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# Conflicts forever

The path dependencies of tourism conflicts:  
the case of Anabeb Conservancy, Namibia

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**Keywords:** Conflicts; Evolutionary Governance Theory; Tourism (EGT); ANT; Luhmann

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[Student:] Well, okay, um, thanks. It was nice of you to talk to me. But I think after all, instead of ANT, I was thinking of using Luhmann's system theory as an underlying framework—that seems to hold a lot of promise, 'autopoiesis' and all that. Or maybe I will use a bit of both. [Professor]: Hmm. . . . [Student]: Don't you like Luhmann? (Bruno Latour, 2005, p. 156)

## Introduction

In tourism studies attention is paid in a plethora books and articles to a wide variety of conflicts: human-wildlife conflicts, conflicts between tourists and hosts, conflicts related to destination management, conflicts on stewardship over tourism related resources, value conflicts, or conflicts over inequalities of economic development through tourism (e.g. Dahlberg, 2005; Hitchcock and Darma Putra, 2005; Okello, 2005; Porter and Salazar, 2005). A great deal of this literature has aimed to problematize conflicts and to find solutions for them, based on the taken for granted idea that conflicts ought to be dealt with in order to make sure they do not delay development or produce inefficiency for an industry with such a high net worth (Von Ruschkowski and Mayer, 2011; Bennett et al., 2001; Hitchcock and Darma Putra, 2005). Conflicts are deemed to be in need of management solutions through 'joint collaborative arrangements between public-private partnerships', 'consensus making', 'local involvement', 'participatory community practices', 'good governance' and 'compensation deals' (cf Bramwell and Cox, 2009; Douglas and Lubbe, 2006; Porter and Salazar, 2005; Uddhammar, 2006).

Within tourism studies' work on conflicts, conflicts are conceptualised in large variety of ways, yet there seem to be some recurring features. *Firstly*, conflicts are often seen as entities that exist between two or more actors, like people, classes, organizations or institutions (Robinson and Boniface, 1999), (cf Ramsbotham, Woodhouse, & Miall, 2011). *Secondly*, conflicts are thought to result from differences between actors and these actors are often presented as fixed entities, pre-existing the conflict. Conflicts are conceptualised as the result of actors' distinctive and somehow oppositional ideas, world views, claims on their environment, ideas for the future, intentions, plans and so on (Dredge, 2010; Domingo and Beunen, 2013). *Thirdly*, except from literatures (mostly outside the field of tourism studies) in which conflicts are conceptualised as productive (Putnam, 1994; Van Assche and Duineveld, 2013; Bernshausen and Bonacker, 2011), many works on conflicts in tourism studies frame them as problematic. Conflicts then should be avoided, resolved or overcome (Eagles, McCool and Haynes, 2002; Marshall, White and Fischer, 2007). Related to the latter, there are tourism scholars highlighting the persistent character of conflicts (Lee, Riley and Hampton, 2010) and scholars that consider conflicts to be mouldable, resolvable or manageable (Bennett et al., 2001).

Based on insights from ANT and systems theory (Van Assche, Beunen and Duineveld, 2014), we seek to get beyond these actor-centred approaches. We understand conflicts as self-referential modes of ordering. Although, like any mode of ordering, conflicts can disappear or get resolved, yet they have a tendency to endure (Luhmann, 1995), cf. (Callon, 1991). If they endure, they can become (temporarily) stabilised. We will argue that conflicts can only be understood if one takes into account the history of their emergence, understanding them as subject to path dependencies (Van Assche, Beunen and Duineveld, 2014; Duineveld, Van Assche and Beunen, 2013). To study these dependencies in more detail we will focus on technologies that shape and maintain conflict, namely: reification, solidification, codification, naturalization, objectification and institutionalization. Furthermore, through our understanding of conflicts, we stress that we paradoxically become part of ongoing path dependencies of conflict.

To further develop our analytical framework we will mine several (ethnographic) studies of conflict in Anabeb Conservancy in North-west Namibia (Lipinge, 2010; Pellis, 2011a; Sullivan, 2003). The findings we present are based on a triangulation of: 1) fieldwork performed in and around Anabeb Conservancy (Pellis, 2011a, 2011b) 2) ethnographic findings of Sian Sullivan (2003) who observed related developments in the larger region of Sesfontein between 1992 and 2000, and 3) different scientific, professional and historical accounts (see for example Corbett and Daniels, 1996; IRDNC, 2011; Lipinge, 2010; MET, 2011; NACSO, 2013). Field notes were taken, 37 in-depth interviews conducted, and participant observations aid in reconstructing how conflict in Anabeb has become manifested before and after the introduction of the prestigious policy model of Namibian community conservation.

