

The Impact of Game Reserve Policy on the River BaSarwa/Bushmen of Botswana

Maitseo Bolaane

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to present a background discussion on the impact of game reserve policy on Bagaklabe, "River BaSarwa" (Bushmen/San people) in Eastern Ngamiland. The issues of local community ownership and its relationship to perceptions of what constitutes a rural development, and the problems of land rights, wildlife management and settlement, are important in the booming industry of the Okavango region. When the Moremi Game Reserve was created in 1963, the San of Khwaai were moved out and relocated in their present position, at the north gate of the Moremi Game Reserve. The question of access to traditional land and its resources has characterized the BaSarwa's response to the government's Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) initiative of 1995.

Keywords

Land rights; Game reserve policy; River BaSarwa/Bushmen; Botswana

The most striking features of the Ngamiland District are the wetland areas of the Okavango Delta. They set a sharp contrast to the generally arid lands of the rest of the country, which are dominated by the Kalahari sands. The Okavango River rises in the highlands of Angola and enters Ngamiland in the north-western part of Botswana via the Caprivi Strip (Scholz 1997). The Okavango Delta biodiversity is essential to the people who live around it and to the tourism industry. The countless islands that emerge from its waterways give rise to several diverse ecosystems which, in turn, form the resource base not only for large populations of African mammals, birds and other small animals but also for the livelihood of thousands of men and women inhabiting this area. The settlement and population patterns of the Okavango Delta people shows a concentration along stretches of permanent water and away from areas previously infested by the tsetse fly and trypanosomes. The

abundance of tsetse fly shielded the region against large-scale permanent settlement. Ethnically, Ngamiland presents a mosaic of cultures, each placing relative importance on different resources. The region consists of several ethnic groups, each with its own identity and language, apart from the BaTawana (Tswana group), the traditional rulers of Ngamiland. They are, for example, Bantu-speaking BaYei, HaMbukushu and Dixeriku (Bock 1993: 174–5; Larson 1970: 29–44; Larson 1992). The Okavango Delta has been under the political and administrative control of the BaTawana¹ since the early nineteenth century and they have been the dominant group in Ngamiland, over all other groups, including the BaKgalagadi. The BaTawana, however, have traditionally lived on the edges of the Delta, practising crop cultivation and large-scale pastoralism (Tlou 1985). Among the “subject” people of the Okavango are the earliest inhabitants of the area, San/BaSarwa² groups of people (Bugakhwe and //Anikhwe) often referred to as “River Bushmen or BaSarwa”. The Bugakhwe utilized both forest and riverine resources while the //Anekhwe mostly focused on riverine resources (Heinz 2001: 98–9). The BaSarwa settlements have been protected by their environment.

There is no universally accepted term for the earliest modern inhabitants of Southern Africa, the historically marginalized people of Khoesan-speaking³ origins. International scholarly work adopted the term *San* in the 1960s, but recently there has been partial reversion to *Bushmen* because *San* is also an imposed name and is not always a clear noun category. The government of Botswana still considers the use of this term derogatory and *BaSarwa* is used officially to refer to people of Bushman/San/Khoesan origin. Recently, Southern African San language, oral history and education specialists have challenged the use of the terms Bushman and San as discriminatory and negative (Penduka Declaration 2001: 1–8; Saugestad 2001: 14–16, 28–9). The standardization of names and of the Ju and Khoe languages is still subject to debate, and so in this paper the terms *Bugakhwe*, *BaSarwa* and *San* will be used interchangeably since the people of Khwaai (the focus study group) refer to themselves variously as Bugakhwe, San or BaSarwa.

Introduction

By the time the Moremi Park was founded in Botswana, it was not uncommon for indigenous people to be removed from African wildlife reserves and national parks. Carruthers (1989: 188–9; 1995: 43) describes this process in the Kruger National Park in South Africa during the 1930s and 1940s, and Ranger (1989) discusses the way in which officials changed their minds about allowing local settlement in the Matopos in Zimbabwe. In East Africa, several scholars (Brockington 2002; Hughes 2002; Homewood and Rodgers 1991) discuss the indigenous residents’ removal from the Kenyan/Tanzanian parks. To be sure, there had been exceptions to this policy of removal. The BaSarwa people were initially allowed to stay within the boundaries of the Central Kalahari Reserve (Silberbauer 1965, 1981). But in Moremi, BaSarwa communities were removed from the outset, despite the involvement of Kwere Seriri (a local BaSarwa chief) in assisting the parks foundation (see below).

BaSarwa have the distinction of being perceived and depicted as the most marginalized of all groups of people in Botswana. Like the Hadzabe of Tanzania (Madsen 2000) and Pygmies in Cameroon (Ngun 2001: 31–7), oppression, discrimination and dispossession have marked the BaSarwa people's history. Over the last two centuries, pressure on land from other ethnic farmers, conservationists and mining companies has cut off the BaSarwa from their traditional lands, and new occupants have been more successful in obtaining legally recognized ownership, a concept unknown in San/BaSarwa culture (Wily 1994: 6–19; Hitchcock 1996; Gordon 1999).⁴ Their political representation has been limited. As a result they have scarcely been visible on the political map of the Southern Africa region.

Nevertheless, concern about the status, and the political and economic position of the BaSarwa in Botswana has been expressed in numerous official and unofficial reports and writings, and at various conferences, seminars and gatherings, both national and international. The question of land, or “securing land rights for the BaSarwa”, has been identified as a critical component in programmes for uplifting and improving the position of the BaSarwa. The recent government-initiated resettlement of the BaSarwa outside the boundaries of the 581,730 km² Central Kalahari Game Reserve has attracted a lot of international debate (Good 1993; Hitchcock 1980, 1996; Erni 1997; Ng'ong'ola 1997: 1–26).⁵ It is within this context that the impact of the Moremi wildlife management area on the people of Khwaai in particular (both as village and as an area of country—see below) should be understood.

