

# The Materiality of Lake Kariba

## Water, Livelihoods, Belonging and Conservation

Joshua Matanzima

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# The Materiality of Lake Kariba

“Lake Kariba began as a heap of concrete blocking the Zambezi River. It became so much more, as Joshua Matanzima tells us: a space of exclusion, livelihood, worship, and death. Water made it so—and in multiple ways. Matanzima’s ethnography explores the complex, often contradictory capacity of this and all waterscapes to make and unmake meaning and power across lines of difference.”

—Professor David McDermott Hughes, *Rutgers University*, author of *Whiteness in Zimbabwe: Land, Race, and the Problem of Belonging*

“This book provides a rich ethnography of the Kariba waterscape by incorporating such themes as religion, wildlife, tourism, fishing and trading. Crucially, it depicts the lake as active in configuring and affecting local lives and livelihoods. It thus contributes significantly to scholarly literature about and beyond Zimbabwe.”

—Professor Kirk Helliker, *Rhodes University*, *South Africa*

“Nearly 70 years after Elizabeth Colson and Ted Scudder began their pioneering research on the social and environmental impacts associated with the construction of the Kariba dam, Joshua Matanzima presents us with a 21st century sequel. In rich ethnographic detail, the author tells the stories of the people whose lives are interlinked with this megastructure and its reservoir lake. Of particular interest is the chapter on religious aspects of Lake Kariba, a topic that has received very little academic attention thus far. An important contribution, of interest to any researcher focusing on the past, present and future of large dams.”

—Dr Christopher Schulz, *University of St Andrews*, *UK*

“This well-researched, innovative study is a timely and needed contribution to the history of the Zambezi and the ways in which humans have been interacting with waterscapes more generally.”

—Professor Julia Tischler, *University of Basel*, author of *Light and Power for a Multiracial Nation. The Kariba Dam Scheme in the Central African Federation*

“Matanzima has deployed concepts of materiality, precarity and index of power to unpack the complex ways people self-position and pursue diverse livelihood options in the Lake. In the main, *The Materiality of Lake Kariba* recasts the angle of analysis from the predictable and common interrogations of dam induced displacements on marginal communities by focalizing precarious livelihoods, human-wildlife conflicts, identity formations and religious activities around the man-made Kariba hydro-spatiality.”

—Dr Terence M. Mashingaidze, *Midlands State University*

“The book “Materiality of Lake Kariba” presents a detailed account of people living next to, depending on, and being affected by Kariba Lake, the main man-made reservoir along the Zambezi River Basin. The book discusses in depth how, despite the potential the Lake represents for socio-economic development, quality of life of populations in rural areas continues being precarious. A recommended reading for those interested in the complex relationships between humans, their needs and beliefs, and the natural resources on which they depend.”

—Professor Cecilia Tortajada, *University of Glasgow, Scotland.*  
*Editor in Chief of the International Journal of Water Resources Development*

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Joshua Matanzima   
Centre for Social Responsibility in Mining (CSR/M)  
The University of Queensland  
Brisbane, QLD, Australia

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*For*  
*Thayer 'Ted' Scudder (My mentor)*  
*And*  
*Kalulu Chisenga (my late maternal grandfather)*

# Foreword

This book, *The Materiality of Lake Kariba: Water, Livelihoods, Belonging and Conservation* is a scrupulously researched and multifaceted text that is essential reading for those interested in human-nature relations and in the everyday relationships between communities and state regulated waterscapes. Lake Kariba is a site of daily struggles, contestations and even tactical alliances by people who make different claims to its waters and resources. This text which unpacks the varied ways waterscapes influence people's livelihoods, identities and spirituality had a justifiably long gestation period. Joshua Matanzima, an accomplished anthropologist with deep academic knowledge and intricate personal experiences of Lake Kariba and its vicinities, spent five years observing waterscape-related activities and interviewing different categories of people that circulated, worked and struggled to eke out sustainable livelihoods around the Lake. This knowledge is supplemented by his childhood memories and experiences of growing up along this dam.