We will first present the basic premises of our theoretical framework and related concepts. Then we will return to the case of Anabeb Conservancy to demonstrate the importance of often-underestimated path dependencies occurring at the background of tourism developments projects. Based on our analysis we will further develop our conceptual framework and critically discuss to what extent it is conceptually useful to consider and observe conflicts as self-referential entities.

### **Self-referential Conflicts**

We compose our conceptual framework using inspiration from actor network theory (Latour and Woolgar, 1986; Latour, 2004; Mol, 2002; Law, 2004) and Niklas Luhmann's systems theory (Luhmann, 2000; Luhmann, 1987). The coalescence of ANT and systems theory, as beautifully demonstrated by Stephen Fuchs (Fuchs, 2001), cf. (Teubner, 2006; Bryant, 2011), provides us with theoretical and conceptual formulations of conflicts as entities with their own history of emergence. Conflicts have a life

of their own, marked by different dependencies and different technologies that co-constitute them. Contrary to the latent assumption or overt hope that conflicts can be resolved – that they are temporary, non-static events – we argue that they have a propensity to endure (Luhmann, 1995) because they are self-referential modes of ordering. To mine these different theoretical foundations and construct a compatible theory we will first explicitly present our theoretical argument.

### *Self-referential Modes of Ordering*

We align with ANT as a radical constructivist theory, in the sense that every element in a network (or in a mode of ordering) is constituted within that network: 'everything in the social and natural worlds as a continuously generated effect of the webs of relations within which they are located. (...) [N]othing has reality or form outside the enactment of those relations ((Law, 2009))'. A priori the observation of a mode of ordering, we cannot presume persons, objects, concepts or any 'thing' else to be fixed entities, waiting patiently 'out there' for their discovery. They are the contingent outcome of particular mode of orderings.

According to ANT, some of the capacities of humans and non-humans should be treated equally: agency for example cannot be presumed for humans only; non-humans can have agency too (Sayes, 2014). For Luhmann humans and non-humans are also treated more or less equally, because agency is *absent* for both. They exist in the environment of a mode of ordering or they are constituted within it. They can 'irritate' a mode of ordering, but lack the agency to steer or control it. For Luhmann, a social system consists of communications and only communications communicate, not humans, artifices, things, individuals, washing machines, animals or rocks.

These communicative modes of ordering, furthermore, are autopoietic or self-productive (Luhmann, 1995). The elements constituted within a mode of ordering are reproduced through a self-referential network of communications communicating with each other. Van Assche and Verschraegen illustrate the theory of autopoietic systems with the following example:

For in order to circumscribe a particular class of systems, such as organic, psychic or social systems, one has to distinguish the recursive (or 'repeated') self-referential operation that ensures the production and reproduction of all the basic elements. Operations of this kind are, for example, thoughts, produced from previous thoughts and generating further thoughts: from their connection results the psychic system, that is, consciousness. There is no production of thoughts outside consciousness, and consciousness exists if and as long as it is able to continuously produce new thoughts that are only its thoughts. These thoughts are indissolubly linked to the chain of operations that

produced it and cannot be exported into other consciousness; in other words: one cannot enter 'the head' of another individual (Van Assche and Verschraegen, 2008).

For Luhmann not only is the brain operationally closed, but all modes of ordering are. A mode of ordering produces itself and thereby delineates itself from its environment. Modes of ordering appear in each other's environment and observe each other based on their own internal dynamics. This implies that although they can influence each other, they never directly communicate, nor do they determine each other's reproduction (Luhmann, 1995). A scientific mode of ordering, for example, cannot determine or steer a political mode of ordering and vice versa. Likewise, labelling tourism entrepreneurs as sustainable does not necessarily imply any change within the economy related to tourism, and the chances are very limited it will directly affect the environment (Moeller, 2006). Although there are interdependencies between different modes of ordering, one mode of ordering can never communicate with another mode of ordering, or with an event in the environment of a mode of ordering. Observations of other modes of orderings, of events in the environment of one mode of ordering are always mediated by the internal dynamics of that mode of ordering. That is, modes of ordering in a Luhmannian perspective are ontologically distinct from their environment. If we add these insights of Luhmann to ANT, we can say that modes of ordering are self-referential and operationally closed.