BaSarwa communities were settled in the area that became part of the Moremi Park, and the resources of this area had been central to their way of life. Yet they were perceived as nomadic—hence without fixed rights in land or an attachment to a particular area—by both the dominant Tswana and colonial officials. Yet the evidence presented here demonstrates that this perception was unjustified. It is interesting that even current maps of Botswana recognize this to a degree by retaining BaSarwa place names in this area (Republic of Botswana 1984; Stigand 1920; Tlou 1985: 40; Cowley 1969: 115; Roodt n.d.). The relationship of the BaSarwa people to the Okavango, and their mode of life there, has become all the more important in recent years because they are gradually asserting claims over the area.

Their memories about settlement form the next part of this paper, because these have become part of the ongoing debate. Specifically, the object is to understand the history of the Bugakhwe, or “River BaSarwa”, especially those now settled at Khwaai village, and their migration patterns and settlement history within the Okavango Delta. The paper then discusses the response of BaSarwa to the establishment of the Game Reserve, and finally it highlights its impact on the BaSarwa. I have drawn heavily on oral data to build this paper.

The BaSarwa Concept of Territoriality and their Occupation of the Okavango

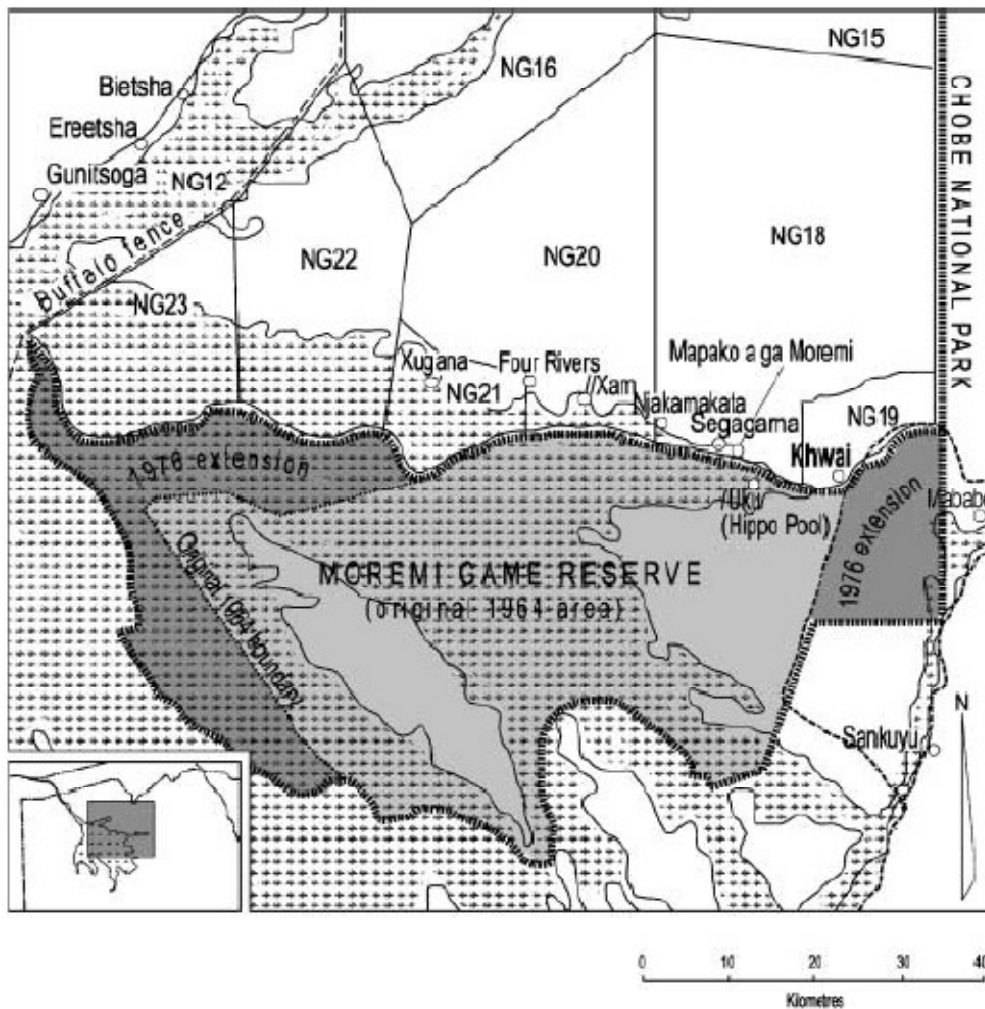
All the people I have spoken to, whatever their ethnic affiliation, have emphasized that the BaSarwa were the first in the land, that is (as is

commonly expressed), they were created by God first. The interviews show that the BaSarwa traditionally lived in bands composed of extended families that moved around following animals, and collecting veld foods. Those whose lives were associated with the sandveld (mostly Ts'exa groups of the Mababe Depression) congregated in a large village in summer, and dispersed as family units to waterholes in the winter, when there was not enough water to sustain a large village. The *BaSarwa ba noka* ("River BaSarwa") who lived around the rivers and islands of the swamps (//Anekhwe and many Bugakhwe) did not follow such a defined annual cycle, since they were unregulated by water shortages. Oral data show that the people of //Anekhwe of the swamp-land and of Mababe who identify themselves as Ts'exa ("Sand BaSarwa"), are the earliest inhabitants of this large territory under consideration. Both the Bugakhwe of Khwaai and the BaYei of Sankuyo state that they found the //Anekhwe, who have since disappeared from the swamps, and Ts'exa of Mababe when they arrived in the area.

