

https://dspace.org/

Poachers, proletarians and gentry in the early twentieth century Transvaal

Trapido, Stanley

1984-03
http://hdl.handle.net/10539/9906

Downloaded from a DSpace repository. https://dspace.org/

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND

A F R I C A N S T U D I E S I N S T I T U T E

African Studies Seminar Paper
to be presented in RW
4.00pm MARCH 1984

Title: Poachers, Proletarians and Gentry in the Early Twentieth Century Transvaal.

by: Stanley Trapido

No. 145

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND

A F R I C A N S T U D I E S I N S T I T U T E

African Studies Seminar Paper to be presented at Seminar in RW 319 at 4,00 p.m. on Monday, 12 March 1984

- - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -

POACHERS, PROLETARIANS AND GENTRY IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY TRANSVAAL

Stanley Trapido

The political economy of hunting is one of the neglected fields of South African social history. Hunting wild animals as an occupation within settler and indigenous societies was for at least two hundred years, between 1670 and 1870, essential for survival, subsistence and often for the creation of income and capital. By the end of the 1890s, however, European rule and merchant capitalism had, by their efforts to subjugate nature brought about the almost complete destruction of wild-life on the sub-continent. As a result, by the beginning of the 20th century, hunting had become a closely regulated pastime for a very small group of well-to-do Angliphone and Afrikaner settlers and a forbidden means of acquiring a subsistence for an equally small group of Africans and Afrikaner poachers. For the poachers wild life represented an ultimately ineffective way of staving off what had become an inevitable process of proletarianisation. To the new men of wealth, property and power in the post South African war era - company promoters and directors, stock brokers, share jobbers, senior mining engineers and managers, lawyers, medical men and journalists - hunting was one important means of creating a new corporate identity. Hunting, crucially because it was associated with British landed upper classes was seen to provide an ethos for creating and transforming a gentry. Although this ethos drew on older notions of 'sportsmanship' these had been transformed and given an African context by several generations of Victorian hunter-authors whose writings had presented Africa and its wild- life as a vast natural resource waiting to be subjugated. It was from this literature that the new men of a reconstructing and industrialising Transvaal obtained many of their images, images which were employed to turn themselves into a ruling class. Hunting or 'sport' was to provide them - so they believed - with an exclusive and a newly established common life style which would barr outsiders as much as it barred poor blacks and poor whites. For the new ruling class hunting could create, metaphorically, as well as literally, a monopoly of consumption, the ultimate objective of a ruling group seeking to enforce its power. By the end of the 19th century the acquisition of these African hunting-fields enabled members of settler classes, as they began to take root, to relate to their metropolitan equivalents on increasingly equal terms. Thus when Randolph Churchill, whose

influence was power, it was hoped could be used to influence the City and the Colonial Office to be well disposed to mining adventures, visited the Transvaal in 1890, he was taken hunting on the Lewis and Marks farms of the Vereeniging Estates.

I

This was a strange and effete transformation of what had been so essential an activity and which for the settlers of the mid-17th century had begun as a means of defence against wild animals and as a way of making good an otherwise large shortfall in food supplies. The demands of commercialism, which got under way after settlement began, rapidly transformed hunting into a war against animals. In the late 17th and 18th centuries successive generations of young men from the new settlement used such capital as they had for hunting expeditions in the hope that the return from elephant hunting would enable them to establish themselves as landowners, cattle keepers and farmers. Out of the commercial hunt a new social phenomenon emerged, the jatersgemeenskap (hunters community). The mystique which surrounds hunting would suggest that the jagtersgemeenskap was an egalitarian brotherhood but in reality its members were unequal. Not all of those who went on the hunt had equal resources to contribute to shared equipment. In the 19th century, or probably earlier, this was overcome by the hunters being financed by a trader or by others with resources in return for which the financier got a half share of the profit. But even more important a very large part of any 18th and 19th century expedition was made up of unfree clients who were included in the expeditions by their masters. Hunting expeditions were remembered in the white collective consciousness as arcadian affairs. In spite of the fact that hunting generally involved danger, intense fear, riding and shooting injuries, severe cuts from thorn trees, much discomfort and the continuous possibilities of disease, only its rare excitement, its conviviality and leisurely pace were recalled. The fact that hunting removed men from the hard and regular work which agriculture or pastoralism required must have contributed considerably to the myth of the male idyll with its legendary implications of unfettered well being known as the lekker lewe (the good life). It survived late into the 19th century, as we shall see. Hunting became important, not only for the profit it produced, and for the possibility of accumulation without the long grind of daily labour. It also served as a form of bonding and initiation for the young white men of settler society.

The jagtersgemeenskap took a very large toll of animal life, even with the weapons available to the 18th century hunter. As a result the officers of the Dutch East India Company (DEIC), who had made feeble attempts to restrict the destruction of wild-life from the very beginning of settlement, continued to reiterate proclamations against wanton destruction. But without the means to reinforce these proclamations the destruction continued. The incoming British administration sent to the Cape during the Napoleonic wars, repeated the DEIC statutes. Lord Charles Somerset with his Regency connections must have thought himself in fammiliar territory.

> 'it is found,' one of his proclamations read, 'that many idle and disorderly persons, of inferior classes of life, who ought to be dependent upon their industry, waste and misspend their time in destroying Game.'

But rather than halting the destruction of wild life the new presence in the Cape exacerbated the commercial plundering of wild-life as the much larger British market began to exercise its pull.

II

By the late 1830s, as the hunter's trader began to make an impression on British import statistics, a new breed of hunter-publicist had emerged to bring the huntsman's exploits before the British reading public. The sportsman-explorer with his books, articles and exhibitions on hunting and wild-life in South Africa was dramatically to influence the way in which the sub-continent was perceived in Britain. There had been those who had provided scientific writings describing and classifying the wild-life of the region (Barrow 1800, Burchell 1811, Smith 1835), but it was the Victorian sportsman-authors, often with Indian military experience, who brought a sense that in the wild-life of South Africa, lay a world waiting to be subjugated. That this subjugation could be accomplished, not by great armies but by individuals reliant only upon courage and a well-aimed rifle offered a world of fantasy to generations of Englishmen and Scots and contributed to an ethos in which, several decades later, imperial adventures flourished.

The hunter-authors proclaiming their 'prodigious slaughters' took on for themselves the dual role of general and war-correspondent, and cast themselves as heroes. For all that an elephant or buffalo was not match for a well armed hunter, the 'kill' was most often portrayed as a military engagement waged between equals. Captain William Cornwallis Harris in his Narrative of an Expedition into Southern Africa speaks freely of "the enemy" and of "leaders" and "detachments". His book set the tone for many hunting books which followed.[1]

Gordon Cummings having grown weary of "hunting in a country where game was strictly preserved, and where the constant presence of keepers and forresters took away half the charm of the chase," went to the Cape "looking once more for the freedom of nature and the life of the wild hunter," and his notions of restrictiveness in the 'Old Country' are exactly echoed some fifty years later by Ryder Haggard's character Sir Henry Curtis in conversation with Alan Quartermain.[2] Cumming's Five years of a Hunter's Life in the Interior of South Africa, published in 1848, had 'an immense success' and was followed by a display of trophies at the Great Exhibition in 1851 - activities which brought him 'great popularity and a good deal of money.' A condensation of the book which appeared in 1856 went into eight editions and ten reprints over a period of fifty years. A permanent museum, established in 1858, housed his trophies which weighed over twenty tons.[3] Like Harris, Cummings expressed himself in the language of heroic and bloody war.[4] "I waged a successful war with the hippopotami," he writes. A wild boar, staggering from gunshot wounds ran off with a "comrade" staining "the stones red in his wake" and breaking both underteeth. He describes in minute detail the death by

suffocation of a sasserby, choking on blood, whose body began to swell while still alive "until it literally resembled a fisherman's float."[5]

These accounts of Africa were remarkable both for blood thirsty detail and for the great variety of species they recorded. "The face of the country was literally white with spring buck" wrote Harris, "pouring like locusts from the endless plains of the interior."[6] Similarly Cummings on antelope:

> "I beheld the ground to the northwards of my camp actually covered with a dense living mass of springboks ... pouring like the flood of some great river."[7]

Even more encouraging for aspirant ivory hunters would have been Harris on elephants.