But what about conflicts? Instead of observing conflicts as something in between actors, we follow Bernshausen and Bonacker (2011) who, following Luhmann, claim that:

As opposed to actor-centric approaches, systemic approaches – and especially approaches founded on systems theory – direct considerable attention to the self-selectivity and self-referentiality of conflicts. (...) Fritz B. Simon has illustrated this by referring to the self-fabrication of causes of conflict within conflict systems: "Whichever official and factual causes are given at the beginning of a war, for the most part they have little relation to the mechanisms that account for its continuation. The war creates its own reasons once it has started. (p. 24)

Conflicts, then, do not exist between modes of ordering. Difference between them can exist but conflicts are not the explicit and contested difference or contradiction between different actors or between modes of ordering (Luhmann, 1995, p. 389). Different modes of ordering may be observed to have totally different interests, yet this only implies that there are differences not conflicts. A conflict is a conflict when it is an operationalized contradiction, not a latent one (Luhmann, 1995, p.

394). Conflicts as self-referential modes of ordering exist parasitically, meaning that they have the tendency to draw all the attention and resources to the conflict (Luhmann, 1995, p. 390). They also occur daily and randomly. They can emerge everywhere; any time and can easily disappear, yet often they can also make a 'greater social career.' (Luhmann, 1995, p. 392) In the words of Luhmann:

As social systems, conflicts are autopoietic, self-reproducing unities. Once they are established, one can expect them to continue rather than to end. Their end cannot ensue from autopoiesis, but only from the system's environment as when one party in the conflict kills the other, who then cannot continue the social system of conflict. (Luhmann, 1995, p. 394)

Seemingly stable conflicts, embedded in and sustained by a variety of networks, discourses or institutions, are subject to constant change, whatever the perceived eternal meaning at any given point (Duineveld et al., 2013). The historical and contextual contingency of conflicts becomes visible when some observers (e.g. a scientific mode of ordering) start to observe how other modes of ordering observe (Fuchs, 2001) conflicts, or how they embody conflicts.

#### *Conflict Formation*

After coming into existence, conflicts are constantly evolving and although this is not determined by the context (the environment) in which they evolve, they cannot escape the impact of their history of emergence (Callon, 1991). Conflicts are therefore marked by path dependencies that enable and constrain their evolution (Van Assche et al., 2014). Here, one could think of the early formation of conflicts, laying grounds for the formal and informal institutions that naturalise an opposition (Van Assche et al., 2014; Van Assche, Beunen, Jacobs and Teampau, 2011); cf. (North, 2005). Path dependency is shaping the course of a conflict at each step, marked by interdependence: the evolving relationship between involved actors. Path dependency creates limited possible progressions in the evolution of conflicts.

A path is a series of events and decisions within which a conflict is formed that can relate different sites (or contexts). Settings like conversations in the corridor or at parties can be sites; NGOs, bureaucratic organizations and academic contexts can be sites too. In different societies, times and contexts, different sites function as 'authorities', like universities in some or NGOs in others (Duineveld et al., 2013). These sites can be more influential to the formation and stabilisation of a conflict than others: they can formalise what is informal in other sites, make the conflict known to a wider audience, or put it under theoretical scrutiny (Foucault, 1972). Each site can have unique knowledge/power relations, influencing the formation of

conflicts (Law, 2004). With each step on the path and within each site through which the conflict travels, the irreversibility of a conflict can be increased or decreased – it can stop or be fortified, with each subsequent decision, depending on the sequence that preceded it (Duineveld et al., 2013). *Reification, solidification and codification* (Duineveld et al., 2013; Van Assche et al., 2014) are techniques that enable us to understand the emergence of a conflict. These techniques can be supplemented by three techniques of conflict stabilisation that increase the likelihood of a conflict to persist: *naturalisation, objectification and institutionalisation*. Before detailing how these techniques might be realized, we turn towards the example at hand: the life of a particular conflict in Namibian community conservation.

### **The Case of Namibian Community Conservation**

Namibian community-based conservation has an international reputation for its success, a success that is at odds given the general low success rate and critique of Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) projects around the world (Brockington, 2004; Büscher and Dietz, 2005; Dressler et al., 2010). According to the Namibian Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET), its policy provides communities with ‘unprecedented incentives to manage and conserve their areas and wildlife’ (MET, 2011). Such incentives, they claim, are enacted through local, regional and national property right arrangements that prescribe the management of unique wildlife resources on communal land (MET, 2011). Resources are managed by local custodians, supported by local organizations, and embedded in (inter)national community conservation frameworks. As the Namibian Association of Community Based Natural Resource Management Support Organizations (NACSO) states, these frameworks ought to enable rural communities to earn benefits from wildlife roaming over their land (NACSO, 2013). Where land formally remains in the hands of the Namibian state, registered communities are given formal rights to benefit from what is claimed to be sustainable natural resource management.

