

Introduction

THE KRUGER National Park (KNP) is one of the most iconic wildlife sanctuaries in the world. Established in May 1926, it is one of the oldest national parks in Africa and, at 2 million hectares, one of the biggest on earth.¹ Situated in the northeastern corner of South Africa, it is home to about 132,000 impala, 37,000 buffaloes, 13,000 elephants, 6,700 giraffes, 1,600 lions, and 1,000 leopards. These are part of an impressive floral and faunal collection that includes 500 bird species, 336 tree species, and about 145 mammal species. But animals have not been the only inhabitants of the park. There were also human beings who lived there—thousands of whom were expelled from the park during the course of the twentieth century. The displacement of these Africans did not mean the end of their connection to the park. It only marked the beginning of a new phase in this relationship.

Scholars working in different disciplines have long noted the connection between Africans and the KNP. This relationship, however, has typically been described as one of restriction. Jane Carruthers, for instance, noted that “Africans were not permitted to visit the park for recreation,” Hector Magome and James Murombedzi argued that “black people were legally restricted from entering Kruger,” Jacklyn Cock said that “black South Africans were denied access as visitors,” and Lynn Meskell maintained that “many black South Africans . . . [were] long excluded from the park on racial grounds (other than as service workers or guides),” while Lindisizwe Magi claimed that apartheid barred blacks from South Africa’s outdoors *tout court*.² By understanding the relationship between the KNP and Africans primarily as one of restriction, these commentators have reduced this connection to a paradigm in which Africans in the park have been viewed as either laborers or poachers.³



FIGURE 1.1. Wildebeest and zebras at a watering hole in the KNP, ca. 1930s.
Source: Transnet Heritage Museum Photo Collection

In what follows, my goal will be to challenge this paradigm and to put forward a new understanding of how Africans (and blacks in general) related socially and politically to the KNP during the twentieth century.⁴ By retrieving a lost history, I will attempt to offer a richer, alternate paradigm for viewing the relationship between blacks and the KNP. To put it succinctly, *Safari Nation* is about the black history of the KNP. It is about the social and political relations between blacks and the KNP during the twentieth century. These relations were a complex bundle made up of struggles over resources, migrant labor, loss and trauma, the rise of tourism, South Africa's transition from segregation to apartheid to democracy, and the making of the South African state over the long twentieth century. The book's fundamental argument will be that these relations were far more intricate and significantly more varied than conventional accounts of the park's history have allowed. Put another way, *Safari Nation's* argument is not just that relations between blacks and the KNP were complex but that beyond that complexity lay a universe whose exploration allows the reader to see the multifaceted methods by which blacks gave meaning

to their lives, despite colonial and apartheid rule, in twentieth-century South Africa. These methods ranged from accommodation to collaboration, from indifference to resistance. Although some were political, many were not necessarily so. They were the actions of individuals in given contexts. *Safari Nation* shows that complexity is not the end of an argument but only its beginning. This is a significant observation that, when taken beyond the study of relations between blacks and the KNP, should apply to every relationship of domination, especially in colonial and postcolonial settings. By calling attention to the ways in which blacks lived with—as opposed to under—colonial and apartheid rule, *Safari Nation* allows the reader to see when asymmetries of power persist, and when they might be challenged.⁵

A HISTORIOGRAPHIC SAFARI

Scholarly (mis)characterizations notwithstanding, at no stage in its history did the KNP restrict access to blacks, especially when they came as tourists. While the National Parks Board, the state agency responsible for South Africa's national parks, did limit black access to the park's rest camps and restaurants, especially during the high apartheid years of 1948 to 1980, it did not bar blacks from visiting the park itself. In fact, blacks could visit from the very beginning, in 1923, of tourism to the sanctuary. That was three years before it became a national park. As a visitors' guide issued by the National Parks Board in 1938 stated: "The Park may be visited by Asiatics and Natives, but, except at Skukuza, there is as yet no accommodation available for them."⁶ Black visitors had to arrange their own shelter and bring their own tents if they planned to stay at camps other than Skukuza. "They are also strongly advised to avoid paying visits during rush periods, such as long weekends, school holidays, etc.," the guide said.⁷ The welcome was anything but warm. But it was a welcome, nonetheless.⁸

The KNP has, I will argue, a hidden history. To unveil this forgotten past, I will use the idea of "histories of presence," a conceptual frame that I have derived from the notion of a "politics of presence." This latter concept, suggested independently by James Ferguson and Anne-Maria Makhulu, provides a useful tool for apprehending hidden histories.⁹ It does so by directing our historical gaze to places where scholars of the KNP and its history have rarely sought the presence of blacks before. By recuperating, both conceptually and empirically,

the histories of black presence in the KNP, I will show how, to paraphrase Makhulu, the sheer presence of black South Africans altered the history of the KNP.¹⁰ As Makhulu points out in her study of squatter politics in Cape Town, homeless communities rendered apartheid unworkable and changed the course of South African history simply by being present in that city—in spite of what the government wanted.

By revising the social history of the KNP, I will show how blacks lived with white rule. My goal will be to change our understanding of the black experience in twentieth-century South Africa. This experience, lodged in the colonial and apartheid archives often as fragments and marginalia, is made up in part of the yet-to-be-written story of blacks and conservation in South Africa. Writing that history means acknowledging that the very categories—African, Coloured, Indian—key to its recovery are not natural but themselves products of history. It also requires understanding that calling these diverse individuals black does not presume a commonality of experience. But it does presuppose a shared sense of political solidarity among some of the black individuals in this story. As *Bantu World*, a black elite newspaper, editorialized in February 1935 in response to yet another government plan to confiscate African land for the sake of the KNP:

While the Government is engaged in this gigantic land scheme for the preservation of animal life, thousands of human beings are landless and homeless and are living in a state of abject poverty. No black man will grudge the animals for the magnanimous consideration of their needs by the authorities; but one would have thought that before more land is added to the Game Reserve, the homeless black man, who is drifting to urban areas, only to find he is unwanted, would have been attended to first. The preservation of animals . . . is a noble thing, but nobler still is the preservation of human life, be it white or black.¹¹

As the editorial made clear, *Bantu World* objected to the government's neglect of landless blacks—not to the preservation of animals, which was a “noble thing.” *Bantu World* did not oppose conservation as such. It only objected to its use in the service of racial segregation. Richard Victor Selope Thema, a pioneering writer and African nationalist who edited *Bantu World* from its founding in 1932 to 1952, likely