> "Here a grand and magnificent panorama was before us which beggars all description. The whole face of the landscape was actually covered with wild Elephants. There could not have been fewer than three hundred within the scope of our vision!"[8]

A sight of hillsides covered with elephants raised not only the spirits but the prospect of the cash register turning over. "Ah! a good bull," Cummings exclaims, with elephant gun poised, "tusks at least fifty pounds; four shillings and sixpence a pound; bringing me £22,10s. Capital days work."[9] David Livingstone, not always uncritical of the hunters observed in some admiration that his patron, the eminent hunter John Oswell had been known to kill four large elephants a day. "The value of the ivory in these cases," Livingstone wrote "would be one hundred guineas. We had reason to be proud of his success, for the inhabitants conceived from it a very high idea of English courage."[10] In the message of the hunter-authors it was clear that profit and glory could be obtained simultaneously, yet the awareness was nonetheless present that wild animals would surely diminish if shot at unchecked. Consequently profits would be maintained only by limiting the activity to English hunters alone. Other contenders for this monopoly right were most notably the Afrikaners of the ZAR as we shall see, and certain African chieftancies. The conviction grew strong in the literature that Englishmen were natural leaders in the war of subjugation. While lesser men might find roles as guides, bearers and ancillary marksmen, only Englishmen had the necessary virtues and skill. For Livingstone these came with "civilisation" and increased the "beauty, courage and physical power of the race."[11] It also made them better elephant shots for, he claimed, of one hunting season that while the average shot by "natives was under one per man, from Griguas one per man, for the Boers two." In the English officers it was "twenty each". "Civilisation" in this way lent a hand to bravery since superior fire power allowed a British marksman to approach within thirty yards "while others stood at a distance of a hundred yards or even more."[12] This daring proximity in itself created manly virtues. "The chase" wrote Livingstone "is eminently conducive to the formation of a brave and noble character, and that coolness in emergencies, and active presence of mind, which we all admire."[13]

H.A. Bryden believed that the qualities of the English hunter had insured British supremacy in Southern Africa, partly by preventing Afrikaner hegemony and partly by inducing admiration among Africans. "The wonderful courage and energy of the early hunter" he wrote "contributed also, in a very great degree, to the respect and admiration in which the Englishman has been held by the black man."[14] But his admiration was clearly not unanimous, "I sometimes feld annoyed," Livingstone wrote "at the low estimation in which my hunting friends were held."[15] "Have these hunters, who come so far and work so hard no meat at home?" they asked. "Why these men are rich and could slaughter oxen every day of their lives." Yet they endured hardship merely for the sake of "play". "Sport", Livingston explained, was a difficult concept for local people to understand. However, the side benefits for Africans could, in the short run, be considerable.

> "When they get a man to kill large quantities of game for them, whatever he may think of himself or of his achievements, they pride themselves in having adroitly turned to good account the folly of the itinerant butchers."[16]

For the sportsmen-authors the distribution of game meat to porters and local people enable them to play out a paternalism which reinforced their role as natural leaders. It also made good sense, both because, unlike the tusks and skins, it was not saleable, and because gifts of meat could be used to appease local chiefs in whose territory the hunters operated. Needless to say, beneficence and not enlightened self-interest is recorded in the literature. Their role in ridding local people of predators was often real enough since a lion could carry off cattle and sometimes people, but in presenting this protective role the writers planted an image of the dependent African, leaving their English readers with little sense, either of the African's traditional defense structures against predators[17] or of their own interference with the ecology which made predators more likely to assault human society.

Among the sportsmen-authors, images of paternalism and dominance in their relationship to sport, extend even to the sexual-erotic where the game - as often - is cast as female. "I was enchanted", Cummings writes of a wounded sea-cow, "she could not escape."[18] Through the African experiences, authors revitalised the concept of "sportsmanship" as an aspect of that "brave and noble character" which distinguished the race. Implicit within it were notions that man met beast on equal terms. Thus to shoot an aminal defenceless at a water hole was "a Bushmanlike practice" and to shoot at night was cowardly as one could often wound but not kill. To kill the female of the species, especially in the breeding season, was undersirable and to kill, not for horns, skins or meat, but merely for the excitement of "the bag" was to be "pretty far gone in the hunting form of insanity."[18]

In practice all of these rules were broken all of the time by almost all of those who wrote about hunting. With their ever-increasing fire power, the notion of equality in combat, analogous to the stylised combat of currently codified public school games - was at best a deception. True, hunting was arduous and hazardous but not

through casualties inflicted by "the enemy". Accidents were caused by faulty gun mechanisms, falls off horses and lacerations meeted out by thorn trees and pot-holes.[19] The sport's essential cowardliness perhaps goes a good way to explain the quite excessive insistence upon the courage of the participants.

An apotheosis of their self-indulgent brutality is adequately summed up in the following description of a 'great slaughter' arranged for Queen Victoria's son, the Duke of Edinburgh in 1860. Appropriately it appeared in a volume entitled Sport and War.

> 'The plain in which we were was of vast extent - I dare say nearly a hundred miles in circumference - and the whole of this extent was one moving mass of game. The gaps between the mountains on all sides of the plain were stopped by a living line of men, and we were in the middle of this whirling throng firing at great game at not twenty five yard's distance as fast as we could load. The Prince fired as fast as guns could be handed to him, for Currie rode on one side and I on the other, and we alternately handed guns to him as he discharged his own ...
>
> Six hundred head of large game were shot in this day ... and most of the sportsmen looked more like butchers than sportsmen, from being so covered in blood. His Royal Highness and Currie were red up to the shoulders from using the spear ... I generally handed my double gun to the Prince as fast as I could load it; nevertheless I could not resist now and then bowling over a couple of great antelopes as they whirled past me. It was a very exciting day and were His Royal Highness to live for a hundred years I do not believe he could ever see such a scene again, for the game in South Africa is fast disappearing.'[20]

III

Independent African societies played a central part in the development of the political economy of hunting. While a detailed consideration of their role must wait for a final version of this essay, the following provisional paragraph will serve as a reminder that this must still be undertaken.