A dominant philosophy within this Namibian conservancy discourse is the ideal of CBNRM that emphasizes a decentralized management of land use. A coalition of rural communities is said to be capable of managing common resources whereby both nature conservation and economic development are enhanced (Boudreaux and Nelson, 2011; MET, 1995):

Conservancies are self-selecting social units or communities of people that choose to work together and become registered with the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET). In order to meet the conditions for registration a conservancy must have a legal constitution, and have clearly defined boundaries that are not in dispute with neighbouring communities. They must also have a defined member-

ship and a committee representative of community members. Conservancies are also required to draw up a clear plan for the equitable distribution of conservancy benefits to members. (NACSO, 2013, p. 11)

Over the past twenty years Namibian conservancies have irrefutably become a showcase for community conservation in Southern Africa, with solid numbers indicating growing wildlife populations and economic benefits for the rural poor (Boudreaux and Nelson, 2011; NACSO, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2013; Weaver and Skyer, 2003). Conservancies are presented as unique in that they allow rural communities almost full ownership and management of local natural resources (Hulme and Murphree, 1999), making the Namibian CBNRM system 'one of the most successful examples of legal empowerment of the poor of the past decade' (Boudreaux and Nelson, 2011, p. 17). Recently, NACSO (2013) reported that around 79 conservancies make about 50 million Namibian dollars per year for over 250,000 rural communities on nearly 150,000 square meters of land. Figure 7.1 illustrates how North-western (Kunene) and parts of Eastern Namibia (the Caprivi strip) have particularly embraced conservancy management. Much of Namibia's tourism itineraries are organised within these areas.

NACSO attributes the positive economic returns from rural community efforts mostly to gains derived from trophy hunting and joint venture tourism (NACSO, 2010, 2013). The functioning of community conservancies are, as such, a vital partner for the Namibian tourism industry, one of Namibia's priority sectors (Novelli and Gebhardt, 2007; WTTC, 2006).

Tracing a path dependency for this success, conservancy discourses attribute the source of the Namibian model to early developments in the North-western region of Kunene since the 1980s (IRDNC, 2011; Murphy, 2003). Informal community conservation was taking place well before conservationist discourses became popular in many parts of Africa. It was only after independence (since the 1990s) that an international discourse on community conservation started to reflect a more utilitarian use of wilderness that was increasingly promoted by international networks in nature conservation and natural heritage protection (cf Barrow and Murphree, 2001).

### *Conservancy Conflict*

Observations beyond these narratives of success, however, inform us that Namibian community conservation projects are definitely not without conflicts (Boudreaux and Nelson, 2011; Murphy, 2003; Pellis, 2011a; Sullivan, 2003). During the performance of our first stage of fieldwork amongst various group members in the birth place of Namibian community conservation in Kunene, our presence was met with suspicion

to say the least (Pellis, 2011a). Where interviews demanded local translation, our first translator accordingly belonged to a well-connected political faction of the so-called 'Kasaona family'. Questioning any other family related faction in either Anabeb or neighbouring conservancy of Sesfontein (see figure 7.2) required the use of different translators entrusted by respondents to represent their interests well.

Initially, we researchers were branded as Kasaona affiliates by other family factions in the area of Anabeb. This changed when we started to hire different translators for each respondent. We were asked by community members to approach different factions with utmost care, as any question related to current disputes in Anabeb or Sesfontein would possibly surface already tense interrelationships between factions. We experienced a multiplicity of tensions that seemed to have become established into an ever-present and unquestionable conflict to insiders in Anabeb. Controversially, this nebulous conflict was observed by external (public and private) networks as ever-present and ineradicable in 'communities': there has, according to proponents of Namibian CBNRM, always been conflict in communities, yet this has, in their observation, nothing to do with the business of community conservation.

One frequently repeated complaint by community members of conservancies throughout Kunene concerned the mysterious disappearance of earnings from conservancy accounts. According to some community members the 'money was eaten' by powerful people with access to conservancy accounts. Others argued income was lost due to inefficient daily management of conservancy personnel. Often mentioned conflicts in the larger region of Kunene concerned the overall distribution of jobs, the lack of transparency in communication and the unequal use of conservancy assets (Murphy, 2003; Pellis, 2011a; Sullivan, 2003). Other conservancy tensions concerned the undermining of the autonomy of traditional leaders. Before the introduction of conservancies they had had an informal role in allocating land use. Hence for them conservancies competed with their traditional authority (Corbett and Daniels, 1996). These everyday events might be observed as ephemeral, but are often 'anchored in more stable conflicts and dilemmas which help to characterize the texture of a more enduring political context' (Meadowcroft, 2002, p. 172).