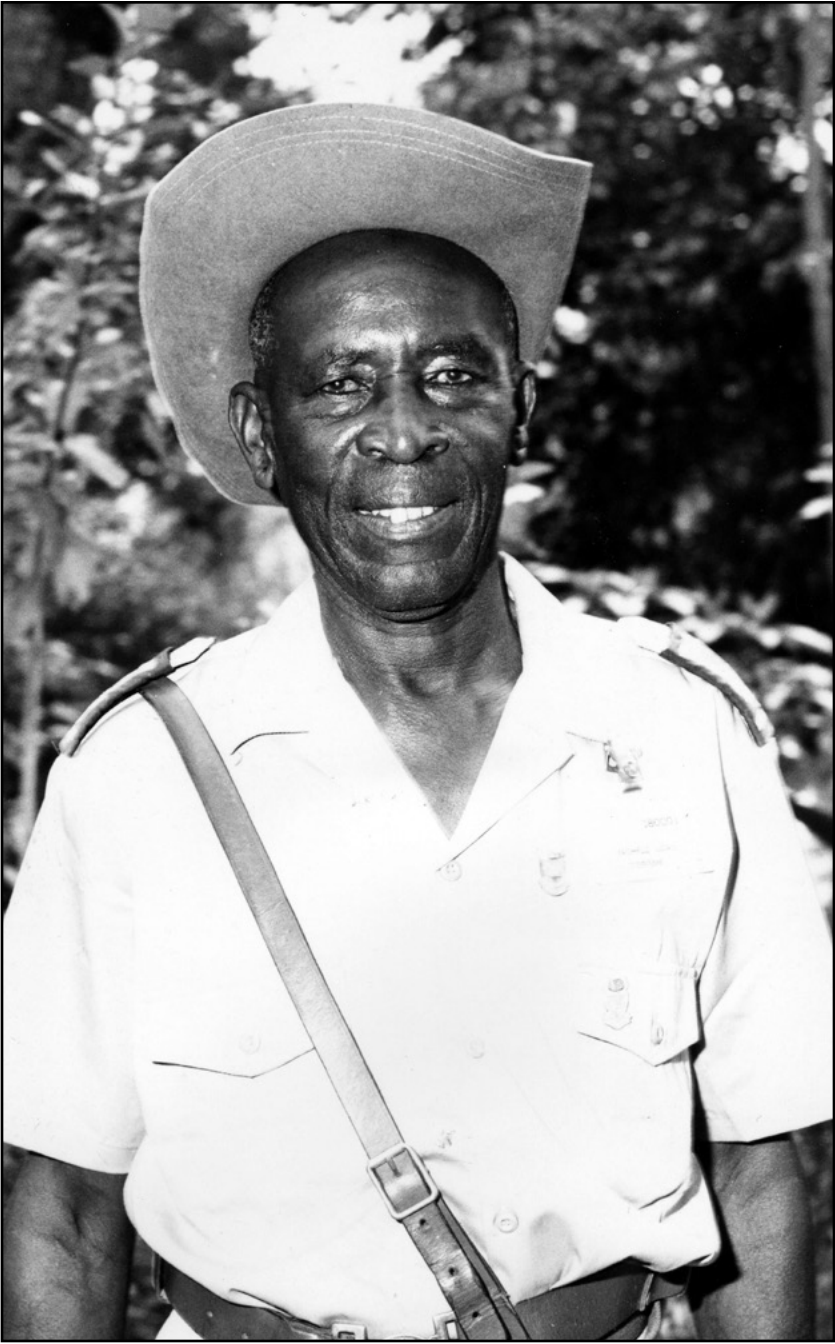


FIGURE 1.2. KNP ranger Judas Mashele, date unknown. *Source:* SANParks Archive

wrote that editorial. As *Safari Nation* shows, Thema had a lot to say about the KNP. He approached conservation the same way that he thought about his political standing as a black person in colonial and apartheid South Africa—as open to negotiation. He did not see why conservation had to be a winner-take-all struggle between humans and other animals. He thought it possible to preserve both human and non-human life. But Thema's voice is not the only one amplified on the pages that follow. Krishna Somers, who visited the park with a group of friends in 1944, recalled: "In stopping in Kruger Park, the only place where accommodation was available for us as non-whites was Skukuza. The building was made of corrugated iron held with wooden supports. There were no facilities. After an overnight stopover, we proceeded to cross the border to Mozambique, where we tasted for the first time freedom from any kind of racial discrimination."¹² It would be easy to focus solely on Somers's confirmation of the racial discrimination to which the park subjected him and other nonwhite visitors. However, *Safari Nation* challenges the reader to see Somers as more than just another victim of colonial racism. Without minimizing the effects of that racism, this book suggests that readers look at what else Somers's story reveals: it proves that he was there; it tells the reader that, four years before the advent of apartheid, Somers and his friends were present in the KNP as paying visitors. It is that kind of presence, not only stories of victimization, that this book recuperates.¹³

Somers and the other black tourists who visited the park were part of a small but mobile and vocal elite drawn from mission-educated African converts to Christianity, aspirant middle-class Coloured communities, and mostly merchant Indian families. These elites saw themselves as modern subjects in control of their time and destiny. They desired tourism because that is what people of their class—some reared on Romanticism in mission schools—were expected to desire. But black tourists were not the only ones present in the park. For many blacks, the colonial boundaries that demarcated native reserve from national park, South Africa from Mozambique, were arbitrary lines that failed to take account of old connections between communities subject through historical accident to Portuguese and Boer/British rule in the lowveld, meaning the northeastern region of southern Africa with a low elevation of between 150 meters and 600 meters above sea level. These communities kept their links despite colonial interdictions that

rendered them, in the view of Portuguese and South African authorities, trespassers.

Some of these so-called trespassers were subject to one colonial regime but had relatives under another. As David Bunn points out, until the advent of the park, those living between South Africa and Mozambique were in a sense “citizens of the blurred border, able to live within the very thickness of the line drawn on the map.”¹⁴ Members of these communities traveled through the park to visit friends and relatives on either side of the colonial border, sometimes with fatal consequences, as chapter 2 shows. This, after all, was a place teeming with wildlife. As the stories recounted in *Safari Nation* illustrate, the black people who dealt with the park came in many categories. Among them were men from Mozambique and other parts of southeastern Africa who came to South Africa in search of jobs in the country’s coal, diamond, and gold mines.¹⁵ These men became part of a migrant labor system that shaped modern South Africa and transformed African polities in southern Africa. Some of these migrants traveled out of their own initiative; many more did so as part of a vast labor recruitment network set up by South Africa’s mining industry at the turn of the twentieth century.

