

Bush Wars? Conservation, Conflict and Cultures of Nature in South Sudan and Northern Uganda, c. 1840–2020

Cherry Leonardi

The death in 2018 of ‘Sudan,’ the world’s last-known male northern white rhino, exemplified the major biodiversity losses in its former habitats in South Sudan and northwest Uganda. While such iconic species loss attracts considerable international attention, the longer-term history behind the extinction or endangerment has received much less focus from either conservationists, who are concerned with ongoing conflicts and illegal trades in the region, or scholarship, which is largely preoccupied with the causes and effects of those conflicts on states and people. This project proposes to place people’s long-term relationships with nature at the centre of these conflict histories for the first time. By exploring the local meanings, knowledge, and management of biodiversity since the mid-nineteenth century, it will examine more fully the causes and implications of recent losses. Using oral history interviews and other oral, performance, and material documentary sources, it will address these core **themes and questions:**

- **Rights and resources:** how have hunting and gathering rights been determined, exercised, and governed, and how (far) have state governance and military rebellions usurped, harnessed, or reshaped customary forms of resource access and governance?
- **Meanings and cultures:** how has nature been defined, constructed, and categorised in vernacular languages and epistemologies; what are the meanings and significance of trees and wildlife for identity and culture; how have these been appropriated and changed in wider political and religious discourse and iconography?
- **Practices and livelihoods:** what have been the material and practical dimensions of hunting, gathering, and managing environments; the effects of colonial resettlements, hunting, and burning restrictions and state forestry; and the risks and refuge of the bush during conflicts?