How can we explain the stark contrast observed between Namibian CBNRM as an international success story and the many controversies occurring on the ground? In order to more fully understand the discrepancy between the success stories and conflicts observed, we expand our case study to neighborhood levels, to trace the emergence and endurance of conflict(s) within the context of Anabeb Conservancy.

### *The Emergence of a Conflict*

Until 2000, Anabeb was embedded within Sesfontein conservancy. Various (escalating) conflicts dating back to early community conservation efforts in the 1980s resulted eventually in fracturing Sesfontein into three autonomous conservancies (see earlier figure 7.2): 1) *Puros conservancy* in the west of Sesfontein constituency (registered in 2000), 2) *Sesfontein conservancy* in central Sesfontein constituency (registered in 2003), and 3) *Anabeb conservancy* south-east of the Sesfontein constituency (registered in 2003).

To exemplify how conflicts play a central role in these developments, we will continue to provide a brief version of historical context of recurring conflicts in this specific region of Kunene, eventually reflecting upon specific developments taking place in present-day Anabeb conservancy. One particular regional conflict is of major importance: originally enacted by two dominant Herero families, this conflict is affecting and affected by discursive alliances in this region that includes connections to locally based NGOs funded by international donors.

Due to past ethnic migrations and displacements, Anabeb conservancy currently contains 7 traditional groups: 4 Herero (Kasaona, Kangombe, Uakazapi, Mbomboro) and 3 Damara (Uises, Taniseb, Ganaseb) family lines. These groups and relative coalitions are outlined in figure 7.3.

To constitute conservancy management, two regionally based conservation and development NGOs within Kunene (co-funded by international donors) have actively been organizing support with traditional leaders since the 1980s. Their formal aim was to protect highly valued wilderness resources such as desert lions, rhinoceros, desert adapted elephants, and other animals (Blaikie, 2006; Jones, 2006; Novelli and Gebhardt, 2007). Western managing partners of both NGOs previously worked for one conservation organization in Kunene. Due to personal differences that we were unable to reconstruct, one of these Western partners decided to establish a second organization, which became active through a Community Game Guard programme in 1982 (Jones, 2001). The newly established NGO, that we call Integrating Conservation with Development in Namibia (ICDN; cf. Sullivan, 2003) was increasingly perceived by (marginalized) community members as a political force with strong ties to one particular Herero family: the Kasaona. It was the ICDN who formally introduced community conservation in cooperation with different village headmen in Kunene (personal correspondence with local game guard in Warmquelle). 'The ICDN is the mother of the conservancy,' and when its Western managing partner transferred management to one of the local Kasaona employees, 'the ICDN became Kasaona' (headman in Warmquelle). In the contemporary organi-

zational structure of the ICDN, we still find foremost Herero staff members named, or closely connected to, Kasaona (cf Pellis, 2011b).

Local reconstructed memories of first conservancy-related conflict date back to 1999/2000, when a former treasurer of Sesfontein conservancy was publicly accused of fraud related to missing financial accounts reserved for conservancy salaries. Not long after these accusations, the conservancy office in Sesfontein, interviewees reported, was shut down by armed Herero guards. A heated protest march organised by leaders of various communal groups feeling excluded from conservancy affairs followed shortly after. On 23 February 2000, at a community meeting in Sesfontein, protestors claimed that A) the accused treasurer should be given back his job, that B) armed Herero guards 'must leave so that [Damara] gardens [situated near the conservancy office in Sesfontein] can be used in peace', and that C) it is difficult for people 'to participate [in conservancy affairs] without access to NGO vehicles'. According to a representative of the ICDN, this community meeting 'was controlled by an aggressive and unrepresentative faction concerned to bolster their privileged access to resources' (all quoted in Sullivan, 2003, p. 75).

Another observation by Sullivan (2003) depicts former treasurer of Sesfontein conservancy as frequently communicating with a competing regional conservation NGO – which we will call RTS here – to establish tourism enterprises in the region. RTS and the ICDN were seen by community members as competitors for donor income, as both organizations had comparable developmental aims for Kunene. The role of both the ICDN and the RTS is well acknowledged by respondents as an important factor in establishing rivalry between different community factions in the larger Sesfontein constituency.

