between ever more varied and numerous actors; and the persistence of colonial representations of an Edenic tropical nature now under threat. In other words, to understand this governmentality, we need to view it through the prism of knowledge agents’ increasing involvement in heritage actions.

Findings

This approach guided Mathieu Guérin’s, Grégory Quenet’s and my investigations between 2018 and 2022, looking at Malaysia, Indonesia, the Seychelles,

Vietnam, Ethiopia and the European headquarters of international conservation institutions. The reason for pooling our research was to identify circulations within and between continents, and then observe how they played out locally. And to do this, it was essential to broaden the enquiry once again. We thus assembled a small team of colleagues to explore the global yet situated histories of the governance of tropical nature.

The sources used vary depending on the periods and the thirteen fields of study: in some cases, the documentation was produced by foresters, veterinary surgeons, biologists or agronomists; in others, the material came from archives left by colonial, national and international administrators; in other cases, the research focused exclusively on correspondence, first-person accounts and photographs. But whatever the nature of our sources, we adopted a common framework of enquiry. First, in order to identify the heritage chronologies that built up over time, we sought to apprehend: for the colonial period, the 'knowledge machinery' fashioned by scientists working in the colonies;⁴⁵ for the time of independence, their repositioning as 'foot-soldiers for international conservation institutions';⁴⁶ and for the subsequent era of community conservation, the 'atypical relation between the government and the "specialist" – a relationship stemming from the colonial legacy'.⁴⁷ Second, to gauge the social depth of the networks and circulations shaping nature governance, we looked for intersections between the situated practices of (colonial or national) state employees and the deterritorialised practices of the representatives of (imperial or international) conservation institutions. Lastly, to assess the role local populations played in building these global bio-policies, we read the archives against the grain to see how the protected areas were, if not contested, then at least negotiated by those living there and in the surrounding areas.

The matter of archives turned out to be crucial for this common framework, and also, ultimately, for each of our individual lines of enquiry. From West Africa to South East Asia, from the headquarters of UNESCO (Paris) to those of the FAO (Rome), the FPS (Kew, in London), the IUCN and the WWF (Gland, in Switzerland), the sheer volume of the archives, and their dispersal, thwarted any attempt to retrace a situated Afro-Asian history of 'the global situation'.⁴⁸ Indeed, studying the local situation in depth frequently meant neglecting the international dimension; conversely, extensive analysis of international conservation networks implied neglecting the local level to a certain extent. The only way to make up for this lopsidedness, which is inherent to our historical question, is to conduct collective research over time, punctuated by intermediate conclusive phases. This work is intended as the first such phase.

Our first conclusion relates to the very essence of tropical conservation: this policy is, in itself, contradictory. Richard Grove has already shown how, in the early modern period, ecologism and capitalism emerged concomitantly in tropical islands colonised by Europeans.⁴⁹ Yet this link between predation and

protection kept on growing stronger. Timothy Barnard points out that in the late nineteenth century, when British colonisers were creating the first forest reserves in Singapore, they sought to combat the deforestation caused by the very farming practices for growing pepper and gambier that they had themselves developed on the islands. The reserves thus served two contradictory objectives: planting trees to protect soil and water resources; and cutting down trees to provide wood for the colony and for export. What mattered was to protect and so exploit, and on other occasions it was a matter of exploiting so as to protect. This was notably the case in East Africa, between 1955 and 1965, during a vast ‘wildlife cropping’ project devised by biologists and ecologists with the backing of the IUCN and the UK-based Nature Conservancy. This project was implemented in Queen Elizabeth Park (Uganda) and Tsavo Park (Kenya), the former being home to hippopotamuses and the latter to elephants. Among others, Raf de Bont has looked at this ‘conservation by culling’: raising wild animals, killing some of them, selling their meat to replace cattle in the African diet and thus replacing the sheep- and goat-rearing economy, seen as ecologically destructive, with a supposedly conservationist wildlife economy. This programme failed to produce any tangible results, but it is a particularly striking illustration of the inherent contradiction still affecting conservation policy today.⁵⁰ Geographer Johan Oszwald thus notes that in eastern Côte d’Ivoire, during French colonisation and then once Félix Houphouët-Boigny was president, export agriculture led to such over-exploitation that the protected forests of Béki and La Bossémati were the last remaining wooded territories in the region. And so by the early twenty-first century, while no exploitation was authorised within these park spaces, the surrounding land was exhausted in the wake of an influx of farmers who had left the over-exploited countryside looking for any remaining arable land. Protection on the one hand, predation on the other. This paradox is part of the very nature of conservation: it does not exist *alongside* destruction, but *in tandem with* it.