African societies were not idle witnesses to this destruction of wild-life and ultimately they made their own contribution to that end. Only the various groups of San or Bushmen, though they were the most adept of societies in the hunting of wild-life, seemed to live in some kind of symbiosis with the beasts of the African plains. Their near extermination took place because their clashes with settler and African societies followed from their need to defend wild- life from commercial hunters, pastoralists and agriculturists. Nguni and Sotho communities, because they were cattle keepers and cultivators were compelled to destroy not only the predators which threatened human or animal life, but also those whose feeding habits imperilled grazing lands and crops. Like the San, whose methods they probably absorbed, Nguni and Sotho hunters used traps, pits, nets, bows and arrows and spears and eventually muskets. With these methods they were not

necessarily less effective than European hunters with their easier access to muskets, powder and lead. As we know other preindustrial societies greatly restricted the activities of carnivores and scavengers as well as all but eliminating herbivours long before the advent of the breach loading rifle. It has been convincingly argued that the centralisation of some of these societies was assisted by the need of chiefs to control products of the hunt to ensure its revenue for their own purpose. As a result many animals were declared royal game and their products became the property of chiefs. To ensure a continuous revenue from ivory some Tswana chiefs as well as the Ndebeli paramount introduced preservationist regimes which were the first to be established in Southern Africa.

IV

In the interior republics, Afrikaners not surprisingly were resentful of British hunters who they saw as constituting a threat to the size of their own haul of ivory and other products of the hunt, though it must be said that their hatred at times bordered upon the pathological.[1] The ZAR, having passed legislation to prevent British hunting in its territory, at one point arrested trader-hunters Chapman and MacCabe who both had their wagons and goods seized. McCabe was taking away 'the fat of the land that is ivory' Andres Pietonius told him,[2] and accused him of being 'an Englishman at Heart.' In practice the law proved impossible to operate. There were schisms and vested interests within the Boer community and many Boer hunters depended upon British traders to buy their ivory. Others could only afford to undertake hunting expeditions 'on the half' with English hunter-traders who financed them.

Boer hunters in practice far outnumbered British, and it was with a view to controlling Boer activities that in 1858 the Volksraad past legislation attempting to place restraint upon the destruction of wild life. The Volksraad legislated that needs of subsistence were to determine the numbers of animals any burgher shot -viz. that no burgher shot more than was required for his own consumption,[4] or more than could be removed in a single wagon-load. Shooting for skins became illegeal. Access to game as a means of subsistence was thereby virtually enshrined in the constitution, but the measure was a dead letter from the start. In 1866[5] one hunting firm exported 152,000 blesbok and wildebeest pelts. Nor did the law make specific provision for elephant hunting where a single wagon load of ivory would have satisfied most hunters as an adequate expedition's haul. In addition, by the late 1850s, as hunters moved into the tsetse fly zone where neither oxen nor horses could survive, bearers had replaced wagons as a means of transporting goods. This move into the tsetse zone altered the nature of elephant hunting, since it not only meant increased tribute paid to African chiefs whose land was being encroached upon, but rendered elephant hunting more and more the preserve of swartskuts or black marksmen who were the white hunters' clients. These were not a new phenomenon - similar clients had played similar hunting roles in the Cape - but by the 1850s in the North-Eastern Transvaal elephant hunting had effectively been abandoned to them.[6] These former child captives-turned-clients owed loyalty to white patrons and were initially dependent upon them for protection and ammunition. The law

of 1858 banned them from hunting without white overseers or from straying beyond night fall during hunting expeditions. A white hunter could be accompanied by no more than two swartskuts who were to be registered with a landdrost, or magistrate. The law was in practice never enforced, partly because local officials were themselves too deeply involved in hunting and partly because the swartskuts' dependent status weakened considerably as the hunting process removed them for longer and longer periods from their masters. Swartskuts became involved themselves in the politics of local Venda chieftancies who possessed their own gun culture, in spite of the Sand River Treaty between Boer and British, both of which forbad the sale of guns to Africans. Afrikaner notables were in practice seeking not to ban the sale of guns to Africans but to secure a monopoly against British hunter-traders in the illegal trade. The role of African chieftancies in hunting must be discussed elsewhere in this paper. It is enough here to say that on effectively free trade in guns was a vital ingredient in the political economy of hunting and in the continuing destruction of elephants.[8]

How phenomenal this destruction was can be seen from the figures. Between 1848 and 1851 at least 50,000lbs of ivory was exported by Boers north of the Vaal River through British colonial ports.[9] In 1855 ivory exports were said to have weighed 200,000lbs and in 1856 elephants reported shot numbered 1,000. But the Volksraad, in its impotent way recognised in elephants, a wasting asset.

Ivory Exports from Durban 1863-67[11]

Year	Value
1863	£40,736
1864	£26,254
1865	£19,154
1866	£6,524
1867	£5,908

Although the decline in ivory sales coincided with a decline in Boer political power in the Zoutpansberg, there is no doubt that elephants had become harder to come by.

In a further effort to slow the reduction in wild-life the Volksraad in 1870 appointed jagopsieners or game wardens to attempt law enforcement but, as Hatting observed, these were either wolves set to mind sheep ('in die rol van wolf wat moes skape oppas') or wholly ineffective officers who soon resigned the task as socially unacceptable.[12]

In the sixties an alternative attempt to arrest the decline of game emerged as landowners issued statements in the Staats courant to the effect that they would no longer permit hunting on their lands. While previously the right of the poor to hunt for food had gone unchallenged, the process of reconstituting wild-life as private property had now begun.

Year	No. of notices*[13]
1867	9
1868	1
1869	6
1870	20
1871	20
1872	24
1873	10
1874	28
1875	22

*Notices were for more than one farm

The logical corollary to this substantial change in social philosophy was that the poor ought to find alternative forms of subsistence.

In 1873 the Volkstem, the ZAR's leading newspaper, drew the conclusion that hunting was not only an assault upon a wasting resource but a disincentive to productive labour. Just then when the new mining settlements were willing to pay famine prices for food the republic could not supply it because its members were engaged in a fruitless chase. Furthermore hunting, the paper claimed, lured men from productive work into a liking for indolence. The country, it stated, would make economic progress only when the game had disappeared. In a preservationist article this was a startling conclusion. The paper ended by calling for heavy fines both to prevent wholesale destruction and to induce men, as the paper expressed it, to work for a living.

Attempts were made over the next twenty years to implement proposals to meet these issues mainly by creating a closed period during which animals could breed and rear young beyond infancy. Legislation was invariably met by claims that the poor would lose their subsistence and that property owners would lose their rights to use their own land as they wished. It was claimed in addition that since the state had insufficient force to curb African hunting, any legislation was not worth the bother. A licensing system to restrict the numbers of animals shot was perceived as disadvantaging the poor who could not pay the licence fee. The preservationist lobby, however - by now much the more influencial - defeated these objections by pointing out that without legislation there would soon be no animals left for the poor to shoot at all. 'The time was past' President Kruger announced, 'when a man could spend three days on the trail of a Steenbuck instead of earning £3 in this time'. Conservation had come tc be perceived as a means to economic growth, though not surprisingly, the only unanimously popular legislation amongst burghers was that of 1891 which forbad Africans to own hunting dogs and - until the outbreak of the South African War in 1899 - all conservation legislation was in actuality beyond the capacity of the ZAR to enforce.