If an elephant and an elephant fight, then the grass is suffering. The NGOs in the area are fighting. The grassroots, the poor members, are suffering from that because people who can reach media, who can disperse information easily, are turning things to their wishes. The communities were fighting [in the larger region of Sesfontein]. One group was saying; conservancy from Puros to Palmwag [a concession area south of Anabeb]? We don't want such a conservancy, we want three different conservancies.' (Sesfontein councillor)

Those factions in favour of three separate conservancies, including the RTS and the Damara councillor of Sesfontein himself, argued that the region was too large for one conservancy to be managed. One popular argument against the idea of a single conservancy was the wide dispersal of homes throughout the area, making access to central infrastructure – necessary to meet on a regular basis – a practical challenge. This discourse of distance is cited as the official reason why Puros con-

servancy was the first to split from Sesfontein in 2000 to continue operating as an independent conservancy.

In the end, two political camps emerged from these tensions in the larger area: 1) a resisting (and self-identified underrepresented) set of community groups (both damara and herero) , and 2) a dominant alliance between the Kasaona and the ICDN. The ICDN and Kasaona are seen by the first camp as the 'evil' of all conservancy related conflict in Kunene. These accusations and reactions have resulted into repeating blame games played out by different camps:

...there is always a problem [...] we were from other traditional leaders, traditional set up, I mean other traditional community, and we were the people who mostly involve with the [ICDN] [...] [other leaders] were never informed what was happening in the conservancy, the committee does not inform them well or involve them into decision making. So [these leaders] complain here and then. (headmen Kasaona in Warmquelle)

The problem comes from the people that work for [ICDN], the regional representatives of the Ministry of Environment and Tourism and the Kasaona group. These three groups are together, and that is just where the whole problem comes from (headman Kangombe in Warmquelle)

The heated escalation of 1999/2000 can hardly be explained as a simple fight between two regional NGOs. Instead, local observers dedicate its existence to old quarrel in the region. The Kangombe and Kasaona, both well-represented Herero families in Kunene, have been in dispute since time remembered. Sullivan argues that the 1999/2000 conflict '[plays] out their own dispute' (2003, p. 81). Asking diverse community members in Sesfontein/Anabeb why these two families are engaged in a vendetta, only vague memories, if any, are brought forth. For some it can be explained as religious (different families practice different religions in and around their homesteads), for some as an old problem that started during apartheid:

'Can you see that big tree? Initially, the old people were getting money from the government. The [government] car was initially standing at the tree, and people would come there to collect. This was before independence, before 1990. It was the South African government who came to provide the elderly. The other headmen didn't want to collect money from this tree, since this tree is owned by me... There are 7 headmen, but the issue was initially just against one here. It was Goliath Kasaona [former Kasaona headman]. [...]. The whole issue started in the 1980s. Because the government people said that we initially agreed to meet under this tree, and those people who do not want to come...we [the government] don't care,

we just give out to those who come.’ (headman Kangombe based in Warmquelle)

For others the conflict between these two fronts is simply the way things have always been, persistently recurring on various occasions, in diverse appearances. There has always been conflict, it is a fact of life, and it is expected that it will endure forever. ‘Why would you even bother researching it?’

### *Present-day Conflict in Anabeb*

In 2010, similar tensions between Kangombe and Kasaona materialised, this time developing into slightly different alliances between communal groups in the south-eastern region of former Sesfontein conservancy (cf Pellis, 2011b). During elections in the village of Warmquelle, new committee members of the conservancy board (the main governing body) were to be elected in August 2010. This time the conservancy in question was Anabeb that once belonged to the larger Sesfontein conservancy.

During elections in Warmquelle, two alliances in Anabeb conservancy emerged in disagreement over the correct sequence of events that day. One group, an alliance related to the Kangombe, wanted to learn more about the functioning of the previous conservancy board before they could decide upon electing new board members. The other group, an alliance related to the Kasaona, held the opinion that the requested report should be due after the elections, since the presentation of last term’s performance was not yet ready for public disclosure. Regional election facilitators from the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET) and the ICDN were present during the election process, and decided that the elections had to continue in line with the Kasaona argumentation. Facilitators stressed the importance of continuation for the sake of time (more elections were already planned that day) and democratic principles: ‘if the majority votes to continue, we continue’. The complete opposition, under leadership of Joseph Kangombe, was furious with this process and decided to withdraw entirely from the election, leaving only Kasaona members to vote for the future committee of the conservancy.

‘People could not agree upon how the election process should be. And eventually like any other election you will agree upon the process, but at the end of the day if you lose, you start complaining, complaining, complaining...about the other party of breaking the election....this and this and this...people know that you are part of the whole election process.’ (headman Kasaona in Warmquelle)

Where present day conflict takes place within the context of an election event, it stages the typical recurrence of recognizable old quarrel between earlier mentioned

families. This time, the oppositional Kangombe group disappeared from the election process believing that the previous conservancy committee had something to hide. Not addressing this issue became reason enough for this group to block local elections for the conservancy committee, consequently necessitating external interference by the national Ministry of Environment and Tourism (Lipinge, 2010). The Kasaona group argued in complete contrast, promoting democratic procedures and efficient time management. Nevertheless, this conflict is once again seen by all involved parties to frustrate conservancy (and tourism) affairs in the region – developments that, despite all controversy, are still valued as crucial for nature conservation and poverty alleviation to happen (cf Pellis, 2011b).