However contradictory it may be, conservation is nevertheless rational. Indeed, tropical nature governance seems constantly driven by the global production and circulation of knowledge about human–nature relations. Raphaël Devred shows this via the history of merino sheep raised at the Rambouillet agricultural station from the late nineteenth century to the 1930s, then sent to Algeria, Madagascar or French West Africa to be crossed with ‘native’ sheep. This project, backed by the industrial sheep lobby, was devised by livestock experts who theorised the ‘degenerative’ nature of African sheep and proposed this cross-breeding strategy to return them to ‘their former balance’. This operation sought to regenerate African wool-producing breeds; it further sought to perfect the African ‘race’ by sedentarising nomads and converting them to a value-generating export economy. Managing tropical nature was thus primarily a matter of transforming it, of turning it into what it ‘ought’ to be, and

then conserving it ‘as it was.’ This absolute confidence in science’s capacity to improve nature and tropical societies developed during the colonial period, and lasted after independence, as did the careers of those championing it. Joseph Hodge points this out concerning the career of Arthur Hugh Bunting, a British agronomist and biochemist. From the 1930s to the 1970s, Bunting circulated between Africa, Europe and Asia. As a communist, he was convinced poverty could be solved by societal change, and to his mind science was the best tool for bringing this about. It was with this in mind that he worked for the Colonial Office in Gambia and in Sudan. Then after independence, as a professor in agricultural botany at Reading University, he established a global network of professionals working in rural development and agricultural science. From India to Nigeria, these employees of foreign affairs ministries or United Nations agencies disseminated knowledge and know-how promoting the tropics’ agricultural ‘development’. Science was thus central to transforming rural societies in general, and conservation areas in particular. In this respect, Simone Schleper emphasises the ever-important role played by technology. In Serengeti Park in Tanganyika, for example, scientists employed various techniques to study the migration of gnus, zebra and gazelles. Over time, this enabled them to assert their authority over wildlife management. But depending on the technologies available, and without necessarily being aware of it, their perceptions of human–nonhuman relations shifted, and they consequently applied different conservation policies. Thus in the 1950s and 1960s, aerial monitoring of ungulates showed seasonal migration, and local hunting that was likewise seasonal. This was deemed reasonable, and authorised. Then in the 1970s, aerial photography captured static landscapes. Where populations used to alternate between hunting and agro-pastoralism following the seasons, conservationists now saw the two activities lasting all year round: this was deemed destructive, and curtailed or sanctioned. Lastly, from the 1980s to the early 2000s, computer modelling pushed park managers to reason in mathematical terms: since the number of ungulates was stable, but human populations were increasing, hunting had to be banned. In the absence of the qualitative studies required to analyse the sociopolitical factors pushing certain populations to practise illegal hunting, conservation policies were now based on computer projections; these led to social exclusion due to the way human–nature relations were perceived and managed.