Throughout my fieldwork (1997–2001), the San concept of territoriality has shown itself to be in conflict with that understood by other ethnic groups and even more by government officials and tourist operators. This conflict of perception is manifested in the history of the Moremi Game Reserve and the lack of knowledge about BaSarwa geographical locations in what my informants refer to as "Khwaai" (meaning Moremi Game Reserve and its vicinity).⁶ Some of the problems encountered today by the BaSarwa of Khwaai village are the result of a prolonged conflict over territory (Barnard 1998: 5–7; Taylor 2000; see also Bolaane fieldwork interviews, 1997–2001). To understand what the people of San origin say in interviews recorded in Khwaai, one has to constantly bear in mind that the area they talk about and claim as their territory is much larger than the village to which they have been confined over the last thirty odd years. It embraces large parts of the conservation areas known today as the Moremi Game Reserve and the Controlled Hunting and Wildlife Management Areas in addition to the area towards the "panhandle" of the Okavango Delta (see map 1).⁷

It is within this context that the concept of "old Khwaai" should be understood. Within this large territory there was little restriction on their mobility beyond what was imposed by the terrain, seasons and tsetse fly; therefore constant movement and seasonal migration characterized the life of these communities. Although the BaTawana imposed their rule on the BaSarwa, they did not interfere too greatly in their traditional social system, at least where it was not to their advantage to do so. Before the 1920s, BaTawana presence in the area west of Khwaai was largely through hunting parties in search of ivory and it was the BaSarwa who acted as guides for these expeditions, as they knew the land best. Specific individuals such as Seriri, father of Kwere, also acted as guides for tours of the region controlled by the BaTawana chieftainship. There is no evidence to suggest that the BaTawana coerced the BaSarwa into hunting elephant, and they were paid in kind with items such as clothes and blankets. However, subject groups such as the BaSarwa and BaYei were expected to surrender elephant tusk in their possession as *sehuba* (tribute) to the Tawana royalty. Symbolic tribute paid in form of precious skins from carnivores like lions and leopards, which were

Map 1



considered royal animals, reinforced Tawana kinship. Also, select portions of game meat such as breast of a duiker were presented to the paramount chief. Honey could also be paid as tribute to the chief. On some occasions in the past, the Khwaai, Mababe and Sankuyo people did not render hunting trophies as tribute but sold ivory and skins themselves to earn money and goods. The BaTawana lived mainly in one large central town, finally established at Maun in 1915. The dispersal of some subject groups in the remote areas of the Okavango helps to explain their relative independence. The riverine environment made regular communications especially difficult for the BaTawana who did not know how to use canoes to move among their subjects in these parts of Ngamiland (Tlou 1985; Larson 1992: 164). The BaTawana lords asserted their presence more strongly in the 1920s by building a kraal at “old Khwaai”, about 10 km west of where the present village is. This kraal, which enclosed houses that served as temporary residence for

royalty was built by regiments (that included BaSarwa) under the BaTswana chief Mathiba, who used to move around the whole region of Ngamiland and Chobe on hunting expeditions and collecting tax from subject groups.⁸

BaSarwa ideas of territoriality, e.g. of “old Khwaai”, although not tightly fixed, imply a claim to a certain area or piece of land and a claim to have full access to its resources. Heinz (1980, 2001), the anthropologist of different groups of BaSarwa in Botswana, has argued that the BaSarwa’s territoriality is intimately associated with their social organization. The band, consisting of a cluster, perhaps three or four, extended families, possesses land and all its natural resources such as game, veld food, firewood and water. The band identifies itself within a certain piece of land, well defined and limited in extent. Heinz notes that the BaSarwa traditionally move within the area they consider as their land, typically up to about 50 km. In the interviews, BaSarwa affirm they are not nomadic as portrayed in the literature.

The ecosystem shaped the size of territories and the distribution of social groups. Each band required a nutritional base. Their very existence depended on an intimate knowledge of the land and the capacity to use its resources. All band members were corporate owners with full access to all resources, even those who joined the group by marriage, adoption or as orphans. Richard Lee’s work concurs with Heinz’s analysis, and both suggest that the “right” to land is basic, because it is synonymous with the very means of existence (Heinz 1975: 78–85; Lee 1972, 1979). The Bugakhwe of Khwaai affirm they lived in small groups in the past and their elders were leaders of bands. “*Our elders and parents were leaders of bands. The leader settled family disputes and was highly respected. We didn’t call him Kgosi [chief], like you people do [BaTswana], we called him rra a rona [our father].*”⁹

The Bugakhwe moved to “old Khwaai” prior to the 1920s. The dates and sequence of migration as well as the order in which the various sites in “old Khwaai” were settled cannot yet be established with any degree of certainty, but it is clear that the migration involved different families moving in waves over an extended period of time. Some like Seriri (father of Kwere) are said to have moved in the nineteenth century and others in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s. The Bugakhwe say they moved for two reasons: first, maltreatment and oppression by their former neighbours, the BaKgalagadi, who, as they put it, wanted to enslave the Bugakhwe, and second, the prevalence in the previous area (Gudigwa/Gabamukuni area) of the tsetse fly disease (trypanosomiasis) which caused a heavy death toll. Clientship, or serfdom, called locally *bothanka* or *bolata* was common in Botswana (Tlou 1985: 51–62) but the BaKgalagadi are remembered for the brutal manner in which they coerced BaSarwa labour and kidnapped women and children.¹⁰ Bugakhwe informants bristled with anger when recounting how their families had been treated in the past. Bugakhwe bands moved to the north-eastern fringe of the Okavango Delta along the Khwaai River. Permanent settlements were often attached to pools.

Like many of the Khwaai elders during the interview, the illiterate Amos used a stick to draw and map the Bugakhwe migration and settlement on the ground, indicating how people filtered down the Delta and locating people’s movement along the Thaoghe and Khwaai Rivers.