The erstwhile colonial Rhodesian government spearheaded the Kariba dam project in the 1950s for the singular purpose of generating electricity to spur economic development in the Central African Federation. Thus, from its genesis the Kariba dam was not designed to benefit the local Tonga and Korekore communities. Contrary to the unidimensional foundations of the Kariba dam, the emerging waterscape or lake evolved over the years into a multi-purpose socio-economic zone that sustains

diverse but interrelated pursuits such as commercial fishing, artisanal fishing, sport fishing, tourism and water transport. The vast Kariba waterscape is also a highway and a conduit for illicit trade between Zambia and Zimbabwe. Lake Kariba propels a sub-regional economy that entangles legal and illegal fishermen, fishmongers, corrupt state law enforcement agents, game wardens, commercial sex workers, smugglers and poachers. Matanzima intricately shows the alliances and tensions between these diverse actors.

Oftentimes, large waterscapes are contested sites of exclusionary resource access and power-laden resource governance regimes. During the colonial interlude, white conservationists and aligned fishing interests introduced racist water policies that minimised Africans' access to the Kariba waterscape and all its affordances. Although the country's power dynamics and racialised environmental management policies changed after independence, Lake Kariba still has a wide array of resource gate keepers that include game rangers, animal conservation non-governmental organizations, as well as army and police officers. Ordinary people deploy various strategies for negotiating and overcoming their constricted access to such state-controlled spaces and resources. Contraband smugglers along the Zimbabwe and Zambia border covered by the waters of Kariba often bribe security personnel to enable them passage illegally and avoid arrests.

Matanzima has deployed concepts of materiality, precarity and indexes of power to unpack the complex ways people self-position and pursue diverse livelihood options in the Lake. In the main, *The Materiality of Lake Kariba* recasts the angle of analysis from the predictable and common interrogations of dam induced displacements on marginal communities by focalising precarious livelihoods, human-wildlife conflicts, identity formations and religious activities around the man-made Kariba hydro-spatiality. Matanzima also explores how Lake Kariba morphed over time into a revered religious site for some of the people in the surrounding communities. Many of these people and their chiefs believe the Lake could be the lair of some sacred spirits. When confronted by drought, low fish yields or any other communal misfortunes, different chiefs and their people take to the Lake to appease what they perceive to be neglect by their gods.



Finally, *The Materiality of Lake Kariba* is a rigorously researched and accessible text that sensitively interrogates precarious livelihoods around the Lake. It is both an excellent intervention and a complement to Zimbabwean and sub-Saharan African studies on landscapes, human-wildlife conflicts, resource governance, dam induced displacements, gender and livelihoods. It is essential reading for historians, anthropologists, waterscape managers, human geographers, theologians, rural development planners and even ecologists.

History and International Studies  
Department  
Midlands State University  
Gweru, Zimbabwe

Terence M. Mashingaidze

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I would also like to thank Professor Kirk Helliker who has been a good mentor to me since 2018 and introduced me to the world of publishing books. I have also benefitted a lot from his intensive knowledge about Zimbabwean society and politics (which is also my field site). He has commented on many of my publications including this book. My PhD supervisors Brooke Daley Wilmsen, Nick Herriman and Tom McNamara read parts of this book and gave me critical feedback. The PhD thesis was

nominated for the Nancy Millis Medal, awarded to outstanding theses deemed to be in the top 5% each year at La Trobe University, Australia. I also want to thank my colleagues and friends including Sally Babidge, Jamie Alexander, Nicholas Nyachega, and Rodney Muringai who read drafts of different parts of this book and sent me constructive feedback. My previous co-authors on several publications, Umali Saidi, Patience Chadambuka, Ivan Marowa and Tamuka Nhiwatiwa also played a significant role in my scholarship and intellectual growth. Sonja Braisler and Jamie Alexander both based in South Africa copyedited the book. Jamie Alexander did not only proof-read the book, but also sent me very critical and constructive comments as she is an intellectual and quite knowledgeable on the subject matter.

The University of Zimbabwe Lake Kariba Research Station and its staff, especially the acting director Professor Tamuka Nhiwatiwa approved and funded some of the fieldwork activities in Kariba town on which some of the data presented in this book is based. Some information is based on data collected when I was a Master and Doctoral student at Rhodes University (in 2017–2018) and La Trobe University (from 2020 to 2023) respectively. Ethics approval for conducting research was obtained from these universities at different times. Much of this book was written when I was working at the University of Queensland's Sustainable Minerals Institute (SMI). I thank the institute for giving me a desk and an office where I worked from intermittently.