This link between representations of nature and nature governance leads us, thirdly, to the key influence of discourse and images. Historians of the environment have noted the extent to which imposing ‘correct’ usage of nature has involved assimilating ‘correct’ visions of this nature. But because representations engender new ontologies, they are also direct drivers of socio-environmental change. William Beinart demonstrates this in his study of the book and film about Elsa, the Kenyan lion of George and Joy Adamson (the

author of *Born Free*). As the colonial era drew to a close in the 1960s, the Adamsons scuttled imperial hunting culture by publicising a human relationship with wild animals based on empathy, affection and non-utilitarian protection. This shift had got under way with the increasing number of African national parks, responding to the need for nature of increasingly urbanised Western societies. But the success of the Adamsons' photographs and tales did not stop there. By fashioning new global attitudes towards the wilderness, they played a part in 'reimagining postcolonial modernity'. The Kenyan government was for that matter involved in the process. Indeed in independent Asia and Africa, after having been placed in the service of colonial power, nature was now put to use for the political ends of new leaders. Grégory Quenet tracks this through the Seychelles archives. From the 1960s to the present day, thus spanning independence in 1976, two parallel processes may be observed. On the one hand, the British deliberately placed the most remarkable parts of the territory under the oversight of autonomous conservationist foundations in order to prevent the Seychelles people from taking control of these conservation sites. But on the other hand, in reaction to this, the authorities of the young country produced and disseminated the idea of a specific form of Seychelles environmentalism, drawing on a French tradition reinterpreted as a Creole figure in which nature was both inhabited and harmoniously exploited. Despite drawing publicly on this representation to combat dominant conservationist ideology, the Seychelles state cooperated with various international conservation institutions to implement it on the ground. Images of nature thus served power, while revealing its mechanisms. Or rather, power struggles, as anthropologist Meera Oommen shows for India, where the postcolonial recycling of British representations of nature has brought two societies into conflict: rural dwellers episodically hunting big game to protect their lives and fields have sparked the ire of town dwellers living far removed from wild animals that they wish to protect at all costs. Thus since the 1980s, tigers, Asian elephants and saltwater crocodiles have played a dual role, acting as 'flagships' for international conservation, yet also as 'battleships' in Indian social conflicts. In concrete terms, their protection now depends on power struggles involving the national administration, nature professionals, animal movements and village groupings. More fundamentally, conserving these species seems to clash with 'correct' usage of nature since, by definition, only one of the two groups has the 'correct' representation.

This global Indian history leads to our fourth conclusion: the need to accept the profound complexity of social relations to nature. Each author contributing to this work would have preferred to present analysis showing conservation policies to be a success. But the archives do not lie: most of the time, conservation fails to attain its objectives. That is why we believe it useful to apprehend the global conservation of tropical nature through the prism not

of a model, but rather of situations determined by the eminently complex interlocking of different scales. First, spatial scales. Mathieu Guérin points this out in his study of the career of Captain Archibald Thomas Ayre Ritchie. After fifteen or so years as head of the Wildlife Department in British Kenya, Ritchie was sent by the Colonial Office to Malaya in 1937 to set up its Game Department and to draw up wildlife protection legislation. His intention was to take the conservation policy he had developed in Africa – based on the principles of culling big game to regulate conflicts with reserve inhabitants, and opening reserves to tourists – and transfer it to Asia. But he was hindered by three factors: the political influence of Malay sultans; horizontal power relations between colonial administrators and colonial subjects; and the singularity of European and ‘native’ hunting practices. So though he did professionalise the new Game Department in his fifteen months in Malaya, he left the colony without having fulfilled his objectives, recognising, despite himself, that above and beyond (or below) an empire and an imperial policy in the singular, there were also colonies and conservation territories in the plural. In this case, the spatial scales overlap; in others, time frames accumulate. The case of Mozambique is a good example. In 2000 a law was passed transforming all the country’s protected areas into ‘conservation areas for tourist purposes’. Since then, there have been continual clashes between nature managers and local users on the one hand, and national administrators on the other, decrying from the capital that ‘use’ now wins out over ‘conservation’. So while the year 2000 marks a clear break, political scientist Rozenn Nakanabo Diallo shows that to understand it, we need to see how the colonial past weighs heavily on the present. Indeed, the Portuguese left a legacy of many practices and representations. Since independence in 1975, nature has been conserved ‘for the benefit of the Mozambican people’; but the narrative of environmental deterioration persists, the state continues to view parks as tools for controlling territories and the private sector remains a major player not in ‘enhancing’ but in ‘developing’ them. Thus far from following one after the other, conservation ethics accumulate: exclusion practices specific to the conservation fortress period of the 1930s were overlaid with those from the community era starting in the 1980s, to which have been added, since the 2000s, principles relating to the financialisation of nature. This mixing of conservation times and spaces explains why local dynamics still predominate in global conservation. Human ecology specialist Pamela McElwee and geographer Diana Davis each point this out in their own way in their studies of conservation or, rather, of its partial and biased implementation. In early twentieth-century Vietnam, a series of measures was introduced in response to fears about a collapse in big game numbers in the colony. But these measures seem to have been dictated in Paris, not Hanoi. They were selectively introduced depending on the territory, imposing greater constraints on the Vietnamese population than on European tourists;