Safari Nation not only charts the histories of black presence in the KNP; it also explores the varied reasons behind that presence, as well as the ways that presence changed over time. For the blacks whose stories this book tells, nature was at different times an economic, political, and social resource. But that resource held different meanings for different individuals. That is, nature was not simply the physical environment but the ideas that flowed from that environment—ideas about access, entitlement, and value. Who had access to the natural environment? The Indian holidaymakers who dominated black tourism in the KNP between the 1920s and the 1980s gave their answer. Who was entitled to nature’s produce? The traditional doctors who harvested herbs, plants, and animal products from protected areas gave yet another. Who could appropriate the value that came from nature? The poachers who troubled state and park officials had their answer. But these answers were not static; they changed over time. Like the Japanese nationalists studied by Julia Thomas, some blacks also saw nature as a political and ideological concept, a “changing, contested matrix” within which to explore different possibilities of what South Africa was or could become.¹⁶ If Afrikaner nationalists saw their history as

a “struggle against nature, the natives and Imperialism,” black nationalists like Thema saw theirs as a struggle for a democratic and inclusive South Africa.¹⁷ People like Thema were fascinated by the park and by South Africa’s landscapes. But they were also interested in the political nature of South African society. They understood that, as Thomas puts it, “whoever can define nature for a nation defines that nation’s polity on a fundamental level.”¹⁸ These individuals wanted a South Africa in which blacks, too, had a home, but as a part of the polity and not of nature.

FROM AFRICANS, COLOURED, INDIANS TO BLACKS

In what follows, I will treat the category *black* as a political—as opposed to an ethnic or racial—category.¹⁹ At the same time, I will attempt to disaggregate this category in order to show how so-called Africans, Coloureds, and Indians of various backgrounds participated in struggles over resources, in migrant labor, in the rise of tourism, in South Africa’s transition from segregation to apartheid to democracy, and in the making of the South African state itself. I will also show how, for some Africans, the park represented both loss and trauma. More importantly, I will argue that social and political relations between blacks and the KNP cannot be reduced to encounters between colonizer and colonized, powerful and powerless, victim and victimizer. To do that would be to miss the density at the center of these relations and to offer a flat rendering of who these people were and why their stories matter. These men and women occupied such a range of subject positions—from migrant laborers, to park residents, to laborers, to park neighbors, to poachers, and to tourists—that we can only make qualified generalizations about them. Some were South African subjects and citizens, some Portuguese, some Rhodesian, and some a mix of all three—if not indifferent to claims of nation and nationalism altogether.

At different times, colonial and apartheid authorities classified these people and their communities as native/African, Coloured, and Asian. Some were Christian, some Muslim, and some followers of indigenous religions; some were women, and many were men.²⁰ These backgrounds affected how each person related to the park. They also engendered a diversity of experiences that should call into question any attempt to present a uniform account of black life under white

rule in South Africa. *Safari Nation* is also careful not to naturalize the African, Coloured, and Indian identities depicted here or to take as a given their existence as coherent—even as it acknowledges that, for some of the black actors in this historical drama, these identities carried political and strategic worth. This book also eschews the easy conflation of blackness with phenotype. Instead, it looks at how individuals interpellated by the colonial and apartheid states as African, Asiatic, Coloured, and native related to political landscapes that made room for them only if they responded to their official interpellation as African, Asiatic, Coloured, or native.²¹ If anything united these disparate individuals and communities, it was their political standing in relation to the colonial and apartheid states. That, in fact, is what defined their blackness: their varied but relative standing vis-à-vis political power in colonial and apartheid South Africa. On the whole, these people did not possess political power. But this is not to be confused with a lack of political agency, of which they had a lot. In fact, it is precisely because they had agency and used it widely that these men and women exist in the official archive—even if many come to us as specters whose haunting presence we can discern but not grasp fully. By disaggregating the category black, *Safari Nation* looks also at how black intellectuals such as Thema understood the role of nature in the political constitution of South Africa into a nation-state, and at how they propagated ideas about conservation.²² It also examines the interplay between the politicization of nature and the naturalization of politics in twentieth-century South Africa. By this I mean, first, the use of racial discrimination by colonial and apartheid authorities to determine who could enter nature and on what terms and, second, the deployment by those authorities of nature to justify racial hierarchies and other asymmetrical forms of power. In other words, *Safari Nation* analyzes the convoluted ways in which colonial and apartheid officials sought to Africanize minority white rule in southern Africa while casting blacks, especially Africans, as nature's denizens—there to be seen and to labor, but not to count as citizens.

FROM RESIDENT NATIVES TO TAXPAYING SUBJECTS

Some of the individuals whose stories are told here came from communities that had long been resident in the reserve when it was

founded—first in 1898 as the Sabi Game Reserve and in 1926 as the Kruger National Park—and whose presence park officials sought to naturalize. As park warden James Stevenson-Hamilton claimed on one occasion, “The few residents native [to the park] live still to a great extent under tribal law, unspoiled by contact with civilization.”²³ Stevenson-Hamilton sought to cast these men and women as being one with nature—even as he drew extensively on their labor and knew that they were taxpaying subjects of white rule. As he remarked on another occasion, “Natives living in the park have no fear of lions, and visitors may note this for themselves by observing how women accompanied by small children and usually carrying babies on their backs freely use the roads at all times of day and, I may add, frequently at night also.”²⁴ Far from being left out of the reserve’s landscape, Africans were in fact written and drawn visually into early depictions of the reserve, as Stevenson-Hamilton above and the numerous pieces of visual evidence presented in *Safari Nation* make clear (see figs. I.3 and I.4).²⁵ This naturalization of Africans was a political move intended to strip them of political agency and, consequently, to deny their claims for political equality.

This casting of indigenous peoples as premodern subjects was not unique to South Africa. As Susan Sessions Rugh points out, in the United States, Native Americans were often presented in advertisements for national parks as part of the landscape to be consumed and not as consumers in their own right.²⁶ In South Africa, colonial officials similarly put Africans in the role of native attraction and marketed them extensively both locally and abroad as one of the country’s exceptional features. As Deputy Prime Minister Jan Smuts said in a 1934 speech promoting tourism in South Africa, “It is only our short-sightedness that prevents us from seeing what a chance we have here. In every overcrowded town in the overworked countries of the world there are vast numbers of people who want to see Africa, its scenery, its wildness, its flowers, its mountains and rivers, its natives.”²⁷ Contrary to claims by Meskell, the park did not, certainly not in its early days, offer “people-free landscapes with few archaeological sites to remind visitors that this was once a living landscape for indigenous Africans.”²⁸ It made it a point to people its landscapes with a certain kind of human: the so-called native.