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## About the Author

**Joshua Matanzima** (PhD) is a historian and anthropologist who carries out interdisciplinary research on the interactions between humans and their surrounding physical environments. At the time of writing this book, he was Research Officer at the University of Queensland, and Research Fellow (sessional) at the Australian Rivers Institute at Griffith University in Australia. He researches and writes about how development projects including the construction of infrastructure, conservation, mining and energy transition projects intersect with people's connections to the environment. He is particularly interested in the materiality of the landscapes, that is how material objects of the environment shape anthropogenic activities both temporally and spatially. He has carried out this research in relation to the affordances of water bodies, water creatures, graves, sacred mountains, rocks and islands. He has carried out fieldwork in different parts of southern Africa and the Asia-Pacific. His works appear in high impact factor journals such as *Oryx*, *Water International*, *Human-Wildlife Interactions* (HWI), *International Journal of Water Resources Development*, *Journal of Southern African Studies* (JSAS) and *Journal of Asian and African Studies* (JAAS). He has edited several books including *Livelihoods of Ethnic Minorities in Rural Zimbabwe* (2022); *Lived Experiences of Borderland Communities in Zimbabwe* (2023); and *Tonga Livelihoods in Rural Zimbabwe* (2023).

# Abbreviations

AIDs	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
BT	Basilwizi Trust
CAMPFIRE	Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources
CIOs	Central Intelligence Officers
COVID	Coronavirus Disease
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
DA	District Administrator
DDF	District Development Fund
FAO	Food Agriculture Organisation
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FGR	First Generation Resettlers
FPIC	Free, Prior and Informed Consent
FSF	Four Stage Framework
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNU	Government of National Unity
HHC	Human-Human Conflicts
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HWC	Human Wildlife Conflict
MDC	Movement for Democratic Change
MP	Member of Parliament
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
NRDC	Nyaminyami Rural District Council

RTGS	Real Time Gross Settlement
TV	Television
UK	United Kingdom
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
USD	United States Dollar
WCA	Wildlife Conservation Action
ZANLA	Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army
ZANU PF	Zimbabwe African National Union—Patriotic Front
ZAPU	Zimbabwe African People's Union
ZIMRA	Zimbabwe Revenue Authority
ZIPRA	Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army
ZPCS	Zimbabwe Prisons and Correctional Services
ZPWMA	Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authority
ZRA	Zambezi River Authority
ZRP	Zimbabwe Republic Police
ZTA	Zimbabwe Tourism Authority



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# 1

## Introduction: Materiality and Research Approach

### Introduction

*Hesi Joshua, Wambonzwawo here zvandanzwa. Haaa zvakaoma. Hanzi mukadzi wa Fortune abatwa neNgwena ku Green water. Zvanzi haasati aonekwa.* (Hi Joshua, did you hear about the news I have just received? It's sad. Fortune's wife has been attacked by a crocodile at Green Water [a fishing site]. She hasn't been found yet.)

It was in early October 2018, when I received the above message from my friend who was in Kariba at the time. I was staying in Grahamstown (Makhanda), South Africa (where I was studying a Master's Degree). She was notifying me about a sad incident in which my brother's wife had been attacked by a crocodile while fishing.<sup>1</sup> When she sent the message, the crocodile had dragged the victim into the deep water already; and I knew that there were no chances of her surviving such a horrific attack. I was emotionally impacted and in tears. The victim had three children with my brother. The incident significantly altered the lives of both my brother and the children. The children migrated to Hurungwe rural areas

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<sup>1</sup> My brother died when I was finalising the writing of this book project on 7 July 2023.

where their maternal grandmother lived. Children who had been used to urban life had to adapt to rural life overnight. Their living conditions in the rural areas were pitiful. Until his death in mid-2023, my brother survived with trauma caused by the death of his wife that he failed to recover from.

Human-crocodile conflict is an everyday happening at Lake Kariba and it alters the lives and livelihoods of people in many ways. Death, minor and serious injuries, as well as loss of fishing gear are incurred by the victims (Marowa et al., 2021; Matanzima et al., 2022; McGregor, 2005; Muringai et al., 2019; Ndhlovu et al., 2017).