more generally, the colonial farming lobby and ‘resident’ elites put pressure on the colonial administration to prevent regulations drawn up in France being applied in the colony. In this instance, it is the colony–metropole dynamic that explains why conservation was ineffective. The history of Syria and Lebanon enables us to build on this hypothesis. In the interwar period, the new French administration brought in colonial agents from Morocco to implement a forestry policy. As in North Africa, they were convinced by the declinist theory that inhabitants had destroyed previously extensive dense forests. Unlike in Algeria and Morocco where these nature professionals had used reforestation as a tool in their civilising mission, forests in Syria became an instrument for economic development by improving agriculture, while in Lebanon they were used to boost tourism. As in Vietnam, using the land won out over protecting it. Only this time, the lack of conservation stemmed from objectives drawn up in Paris rather than in the colony. For France was not looking to build a colonial society in the Middle East, but above all to increase the profits extracted from the two territories placed under its ‘mandate’ while awaiting sovereignty. Above and beyond the colony–metropole dynamic, the explanation lies more generally in the tension between the general and the situated.

Global nature conservation in the Global South has changed in tune with the fluctuations in a permanent contradiction between predation and protection. Yet to some extent this contradiction has been toned down by knowledge and images circulating within an Afro-Asian area in which territories have overlapped, time frames accumulated and centre–periphery dynamics been recomposed in various ways throughout the twentieth century.

These are the initial findings of our joint research. They need to be tested in other fields to be confirmed or invalidated, and in any case developed. But there are four firm beliefs underpinning the following chapters that seem, to our minds, to be definitive.

The first is that there is an undeniable gap between standardised imperial and international conservation models and the many ways in which they have been applied in colonial and postcolonial societies. This observation leads us to our second belief: studying the contemporary history of conservation in Africa and Asia always entails revisiting the history of colonisation and decolonisation. This (post)colonial history does not follow a binary logic opposing local societies to empires and then to international institutions: there is a kaleidoscope of situations in which conservation is, to varying degrees, violent and exclusionary, and this violence is associated with the colonial order, its postcolonial legacy and the context in which these take shape. Our third belief, then, is that to understand conservation policies we need to go beyond an approach focusing solely on protected areas, which are only one way of governing people and things. It is thus important to consider the entire set of laws, practices and representations seeking to order the natural world by regulating

hunting, establishing and turning tracts of land into parks and managing access to so-called natural spaces, together with agronomy, the domestication of animals and the process by which culture fashions the categories of town and nature, of 'local' and 'global'. Lastly, however indispensable it may be, a historical approach cannot suffice on its own. This book, devised as the first step in an ongoing enquiry, hopes to demonstrate this over the course of its thirteen chapters, combining history, anthropology, human ecology, political science and geography. It is only by being open to other social sciences that we may truly decipher and understand the relations binding human societies to the nonhuman world on which they depend.