Prominent among the waves of migrants was the Seriri family. Kwere Seriri, who has been mentioned earlier, was born about 1926, at the Bodumatau flood plain,¹¹ an island further into what is now the Park, and exhibited strong leadership qualities from an early age. He was recognized as a leader by the community long before he was formally installed as a *Kgosi* (chief) of Khwaai village, when the concept of chieftainship developed among the BaSarwa of this area. Kwere's niece describes her uncle as

*“well-known by the BaTawana; a man who enjoyed wandering in the wilderness [mo dikgweng] because his parents conceived him in the wilderness, so BaTawana who came to know him, first knew his father Seriri, and came to know Kwere as well. BaTawana heard about Seriri while in their areas—those who heard about him left their areas and came here for hunting purposes. Seriri would take this hunting expedition and show them areas where they would find plenty of game. Then after hunting mission these people would tell others about their hunting expedition and the man they met, the man being Seriri. This is how Seriri came to be known by the BaTawana. Seriri had a rifle. My uncle, Kwere Seriri inherited this area after the death of his father—this is Khwaai/Xainga/Khweega.”*¹²

When the Reserve boundaries were being plotted in April 1963 Kwere and his village were occupying an island between Dombo and Oyi and had to be resettled on Khwaai north bank (near the Reserve's north gate).

BaSarwa Perceptions and Memories of Moremi's Foundation

The Bugakhwe of Khwaai played a role in the establishment of Moremi Game Reserve, but have yet to be given recognition for this. Their removal from the park was a sacrifice they were persuaded to make in order to secure this area for wildlife, which is today the national assets of Botswana. Although other communities lost some access to wildlife for hunting, there is no doubt that the BaSarwa lost the most in the foundation of the park. This lack of recognition is evident in other areas. Over the years the Department of Wildlife and National Parks have tended to depend on the BaSarwa's knowledge of animals and employed them temporarily as guides and resource people. This was confirmed in an interview with one of the game guards based at the wildlife camp of northern Moremi gate: *“When our new recruits come out of a theoretical training in Maun, they are brought in to areas such as Khwaai, and Bugakhwe are temporarily employed to teach them animal habits, various kinds of game, how different animals behave, and how to protect oneself against dangerous animals like buffalo, lions.”*¹³ Interestingly, after acquiring such knowledge officials tend to ignore their “teachers” (BaSarwa). Another example of the lack of recognition is the herbarium collection of the late Pete Smith, who acknowledged his debt to Kwere. The collection was donated in his name to the University of Botswana for research at the Harry Oppenheimer Okavango Research Centre, Maun, while there is no collection in the name of Kwere.

The details of BaSarwa involvement as guides and assistants to some of those involved in establishing the park have generated some written records, but there are few which directly comment on Kwere Seriri's motivation or

debates within the BaSarwa community about the park. My interview research with the Bugakhwe of Khwaai throws some light on this but there are competing versions and emphases in BaSarwa memory. It is difficult to separate present politics and attitudes to the park from memories of the BaSarwa migration and their exclusion from the park. I was not able to interview Kwere himself, who died in November 1997.¹⁴

What does seem clear is that Kwere was central to these events. Through his interactions with outsiders, he was regarded as the intermediary. Because of the authority he had achieved, legitimized in the wider power structures under which the BaSarwa lived, his people chose to follow him. Thus he came to be regarded as a chief. Negotiations for the removal from the reserve were done through Kwere. From the Xuku floodplains (Hippo pool) the Bugakhwe were transported (in the early 1960s) by the founder of the Khwai River Lodge, Harry Selby, to the Segagame pool site. A year after the creation of the park they were moved for the second time when the boundaries of the Reserve were extended. This time they were asked to cross the Khwaai river, which now forms the boundary line between the Reserve and the village. In the process they lost access to all resources inside the Reserve.

The primary concern of the Delta BaSarwa whom I interviewed is the way that their traditional access to the land and its resources has been restricted by the park and the burgeoning tourism industry. They lament the loss of an area that has become a lucrative resource for the government of Botswana, not only in tourist fees from the Game Reserve, but also in tourism-related activities in the wildlife areas around the Reserve. The BaSarwa feel they have been discriminated against, especially in access to land, which has since been leased to white operators, generating a large amount of money for the government.¹⁵ Ironically, participation in the cash economy stimulated by tourism has not been difficult for many BaSarwa in the region. They have been able to earn money and goods by working in the many lodges in the region. Young BaSarwa who find their way through formal education are not usually attracted to the city lights but prefer instead to look for jobs related to wildlife utilization and the tourism industry. The BaSarwa have engaged in many ways with tourism operators, tourists, and the many local faces of the government (Wildlife Department, District Council, Rural Development Programme, Land Board, Botswana Defence Force), and these experiences influence their perception of the history of Moremi.

From the interviews conducted among local communities the sequence and details of steps taken towards the establishment of the Moremi Game Reserve were clear. To the BaSarwa of Khwaai, conservation policies brought severe restrictions on access to land and their traditional mode of life. They argued, in particular, that relocating their families out of Moremi was detaching them from natural resources. The history of Moremi is thus used to assert land rights. There is a bond to the land and there is economic value in it. The BaSarwa articulate this history and speak with a gleam of nostalgia in their eyes as they define and seek an economic and social status within the broader Botswana society. Their articulation of history through an ethnic discourse is evident in a desire to project a specific identity among the communities of Mababe and Khwaai villages. This identity is that of *BoSarwa* (being Sarwa).

The Bugakhwe generation that traces its origins to the park feels it has been disadvantaged by the movement from the Xuku flood plains to make way for the park. This group argues that the BaTawana authority decided on their own, in their Maun township, in the absence of the BaSarwa, to create a park. The Tawana Tribal Administration and the Fauna Society's consultation process in establishing a game park in the Okavango Delta is also questioned by the interviews with some BaYei elders of Sankuyo, who like the BaSarwa express a minority view:

*"The idea of the game reserve was formulated in Maun kgotla and we in Sankuyo and the Khwaai people were not necessarily part of it. Remember, historically BaTawana administrators have not always looked at land rights of other people. They had control over this land. Moremi was an area they utilized prior to the creation of the park."*¹⁶

Those who hold this view feel they were not consulted properly, "they came here, got some of our elders from Sankuyo to help in demarcation of boundary lines of this park", pointing towards the Moremi Game Reserve.¹⁷ The creation of the park was viewed by some subject groups as "a source of tribute to Kgosi Moremi [Palane]",¹⁸ hence groups such as the Bugakhwe of Khwaai had to make way for the establishment of a park. They therefore cannot be seen as active participants in the creation of the park. They interpret the foundation of Moremi as enforced alienation from their land and as part of a pattern of displacement and oppression.