My brother and wife were unemployed. For this reason, the wife occasionally fished in Lake Kariba to sustain the family. This was/is the case for many unemployed people living around the Lake. People depend on the Lake for survival. Unemployed people from other parts of Zimbabwe also depend on the Lake in different ways. People from as far as Harare and Bulawayo visit Lake Kariba as fish traders; and some rural dwellers from nearby rural areas in Hurungwe temporarily fish in the Lake. Lake Kariba significantly alters the lives of migrants and local people both temporarily and permanently. Mobilities, migration patterns and livelihoods are all contingent on the affordances of the Lake. Furthermore, the ways in which the Lake interacts with humans is both positive and negative. Though people are negatively impacted by Kariba dam, they continue living along it and interacting with it socio-economically. The serious socio-economic hardships in Zimbabwe push people to interact with it even if it is a dangerous waterscape (Nhiwatiwa & Matanzima, 2022; Ndhlovu et al., 2017). People have very limited options and opportunities in an economically crippled country (Gukurume, 2011, 2015).

This book critically assesses the interrelationship between Lake Kariba and humans from different angles. It discusses how different forms of anthropogenic activities—including tourism, conservation, fishing and religion—in the Lake are shaped by material objects of the Lake. It draws upon the materiality turn in anthropology and social construction of nature theories to discuss the symbiotic relations of people and this waterscape. The book demonstrates the ways in which the Kariba waterscape shaped/shapes the history, lives and livelihoods of those who occupy its margins; and, in turn, how humans shape the history and geography

of the Kariba waterscape. Narratives about dams are shaped significantly by people who reside near them as well as by migrants. The relationship between Lake Kariba and humans has been reciprocal since the late 1950s. Entangled in the people's narratives of the dam are fear, sacredness and danger. At the same time, migrants and tourists perceive the dam as aesthetic and a source of income and livelihood.

One of the most important themes recurrent in the entire book is the 'precarious livelihoods' of communities surrounding the Lake. The diverse groups, ethnicities and races residing along the Lake, in both rural and urban areas, depend on the Lake for livelihoods. The Lake sustains (and facilitates) a myriad of livelihoods from fishing to (il)legal cross-border trade to tourism/recreational activities amongst other activities. However, the nature of the Lake (its size, volume, littoral features and everyday waves) and conservation policies and regulations (from Lake Navigation and National Parks authorities) shape the occurrence of people's livelihoods both temporally and spatially. While sometimes livelihoods thrive, other times they do not. For instance, a series of waves might impact the fishermen's expeditions and often result in loss of fishing gear and lives. The size of the Lake also determines the nature of illegal cross-border trade occurring on it. It shapes, as well, the gender dimensions of illegal cross-border trade. All these factors and many others to be discussed in the book significantly induce the precarity of the livelihoods of the people. For these reasons, overall, livelihoods do not thrive; and the majority of the populations, especially in the rural areas and fishing camps, continue to survive under conditions of serious hunger and poverty.

The precarity concept concerns itself with the conditions of uncertainty and vulnerability of lives and livelihoods, and the multiplicity of factors that induce these precarities temporally and spatially (Butler, 2012; Nhiwatiwa & Matanzima, 2022; Matanzima & Nhiwatiwa, 2022; Standing, 2011; Wilmsen & Adjarney, 2020). Lake Kariba's characteristics (as well as local conservation rules) lead to the sustained uncertainties and vulnerability in the profitability of the livelihoods of the people. On many occasions, people do not realise any profits resulting in impoverishment. These precarities are often linked to the political-economic crises in Zimbabwe that commenced in the early 2000s which deepened the impoverishment of the people. Such a scenario is indicative of the

intersection of the materiality turn, precarity concept and livelihoods at Kariba. As shown in the book, the unpredictable (and changing) features of the Lake perpetuate precarious livelihoods. Therefore, this book connects the materiality turn with the precarity theoretical framework.