FIGURE 1.3. A group of African women with children on their backs walking through the KNP, ca. 1930s–1940s. *Source:* Selby Collection 590.72, used with the permission of MuseumAfrica



FIGURE 1.4. Children in the Crocodile River in the southern section of the KNP, date unknown. *Source:* Ludwig Jindra

OLD PROBLEMS, NEW HISTORIES

If relations between blacks and the KNP were as complex as this book says they were, why do claims of black exclusion persist? Why does the dominant scholarship on the park insist on a black absence that was, in fact, not there? One answer is that scholars have simply neglected the black presence that has animated relations between blacks and the park over time. Rather than look at how blacks made their presence felt in the park, scholars have taken segregation and apartheid at face value, thereby limiting their search to the stock figures of the laborer and the poacher. Jacklyn Cock and Njabulo Ndebele have rightly called attention to how places such as the KNP made black labor invisible, all so they could present themselves as pristine wilderness areas removed from the soiled political economy of southern Africa, while Carruthers and Stanley Trapido have reminded us that poaching is by definition political in that it involves a contest over who gets what part of nature's bounty, when, and how.²⁹ But there was more to the presence of blacks in the history of the KNP. By taking seriously the histories of presence made visible by, for example, Thema's editorial and Somers's story, we can see blacks in places where scholars have not looked before: the villages inside the park where the KNP drew its staff, the rest camps set aside specifically for blacks, the lodgings provided to black domestics accompanying white families, the opinion pages in which black thinkers debated the leisure question, the government halls in which black politicians drew unfavorable comparisons between their treatment by the apartheid government and the care that the same government took of the wildlife in the KNP, the communities outside the park, and the homelands adjacent to the KNP where Bantustan leaders professed political support for apartheid even as they pointed out that apartheid policies (illustrated by the apartheid signage in fig. I.5) could not work because they undermined the ecological integrity of the KNP.

By putting forth histories of presence as a conceptual frame through which to recover and to understand the hidden history of the KNP, *Safari Nation* undoes the national(ist) casing that surrounds most histories of the KNP. Even though the KNP has been, since 2002, an essential part of the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park—a transnational initiative that includes Mozambique's Limpopo National Park and Zimbabwe's Gonarezhou National Park—it remains a national institution, South Africa's premier national park par excellence. As Bram Büscher,



FIGURE 1.5. Still from a 1968 documentary titled *The Heart of Apartheid*.
Source: Still image supplied by BBC Studios

Elizabeth Lunstrum, Clapperton Mavhunga, Maano Ramutsindela, Marja Spierenburg, and Harry Wels have shown, despite claims to the contrary, the promise of a borderless zone entailed by the transfrontier initiative has been extended only to the megafauna of the three constituent parks and to the tourists who pay to see these animals—not to the millions of Africans who live on either side of these political borders.³⁰

These Africans remain citizens of their respective countries. They remain national subjects whose movement across international boundaries is governed still by protocols that take the nation-state as their starting point. This is despite the fact that, throughout the twentieth century, the region in which the KNP and the other two parks lie was an important corridor for the movement of humans, animals, epizootics, and commodities.³¹ If anything defines this corner of southern Africa, it is the fact that it was one of the few places in the region where the nation-state form met its limit. This corner boasts a record of flows, connections, and movements whose historical significance we risk missing unless we look at the histories of presence that include more

than the laborers, the poachers, and the crooks who turned the northern corner of the KNP into a hiding place—a no-man’s-land—from the weak but searching eyes of three colonial governments.³²

THE KRUGER NATIONAL PARK IN THEORY

To be sure, *Safari Nation* is not the first book to examine the role of blacks in the history of the KNP. Leslie Dikeni has documented struggles over the park’s habitats and shown how Africans forced to live with the park remember its creation.³³ Dikeni combines ethnography and sociology to show how memories of dispossession have colored attempts by the KNP to make itself a postapartheid park for the benefit of all South Africans. Lynn Meskell has examined the ways in which the KNP privileged the heritage of white South Africans over that of their black counterparts by, for example, neglecting the extensive archaeological record that points to a rich prehistory of the area that is now the KNP.³⁴ David Bunn has pioneered rich ethnographies that illustrate the place of the park in the symbolic economy of white rule in southern Africa.³⁵ As Bunn makes clear, the KNP was instrumental in the naturalization and staging of racial hierarchies in South Africa (see figs. I.6 and I.7).

Salomon Joubert, the last white warden of the KNP, and Uys de V. Pienaar, arguably the most influential warden of the park after James Stevenson-Hamilton, have each given us official and magisterial accounts that place the KNP within the broader sweep of South African history.³⁶ Cock has pointed to the much-neglected labor history of the park and shown the ways in which the presence of black laborers in the park has been effaced. Cock has also explored the ways in which an authoritarian form of conservation marginalized black voices and victimized blacks.³⁷ Carruthers, on whose pioneering shoulders this book stands, was the first historian to challenge the romantic myths that inform the literature on conservation.³⁸ As Carruthers shows, the establishment of the KNP depended on the active removal of Africans from the land and on their marginalization (except as mute laborers, as fig. I.8 shows) from debates about conservation in South Africa.

The scholarship cited above has certainly enriched our understanding of the park and its history. But narratives of dispossession dominate the historiographic insights of this scholarship.³⁹ Driven by a commitment to historical redress, scholars have examined the ways in which



FIGURE 1.6. Unnamed KNP ranger with photographer Ludwig Jindra at the park's Numbi Gate, date unknown. *Source:* Ludwig Jindra



FIGURE 1.7. Unnamed KNP ranger at entrance to a KNP rest camp, date unknown. *Source:* Transnet Heritage Museum Photo Collection



FIGURE I.8. Color spread of a holiday camp by artist Charles E. Turner. The spread was part of an advertising campaign run by the South African Railways corporation between the 1920s and the 1940s through select publications in Africa, Asia, Europe, and North America. *Source:* Transnet Heritage Museum Photo Collection

protected areas have exploited and victimized Africans through approaches such as “fortress conservation” or by imposing racialized notions of wilderness on Africa.⁴⁰ Carruthers and others have rightly challenged the “white romantic myth” whereby enlightened Europeans saved Africa’s flora and fauna from savage Africans (see fig. I.9 for an idealized portrayal of the African wild in which the African figure only appears as a servant).⁴¹ However, the scholars’ focus on these narratives has blinded us to dimensions of the black experience of protected areas defined not by dispossession but by *possession*, not by hostility but by ambivalence—if not appropriation.