Lesie Kwere (niece of Kwere Seriri) recalled:

*"While we were here in the bush, in our land, the BaTawana Tribal Authority and Fauna [Ngamiland Fauna Society] came with a decision that they wanted to protect/preserve our wildlife, to create a game reserve. We were told if we do not reserve land to protect wildlife we were likely to face the problem faced by other African countries. A white man, Robert Kay, talked about foreign safari companies who caused a lot of game destruction in countries like Kenya, already approaching our country, coming to shoot and make money out of them. The main issue was to conserve wild animals for posterity because masafari [safari companies] threatened their existence. The people who were in the forefront of this proposal were Jack Ramsden, Isaac Tudor, John Benn and the grey-haired Montsho Mogalakwe. There was also Gaselemogwe Segadimo, also Tawana. The secretary of the District Commissioner's office accompanied them. They came to Kwere's place Xuku, where there were many animals and introduced the idea of protecting wildlife. They suggested dividing this area into two parts, the western part of Khwaai River would be protected for the Xuku wildlife and the other side would be a place where they would create employment for us BaSarwa."*¹⁹

The elders agreed to this proposal since they were enticed by the idea of employment opportunities in the area.

Keamogetswe Kwere (sister of Lesie, see above) gives a similar synopsis:

"BaTawana and a white man called Robert Kay, nicknamed Rra tau [father of lions] came to Xuku. They said, told us their main interest was to protect the

wildlife. Kwere's response was that he does not have the powers to guarantee his wishes because the land belonged to chiefs Moremi and Mathiba—that he was only a guard or a caretaker. He would therefore refer them back to the Regent, to place their request. So Isaac Tudor, Jack Ramsden, Peter Smith, Gas Segadimo and Robert went back to report to Pulane Moremi. The delegation later came back to brief Kwere about what had been discussed in Maun. So Kwere showed them the land and asked them to choose. They told him they would like to start with where he was, Xuku.”²⁰

In this case, the emphasis is less on employment, and more on Kwere's acknowledgement of BaTawana political authority. He had acquired his position and authority through service, and a cautious role in respect of authorities. Keamogetswe directly interpreted events in this light in respect of the second move: “still Kwere Seriri did not resist the Fauna Conservation Society. We agreed to move not because we were happy to move but were rather scared of the law. Kwere thought the law [molao] had decided and therefore we couldn't disagree with them. We lacked knowledge that we could refuse as we do at the moment”. At that stage, the BaSarwa were isolated from outside assistance.

It is clear from the accounts given above that there were two main visits made by the executive of the Fauna Conservation Society of Ngamiland and representatives of Tawana tribal authority at the beginning, mainly to explain to Kwere about the idea of the creation of a park. This is confirmed by an interview with Pete Smith, one of the members of the delegation, which later conveyed their discussion with Kwere at the Maun *kgotla* meeting. The members of the Fauna Society and the BaSarwa, on the other hand, had their different way of understanding the consultation process. Isaac Tudor and the Tawana nobility insist they “did not force BaSarwa of Khwaai out of the park area” but equally confirm that the first time they talked to Kwere “at the fire place in Xuku, presenting our proposal, he was suspicious for fear that they were going to lose their rights. But they agreed to move, however reluctant they were, they appreciated the importance of setting land aside as game breeding ground”.²¹ Segadimo affirms that “at first, Kwere wanted to be given a chance to think. In the end he agreed to move”.²²

Those who are critical of the discussions held between Kwere and the members of the Fauna Conservation Society of Ngamiland and the representative of Tawana tribal administration maintain that:

“Kwere was not aware that Fauna Society meant that he would later have to leave Xuku. He understood them as saying, they conserve the area so that no hunting is done within the Xuku area, but would be done outside the area. He did not know that it meant he should move completely out of the area, otherwise he would not have allowed the project to take off. He was not aware that he was being evacuated from the area completely.”²³

The emphasis in this version is that Kwere misunderstood the implications of the proposals. On a similar note, another informant argues that he doesn't think that “they even had a long conversation or clear negotiations. The Tawana Tribal Authority was there at the time of introducing the idea of the Game Reserve to the BaSarwa. We were not really following the proposal but only to understand later on. We were moved to Segagama on Selby's truck to give way to the park”, affirmed Keamogetswe.

Keamogetswe Kwere thought that it was more than a misunderstanding: “My uncle was cheated by Fauna Society. No one could read and write at that time amongst Bugakhwe. If Kwere was literate, he could have written down our agreement and this could have been a testimony [bosupi] for our young generation.”

Then there was the direct threat of force. Joseph Sango affirms that Kwere was further warned that “if he dares cross the river to the park side, they would come back to move him again”.²⁴ They also raise an issue of not having been compensated for their huts, which were set on fire prior to their movement from Xuku. This is viewed by some members of the community as “forced removal”. To those who do not appreciate the BaSarwa modes of shelter, BaSarwa did not have proper houses but beehive shelters, and therefore could be moved easily. Lesie Kwere spoke of the second move in this context:

“When they came to us for the second time they told us that they were going to move us again. We had spent a year at Segagama. On the second year they told us to move out of the place because they had expanded the park to where we were. We were told to cross the river and that this river would be a boundary [molelwane] between the people and the park. We moved again carrying our belongings, this time not transported by Selby. When we settled here in new Khwaai, we settled in two separate camps, some came here (Kwere’s ward) and some like families of Lekgoa and Amos were there beyond Khwaai no. 2 along the road to the Game Trackers’ lodge. It was only later that the two merged to form the current Khwaai village.”