Another recurring theme is the interrelationship between communities, conservationists and the regulatory authorities of the Lake. Conservationists include the national parks, Africa Parks and other animal conservation-related non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Regulatory authorities include the Zambezi River Authority and Lake Navigation. Communities are always in conflict with conservationists regarding access to the Lake's resources, as they rely on the Lake for livelihoods. Over time, resources in the Lake have been depleting, and the conservationists engage in efforts to conserve these resources. This also relates to the abundant wildlife in the area, which regulatory authorities seek to preserve despite this wildlife (such as elephants and crocodiles) endangering the lives and livelihoods of people. The conflict of interest at Lake Kariba around wildlife in particular has been referred to in the scholarly literature as Human-Human Conflicts (HHC) about wildlife (Redpath et al., 2015; Jani et al., 2020). Studies have shown that HHC is a threat to conservation. When local communities feel that animals are prioritised over them or are excluded from animal conservation, they develop negative attitudes towards wildlife, resulting in poaching and retaliatory killings. To avoid such negative outcomes, the Zimbabwean government introduced the Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE) into many rural communities to promote the collaboration of conservationists and communities in conserving animals and promoting human-wildlife co-existence.<sup>2</sup>

This book also discusses conflicts over religious access to the Lake among different local groups. Contestations often emerge as one group seeks to dominate the others in accessing the reservoir. As shown throughout the book, the Lake is interpreted as sacred by the local people and some immigrants. It is believed to be the abode of sacred spirits and thus it must be approached with awe and respect. For this reason, several chieftaincies lay claims of entitlement to the Lake and its littoral and

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<sup>2</sup> I shall engage at depth with the successes and failures of the CAMPFIRE programme in Chap. 5.

narrate stories of attachment in ways that exclude ‘others’. Interestingly, these conflicts are often rooted in national-level politics in Zimbabwe and affiliation to the ruling party, Zimbabwe African National Union—Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF). Sometimes these conflicts arise during droughts when water levels drop, resulting in low-fish catches and decreased electricity generation in the country. Several chiefdoms want to appease in the Lake to resolve these problems; consequently, conflicts emerge over who has legitimacy to appease in the Lake. People assert cultural connections to the spirits in the Lake to justify propitiation. In this way, the materialities of the Lake interlink with conflicts and politics of belonging at Lake Kariba.

Another important strand that the book focuses on is the conflicts between local people and various regimes of authority (not just the national parks, but also Zimbabwe Republic Police and the army) over access to the Lake for different reasons. Existing literature mainly concentrates on the conflicts between people and conservationists; however, beyond this layer of conflict, there are other layers involving the police and the army. At Kariba, people enter into conflict with the army and the police mainly when it comes to illegal cross-border trade and smuggling. At the same time, the relationship between the people and the security forces is not always negative; sometimes the two antagonists work together. People often bribe the security officials to cross the border illegally and avoid apprehension.

Aside from conflicts among different actors, the book also details the economic significance of the Lake in terms of facilitating conservation, fishing, tourism and cross-border trade for many people. The role of the Lake and the challenges it presents to all these economic activities are critically discussed. Challenges include death and injuries that befall people when engaging in these socio-economic activities.

## **The Rationale for Writing About Kariba**

This book contributes significantly to our understanding of human-nature relations within the Southern African region and beyond by emphasising the materiality of the waterscape. Previous studies

predominantly focused on the social constructions of nature in the Zambezi Valley. For example, McGregor (2009) studied social constructions of the Zambezi River—asserted by different groups of people—over a 150-year period. Her book is more about the Zambezi River than the dam. As well, she conducted research in the Upper River regions of the Zambezi Valley, which is home to Tonga, Dombe and Leya. In contrast, in this book I focus on the lower river regions that were flooded by the dam—the area that mostly Tonga, Shangwe and Korekore people call home. Hughes (2006, 2010) provides a different side of the story to that of McGregor by focusing predominantly on Europeans' social constructions and notions of belonging to Lake Kariba. Therefore, this book gives a new angle of looking at the ways in which various groups interact with the Lake, with the waterscape being the determinant factor of praxis. As shown throughout the entire book, I focus more on what water does and less about what humans say about water. For this reason, I draw heavily on the materiality literature both past and current.