Yet, inspite of legsilative impotence, the conservationist programme was more and more widely accepted and by 1891 the first of the Transvaal wild-life protection societies was formed in Pretoria and Johannesburg. By 1898 legislation had been passed to create a game reserve in the Sabi River region of the eastern Transvaal which bordered on the Portuguese colocy of Mozambique and where wild life still survived in significant numbers. There were few white settlers,

since both climate and malaria inhibited permanent residence, though it had been established as an area where trek boers took cattle for "winter grazing". As one landdrost remarked, however, this was a thinly disguised name for a hunting party. Relatively few Africans lived in the region beyond three thousand partly because of the reign of terror conducted by the Lydenburg Native Commissioner, Abel Erasmus, who sought to control local game for his own and his supporters use, but there was nonetheless black residents, including Swazis who used the area for seasonal grazing, who would have been dispossessed by the scheme, being too weak to resist in the event of its implementation. There were also absentee white landowners - mainly corporate landowners - who had acquired land in the area for speculative purposes. Minerals had not yet been uncovered here, though coal and diamonds were thought to exist, and their sole source of income from the land meanwhile was in rent from African tenant farmers. In the event interest groups had little need for opposition since in the two years left to the republic the scheme was never implemented. The War in 1899 was paradoxical in its effect with regard to wild-life. It both hastened the destruction of game in the designated reserve area and provided the frfmework for administrative coercion in which conservationist policy could ultimately flourish. To the preservationists who finally formulated effective government policy, extermination had gone too far for a simple management strategy towards game as a commodity to be possible. Nor could it be managed to provide regulated subsistence and sport. Commercial hunting was no longer viable and game took on instead a value beyond it usefulness as a commodity. Its value, like that of precious stones, was perceived as existing beyond its utility. To the harbingers of a new industrial society its validity as a source of food for poor white and poor black had disappeared.

V

The destruction of the Boer republic saw the creation of the Transvaal colonial state and with it an effective wild-life preservation policy. The state of the late ZAR had used its power to control Africans in many areas of economic and social life but it took Milner's reconstruction regime to use it systematically to restrict hunting. It was no doubt for this reason that the Transvaal government chose to place the administration of the Sabi game reserve under the aegis of the Department of Native Affairs but we can hardly avoid thinking that this classification was itself revealing. Milner's officials also used their resources to ensure that both the Afrikaner poor and the influencial corporate landowners respected the preservationist measures which they introduced. The new Transvaal government worked closely with the preservationist pressure group, the Transvaal Game Preservation Association (TGPA) which provided it with endless proposals for legislation. To a regime over-concerned to ensure labour for the goldmines the claim that putting an end to poaching would increase that labour supply was extremely gratifying. This coincided with the fostering of 'sportsmanship' which, by the observation of its rules, could be seen 'to improve the national character.'[1] Moreover by safeguarding the survival of the veld and the bush with their wild life inhabitants, preservationists secured the teaching of 'resource-

fulness', 'self-reliance', 'unselfishness', 'endurance', 'vigilance' and the 'proper understanding of our fellow man'.[2] Unfortunately this 'understanding of our fellow man' did not extend to poachers, white or black, and such was the preservationist hostility to them that it was often indistinguishable from hysteria. Determined as they were to manage game as a method of ensuring sport for themselves, they conjured up a nightmare world of poachers - black and white - with illegal rifles, traps, pits, snares and dogs. Like a hunter's version of black peril, their exaggerated fears may have caused some officials of the Transvaal government to consider aspects of the preservationist programme. Having accepted the bulk of this they began to doubt its wisdom. Anti-poaching legislation, having denied Africans game as apart of their diet and having compelled them to grow their food supply, now threatened this same food supply by preventing Africans from inhibiting wild animals roaming free over their cultivated lands. This was almost certainly an unintended consequence of preservationist legislation - it cannot be argued that social policy included the creation of a fully-fledged proletariat - and must have contributed to the famine associated with the drought of 1911-12. At the same time there was some African resistance to the new scheme of things and nowhere was this resistance as spectacular as in the Sabi game reserve.

The incoming British administration showed its concern for the preservation of wild life even before the end of the South African War. It went so far as to appoint a game ranger for the Sabi reserve before the war was over and before Boer forces had been dislodged from the entire reserve. Recognising that this was premature the ranger was dismissed and the control of the region was placed in the hands of a locally raised cavalry unit known as Steinaecker's Horse. Being mounted and armed in an area still rich in wild life, the cavalrymen inevitably took advantage of their position to shoot buck for themselves but they were also employed in a preservationist role both before and after peace was declared.[3] Using martial law, they were soon 'arresting and punishing all found killing game in the Reserve'.[4] James Stevenson-Hamilton, who, six weeks after the war ended, was appointed warden of the Sabi Game Reserve in July 1902, thought that Steinacker's Horse had provided a 'wholesome restraint' for Africans-hunting in the Lower Sabi area but he recognised that once the military had been withdrawn hunting would soon start again. It was therefore 'absolutely imperative to remove all Natives and remove them speedily'.[5] This widely held opinion was early on given support by the Director of the Pretoria Museum and Zoological Gardens who in Frebruary 1901 when the war was far from being over, wrote to the Colonial Secretary of the new British administration, urging that 'All kaffirs should be immediately moved out of the area to be proclaimed except personal servants of the officials and native police'.[6] Similarly the magistrate at Barberton spelt out the reasons why he thought Africans should be expelled from the area which was to contain the game reserve.

> 'There is,' he wrote, 'a large native population in the reserve which is, from time to time increased by immigrants from Portuguese territory. The presence of the Natives drives the game further north and outside the

> Reserve. The Natives by traps, with arms and dogs, slaughter large numbers of game. If the Native population is allowed to remain in the Reserve it is almost idle to talk of preserving the game. I am therefore of the opinion that all Natives should be removed from the Reserve.'[7]

As he saw it, therefore, one of the first tasks of the warden of the new game reserve was to attempt to control the African popoulation within his domain and where possible to expel it from within its borders. He claimed that in August 1902 there were between two and three thousand men, women and children living within the reserve who had, as he put it, all 'left' a year later.[8] We can only guess at the circumstances of this departure but in November 1903 the Secretary of the Transvaal Consolidated Land and Exploration Company wrote to complain that on fifteen of their landholdings 'we have been informed that natives have been driven from our farms in the Eastern Transvaal and that their huts have been burned'.[9]

There was never denial that this had taken place, only the claim that, since there were no survey beacons, the Company could not prove that what by common consent had happened, had in fact taken place on their land. What had been done had been undertaken 'in connection with the preservations of game', for which Stevenson-Hamilton was said to have had their 'authority'. To this the Company secretary replied: 'his authority is to preserve game and he has never been authorised ... to interfere with the natives living on our farms and so deprive us of revenue from our properties.'[10] There were other land company farms where the game warden had to tread warily for a considerable time. As late as 1904 there were still farms on the western and northern areas of the reserve where trapping, snaring and hunting were still being systematically undertaken by resident African tenants on Company land. In an attempt to bring this now illegal hunting to an end Stevenson-Hamilton established a police post in a position central to where the newly created poachers were operating. Six weeks after the establishment of the post the local agent of the Transvaal Estates and Development Company wrote to Stevenson-Hamilton reporting that his tenants had complained about the police post in their midst. Stevenson-Hamilton defended the location of the post - it was an important river crossing - and the alnd agent conceded that the post should remain on Company land. He insisted, however, that there should be an assurance that there would be no prosecutions for the trappings or snaring of guinea fowl. Stevenson-Hamilton could give no such assurance.