The Fauna Conservation Society assured the Bugakhwe that they would not be moved again in future. However, when the management of the Game Reserve was transferred to the Department of Wildlife and National Parks in 1979, the government considered relocating them completely from the wildlife area. The choice was between moving to Mababe or Sankuyo, thus relocating away from the general area altogether. This they adamantly refused to do on the grounds that the area of Khwaai was “their” territory. This seems to be the reason why the village has not been gazetted—despite the local authority having recognized the *kgotla* and the village development committee within NG19 (see map 1) where the village is currently located. Part of NG19 is leased by government to three lodges as a photographic safari area, and this partly explains the problem of gazetting Khwaai. This means that the village cannot officially be provided with government facilities, such as water reticulation, schools and clinics, through the Remote Area Dweller Programme (Bolaane 2000).

Joseph Sango remembered that as soon as the park was established there was law enforcement:

“1964 brought changes and problems started, they took all our rights over wildlife. In 1969, during Seretse Khama’s government, we were told we can only have access to wildlife through paper [special game licence], this paper gave 10 kudu, 10 duiker, 10 wild pig, 10 impala, etc. for a whole year of subsistence. We were also told not to use traps nor wire but could use digwele [ropes] or rifles for hunting. We were told some hunting methods subjected animals to pain. Then the 1970s we saw

Ramsden, the Game Warden, paying visits to our homestead, pretending to be our friend while he was assessing poaching. This led to more changes after his report that BaSarwa were finishing wild animals. The use of ropes for hunting was forbidden. Ready-made laws were imposed on us."²⁵

Following the creation of the Moremi he, and other young BaSarwa men, left the area to seek employment in Francistown and elsewhere. He remembers the events of the 1960s and 1970s as part of a continuous process of exclusion. "*The animals now belong to the government, the trees, and all the land. We have to get paper to cut a tree down, and these things burden us.*"

They have since developed new survival strategies in order to be able to stay on in this area. Aside from limited job opportunities within the tourist industry, the people of Khwaai were selling thatching grass to the lodges as well as baskets and other curios to tourists. Towards the end of the 1990s, Community-based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM; Botswana Government 1986, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1998) opened up a major new strategy to improve their livelihoods. The Khwaai community has since started their own wildlife-based project in NG18 (see map 1), an area that falls within the Bugakhwe mapping of "old Khwaai". Their hunting and photographic safari camp is situated within the riverine area of Khwaai. The potential of this development, to some degree recognizing them as custodians of land and natural resources, is significant to the BaSarwa. NG-20, which also used to be part of "old Khwaai" has also been leased for private safari hunting. When CBNRM was introduced, special game licences for the BaSarwa were replaced by the quota system, which entitles communities in the wildlife management areas like Sankuyu, Mababe and Khwaai to manage and utilize wildlife for their benefit (Painter 1995; Bolaane 2000).

Mention has been made of the pattern of migration from Bietsa Gudikwa/Gabamukuni region (map 1) to "old Khwaai".²⁶ This pattern is more or less reflected in that of settlement in Khwaai village. When the Bugakhwe families moved from the park area, they did not crowd as a big group but maintained a rather traditional lifestyle in separate bands. The earliest families to arrive see themselves as "owners" of the territory and live in the central parts of what is loosely referred to as Khwaai I, that is, west of the main road passing through the village of Khwaai (to the Chobe National Park). The Kwere Seriri family is probably the most prominent of this group. To the east of the main road is Khwaai II including the Amos and Sango extended families. While I and II are related to each other and have common history, those that live in Khwaai III, that is towards the west of the village, between Khwaai I and the Tsaro Game Lodge area, are mainly the later arrivals.

The members of Khwaai III are often singled out as "visitors" or "outsiders" irrespective of their Bugakhwe ethnicity, partly because they came from Gudigwa, and even the Caprivi Strip, long after the establishment of "new Khwaai".²⁷ They were attracted by employment opportunities through safari companies and a market for baskets. The members of Khwaai III have little representation on either the Village Development Committee or the Khwaai Community Trust Development. The other small group of people who arrived recently to settle in Khwaai are of Yei origin, also attracted by

employment and business opportunities. Some of them, who came from villages of Sankuyo and Shorobe, have set up small kiosks in Khwaai. This factor helps to explain the way in which various members of the Khwaai community perceive their history. The original Bugakhwe migrants, who were pressing for their rights when I interviewed them, were also resisting incorporation of new immigrant groups that might achieve entitlement to the resources or become a threat to the demographic carrying capacity of the territory.

The earliest families perceive the history of Khwaai as more or less a continuation of the history of their original homeland and emphasize the migration/settlement story and their “leadership” role in it. Among them are a number of individuals (at the time of my fieldwork) who consider themselves as “enlightened” by virtue of having travelled and worked for varying lengths of time outside the “old Khwaai” territory.²⁸ As a group they are shrewd and vociferous, and articulate a perception of local history that may be said to have a political function in the sense that it enables them to portray “old Khwaai” as the only homeland the community ever had and the only territory the Bugakhwe have ever “owned”. Divisions seem to have become more pronounced with the inflow of money from tourist-related activities. This is further demonstrated by the exclusive deed of trust Khwaai produced when organizing itself into a “Sarwa-only” Community-based Organization (CBO) in 1998. For the time being, their request for the land lease of NG18 from the Tawana Land Board and wildlife quota and photographic rights from the Department of Wildlife and National Parks was not granted (Bolaane 2000: 78–96). The Tawana tribal land administration and government would not allow a deed of trust which excluded non-BaSarwa households resident in Khwaai. The government officials affirmed that under the Botswana Constitution, “everybody is Motswana [citizen of Botswana] and therefore, “all communities, found in the adjacent areas of a park were entitled to become members of a CBO”²⁹ to enable households to derive benefits from a wildlife-based enterprise development. The Khwaai community was allowed to enter into a joint agreement with safari companies only after amending their constitution (Bell 2000).