It is over a decade now since the last manuscript about Kariba was published and, since then, changes in the interactions of people and water have occurred in response to different socio-economic events including El-Nino, COVID-19 and serious political and economic crises. These events significantly shape nature-people interactions. Therefore, this empirically rich study, based on anecdotal and ethnographic evidence, provides an update on what is happening at Lake Kariba. Most scholarship on Lake Kariba has focused on the displacement of the Tonga and this is what the Lake is mostly known for in Zimbabwe and beyond; whereas the everyday life of those who interact with it is less understood. Therefore, this book provides data on how the waterscape shapes the lives of people both temporally and spatially through tourism, fishing, cross-border trade and religious activities. As well, I also refer to the ways in which people's narratives about the waterscape continue to shape its ongoing becoming.



## The Reservoir and Its Geography

This book focuses exclusively on the interrelationship between Lake Kariba and communities living along it in Zimbabwe. It is more about the reservoir, than the Zambezi River. Between 1955 and 1959, 10,000 workers built a hydroelectric dam across the Zambezi, Africa's fourth-longest river, draining the continent's fourth-largest basin. The result of such incredible work was a dam wall which is 420 feet in height and 1900 feet in length. Its base width is 105 feet and the crest width is 30 feet.<sup>3</sup> Over the next five years, water flooded 5580 square kilometres, creating what was then the largest reservoir in the world (see Figs. 1.1 and 1.2). Its shoreline is about 2600 kilometres long (Hughes, 2006). Kariba was the

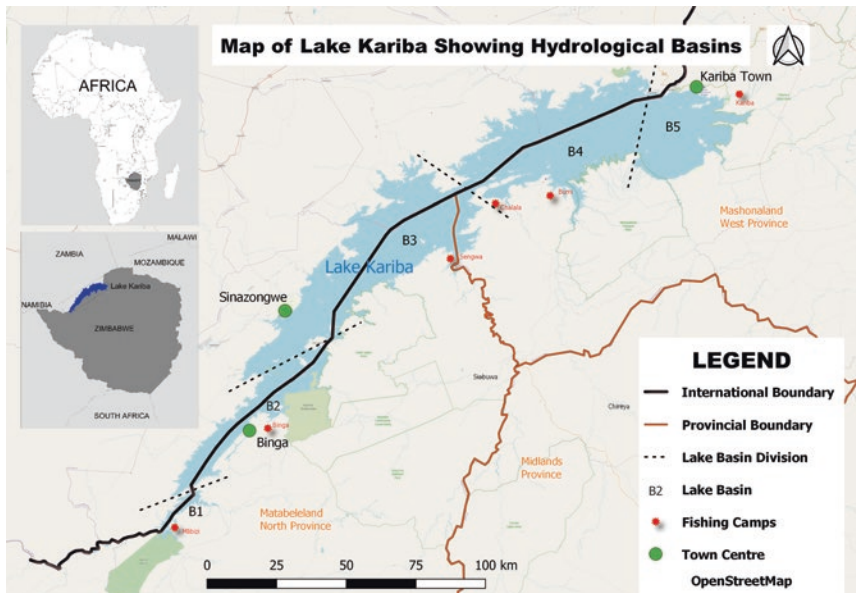


Fig. 1.1 Map showing the location of Lake Kariba. (Source: The Author)

<sup>3</sup> Animals (14 June 2023). The largest Man-Made Lake in the World is infested with Crocodiles and Hippos, a blog by Kaleigh Moore, Retrieved from: <https://a-z-animals.com/blog/the-largest-man-made-lake-in-the-world-is-infested-with-crocodiles-and-hippos/>



**Fig. 1.2** An aerial image of Lake Kariba. (Source: NASA: Landsat Image Gallery (December, 2022))

first mainstream dam built on the Zambezi River. Its construction was partially financed by the largest loan that the World Bank had given up until that time. It was built for the sole purpose of electricity generation, but over time it attracted the fisheries, recreation, tourism and conservation sectors. Kariba's construction drastically altered, and regularised, the Zambezi's natural regime (Scudder, 2005b).