> 'The answer of the agent to this' the Warden wrote 'was that the natives had informed him that unless the police were immediately removed and were forbidden to interfere with the natives in the district, they would give notice to quit the farms. He went on to say that as this would mean a very serious pecuniary loss to him he must request me to forthwith remove the police and place them some distance of where there are fewer natives.'[11]

The same warden felt it necessary to obey the landowners' injuntion and the local officials were asked to withdraw the police station to the land of a more friendly property owner four miles away. Stevenson-Hamilton found this restriction galling since it was likely to lead to resentment from surrounding landowners who would claim that their self-denial was being exploited by 'a lot of lazy natives who will not go out to work.'[12]

It had become a common place that hunting was the activity of 'lazy natives.' Nor was it only 'natives' who would rather hunt than accept paid labour. 'Poor Boers' the Transvaal Game Preservation Society complained 'trekked about the country and practically lived on what they could get with the gun.' If poaching could be restricted by judicious expenditure on game keepers then not only would considerable income be made from sportsmen who would pay to shoot on landowners farms, but a wider benefit would be obtained. 'A large number of Natives and others who are now subsisting on this game would compelled to work in a legitimate way for their livelihood.'[13]

From the outset of this tenure as warden Stevenson-Hamilton was determined to rid himself of poor whites living on the fringes of the game reserve as he was of poor blacks living within it. Of one group of White River Boer squatters, he wrote that they 'are of so low a type that other Boers frequently allude to them as wild people.' He was harassed by them as people living 'almost wholly by killing game' and furthermore as people whose horses made them sufficiently mobile to make prosecution cirtually impossible. He proposed moving one group of twenty to thirty families out of the district.[14] Unlike African squatters, however, he found that he could not get the White River squatters moved simply because they posed a threat to game.[15] 'Boer hunters' continued to menace him when in September 1904 he undertook an exploratory journey north of the Sabi River. In one forty mile stretch he wrote:

> 'I actually saw no game whatever. The reason being' he continued, 'that during the War and before it ths was one of the favourite Boer hunting grounds, while this winter two separate parties of Boers have shot along the river; one party twice and the other once.'[16]

Along the Singwitsi River he reported seeing small numbers of kudos, reedbuck, impala, waterbuck and ostriches, and observed that these were being hunted systematically by Africans using bows ans poisoned arrows. Nevertheless, he felt it necessary to assert that the damage done by Africans in a year would not equal that done by a 'few Boers in a week.'[17] The last elephants to enter the region - eight in all - were 'shot by Boers' on the Letaba River; the last of the Transvaal eland, he said, were 'exterminated by the Boers during the War' and a similar fate had befallen the last rhinoceros. Stevenson-Hamilton proposed that a game ranger with police powers be placed in the region to enforce the game laws.

> 'I would, however emphasize the fact that Game Ordinances of all kinds are so much waste paper to the Boer hunters; one out of sight of a policeman, they have no sporting instincts and no sense of nonour as a rule, and know well

> how hard it is to secure a conviction against them for what they do far away from civilization.'[18]

Or, as he wrote on another occasion, when presented with one of the interminable applications to go treasure hunting for the 'Kruger millions'[19] 'this man is a bywoner and could not be trusted in the Reserve'.

The Transvaal Land Owners' Association (TLOA) a mainly Anglophone corporate organisation, was, if possible, even more hostile to Afrikaner poachers. In 1905 with Stevenson-Hamilton's dishonourable Boers' in mind, the T.L.O.A. proposed that its members attempt to control white squatters living on their lands, mostly without permission and without paying rent. Many of these squatters, or bywoners, the Association complained

> 'make no attempt to live by farming but merely make the farm their Headquarters from which they organise shooting expeditions. They live by poaching and stealing their owner's wood. One of these men, a tenant on a member's farm lately sold 2400lbs of bilton (dried venison) at Nylstroom.'[20]

The Association proposed, therefore, to draw up an inventory of bywoners living on member's land holdings. Confidential enquiries were to be made into their activities and where it was discovered that a man supported himself and his family by poaching he was to be evicted. His name was to be placed on a 'black list' and other members of the Association would then deny him access to their land.[21]

More often than not, however, both officials and the various pressure groups to which they resonded concerned themselves with African poaching, not least because White sportsmen complained that African hunting was denying them the kill which was rightfully theirs. The Secretary for Native Affairs seemed to have been sensitive to such charges. Hence the concern, for example, to take note of a complaint made by a 'sportsman' named Duncan Stewart who had had his hunting frustrated by the 'wholesale trapping and slaughter' of small game by 'indolent and lazy natives who are loafing their time here doing nothing else.' Stewart's 'surprise' and 'chagrin' was the result of hishaving had to pay £3 for a hunting licence, only to find that unlicenced Africans were using traps and dogs to bring down guinea fowl and buck. Stewart thought this unfair. Without a licence he was liable to a fine, but at that same time hunting was being undertaken by 'thousands of lazy natives who appear to do nothing else and I consider it very unjust and against all reason.' Stewart's indignation may have been exacerbated by the response he got from Africans when he tried to stop them hunting. 'On expostulating with the natives against trapping' he wrote 'I was only laughed at and told that they wanted "Injama" (meat) and intended getting it.'

Stewart took it upon himself to destroy every trap that he came across but, as he reported, his efforts came to nothing 'for the niggers simply substitute other contrivances at short notice.' Police patrols, he claimed had not visited the district for almost four months and it was little wonder that 'wholesome poaching and destruction of game would be carried on with impunity.'

> 'I think' he wrote 'that the Game Protection society should take the matter in hand. I believe its purpose is to protect game throughout the country and there is adequate scope here to enforce their regulations. The game is so wild owing to being chased and hunted by natives that any sportsman coming down here for a few weeks shooting would be very much disappointed.'[22]

Stewart's complaint about ineffectiveness of the South African Constabulary and the insinuation that not enough was being done to protect wild life caught the administration on the hop. It did not matter that his protectionism was geared to maintaining his hunting stocks rather than saving wild-life. His letter passed from department to department and local police were called on to justify their supposed slackness. The police defended themselves by assertting that Stewart was insufficiently precise for them to know where the poaching had occurred, that they were, in any event, not responsible for detecting 'undue' hunting, and in any event there were frequent police patrols in the Klein Letaba District. Nevertheless, a circular was sent to the Constabulary asking them to pay special attention to illegal hunting. Within a few days an Afrikaner called Vermeulen was arrested for having shot thirty six buck in two days with the intention of selling the meat on the Pretoria market, but otherwise not much seems to have resulted from a great deal of bureaucratic exchange.[23]

If officials in Pretoria and Johannesburg seem to have been anxious to placate the sportsmen of the T.G.P.A. then many of the local administrators in the Native Affairs Department were less sympathetic to them. Thus Charles Wheelwright in the Northern division of the Transvaal took a completely different view of Stewart's complaints. His officials had few, if any, police to spare for wild life protection but in any event traps set for guinea fowl were justified because the birds threatened the crops of local people. These birds he wrote were a 'pest' as they ran about in 'countless' numbers.[24] When the warden of the reserve sounded a note of scepticism about Wheelwright's opinion, the latter resonded with some irritation.

> 'I would suggest as an experiment, that Major Hamilton might attempt to grow grain crops of any kind, along the main road and be prohibited from destroying guinea fowl.'[25]

A year later Wheelwright returned to the theme.