Such a portrayal of history, while it clearly includes strong memories of the period up to the 1960s, appears to have been crafted partly to counteract the view, articulated by some of the players in the conservationist, tourist and wildlife industries, that the Bugakhwe as a group came to the area only recently, attracted by the opportunities that the industry offered. While some have come to the village since the early 1960s, these families also had more distant roots in “old Khwaai”, and they are not the majority.

In broad terms, wildlife and tourism interests tend to portray this part of the Okavango Delta as relatively unoccupied wilderness where “Nature” rules supreme. This strategy is economically important, since it denies the legitimacy of any claim to ancestral rights made by the BaSarwa. Although the local non-BaSarwa communities are more ready to recognize the primacy of BaSarwa settlements in the area and may even acknowledge the social and economic ties of the past, control of access to the land has become increasingly more important to them. For them, the issue of the “permanency” of settlement rather than antiquity of occupation has assumed greater

rhetorical significance. Once again, the BaSarwa are disadvantaged in this debate since they are perceived as having been naturally nomadic and so could be said to have never really settled anywhere.

Clearly, the role of history in the present has social and ideological significance within the area. Different communities have different perceptions of the past, and for economic reasons as much as any other, are more likely to favour certain interpretations of historical events over others. In short “the past” is very much a contested issue for a diverse set of different people who live in the Okavango Delta and utilize its resources.

The BaSarwa themselves do not necessarily see their history in a unified way. A significant number of people with the label Sarwa live in Maun, and some have either assimilated or live under a disguised label as Tawana or Yei. The Bugakhwe themselves still extend to Gudikwa settlements, as beyond Molembo and into the Caprivi strip (Namibia). Khwaai is in this sense a distinctive community with separate settlements, whose members are quite politicized, and who strongly identify as BaSarwa. Gudikwa is a more recent village created under the Rural Area Development Programme (RADP), and does not seem to have the same level of politicization. Although the Bugakhwe of Khwaai and the Ts’exa of Mababe as kin groups share a cultural history, it is clear that the people of Khwaai and Mababe see their identity differently, as is evidenced by difference in dialects. They maintain this difference despite having married extensively with BaYei, and so often do not physiologically look like the stereotype. Both communities, who relied on hunting and gathering strategies of food procurement in the past, are now sedentary as a result of land use in the area with the establishment of the northern parks. There is no doubt that they have been disposed to defend what they regard as vital resources. Those who are demanding collective ownership rights in Moremi argue that since the introduction of controlled hunting areas and wildlife management areas they are a dependent society.

However, some non-Sarwa groups present and operating in the region are in addition influenced by information and presentations they encounter outside the park and the immediate surroundings. Tourists, safari operators, people now settling in Maun, and other groups in Botswana all receive information and impressions of the BaSarwa and of the history of the region and the country as a whole, via numerous channels. The tourist brochures produced by safari companies operating in the Moremi/Okavango area present general and sometimes stereotypical information about the history of settlement in the area under study, which often results in negative perceptions. According to the former Director of Wildlife and National Parks Alec Campbell, some safari operators have a history of not treating their BaSarwa casual labour well, simply because they want to exclude the people from the land. The BaSarwa were outlawed and deprived of access to land because of their social status and the small size of their population.

Conclusion

The effects of wildlife conservation measures on the local people are fairly clear and, as a community living within or adjacent to a controlled hunting

area, the BaSarwa of Khwaai seem to be pretty knowledgeable about the current boundaries of the Controlled Hunting Areas within the Okavango. The locations of previous settlements and foraging areas, however, are remembered by people within these communities, and particularly by the older generation.

With the creation of the Moremi Game Reserve in the 1960s, the small community of Khwaai was moved twice so that it would be outside the park boundaries, and access to areas of accustomed use was limited. Through the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, three safari lodges were also established in the area outside the park owing to a growing interest in Botswana's wildlife and tourism. This caused great resentment, especially when the government attempted to move the Khwaai community from the current settlement to relocate them either in Mababe or in Sankuyu village (see map 1). Several reasons have been advanced by officials since independence as to why the resettlement of the Khwaai community was necessary. First, they noted that the move would help ensure conservation of the resource base, mainly wildlife, in the reserve; second, the move was supposed to enhance the tourism potential of the region and create jobs for the rural communities.

Over a relatively short period of time, people have reconstructed their identity of *Bo-Sarwa* (being Sarwa) that is closely tied to the Moremi Game Reserve, in response to changes within their local environment, such as changing policies governing access to land, wildlife resources and government-aided resources. The reason the Bugakhwe of Khwaai stay just outside the reserve, in view of the northern gate, is as a way to politicize the settlement to make a highly contentious point about what they consider today as their "forced removal". There is an emphasis on being connected to Kwere and the park. This is important since the Bugakhwe social and spatial relations within the park landscape are historically tied to his leadership and knowledge of the Khwaai environs.

During the creation of the game reserve, an influential class of BaTawana saw to the continuance of their own influence and respectability. The park creators did benefit from San local knowledge, but took insufficient notice of San views when the relocation exercise took place. When the Botswana government took over the management of Moremi in 1979 they continued this dominance over the Moremi landscape and the BaSarwa, and further denounced the latter's customary rights in the area. The oral accounts demonstrate that promises were undermined by the failure to recognize the position of the Khwaai community in relation to the park. The community's sense of threat is equally a desire for better standards of well-being and greater control over their destiny within wildlife management areas. They have used their history of displacement and resettlement to acquire a voice for their rights.