Lake Kariba is located approximately 365 kilometres from Zimbabwe's capital city of Harare in a north-western direction. It is the largest fishery area in Zimbabwe and it significantly contributes to Zimbabwe's economy through fishery-related employment, enhancing rural livelihoods, food security and tourism (FAO, 2019). As Mhlanga and Nyikahadzoi (2017) highlight, the Lake is now a multi-purpose resource that supports economic activities such as commercial fishing, artisanal fishing, aquaculture, tourism and water transport.

Lake Kariba is divided into five basins, that is, Basins 1 to 5, as shown in Fig. 1.1. Kariba town occupies a small portion of Basin 5 of the Lake's shores. The remaining part of Basin 5 and the entire Basin 4 are under Nyaminyami Rural District. Basins 1 to 3 fall under Binga Rural District. Nyaminyami and Binga Rural Districts are occupied mainly by the Tonga (and Shangwe) people and are significantly marginalised and

underdeveloped. Studies have shown that the areas have poor transport and communication networks, dilapidated infrastructure, poor health and education facilities and services and very high rates of hunger and poverty (Dhodho, 2022; Matanzima & Helliker, 2023; Helliker & Matanzima, 2023; Muguti, 2023).

The Lake lies within latitudes 16° 28' to 18° E 04' S and longitudes 26° 42' to 29° E 03' E. The climate of Kariba is typically tropical and semi-arid. The annual mean air temperature ranges between 24.4 and 24.8 °C. The area is characterised by an average of 30.7 °C for maximum temperatures during the hot dry seasons, while the cold winter seasons have an average maximum temperature of 21.7 °C (Muchuru et al., 2015). Little or no rainfall is recorded during the winter periods between March and August. Average annual rainfall for Lake Kariba catchment is approximately 700 millimetres and high volumes of rainfall are recorded during the rainy season from October to March (Muringai et al., 2019).

## The Materiality of Water

Materiality and material culture studies have tended to focus their attention on things or objects, especially the things that people make. Scholarship has been less concerned with how materials behave, in favour of looking at how people use materials. The consideration of agency as a property of humans alone along with the belief that 'technology does nothing, except as implicated in the actions of human beings' (Giddens & Pierson, 1998, p. 82), fails to capture the real social ontologies. As well, as Gagné (2020) observed, development, environmental and climate change studies tend to objectify water through an epistemology that isolates nature from culture. Materiality studies, therefore, demonstrate a connection between humanity and the things that they make and use. In other words, it explores how items reflect their makers and owners, and therefore embody meanings (Attala, 2019; Ballestero, 2019; Barker, 2019; Fontein, 2015, 2022; Strang, 2004). This book is concerned mainly with the materiality of water: how it shapes human agency, and the assemblages of water and anthropogenic activities at Kariba. Put more precisely, it is about what water enables and necessitates as well as human

responses. Waterscapes and humans need not be studied separately because 'human-environmental engagements are mutually constitutive' (Strang, 2011, p. 1). Materiality is a significant shift from material determinism which fails to acknowledge the interrelationships between humans and non-humans, by favouring what the environment does to humans.

Such a weakness (i.e., overlooking non-human agency) also prevails within the earlier scholarship about Kariba (including Colson, 1971; Hughes, 2006, 2010; McGregor, 2003, 2008, 2009). David Hughes has written quite intensively and extensively about how Europeans (mostly whites) altered the Zambezi and made nature at Lake Kariba (Hughes, 2006, 2010). In his narratives, he heroised Europeans by describing how they managed to tame nature by building and establishing artificial belonging at Lake Kariba. Yet, during this time, the Lake was also notable for its materiality. At the same time, McGregor (2003, 2009) documents a history of claims to the Zambezi, focusing on the stretch of the river extending from the Victoria Falls downstream into Lake Kariba. Her book is a story of conflict over the changing landscape of the river, in which the tension between the Zambezi's 'river people' and more powerful others (the Shona, Ndebele and Europeans) has been central. By her own admission, McGregor recognises that her book

casts claim-makers as primary actors ..., [and] writes against much recent interest in the agency of the non-human world, which has involved various means of trying to equalise human and non-human actors and blur the categorical boundaries that separate them. (McGregor, 2009, p. 5)

While McGregor observed that 'the impact of human agency [was] disproportionate' (McGregor, 2009, p. 5), my own research has shown that non-human agency has been central in north-western Zimbabwe in terms of shaping local histories, cultures and livelihoods. However, it is not only the twenty-first-century writers who have ignored the materiality of Lake Kariba. Elizabeth Colson's seminal book, *The Social Consequences of Resettlement*, for instance, is less about the physical properties of the dam and more about the involuntary resettlement it induced (Colson, 1971). She problematises the resettlement scheme rather than

the dam itself. Beyond just inducing resettlement, the dam has over time shaped the everyday lives of those displaced by it and who still ‘occupy’ its ‘margins’. In Zimbabwe, Lake Kariba has remained a serious problem and unfinished business for those who occupy its margins.