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Notes

1. Antoine Prost, *Douze leçons sur l'histoire* (Paris: Seuil, 1996), 80.
2. In French historical scholarship, the idea of 'space-times' (*espaces-temps*) has been used since the 1970s to emphasise the historically and geographically situated nature of global phenomena.
3. Achille Mbembe, *De la postcolonie: Essai sur l'imagination politique dans l'Afrique contemporaine* (Paris: Karthala, 2000), 36.
4. Gérard Noiriel, *Introduction à la socio-histoire* (Paris: La Découverte, 2006), 31.
5. See in particular: Guillaume Blanc, 'Governing Nature and Ethiopia: Struggles around World Heritage, Nation-Building and Ecologies (1963–2012)', *Northeast African Studies* 18(1–2) (2018), 137–64.
6. See in particular: Mathieu Guérin, 'Conserver la faune sauvage de la péninsule malaise: De la Malaya britannique à la Malaisie indépendante', *Vertigo* 17(1) (2017), <http://journals.openedition.org/vertigo/18503>.
7. See in particular: Violette Pouillard, *Histoire des zoos par les animaux: Impérialisme, contrôle, conservation* (Seysssel: Champ Vallon, 2019), 250.
8. See in particular: Grégory Quenet and Jan Synowiecki, 'Ce que conserver veut dire: Praxis et historicité de la nature (1770–1810)', *Annales historiques de la Révolution française* 399(1) (2020), 97–121.
9. Paul Basu and Vinita Damodaran, 'Colonial Histories of Heritage: Legislative Migrations and the Politics of Preservation', *Past and Present* 226(10) (2015), 240–71.
10. James McCann, *Green Land, Brown Land, Black Land: An Environmental History of Africa, 1800–1990* (Portsmouth/Oxford: Heinemann/James Currey, 1999), 47–48.

11. William Beinart, 'African History and Environmental History', *African Affairs* 99(395) (2000), 269–302.
12. Dominique Guillaud, Chayan Vaddhanaphuti and Olivier Evrard (eds), *Mobility and Heritage in Northern Thailand and Laos: Past and Present* (Chiang Mai: Good Print/ Institut de recherche pour le développement, 2013).
13. Bruno Latour, *La science en action: Introduction à la sociologie des sciences* (Paris: Galimard, 1995), 515.
14. Hélène Blais, Florence Deprest and Pierre Singaravélou (eds), *Territoires impériaux: Une histoire spatiale du fait colonial* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2011), 8.
15. Isabelle Surun, 'L'exploration de l'Afrique au XIX^e siècle: Une histoire pré-coloniale au regard des *postcolonial studies*', *Revue d'histoire du XIX^e siècle* 32 (2006), 21–39.
16. William Beinart, Karen Brown and Daniel Gilfoyle, 'Experts and Expertise in Colonial Africa Reconsidered: Science and the Interpenetration of Knowledge', *African Affairs* 108(432) (2000), 413–33, here 432.
17. Edmund Burke and Kenneth Pomeranz (eds), *The Environment and World History* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2009), 9.
18. Yannick Mahrane et al., 'De la nature à la biosphère: L'invention politique de l'environnement global, 1945–1972', *Vingtième siècle: Revue d'histoire* 113(1) (2012), 127–41.
19. Anna-Katharina Wöbse, "'The World After All Was One": The International Environmental Network of UNESCO and IUPN, 1945–1959', *Contemporary European History* 20(3) (2011), 331–48.
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21. William Adams and David Hulme, 'Conservation and Communities: Changing Narratives, Policies and Practice in African Conservation', in Institute for Development Policy and Management (ed.), *Community Conservation Research in Africa* (Manchester: University of Manchester, 1998), 1–31.
22. Jean-François Bayart and Romain Bertrand, 'De quel "legs colonial" parle-t-on?', *Esprit* 12 (2006), 134–60, here 145.
23. Corey Ross, *Ecology and Power in the Age of Empire: Europe and the Transformation of the Tropical World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 395.
24. William Adams, 'Nature and the Colonial Mind', in William Adams and Martin Mulligan (eds), *Decolonizing Nature: Strategies for Conservation in a Post-Colonial Era* (London: Earthscan, 2002), 16–50.
25. Marie-Christine Cormier-Salem et al. (eds), *Patrimonialiser la nature tropicale: Dynamiques locales, enjeux internationaux* (Paris: IRD Éditions, 2002).
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28. Francesca Trivellato, *Corail contre diamants: De la Méditerranée à l'océan indien au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Seuil, 2016), 36.
29. Alan MacEachern, 'Writing the History of Canadian Parks: Past, Present and Future', *History Publications* 1 (2008): 1–9, here 7.
30. Pierre Bourdieu, *Réponses: Pour une anthropologie réflexive* (Paris: Seuil, 1992), 191.
31. Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1967).