Carruthers observes, for example, that “there is considerable substance to the African attitude that game reserves and wildlife protectionist legislation have from the start been detrimental to African interests.”⁴² But, as *Safari Nation* shows, there was no singular African attitude and certainly no uniform African interests. By focusing on the dispossession and marginalization entailed by protected areas, scholars have done well to remind us of the centrality of justice to the postcolonial and postapartheid projects. But their neglect of the stories of possession and the agency implied by that possession has left us with a truncated understanding of the history of black responses to protected areas in Africa. In the process, we have ceded the last word on the



FIGURE 1.9. Color spread by artist Charles E. Turner celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of South Africa. *Source:* Transnet Heritage Museum Photo Collection

matter to Julius Nyerere, Tanzania's first president, who quipped in 1961, "I do not want to spend my holidays watching crocodiles,"⁴³ or to the Zambian parliamentarian who remarked, when asked in 1982 to support the stiffening of Zambia's laws against poaching, "At no time did rhinoceros or elephants participate in the fight of our independence."⁴⁴

Nyerere might have cared little about crocodiles. Still, he believed that they should be conserved for posterity and for the benefit of Westerners who traveled thousands of miles to satisfy their "strange urge to see these animals."⁴⁵ To hear Nyerere and the Zambian MP tell it, Africa's protected areas existed primarily for the benefit of paying Europeans and North Americans. Nyerere and the MP implied that the flora and fauna of these places held no meaning for Africans beyond the economic, cosmological, and utilitarian.⁴⁶ But might there be reasons, beyond the economic and the utilitarian, why protected areas not only survived the demise of white rule but thrived in postcolonial Africa?⁴⁷ If the creation of these areas was, as Mavhunga says, the most "sadistic colonial act," why do they continue to be such a marked feature of African landscapes?⁴⁸ How might we get past Roderick Nash's mythical Maasai, for whom a giraffe holds as much interest as does a yellow taxicab for a New Yorker, and the idealized African conjured up by Gilson Kaweche, for whom the "meaning of conservation has been always in

each African's heart"?⁴⁹ For both Nash and Kaweche, Africans are such an organic part of nature that they cannot adopt a tourist gaze or cultivate an affective appreciation of wildlife. For Nash, Africans are also not meaningful players in conservation at all. A pioneer of environmental history in the United States, he once said that if Tanzania could not stop poaching in the Serengeti, "we will just have to go in and buy it."⁵⁰ In the South African context, narratives of dispossession have led to claims that the reason why blacks in postapartheid South Africa did not visit the KNP in large numbers was because, as one government official put it, blacks had "no history of travel" or because, as Ndebele said, the "black tourist is conditioned to find the political sociology of the game lodge ontologically disturbing."⁵¹ This book tells a different story. It does so by looking for black faces in places other than the "white spaces"—the usual nooks and crannies—of the KNP's history.⁵²

THE NATURE OF HISTORY

By recuperating stories that have yet to trouble conventional histories of the park, *Safari Nation* contributes to a growing literature about alternative histories of conservation in Africa. This literature is part of a historiographic trend defined by an interest in how ordinary people, acting as something other than victims, have engaged with conservation. Scholars who have contributed to this trend include Nancy Jacobs, who examines the active role that a number of Africans played in colonial and postcolonial birding networks.⁵³ There is also Maitseo Bolaane, whose account of the creation of the Moremi Game Reserve in Botswana's Okavango Delta in 1963 places local African elites at the center of Moremi's founding. As Bolaane points out, Moremi is unique among southern Africa's protected areas because African initiative—not European imposition—brought the sanctuary into existence.⁵⁴ In fact, influential Europeans opposed Moremi's establishment, but their opposition proved futile when confronted with the house-to-house campaigning that African activists undertook to gain popular support for the park.⁵⁵ Most importantly, Bolaane shows that Moremi did not come about because of some supposedly natural connection between Africans and wildlife. Supporters of the park idea, led by the female monarch Pulane Moremi, had to expend considerable political capital to persuade the different ethnic and interest groups that made up the delta region to throw in their lot with the reserve.

Bolaane's story finds echoes in other colonial contexts where, as Edward Teversham points out, "the creation of a national park was a strategic move to maintain access to traditional lands, as happened with the Ngati Tuwharehou Mori in New Zealand."⁵⁶ Understanding the discursive power of the idea of wildlife protection, individuals and communities in places such as Botswana and New Zealand took up the idea to secure their interests. Reuben Matheka has also detailed the historical antecedents to wildlife conservation in Kenya, showing the role played by Maasai and other communities in establishing protected areas under colonial rule. Thanks to local activism, Kenya's colonial officials promoted the establishment of "park adjuncts," areas whose creation was premised on the coexistence of humans and wildlife.⁵⁷ As Matheka points out, "While formal wildlife conservation in most colonial societies was a foreign imposition based on [a] Western ethos, it was sometimes modified in line with local circumstances of ecology, culture and politics."⁵⁸ In a similar vein, Adrian Browne examines the key roles played by Africans in the "Africanization" of conservation in Uganda during the transition to independence. Browne notes that scholars have yet to examine why the decolonization of Africa did not lead to the much-predicted collapse of Africa's national parks.⁵⁹ By looking at the transformation of Murchison Falls National Park (Kabalega Falls) and Queen Elizabeth National Park (Rwenzori), Browne shows the "existence or creation of a non-functional, non-materialist African constituency for wildlife conservation."⁶⁰ In addition, Browne tracks the careers of a number of Africans to show how this constituency developed; from its ranks emerged the men who, come independence in 1962, led Uganda's national parks and transformed them into places for the enjoyment of all.

These men invested in educational programs designed to take national parks to the public. Their efforts paid off, with more Ugandans visiting national parks for vacation and school trips as the 1960s gave way to the 1970s. Tragically, Idi Amin destroyed some of these men together with what they had built. The significance of Browne's account lies not in its detail of the tragedy of Amin's rule but in its documenting of African initiative in the propagation of conservation. Browne's account and studies like it insist that scholars do more than recount stories of marginalization and victimization. While the experience of marginalization and victimization is certainly real and, sadly, an

important part of the story of conservation in Africa, it does not account fully for the history of protected areas in Africa. In fact, as Carruthers and others have shown, even the dominant narratives of displacement and victimization need a rethink, given the paucity of research on the topic.⁶¹ We assume more than we know about displacements in protected areas and, in the process, collapse disparate histories into one. Carruthers and others have also warned that conflating displacements from protected areas into a “single generalized universal narrative has polarized diverse perspectives and established a discourse of conflict rather than a dialogue.”⁶² Scholars can only give a better account of the history of protected areas in Africa and on other continents by moving beyond narratives of displacement.⁶³ This book does that. But it does not ignore the history of displacement and victimization. In fact, for the vast majority of the black communities that dealt with the KNP over the time period covered by *Safari Nation*, theirs was indeed a story of official neglect, as well as colonial and apartheid violence. As Jimmy Mnisi (who was born inside the KNP and is a descendant of a community expelled from the park in 1969) said, the tourist enjoyment of the park cannot be divorced from a critical appreciation of its history. Mnisi said that his grandfather, who was a KNP ranger, was killed by lions while cycling through the park on his way to work sometime in the 1960s. The only thing left to bury was the old man’s intestines. Mnisi recalled:

Remember, it was during apartheid. They [the family] were given the remains with no compensation. Nothing. That’s very traumatic. But it’s more traumatic with us because we know our rights. Remember, with the old people exposed to apartheid, illiterates, they did not know their rights. They were not aware that there’s supposed to be compensation. The old man was the only source of income. But they were not aware. When our mothers start to relate the story, because we are learned, literate, and know our rights, we feel trauma.⁶⁴

THE KRUGER NATIONAL PARK IN HISTORY

To understand why the KNP would induce feelings of the kind experienced by Mnisi, we need to understand something of the park’s

creation. The KNP, which sits on South Africa's borders with Mozambique to the east and Zimbabwe to the north, is the flagship of South Africa's nineteen national parks. Paul Kruger's South African Republic established it as the Sabi Game Reserve in 1898. This was a year before the outbreak of the South African War, which sent Kruger into terminal exile in Switzerland, destroyed the two Boer republics (Transvaal and the Orange Free State), and laid the foundations for the creation of the Union of South Africa in 1910. The British reproclaimed the reserve in 1902 after defeating the Boers and bringing South Africa under a single political authority for the first time in its history. The reserve became the Kruger National Park in May 1926 in a flurry of state-making activities that saw South Africa's parliament adopt, in addition to the National Parks Act of 1926, the National Flag Act and, two years later, the National Monuments Act. This was preceded in 1925 by the designation of Afrikaans as one of South Africa's two official languages—a move that signaled the beginning of the political ascendancy of Afrikaner nationalists in South Africa. As figure I.9 shows, colonial officials depicted the development of South Africa as a natural and organic process in which the country's history began in the fifteenth century with the arrival of the Portuguese in southern Africa.

Described as a state within a state, the park certainly enjoys the trappings of a state.⁶⁵ It exercises sovereignty over a bounded territory with clearly demarcated borders, it conducts a regular census to keep track of its nonhuman inhabitants, it employs experts (e.g., biologists, ecologists, social scientists, veterinarians), and it has a paramilitary force (with a special forces component) to police its boundaries.⁶⁶ Until the 1960s, the region in which the park sits was malarial and had poor soils, low rainfall, and no decent mining prospects.⁶⁷ When nineteenth-century European settlers of varying economic means used it, it was mostly for hunting (as seen in fig. I.10) and winter grazing.

Europeans considered the area a white man's grave in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, even though it had African economies based on hunting and the ivory trade.⁶⁸ The region was one of the last parts of Africa to come under direct European rule.⁶⁹ It was also a source of inspiration for the lost-world fiction of Arthur Conan Doyle and Rider Haggard. In fact, in the last decades of the nineteenth century, most lowveld Africans still lived in polities belonging to the Pedi, Tsonga, Swazi, and Venda. Alongside these were isolated Boer

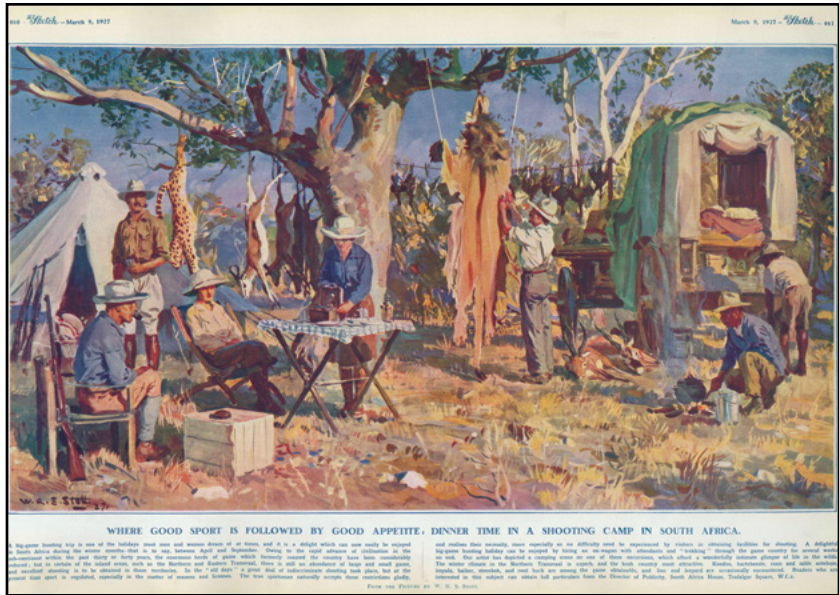


FIGURE I.10. Color spread from 1927 by artist William R. S. Stott depicting a hunting scene in the lowveld. *Source:* Transnet Heritage Museum Photo Collection

settlements. These settlements competed with Africans for land, livestock, and trade in ivory and hides (see figs. I.11–I.14).⁷⁰ One of these Boer settlements was the Zoutpansberg Republic, founded in the 1840s as a splinter community from Kruger’s republic. It was not until 1879 and, even then, only with the help of the British and the Swazi that Boers defeated the Pedi kingdom. It was not until 1898, the same year in which the Sabi Game Reserve was founded, that the Boers defeated the Venda.

The defeat of African polities had major implications for Africans at the turn of the twentieth century, especially with regard to access to land.⁷¹ Kruger’s republic had proclaimed the Sabi Game Reserve to preserve what little game had survived the wanton hunting that had accompanied the mid-nineteenth-century entry of European settlers and guns into the lowveld.⁷² Africans and Europeans alike had used guns extensively to drive, for example, the region’s rhino to extinction and to bring the elephant to the brink. The proclamation of the reserve sought to reverse that process of extirpation—a mission continued by the KNP when it was founded in 1926. However, as Carruthers has shown, the park did more than preserve South Africa’s flora and fauna.



FIGURE 1.11, 1.12. Photographs depicting hunting in the lowveld in the 1890s.
Source: Transnet Heritage Museum Photo Collection



FIGURES 1.13, 1.14. Photographs depicting hunting in the lowveld in the 1890s.
Source: Transnet Heritage Museum Photo Collection

It also served a political function.⁷³ It gave natural expression to the “expedient solidarity” between English- and Afrikaans-speaking white South Africans founded on the political subjection (see fig. I.12) and exclusion of blacks from the realm of citizenship.⁷⁴ Colonial authorities used the park to promote a “national feeling” among whites, who were still “groping for a common identity” following the end of the destructive South African War.⁷⁵ This was not unique to South Africa. The United States and Australia, for example, also used ideas about the preservation of nature and distinctive landscapes to promote a sense of nationhood built on the exclusion of indigenous peoples. The KNP also helped consolidate the interests of white South Africa in its political conflict with blacks over land and labor.⁷⁶ Over time, the park became a commemoration site for South Africa’s “white heritage.”⁷⁷ But the political exclusion of blacks from what the park was intended to commemorate did not mean their physical exclusion from the park itself, as the following story demonstrates.