### *Understanding and Managing Conflicts*

Conversations with policy makers and involved actors on regional, national or international levels revealed different conceptions about conflict in Anabeb Conservancy. These perspectives generally formulate local conflicts as, by definition, local. A spokesperson of a regional supporting NGO illustrates that conservancy conflict circles around trifling self-interest or envy:

Most conservancies [are] about fighting who is going to be a manager, about income, why the money was spent in this way....[...] people here seem to mix politics with conservancy business...the real problem lies with the fact that there are too many headmen, and all of them want to be represented equally in the management of the conservancy.

Communal differences were also mentioned, especially by politicians on a national level. They argue that these differences were recognized and dealt with in post-apartheid Namibia. After Namibia's independence, a dominant discourse of black empowerment led to popular community participation to make up for past wrong-doings towards ethnic groups under apartheid (Büscher and Dietz, 2005). One would argue that today only Namibians are living in Namibia, as all people are considered equal in terms of rights; disregarding race, colour, or political position. The Namibian Traditional Authorities Act however creates a contradictory role for 'recognition' of post-apartheid communities and communal leadership structures. Homogeneity of distinct communities is formally required to get conservancies and related communities recognized under contemporary Namibian law. The Traditional Authorities Act (2000) states that a traditional community is:

'an indigenous, homogeneous, endogamous social grouping of persons comprising of families deriving from [...] clans which share a common ancestry, language, cultural heritage, customs and traditions, recognizes a common traditional authority and inhabits a common communal area.'

Although traditional leaders are recognized in Namibia, they are occasionally remembered as former representatives of apartheid who 'administer[ed] native areas' on behalf of the state (Werner, 1993). There is no longer formal space for traditional authorities to manage 'their' land which used to be a self-proclaimed task of local chiefs who after independence had to re-register themselves (Corbett and Daniels, 1996):

'I think that the chiefs see the conservancy as a person that is taking over their role. [...] The chiefs want to be the one allocating the land, and the one who is getting all the benefits. But the conservancies say no, we are having the right over land, and we are going to allocate this land. We in turn will give you the benefits, like we give to anybody else that is a member of the conservancy.' (Spokesperson international conservation NGO)

To deal with the fuzziness of local leadership, conservancies are seen by support organizations as solutions to problems coming from communal conservation: 'When the conservancy was coming in, they said let us stop this [conflict]. Let the conservancy take over [...] and we let somebody take over the management because of this conflict' (spokesperson international conservation NGO). The conservancy policy' mode of ordering does not typically recognize a role for local divisions in these conflicts, as illustrated by the approach of supporting organizations: 'we didn't really work with groups, but rather on the products. Whoever was there, we were not interested in politics, we are not a political organization.' (spokesperson NACSO). Nevertheless, some analysts repeat that strong local governance measures (e.g. clear tenure rights) are instrumental to ensure effective working relations with communities in order to keep developing profitable tourism enterprises (Boudreaux and Nelson, 2011; Murphy, 2003).

One proposed solution to deal with traditional community conflict led to an ongoing experiment to institutionalize the position of traditional authority (TA) representatives into formal conservancy committees. In Anabeb, the conservancy committee consists of 10 elected community members (with voting power), and 7 traditional authority representatives (without voting power). 'Traditional Authorities complain here and there...if that is the case we decide [that] traditional authorities select their representative that is going to represent them on the management board' (ICDN officer).

Related more specifically to the Anabeb election in 2010, mediating officers from the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET) observed that most of the issues in Anabeb were related to differences between traditional authorities and more widespread political affiliations. The MET concluded that it is the continued influence of traditional authorities that need 'to be clarified in the conservancy con-

stitution' (Lipinge, 2010, p. 7). Traditional divides, in their view, existed already before the election process (cf Murphy, 2003). 'You should be careful in arguing that a conservancy creates conflicts in community lands. If you look at the historical development, you see that these conflicts already existed in the past, the conservancy is merely surfacing them to the foreground' (NACSO – a national CBNRM umbrella organization - representative).