> 'I have seen numerous instances in this District where entire fields have been cleared away of all seeds planted standing crops destroyed by Guinea Fowl, Partridge, Stein Buck, Duiker etc.'[26]

Stevenson-Hamilton saw no problem in securing crops. All that had to be done was for 'the boys and idle young men who at present do nothing but hunt, and load in the kraals ... to donate some of their spare time guarding their crops.'[27] But many administrators in the districts outside of the game reserve - and others besides administrators - came to hold Wheelwright's opinion that protectionist measures

were becoming so effective that Africans were losing their crops and in some instances were threatened with starvation. They did no deny that Africans were responsible for the destruction of some animals, but considered it improbable that these Africans caused the devastation for which they were often credited. There were variations from district to district and some officials were rady to agree with the protectionists on the scale of poaching taking place. But the overall picture which emerged was far more complex than either the T.G.P.A. or the T.L.O.A. would allow. Thus the Native Commissioner in the Rustenburg district urged caution when in 1903 he wrote,

> 'Very little game is destroyed by natives in this District by means of snares, traps etc., and it is only done for the protection of crops which are in places greatly damaged by both bucks and birds.'[28]

A year later there was a note of desparation in that Native Commissioner's comments.

> 'I should like' he wrote 'to let the Game Protection Association know that we have during the last twelve months, had occasion to realise that the over-protection of game in some parts has resulted in the most dangerous consequences to the natives who have, in many cases, lost their crops ... it would', he continued, 'be a monstrous thing and severe on persons being as a rule unarmed, who were not allowed to protect themselves by any methods, and who would otherwise be deprived of their means of living.'[29]

If we need any more confirmation that conservationist legislation was threatening the livelihood of farmers - settler as well as Africans - then the testimony of E. Steinaecker, whose military unit had employed martial law to stop hunting in 1901 and 1902 may be of some value. Now, in 1907, he found that because trapping had been made illegal there had been an unchecked increase of bush pig, duiker and hare as well as packs of wild dogs. This resurgence of these wild animals meant, according to Steinacker, that farming in the low country was becoming almost impossible. That year drought had led to the failure of the maize and sorghum planted by Africans and although they had planted a line of secondary crops, sweet potatoes and monkey nuts, these were being consumed by the hares as they grew. Steinacker's great fear was that the authorities would allow Africans to arm themselves to prevent famine. He proposed instead, therefore, that Africans living on his lands be permitted to set traps on their fields. At the same time, they could, he said, set them on his own fields since the was faced with the same difficulty.[30] It is verly likely that in the long drought between 1907 and 1911 preservationist measures gereatly affected the growth of African crops. As one official of the Native Affairs Department observed in February 1911,

> 'The (Game Preservation) Association is, I am aware, active in preserving game and solicitous about locations. To judge by the complaints regarding destruction of crops by game I should think that game in some locations thrives better than natives.'[31]

Protectionist measures were not, of course, equally effective in every region and district. The native Commissionr in the Central Division of the transvaal accepted that 'in the more isolated locations, much game is destroyed by native dogs and pitfalls'. The resident magistrate in Standerton reported that two or three cases had been brought before him the previous year, and the magistrate at Ermelo told of a similar number. From the far more isolated Waterberg district, the Resident magistrate claimed that very great destruction of wild life was taking place.

> 'Iam continually receiving information, he wrote, 'that the destruction of game by natives takes place on an extensive scale especially in the Utard Koedoesrand. It has also been brought to my notice that natives from Khama's Territory cross the Crocodile River into Tul, kill large numbers of game and do a good trade in skins ...'[32]

But there were other claims that Africans were responsible for the widespread killing of game which could either be shown to be false, much exaggerated or to have been the work of white hunters. A case in point was in the Rustenburg district, where the T.L.O.A. claimed that Africans were responsible both for the commerical shooting of ostriches for feathers and the stealing of ostrich eggs from nests. Charles Griffith, the magistrate in the district could only discover one case of a man being illegally in possession of ostrich eggs. As for feathers, one or two ostriches had been shot the previous year and their feathers had been sold to a local trader by an African, but the killing had been done by white 'shooting parties.'[33] In general he was, however,

> 'convinced that very little game is destroyed by Natives and in support of this it is the experience of almost every sportsman here that the best shooting in the Division is to be got on ground owned and occupied by Natives and on adjoining unoccupied European farms.'[34]

The claim that wild life was in serious danger of being shot out in the Rustenberg district was valid but it was not the Africans of the district who were responsible for this. A letter written to the Volkstem in September 1905 pointed to those who were. Written by a local correspondent called Van Noorden, he complained that in the previous hunting season 3,000 buck of several varieties were killed in the district by Johannesburg 'shooting parties'. Each one of these, he wrote had gone away with eighty or ninety carcasses. The 3,000 animals did not include animals killed by landowners on their own farms. If there was another year like that, Van Noorden wrote, there would be no buck left in the district. These figures were disputed by Griffiths who thought 3,000 too high but he accepted that shooting parties never came away with less than fifty buck.

These parties, Van Noorden reported, came to the district with spring wagons and mules and were 'well equipped in every way for the slaughter.' They trekked on to Bushveld farms without permission of absentee owners, ignoring notices that shooting was not permitted. Where the land-owner had African tenants or squatters these were given

written authority to tell 'sportsmen' that they were denied shooting rights. What, Van Noorden asked, did these 'self-styled Johannesburg gentlemen' do when confronted with such an injunction?

> 'The nigger boy did his duty and showed them the notices, with that result that after he had received a thrashing he was chased away.'

By the time the land-owner was told of the incident the poachers were a long way away and it was impossible to trace them.

> 'It is common amongst us' Van Noorden wrote, 'to always put the blame on Kaffirs where there are lots of dogs as being the cause of all extermination. Notwithstanding that the blacks do a lot of harm to the game, still they are like angels compared to the devils from Johannesburg. The Kaffir dogs may catch a buck here or there but the loss is small in comparison with the unsportsmanlike shooting of game caused by these parties.'[35]

A similar refutation came from within the remote Sibasa district within the Zoutpansberg region. This was a large district which had a northern border extending for seventy miles along the South African-Southern Rhodesian frontier and a western border, 120 miles long, running along the line separating South Africa from Mozambique. According to the sub-Native Commissioner C.N. Manning, in areas where there was no white settlement at all, but which were inhabited by large numbers of African communities, wild life abounded. On the other hand in areas occupied or frequented by Europeans, wild-life was 'extremely scarce'. 'One seems justified' Manning wrote, 'in stating that Europeans generally and especially shooting parties are responsible for this to a great extent.' There was an additional hazard for many of the antelope and other species which the state was now attempting to save from extinction. Because Africans had had to surrender their arms, and because a very lage area had been cleared of hunting dogs, protected species were being threatened by lions, leopards and other carnivores. Manning also denied that hunting drives were being organised by chiefs. To be effective these had to be large enough to attract public attention and it was impossible to have clandestine drives. Rather than being in the fore-front of poaching Manning claimed that chiefs had prevented the destruction of protected animals such as hippopotomi even though these often destroyed crops. Manning alsow showed that the traps which were so widely complained about were built to protect homesteads and crops from assaults by animals officially classified as vermin. Manning acknowledged that guinea fowl and partridge were caught by such traps, but from observations he had made, the traps were far more effective against wild cats, cane rats, lynxes, jackals and even leopards.