Beyond any social dogmatic (and romanticised) views of looking at the material, the new materiality turn is mainly concerned with what ‘stuff’ does, to use Joost Fontein’s (2015) terminology. It maintains that all behaviour and any action emerge from a material turn, because there is no other ‘place’ where it can come from. Therefore, to grasp the principles and influences that sustain and generate activities on any scale, we must dissolve entities conceptually into their underpinning materiality to get to the core of how materials function, thereby realising our fundamental dependency on the substances that form and constantly recycle themselves through us (Attala, 2019). Strang (2004) argues that the immutable physical properties of water induce physical and cognitive responses such that we should think of water as possessing a certain material agency. Water is not a mere passive matter, but in its different qualities and quantities it interacts with humans in ways that the latter’s patterns of everyday life are produced and sustained over space and time. Water thus is not just a physical resource: in every cultural context, it is densely encoded with social, spiritual, political and environmental meanings, and these have a powerful effect upon patterns of water use and upon the relationships between water users and its suppliers (Strang, 2004). Furthermore, both the absence and abundance of water have played a crucial role in shaping African societies—for instance, when the rains fail, crops, animals and the communities that depend on them risk deprivation. When the rains come too hard or too long, the rising waters wash away crops, soil, homes and roads, thus threatening survival (Hoag, 2013).

The materiality turn illustrates how materials of the world shape, determine and enable humans to be ‘humans’ in the ways that they are (Attala, 2019). Such interrelationships are consistent with what is happening at Lake Kariba today, as clearly described in the chapters of this book. Lake Kariba’s waters in their different forms (qualities and quantities) both temporally and spatially significantly alter local people’s histories, everyday lives, politics of resource access, livelihoods, mobilities,

morbidity and mortality, articulations of landscape and belonging. Water is an all-dimensional factor. Water (together with its affordances) shapes how diverse groups of indigenous people and racial groups interact with each other, and even the ways in which water interacts with different groups is diverse. This book considers water's complexity and contributes to the materiality scholarship by showing the complex histories of affordances characterising Lake Kariba.

As shown in the book, before, during and after its creation, the Lake has shaped politics and racial interactions in temporal phases during colonialism and in the post-colonial eras. During the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland period, debates about the creation of the Lake threatened the very existence of the Federation and brought it to the brink of collapse. During the colonial period, white conservationist and fisheries interests resulted in the introduction of racist water policies that minimised blacks' access to this resource. During the liberation war, Lake Kariba was central in shaping war modalities of both guerrillas and Rhodesian Forces, and it also brought the marginalised Tonga communities into the spotlight of the colonial government. The Lake's affordances became even more pronounced in the post-independence era as we shall see in this book.

The agency of non-human 'things' is complex and sometimes it intertwines to determine human action. As Attala (2019) writes, the new materiality perspective is an inclusive approach to seeing the world (an ontology) as it looks at how materials behave together, so as to consider (human and animal) life from the perspective of material interactions. Thinking along these lines, this book looks at the entangled relationships between water and other creatures such as crocodiles and hippos to understand life and livelihoods at Lake Kariba. Water is endowed with many material properties that deepen the level of its affordances. Therefore, its affordances need to be discussed in relation to that of other creatures living in it. While people fear the water itself, the fear is worsened by their knowledge of the presence of crocodiles and hippos. Stories of human-wildlife conflict (HWC) at Kariba are common, and HWC is an everyday phenomenon (Jeke, 2014; Matanzima & Nhwatiwa, 2022; Marowa et al., 2021; Matanzima et al., 2022; Mhlanga, 2001).