

# Publications

**Life as a Hunt: Thresholds of Identities and Illusions on an African Landscape** by Stuart A. Marks (2016), xxxvi + 504 pp., Berghahn Books, Oxford, UK. ISBN 978-1-78533-157-2 (hbk) USD 150.00/GBP 107.00, ISBN 978-1-78533-158-9 (e-book).

In 1998 a man was arrested by wildlife scouts in the Luangwa Valley in Zambia, and accused of distributing meat from an illegally killed elephant. The man, a pastor and acting deputy headman, had been asked by the community conservation project supervisor and senior counsellor to collect elephant meat as a traditional tribute for the Chief, away in Lusaka, in the hope of deflecting official anger at the elephant's death. He was imprisoned, handcuffed, beaten and interrogated, as were a series of other people. Eventually, he was released. It was never discovered who had killed the elephant. The tusks were recovered by game guards from the carcass, untouched.

This story, with complexities far beyond this brief retelling, opens *Life as a Hunt*. It captures the spirit and aim of the book, which seeks to set out something of what it is to be a member of the Valley Bisa, a group of subsistence hunters and farmers living in the malarial lowlands between two national parks in Zambia, and subject to the aspirations, ideas and conservation programmes of a succession of outsiders.

*Life as a Hunt* is a vast and fascinating volume, a compendium of four decades of research. Stuart Marks first came to the Luangwa Valley in the 1960s, and has gone back repeatedly in the decades since. At one level *Life as a Hunt* is therefore an all-too rare exercise in long-term anthropology, a summary and reflection on a lifetime of research, and of interactions with individual people and families. Marks has written about the Bisa before, many times, in academic journals and books (notably in *The Imperial Lion*, 1984, and *Large Mammals and a Brave People*, 2005). He tells stories about people today and their fathers and their grandfathers, all of whom he has known. There is a lyricism and astonishing historical depth to the book's detailed personal accounts; for example, describing the lives and experiences of three generations of hunters (chapter 5), graphic descriptions of two walks with hunters in the 1980s (chapter 6), or the writing of a social history of a single muzzle-loading gun (chapter 8).

At another level this is an angry book, trenchant in describing how conservation is experienced 'from below', by the people on whom it is imposed. Marks describes the

importance of hunting for the Bisa, culturally and economically, the significance of lineage guns and the beliefs and practices of hunters. He describes the pejorative vocabularies, inscrutability, petty corruption and bullying that has characterized the generations of community-based natural resource management (CBNRM) projects such as the Luangwa Integrated Resource Development Programme and the Administrative Management Design for Game Management Areas. Over a third of people interviewed in a Game Management Area in 2006 said that either they or a close relative had recently been arrested for a violation of wildlife regulations. He analyses the way insiders and outsiders exploit kinship and ethnic and work affiliations to gain access to wildlife, legally and illegally. *Life as a Hunt* is a rich mixture of anthropology and history, moving from the role of guns in the construction of masculinity to the power of witchcraft in social understandings of success and adversity, and the criminalization of local hunting management by the state.

Stuart Marks sees little evidence that CBNRM projects have contributed to rural welfare. Social processes, histories and understandings weave a complex web around and through attempts to do conservation in the Luangwa Valley, and people respond and innovate in diverse ways that make perfect sense to the Bisa, but can seem inexplicable to outsiders. Therefore conservation programmes, their managers (turning over whenever aid money sloshes in or out) do not learn from mistakes and never really understand who is doing what on the ground (or in their own organizations) or why. They plough on regardless.

*Life as a Hunt* is a book that shows rather than tells. At times I found myself wishing that Marks would leave out some of the detail, and set out his argument more explicitly point by point. The book is far too long (at over 500 pages), and unevenly paced. As a story it grows on you, but plot development is complex and slow, and in places overweighted with relatively undigested data.

But that is to miss the point of this book. While it is highly scholarly, it tells its story in a manner and with a pacing that ignores the short attention span of today's academic. Quietly and undemonstratively it explains what it is to be Bisa, and how it is to live in a place over which successive conservation initiatives have washed like imperious, ignorant and sometimes deceitful tides.

So who should read this book? Students in anthropology and geography, of course, and anyone interested in Africa and its

development. But also, I would say, anyone planning a career in conservation, or curious at what lies behind the problems conservationists have in engaging with ordinary people.

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**The Partners Principles for Community-Based Conservation** by Charudutt Mishra (2016), 180 pp., Snow Leopard Trust, Seattle, USA. ISBN 978-0-9773753-1-8 (hbk), ISBN 978-0-9773753-0-1 (e-book).

I have to confess that I'm a sucker for a good acronym as long as it's not too contrived. So I was immediately attracted to the title of this book, which uses PARTNERS to describe eight principles for working with communities in conservation. The principles are framed as Presence, Aptness, Respect, Transparency, Negotiation, Empathy, Responsiveness and Strategic Support. As the author writes, the acronym is more than a buzzword; it illustrates a conviction that local communities must be respected as equal partners in any conservation initiative.

The book begins with a chatty preface describing the process by which it came to be. This sets the tone for the following chapters, in which the author uses smoothly flowing prose to explore key issues. He combines this with examples, reflections and insights based on several decades' experience working with communities in central Asia on snow leopard conservation.

The book comprises three main sections. Part 1 introduces the principles, with each chapter starting with a useful summary. Part 2 describes specific community-based initiatives, such as conservation-linked enterprise development, livestock insurance, and community-based livestock vaccination services. These chapters detail the steps taken to set up the initiative, specific points of good practice that help avoid common problems, and explanation of how each of the principles applied to the examples given. Appendices at the end of each chapter provide templates and key points for inclusion in conservation agreements, including the respective roles and responsibilities of the communities and other stakeholders.

In the final part, Concluding Thoughts, the author recognizes a key omission in the