> 'The construction of these traps,' Manning wrote, 'with small openings and often closed up at one end, is hardly such as would tempt a small buck - not to mention larger species - to enter same voluntarily, when the fences can easily be jumped over, whereas vermin will generally creep through a hole.'

Manning claimed that there were a number of places along the lower Levubu river where reed-buck, duiker, steenbuck and large numbers of guinea fowl were to be found within a few hundred yards of African homesteads. These had often provided the "bag" for European 'shooting parties'. On the other hand if local people were to kill 'what often constitutes even a day's bag by European shooting parties' the word would quickly get round and would ensure their prosecution. Manning's purpose in all this was not to suggest that Africans were not responsible for the destruction of any wild life but rather to show that the allegations of wholesale slaughter were much exaggerated as any careful and competent observer would have been able to prove.

> 'To state' he wrote, 'that no killing of game by Natives takes place or that they would not destroy game if given their old opportunities (emphasis in original) for doing so, would obviously be absurd but under present circumstances it is submitted that a number of statements made prophesying extinction of game by natives in the near future are unfounded and could be easily refuted.'[36]

VI

In 1898, to prevent Africans from hunting in the Sabi region where he was Native Commissioner, Abel Erasmus had left officials of the Boer state in rounding up people and forcing them out of the district.[1] Erasmus was not, of course, a protectionist, but was intent on having a monopoly of wild life in the eastern reaches of the ZAR. Those evicted were either forced to move onto white farms, or evaded Erasmus's rule by moving across the border into Portuguese-ruled territory. Settler rule was less pervasive there and an unknown number of refugees established new homesteads close to the border with the Transvaal. From there they joined forces with kinsmen and others and continued to hunt for skins and food on both sides of the Transvaal-Mozambique border. During the war Erasmus's rule collapsed and hunting went on - for a while at least - without restriction. Steinaecker's Horse placed some restraint on African hunters but, with the lifting of martial law, poachers were said to be entering the new game reserve both from the Transvaal and from Mozambique. Stevenson-Hamilton was nevertheless able to report that two separate charges of poaching had been successfully brought before local courts; in one case for the killing of a zebra and in another for the shooting of an impala and a warthog. The convicted persons were said to have been 'severely punished'. Possibly more important was the conviction of a Portuguese 'boy' arrested while hunting in the reserve with a Martini Henry rifle. The man was given an 'exemplary sentence' which, somewhat optimistically, Stevenson-Hamilton claimed had had the 'effect of putting a complete stop to depredations'.[2] In fact, the next twenty five years were to see ever-increased raiding from the Portuguese colony as more and more poachers crossed into the South African game reserve in search of buck and other animals.

Poachers coming across the border from Mozambique - the overwhelming majority of whom were Africans - were very often armed with rifles. There was considerable illegal trade in modern rifles and ammunition in the Portuguese colony and, in addition, a large number of

muzzle loaders were still in service the first decade of the twentieth century. Many rifles were purchased or stolen at the end of the South African War while others had been brought from white hunters before the War. Africans living in the Sabi River area were armed at the end of the war but had been forced to surrender their arms in 1902. Ammunition for breach loading rifles could be bought illegally on the west bank of the Sabi from local traders who attempted to palm off old stocks on their customers, but knowledgeable shots could always ensure that they obtained new cartridges in packets of ten at ten shillings a time. One of these treaders, a European, known to his customers as Laise (Rice?), reported that he had acquired his stocks of ammunition from a storekeeper on the outskirts of Lourenco Marques (Maputo) in the district of 'Mashaba' where he paid £1 for six packets. African traders also purchased ammunition in Mashaba and, travelling in twos and threes, they peddled their wares from sacks. Pedlars were to be found traversing the Wanitzi River and its tributary in districts adjacent to the Lebombo Hills which ran parallel to the South African border.[3]

By contrast the black rangers and police recruited to the game reserve staff were restricted to assegais and sticks - restriction which followed from settler and colonial mistrust of African rangers and from anxiety about arming Africans in general. At best African rangers were seen as ex-poachers who would probably use arms to make their own kill for meat and skins. At worst the fear was that African rangers would invovle the state in their own quarrels with poachers who were, as often as not, their kinsmen and ex-neighbours and with whom they had shared the region before its designation as a game reserve. When the TGPA proposed the introduction of African rangers for districts outside the game reserve, the Commissioner for Native Affairs, Geoffrey Lagden, revealed how little he and his officials trusted the men now serving them in the Sabi district in the following comment. 'Personal friends of the detectives', Lagden wrote, 'or those prepared to pay him a fee or hand him a proportion of the meat would go free, while innocent persons would be accused in order that he might earn his information fee and keep up a reputation for alterness'. As for the rangers in the game reserve, while Lagden had 'no doubt' that they did 'most excellent work', this was because there was constant 'white direction and supervision'. Stevenson-Hamilton might write of one ranger, a man whom he called Jase, that he was 'a noted poacher' whom he had engaged 'according to the principle of setting a thief to catch a thief' and that he was now 'invested with the halo of respectibility which surrounds government employ, 'but it was Lagden's view of African game rangers which was to prevail. 'Give even the best of them a free hand allow him to get away from control and he will not improbably do a great deal more harm than good.' The fact, as we shall see, that it was not only possible for poachers to become rangers, but for ex-rangers to become poachers, would have left Lagden feeling justified in his views.[4]

The 'exemplary sentence' of 1903 from which Stevenson-Hamilton had derived so much hope, was followed within two years by the first murder of an African ranger carrying out his patrol duties within the reserve on the Lebomba Hills. The culprits were said to have been 'Portuguese natives' and the Transvaal Government began the first of its many attempts to persuade the colonial Government of Mozambique to

allow the extradition of these accused persons. The ineffectual Mozambique authorities blocked the extradition and the morale of African rangers slumped, while the confidence of poachers was said to have been considerably raised. Already by 1906 it was said that poachers had established a pattern for their raids into the Transvaal. Knowing full well that unarmed rangers could not effectively challenge their activities it became far more feasible for poachers to open fire on rangers, than for rangers to challenge poachers. Even when the police-cum-rangers pursued poachers, the offenders could recross the border into Mozambique, summon assistance in large numbers and return to drive them away. This significant advantage among poachers was already established in 1912 when poaching appears to have reached such proportions that it threatened the preservationist objective.

Increasing poacher activity - aggravated both by the serious drought of 1912 and by the decrease in wild-life on the Portuguese side of the border - led to a series of incidents which caused Stevenson-Hamilton to fear that the constant flouting of authority in this area would pose a serious challenge to colonial rule on both sides of the border. In November an African constable, patrolling the reserve along the foot of the Lembombo Hills, encountered a poaching party bearing the carcasses of a sable antelope, two warthogs and a reedbuck, the last of which had already been carved for the pot. The men were on a path leading from the game reserve direct to their village within the Portuguese colony and on being discovered fired a shot at the ranger who took cover behind a tree, and began to blow a whistle in order to convey an impression of calling up reinforcements. Shortly thereafter a 'very well-known native poacher' named Sigodo was captured by police, after which his relatives and 'others usually implicated in the poaching business', let it be known that they would henceforth shoot at unarmed policemen on sight. Within a week a patrolling constable had been fired upon by an assailant who gave no warning and, in December, three African rangers - their names doubtless assigned to them in the manner of settler tradition - were fired upon after a skirmish with 'four natives sitting down, while a fifth was in the act of stalking a herd of wildebeest.' Constables Breakfast and Mafuta and Corporal Mpampuni, having pursued the men who were all armed with rifles, succeeded in apprehending an old man among them named Myambi. After this the poachers fired two shots from a distance of seventy yards.