32. Janet Foster, *Working for Wildlife: The Beginning of Preservation in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978).
33. John MacKenzie, *The Empire of Nature: Hunting, Conservation and British Imperialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988); David Arnold and Ramachandra Guha (eds), *Essays on the Environmental History of South Asia* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995).
34. Roy MacLeod, 'Nature and Empire: Science and the Colonial Enterprise. Introduction,' *Osiris* 15 (2000), 1–13.
35. See in particular Bernhard Gissibl, *The Nature of German Imperialism: Conservation and the Politics of Wildlife in Colonial East Africa* (New York: Berghahn, 2016).
36. Peder Anker, *Imperial Ecology: Environmental Order in the British Empire, 1895–1945* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).
37. David Anderson and Richard Grove, 'The Scramble for Eden: Past, Present and Future in African Conservation,' in David Anderson and Richard Grove (eds), *Conservation in Africa: People, Policies and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 1–12.
38. Richard Fitter and Peter Scott, *The Penitent Butchers: The Fauna Preservation Society 1903–1978* (London: Collins, 1978).
39. Guillaume Blanc, *The Invention of Green Colonialism* (Cambridge: Polity, 2022), 35–37.
40. Roderick Neumann, 'The Postwar Conservation Boom in British Colonial Africa,' *Environmental History* 7(1) (2002), 22–47.
41. Melissa Leach and Robin Mearns, 'Challenging Received Wisdom in Africa,' in Melissa Leach and Robin Mearns (eds), *The Lie of the Land: Challenging Received Wisdom on the African Environment* (Oxford/Portsmouth: James Currey/Heinemann, 1996), 1–33, here 8.
42. David Hulme and Murphree Marshall, 'Communities, Wildlife and the "New Conservation" in Africa,' *Journal of International Development* 11(2) (1999), 277–85.
43. Birgit Müller, 'Comment rendre le monde gouvernable sans le gouverner: Les organisations internationales analysées par les anthropologues,' *Critique internationale* 54(1) (2012), 9–18, here 10.
44. Timothy Luke, 'Environmentalism as Green Governmentality,' in Éric Darier (ed.), *Discourses of the Environment* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 121–51.
45. Helen Tilley, 'African Environments & Environmental Sciences,' in William Beinart and Joan McGregor (eds), *Social History & African Environments* (Oxford/Portsmouth: James Currey/Heinemann, 2003), 109–30, here 113.
46. Jonathan Adams and Thomas McShane, *The Myth of Wild Africa: Conservation without Illusions* (Oakland: University of California Press, 1996), 91.
47. Anderson and Grove, 'The Scramble for Eden,' 3.
48. Anna Tsing, 'The Global Situation,' *Cultural Anthropology* 15(3) (2000), 327–60.
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50. Raf de Bont, 'Abattre pour conserver: Protéines, organisations internationales et faune sauvage africaine (1955–1965),' in Guillaume Blanc, Mathieu Guérin, and Grégory Quenet (eds), *Protéger et détruire: Gouverner la nature sous les Tropiques (20^e–21^e siècle)* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2022), 189–211.

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