EDUCATING NATIVES

On November 30, 1926, J. L. de Jager, a white game ranger in the KNP, arrested an African man named Mastulela for trespassing.⁷⁸ Mastulela, traveling from Mozambique to the South African side of the border, was carrying 529 hides of wild animals that he had collected from the Portuguese colony. He claimed not to know that his movement through the park violated South African law and the game preservation regulations of the Transvaal. De Jager confiscated the hides, warned Mastulela not to trespass again, and let him go. But the matter did not go away, judging by the flurry of correspondence that ensued between various government officials.

A clerk in the Native Affairs Department in Sibasa, northern Transvaal, told his boss, the sub-native commissioner for Louis Trichardt, “I understand that the natives of this area have in the past made a habit of passing through the Reserve while enroute to and from Portuguese Territory.” The clerk said he was “taking steps to put a stop to this, and to advise the natives of the provisions of Act 55 of 1926”—meaning the piece of legislation that had brought about the existence of the KNP in May of that year. In turn, the sub-native commissioner informed his superior, the secretary for native affairs, that “steps are being taken to warn all natives of the consequences of traveling through the park

without authority.” On February 12, 1927, the Native Affairs Department ordered that Mastulela’s hides be returned to him.

Mastulela’s professed ignorance of the law may have been genuine. After all, the park was only about six months old at the time of his meeting with de Jager and was in a remote corner of South Africa. In fact, South African surveyors and their Portuguese counterparts had only finished demarcating the border a month before Mastulela’s arrest.⁷⁹ But it is also possible that he was dissembling because, although new in law, the park was founded on the Sabi Game Reserve, which had been around since 1898. Reserve warden James Stevenson-Hamilton had made his presence felt as early as 1902 by expelling three thousand Africans from the reserve following its reclamation after the end of the South African War. While we cannot say for certain what Mastulela knew about the park, his presence there, not to mention the bureaucratic anxieties it generated, does serve to illustrate Karl Jacoby’s observation that “landscapes do not magically reshape themselves in accordance with the desires expressed in legislation.”⁸⁰ In fact, colonial authorities had to expend a lot of bureaucratic and political energy teaching people like Mastulela new colonial truths about the actual meaning of the park. They had to do this because there was nothing obvious or natural about the park’s political meaning (see fig. I.15) and what it represented.

ECOLOGICAL FICTIONS

The park was founded in part on the idea of territorial integrity. Its founders imagined it as a place with finite boundaries—even if these had to be fixed by law to turn a political desire to preserve South Africa’s fauna into the legal fiction of a sovereign sanctuary. The founders said the park must form “one continuous whole” and be large enough particularly for animals that “require plenty of room to move about.”⁸¹ The imaginary park thus conceived demanded a fiction of form (a clearly demarcated place with identifiable borders) and content (flora and fauna that existed independently of the world beyond the park’s boundaries). But how would this be achieved in a place that was in fact traversed by the likes of Mastulela? A place with a “peopled past?”⁸² Minister of Lands Piet Grobler knew that claims of territorial integrity for the park were open to challenge. But he saw the threat as coming from the government itself.



FIGURE 1.15. Photograph depicting the unveiling of tablets carved onto a granite boulder in the KNP in honor of Paul Kruger and Piet Grobler. Left to right: Unnamed ranger, Mrs. Hilda Stevenson-Hamilton, Grobler, and National Parks Board chairman W. J. C. Brebner. September 22, 1933. *Source:* SANParks Archive

He told Parliament in 1926, “In the first place we must fix the boundaries by legislation.” There were vocal mining and farming lobbies with considerable political support that wanted free reign in the park. Grobler worried that these lobbies might prevail—unless the park’s boundaries were cast in law: “As long as the alteration of the boundary is in the hands of the Government the Government will always be exposed to being pressed by supporters to alter the boundary.”⁸³ The boundaries were indeed established by law, thus creating the fiction of territorial integrity. In truth, the boundaries fixed in 1926 were never as stable as the legal fiction made them appear. There were territorial inclusions, excisions, fencing, and de-fencing throughout the park’s history. These changes happened as farms were bought, land swapped, and Africans such as Jimmy Mnisi’s community removed—to make real the fiction of the park’s contiguity.⁸⁴ The fiction persisted, despite evidence to the contrary. It rested on myths about the park’s locality that downplayed a history of flows.

These flows belied claims that the park was separate from the biological, economic, and political ecosystems around it. They also went

against the *raison d'être* of the National Parks Board, which saw its mission as the defense of South Africa from diseases, Africans, illicit goods, and political insurgents, especially after the decolonization of southern Africa in the 1970s.⁸⁵ In fact, by the 1980s, the KNP was one of the most militarized zones in South Africa.⁸⁶ Despite this, the flows that defined the lowveld continued; millions of blacks continued to make their presence felt, thereby giving us the histories recuperated here. These histories have a lot to teach us about how blacks lived with white rule. They also have a lot to say about how their presence in the KNP shapes the ways in which many blacks relate to the park in post-apartheid South Africa.

SITUATING HISTORICAL TRAUMA

Take Jimmy Mnisi, the man who lost his grandfather to lions in the KNP in the 1960s. When I interviewed him in November 2009, Mnisi was a local African National Congress (ANC) politician and leading member of the Mahashi community, which had instituted a restitution claim for the community's return to the land taken away by the park in 1969.⁸⁷ When I examined the National Parks Board's annual reports about the KNP for the 1960s, I found no account of a park ranger killed by lions during that decade. The only incident mentioned of a ranger killed on the job was in the report for the year 1963–64 and concerned an elephant that “attacked a Native Ranger for no apparent reason and killed him. He was cycling along the road alone.”⁸⁸ I mention this not to question the veracity of Mnisi's story. I do not believe that the colonial and apartheid archives on which this book draws set the standard for truth against which all claims about the past must be measured. Rather, I mention the apparent dissonance between Mnisi's memory of his grandfather's demise and the archival record in order to show the importance of context.⁸⁹