> 'The first bullet struck the ground just at my feet,' Corporal Mpampuni reported, 'and the second one passed so close to Native Constable Breakfast's ear that he thought he was hit and fell to the ground. Thinking he was shot, I let the prisoner we were holding go.'

Constable Breakfast who knew one of the poachers called out, 'Why do you want to kill me?' 'Because we want to kill meat,' came the answer, 'and because you have caught my brother Sigoda.'[5]

Within days another group of poachers were encountered at Hlowa Spruit to the west of the Lebomobo Hills. Both sergeants recognised one of the men - Sergeant Jafuta because they had grown up together in neighbouring homesteads on the same farm. The poachers, one Matafene,

had previously been forced out of the low veld with his entire family by Abel Erasmus and had later moved into Portuguese territory. Now with his wife and dependents dead, he was engaged in poaching expeditions and on this occasion armed with a Martini-Henry rifle, Matafene succeeded in securing the release a prisoner whom the African policeman had in tow.[6]

Matafene was one of nine living near Matukunhana who were said by the game reserve authorities to have been involved in recent affrays. They were all armed with rifles. Another two men from near the railway town of Ressano Garcia were also known to have been involved in recent skirmishes and two further groups of five 'well known' poaches including the ammunition seller Laise were said to live between the Sabi and Manzemtoto Rivers close to the Transvaal border. Further groups of armed poachers, among them certain local chiefs, were known by the game reserve authorities to be living in the area to the north of the Manzemtoto River. One of the chiefs involved had recently attempted to secure the release of several relatives held on poaching charges by offering bribes to the arresting constables and another had been found in possession of a double barrelled gun.[7]

It is little wonder then that Stevenson-Hamilton came to be deeply disturbed by the situation. As poaching increased, so he felt driven to respond, with the object of curtailing illegal hunting. But the poachers in their turn responded with ever-increasing violence.

> 'Our men cannot be expected to go on any longer on the present lines', he wrote, 'and it must either happen that all supervision will come to an end or that our police will be driven to defend themselves with the result that considerable loss of life may occur followed by possibly serious native unrest especially in Portuguese Territory, but also in the Transvaal, since the natives on both sides of the border are closely and intimately connected by blood and marriage ties. In any case it seems desirable to avoid the long official enquiries and expenses which any serious fray, followed by further reprisals, and possible agitation against Europeans might lead to.
>
> It is a serious danger to all Europeans living in the Low Country, but especially to the Portuguese themselves that such a large number of natives should not only be well provided with firearms and ammunition, but should also have so much opportunity of learning to use them to advantage.
>
> In the event of any general or partial native rising in the border districts, it would, I am confident, be quickly discovered that the Portuguese natives are not only adequately equipped but are many of them extremely capable marksmen. Native trouble of a serious nature has before now arisen from causes quite as slight as the present.'[8]

The years immediately following Stevenson-Hamilton's prognostications in 1912 were, as it turned out, no more than average years for violent activity among poachers. Poaching continued unabated on the Mozambique-Transvaal border throughout the Great War, and while we cannot for want of space linger here on the events of the next decade,

it is worth briefly noting and illustrating an additional dimension which was accruing to the conflict. Enmity between poacher and ranger had reached a pitch where original objectives were forgotten in an increasingly desperate vendetta waged by poachers against African rangers who, in their turn, were forced into a defence of an institution increasingly valued by white South Africa but which gave them little in return, not even trust. After one more poaching foray, Stevenson-Hamilton wrote, in November 1928, that it was becoming

> 'increasingly difficult to get our men to patrol the Portuguese border which, therefore becomes more and more free to the poachers. I accordingly most earnestly request that the strongest representations be made in the proper quarter with a view to putting a stop to the present terrorism.'[9]

A last episode in 1927 must suffice to give an impression of the ultimate and intense conflict which evolved during the poacher's attempts to secure their own subsistence. As a prelude to the episode it ought to be said that the drought of 1927 had intensified antipathies and had forced Mozambiquan Africans to bring cattle over the border into the reserve for drinking water. East Coast Fever regulations, however, had led to many of these animals being impounded by rangers and then - on instruction from the Department of Agriculture - systematically destroyed. Rumour soon spread that this destruction had been followed by a clash between rangers and 'a band of Portuguese native poachers', two of whom were believed to have been killed. The rumour, whether based on fact or not - and the authorities found it impossible to establish - had the effect of deepening ill-feeling which manifested itself in the following episode.

On November 21st a group of five African rangers, among them Constable Cement Mathlabi, set out to patrol the eastern boundary of the reserve. On the third day while on the farm, Tivoli, four miles from the Portuguese border, they encountered three African poachers with the carcasses of two waterbuck and a steenbuck. The rangers managed to arrest one of the men known to them as Penny and, having moved on, made camp for the night. In the morning two of the five rangers set off to follow a honey bird, leaving three to guard the prisoner.

> 'About 9 a.m.' Constable Cement Mathlabi later reported, 'I noticed that our camp was surrounded by Portuguese natives from over the border - about forty or fifty, all men armed with sticks and loaded sticks, two had guns and some had assegais. The guns were rifles. Without a word they all surrounded us, closed in and assaulted us.'[10]

The assailants were from the Maplankwene district and many of them were known to the rangers. Significantly, at least five of the rescue party were South African subjects who had taken refuge in Portuguese East Africa to avoid 'punishment for offences committed while residing in the game reserve.' Two of them were former game reserve policemen discharged for 'ill-conduct' and of one of these, Mashashi Gumbany,

Stevenson-Hamilton wrote that he was, 'a very dangerous character'.

> 'These people surrounded us', Cement Mathlabi reported, 'closed on us and assaulted us. They did not say a word. Stephanus was first struck with a loaded stick ... and he fell to the ground. I then received a blow which felled me, on the right side of the face next the eye. I was struck with a loaded stick by Mashashe Matebula. (The second ex-game reserve constable among the raiding party). I became unconcious for a time, I came to and got up. I saw Stephanus dead on the ground ...'[12]

The raiders, having dismissed the idea of handcuffing Mathlabi and taking him back with them into Portuguese territory told him, 'You can go now, as we have given you enough.' A third member of the ranger's party managed to escape unharmed and while the two returning from their search for honey were also chased, they managed to escape assault.

Before the poachers' rescue party struck, the rangers had all removed their uniforms and were dressed only in loincloths. Their assailants consequently made off with five uniforms, four pairs of handcuffs, a gold wristlet and some £9 in cash. Significantly they also took a Lee Mitford rifle and four cartridges, which by that date had been issued to certain constables to meet the rising emergency.[13]

There can be little doubt that the significance of the episode must largely be lost if we see it merely in terms of a narrow preservationist programme. The game rangers may have been patrolling to prevent the poaching of endangered species, but they were also intent upon thwarting their 'enemies'. To the magistrate in Pilgrim's Rest who later investigated the episode, the solution lay in the establishment of posts manned by the South African Police. While these should be established in order to ensure the 'preservation of the peace (and) the checking of raids,' he said, they would also make it possible, 'to keep an eye on the native game rangers of the Park.'[13]