Access to land by the BaSarwa (among others) in eastern Ngamiland has largely been restricted through the creation of government-controlled game reserves as well as wildlife management areas and this makes the current move to community-controlled hunting areas (CCHAs)—and how these are received and used by BaSarwa—also significant. The government of Botswana's Community-based Natural Resource Management Policy is to

allow communities control over wildlife and other natural resources.³⁰ While several non-BaSarwa communities have collaborated with the government and tourism operators in the setting-up of CCHAs in the mid-1990s, the two established BaSarwa villages in the area, Khwaai and Mababe, for a while resisted this policy, indicating a profound distrust of the government. The government-sponsored Joint Venture Agreement (JVA) model encouraged communities such as the BaYei of Sankuyu (see map 1) to sub-lease their hunting area and to sell their hunting quota to a commercial safari operator. The BaSarwa feared that this government JVA model would not allow them greater autonomy and control over productive use of their natural resources. But the Botswana government was not willing to encourage a different community wildlife-based model. The case of Khwaai has shown that community experiences, perceptions and desires need to be understood better in order to design more appropriate institutional support for alternative joint venture options. To them the government model was not likely to give them greater control of their destiny. They opted for a model that would protect their interests as well as enable them to voice their concerns and aspirations. The history of the BaSarwa in the Okavango has shown that community-based wildlife management in the Okavango Delta needs to be analysed and understood within the broader political, ecological and economic trends affecting Botswana as a whole. A range of issues, including global economics, competing land use strategies, tenure regimes, village economics and settlement patterns, the role of donor agencies and the economic and political transformation of Botswana society since independence, all impact on the prospects for community-based wildlife management.

Notes

1. In 1785 a major split took place in the Ngwato chiefdom, one of the well-established Tswana-speaking groups to the south. Tawana (Ngwato's brother) seceded and founded his own state in Ngamiland where his followers took the name BaTawana, while the Khama's people retained BaNgwato.
2. The San in Botswana are estimated at 50,000, and in Namibia 35,000. Small groups are scattered over different countries including Angola, Zambia and Zimbabwe.
3. That is, the Khoesan family of languages.
4. There is a growing literature promoting development and human rights among indigenous people around the world. See the References section.
5. Recently the Botswana Council of Non-governmental Organizations (BOCONGO) and UNDP organized a workshop, "BaSarwa need extra backing", Gaborone, 17–18 March, 2004, with the aim of encouraging a meaningful dialogue between the Botswana government, BaSarwa representative bodies and international organizations such as the UK Survival International on the question of "rights of BaSarwa".
6. There are two spellings of Khwaai (i.e. Khwai and Khwaai). The official records use the spelling Khwai in reference to the current settlement, but most people associated with the history of Moremi Game Reserve use the second spelling in their name for the older settlements. In the meantime, I will retain "old Khwaai", and Khwaai in reference to Bugakhwe settlements, which the game reserve is part of.
7. Ngamiland/North West District has been divided geographically into Controlled Hunting Areas. NG refers to Ngamiland.

8. A game reserve was later created by the BaTawana chieftaincy and the Ngamiland Fauna Conservation Society and named Moremi-Tawana royal name.
9. Khwaai male group interview, 24 February 1998.
10. Interview with two of the Khwaai Community Trust Development leaders: Leslie Kwere (F), 18 September 1997, and Joseph Sango (M), 21 September 1997.
11. See Bodumatau in map 1.
12. Keamogetswe Kwere (F), Khwaai, 18 September 1997.
13. Interviews with Moremi game guards, northern gate, 20 June 1998.
14. I met Kwere in June 1997, but he was already gravely ill, so I could not conduct a formal interview with him. However, he also expressed the common frustration at seeing foreign tourists “enjoying the fruits of our land”, while “we sit on the fence [i.e. the Khwaai river] watching the tourists [*masafari*] on the other side”.
15. Pete Smith had an interest in exploring the Okavango Delta channels studying plants, as is demonstrated by his collection. By the time he died in 1998, he had already been interviewed more than twice.
16. Interview with BaYei male elders of Sankuyu (Salepito Baphare and Dipuo Moarabe Bayei), 27 February 1998.
17. Elders of Sankuyu, 27 February 1998.
18. At the time of creating the Game Reserve, Ngamiland was ruled by Regent Pulane Moremi III (1947–64). Her son Letsholathebe Moremi, educated in England, took over power 1964–80. After the death of his father, Tawana II, also educated in England, was installed the paramount chief of the region.
19. Leslie Kwere was already the young mother of a small child at the time of creating the game reserve. Interviewed in Khwaai, 3 July 1997.
20. Robert Kay kept lions as pets and this is how he got the nickname *Rra tau*.
21. Interview with Isaac Tudor, Maun, 26 February 1998.
22. Interview with Segadimo, Maun, 25 February 1998.
23. Keamogetswe Kwere (F), Khwaai, 4 July 1997.
24. Joseph Sango, Khwaai, 24 June 1997.
25. Joseph Sango, 21 September 1997.
26. The Biets’h’a/Gudigwa/Gabamukuni region falls within NG12, as shown in map 1.
27. I discovered throughout my interviews that some of the “new arrivals” came to Khwaai (NG19) from Gudigwa and Namibia in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. Those who were coming from Namibia arrived at the time the government was introducing the identity card (*Omang*) and they identified themselves as people born in Botswana. As long as they have *Omang*, they are regarded as citizens of Botswana. See, for example, interview with Sabadimo Mohobo, 25 June 1997. This was also confirmed by Patrick Mosweu, the Gudigwa VDC chairman who frequently visits Khwaai. The Bugakhwe Khwaai and Gudigwa families frequently visit each other.
28. Their children are the most educated in the area and form part of the emerging elite of Khwaai.
29. Interview with game warden (Northern Parks), Gaborone, 2 September 2001.
30. The government’s experience in CBNRM was formalized in the 1991 Land Use and Development Plan for Kwando and Okavango Wildlife Management Areas and the Management Plans for Controlled Hunting areas allocated to communities in Ngamiland, in which the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and the Ministry of Local Government, Lands and Housing played a leading role.

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