More than that, I mention the apparent discord to foreground my awareness of the historiographic challenges posed by the archival and oral sources on which I rely, as well as to point out the limitations of the methodological approaches used in this study.⁹⁰ This book seeks neither to confirm nor to challenge Mnisi's account. But it does provide the historical context within which his memory of loss and trauma can be understood. When Mnisi told me about the feelings that overcame him—a learned, literate man who knew his rights—each time

the elders in his family related the story of how his grandfather died, he was talking as much about the past as he was about the present. He was giving me the setting within which to understand his and his community's claim for the return of their land from the KNP.⁹¹ Mnisi said that, unlike the elders in the family, his generation felt the trauma of the grandfather's death most keenly because "we know our rights." But there was far more to the story than Mnisi let on. Mnisi spoke to me as a citizen of the democratic Republic of South Africa. The difference between him and his elders was not that they "did not know their rights" whereas he and his contemporaries knew theirs. The difference was that when the old man died, Mnisi's family were subjects and not citizens. There was a limit to what they could claim. Mnisi, on the other hand, could not only express personal and collective memories of loss but also make claims for justice that a democratic government committed to redress for historic injustices was bound to honor, even if only on paper.⁹² This means that Mnisi's feelings must be understood, first and foremost, politically. His talk of trauma was as much about the "social memories" of what happened in the past—the grandfather's death, the community's expulsion from the park—as it was about his standing in a democratic South Africa.⁹³ Mnisi's feelings were no doubt sincere and an important source of fuel for his demands for justice. But they could not be divorced from what he was trying to do—that is, stake a claim for compensation in ways that his family could not under apartheid. Here was a vivid illustration of the profound social and political changes that people like Mnisi and institutions like the KNP went through during the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first. This book documents these changes by looking at the context, circumstances, and contingencies that brought them about.

The history presented here does not go in a straight line, with blacks starting out as powerless subjects and then growing into political citizens, and with the KNP as a national playground against which the story unfolds. The story presented here is far too complicated to allow for such plotting. It is a story of absences (of equality, of justice, of rights) and presence (of a range of individuals and communities). Whereas past histories of the park have tended to emphasize the absences, this book asks that we look also at the histories of presence that animate the park and its unsettled pasts.⁹⁴ The two go together. They have to go together for the black history of the KNP to claim its place

in the world—not as a replacement for the white romantic histories of the park but as both a corrective and supplement to those histories.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

The book is divided into two parts. Each part is made up of four chapters. Part 1, titled *Movements*, is about poachers, migrant laborers, and early histories of black tourism. Chapter 1, “Natural Enemies,” looks at struggles over the park’s resources between park and state officials, on the one hand, and groups of people labeled poachers, on the other. As this chapter shows, park and state officials sought to present the so-called poaching problem as a law-and-order issue, when it was in fact a political matter involving disputes over who could claim the resources of the park. Displaying a pronounced indifference to borders as markers of national identity, these so-called poachers challenged the colonial state through their sheer presence in the park. Playing the border like a concertina, they moved back and forth as they used their presence to take advantage of the weak and incomplete state’s failure to be present in the park. Chapter 2, “Stray Boys,” researches the role of migrant labor in the creation of a particular kind of black presence inside the park. This presence helped turn the National Parks Board and the mining industry into strong allies. But, as this chapter shows, it was the presence of these migrant laborers inside the park that brought this alliance about. In other words, black initiative helped bring colonial conservationists and the mining industry together—in ways that did not necessarily benefit the migrant laborers.

Chapter 3, “New Africans,” and Chapter 4, “From Roots to Routes,” zoom out of the KNP to set the scene for the emergence of black traditions of holidaymaking and tourism in the early twentieth century. Chapter 3 studies the ways in which members of the black elite made themselves present in colonial South Africa by developing a cult of travel designed to make the new country known to them while also making them known to the new country. These elites used the opinion pages of their newspapers to make themselves present in the making of South Africa. They had to do this because they did not enjoy an organic connection to the country. South Africa was not already known to them—it had to be discovered through imaginative and real travel. Chapter 4 documents the struggles that these elites waged for the right to be present wherever their means took them. For them to know South

Africa and to claim it politically as their own, they had to take its railways and highways. Colonial racism made it difficult for them to get around, but, as this chapter shows, they got around. They made their presence felt.

Part 2, titled *Homelands*, zooms back into the KNP to offer a detailed social history of black tourism to the park. Chapter 5, “Civilized Natives,” explores how African, Coloured, and Indian visitors made use of the park as a place of leisure and social distinction. The chapter looks especially at how black domestics, ostensibly there to tend to the needs of their white bosses, made their presence felt through surreptitious subversion and by linking the park’s employees to wider circles of political struggle beyond the park. Chapter 6, “Black Mobility,” examines the paradoxical role of homelands in the expansion of black tourism to the KNP. The chapter shows how, in order to stay faithful to its claim that homelands were indeed independent nations worthy of international recognition, the apartheid government had to treat the “citizens” of these Bantustans in the park as international citizens no different from those of, say, Italy. However, doing so meant getting rid of petty apartheid in the park—all so the park could avoid international embarrassment. Part 2 also explores changes over time in relations between the park and the descendants of those expelled from the park over the years. Chapter 7, “Beggar Thy Neighbor,” analyzes how these relations continue to inform patterns of engagement between the park and local communities in postapartheid South Africa. The chapter illustrates this, in part, through oral historical accounts of the worst human tragedy in the history of the park—a 2001 fire that killed twenty-four people and injured many. Chapter 8, “The Road to Kruger,” shows how communities adjacent to the KNP use their proximity to the park to make demands on the postapartheid government. That is, the chapter assesses the ways in which local communities draw the park into the political calculus of their struggles against the state. Whenever these communities have complaints against the government, they blockade the roads that take tourists to the park, thereby endangering the park’s reputation and revenue. But, as the chapter shows, this is not a postapartheid tactic. It goes back to the days of apartheid. Recuperating this history of protest on the margins of the KNP helps *Safari Nation* challenge assumptions that the rural areas adjacent to the park were either acquiescent or too conservative to challenge injustice during

colonial and apartheid rule. They were not. In fact, when communities adjacent to the KNP protested in postapartheid South Africa, they drew on much older traditions of struggle and protest. That, then, is the structure of the book.

SO WHAT?

The KNP is truly one of the most beautiful places on earth. Alan Paton had another part of South Africa in mind when he called it beautiful beyond the singing of it. But he might as well have had the KNP in mind, such is its majesty. The park is beautiful beyond the singing of it. No song, no melody, can do the park justice. But that splendor has a history. That beauty has a past that cannot be divorced from South Africa's ugly history. Above all, *Safari Nation* is about the beauty of the KNP, as well as the ugly side of that beauty. The book will have succeeded if it helps readers already familiar with the park renew their love for the park, and if it drives readers not acquainted with the park to fall in love with it. But, for both sets of readers, that must be critical love. It must be love rooted in history, not some cant about a pristine wilderness or, worse, some unspoiled Africa somewhere. To help preserve the KNP for posterity, we have to come to terms with its past while helping to prepare it for an uncertain future. The future of Africa's national parks depends on our opening our eyes, not on closing them and imagining histories that never were. Hopefully, *Safari Nation* can contribute to this by helping the reader look anew at the Kruger National Park.