In retrospect, the Namibian Ministry of Environment and Tourism explains the entire Anabeb situation as follows: 'It is observed that, the root cause of the conflict is a vague Conservancy Constitution with regards to the process of election of the Conservancy Committee' (Lipinge, 2010, p. 12). For the MET it is therefore a matter of improving the implementation of policies and streamlining democratic processes for conflicts to be resolved within the ongoing development of conservancies as a successful policy model.

### *Enacting Conflicts, Forever?*

Our re-mining of a history of decision-making in Sesfontein and Anabeb has shown traces of interdependent conflicts. Old conflicts are partly reproduced in new conflicts. At different sites and at different stages in the development of conflict, old conflict was recalculated in various ways. Pre-conservancy history has illustrated particular mobilizations of communal actors into distinct spatial configurations that, after independence, are simultaneously hidden ('we are all Namibians in one democratic nation') and brought back to the fore (traditional structures and conflict are irrefutably connected to the development of modern communal conservation).

Unrepresented factions within Anabeb/Sesfontein conservancy, especially traditional authorities, cannot fully grasp the idea that 'their' access to land management, to a large extent, is taken over by an 'apolitical' actor: the conservancy. Simultaneously, there seems to be a general blind trust by community members in the 'goodness' of community conservation as a historical correction for past oppression under apartheid law which would not allow communities to 'rightfully' take decisions on natural resource management (cf Pellis, 2011a). As a consequence, community members, as well as support organizations, continue to search for experimental solutions to 'local' conflicts, and thereby co-construct an ideal and internationally appraised future for Namibian CBNRM. These so-called solutions, such as the re-introduction of traditional authority in conservancy committees or the homogenisation of communities in democratic conservancy policies, do not necessarily solve old and new conflicts, but rather allow old conflict to become manifest. Every proposed change in the conservancy, no matter how good the proposal, is closely observed by opposing factions to a point where it no longer seems to matter what individuals

have to say. What truly counts is affiliation to particular modes of ordering; the rest is irrelevant in the eyes of local observers.

### **Conflict Formation and Stabilisation**

We return now to our theoretical approach towards conflict, to explore how the different techniques of conflict formation and stabilization can help us approach this scenario where conflict can be understood through its path dependency. The first of three techniques that increase the likelihood of conflict to endure is *naturalisation*, the process in which the conflict becomes part of the natural order of things (Foucault, 2006, p. 189; cf. Fuchs, 2001; Barthes, 1957), it becomes impossible to imagine a world without it. In this process the constructed character of the conflict is hidden, masked or forgotten (Latour and Woolgar, 1986). In this process of masking, conflicts solidify gradually and take up their final shape, the conflict becomes part of the 'warehouse of unquestioned commonplaces' (Duineveld 2011; cf. Fuchs, 2001). In Anabeb/Sesfontein conservancy, an old vendetta between two families has been around as long as people can remember. Members of two renowned families claim not to remember why they actually are in conflict. Over time it has slowly become a *natural* characteristic of this region. One of our translators illustrated this by asking: 'why are you interested to learn about this conflict? We all know here that it exists, why bother to look further into it?'

Naturalisation is sometimes highly entangled with the process of *objectification*, which is the processes in which a conflict is constructed as an objective truth, as a fact, as something that seemingly exists independent of observation (Foucault, 1998, p. 33; Foucault, 1972, pp. 40-49). Science, law and bureaucracy are in many societies the dominant sites and sources of objectification. Different alliances in Sesfontein and Anabeb demonstrate how interrelations of conflict have become exceptionally complicated over time. Encounters between NGO alliances, relationships with other traditional authorities or intermarriages, but also our own scientific inquiry, have contributed to sharpened distinctions between coalitions. We are not claiming that these distinctions are automatically leading to conflict; rather they are a mere result of it, perpetuated as an irreversible effect of already established conflict. Whatever 'solution' is brought in to resolve the situation, the central and historical conflict keeps re-emerging as a strong local immobilizer to desired communal development. We as outsiders might think that such hindrance is negative, and as such we keep on looking for ways to understand conflicts, in order to deal with them.

When conflict is recognised as a distinctive, 'natural kind', by a growing number of institutions, we can speak of *institutionalisation*. The cementing of conflict into

organizations, policies, politics, regulations, techniques and plans (cf. Foucault, 1979; Foucault, 2007; North, 1990) increases its path dependency. This enables an increased irreversibility of conflict in a specific practice or discourse. Conservancies are known for its instrumentality to devolve decision making and resolve conflicts through locally established rules. It is within a complex web of national and local regulations that various contradictory traditional and modern practices are to be regulated; e.g. recognizing traditional authorities while ensuring decisive roles for democratically elected community conservancies. Allowing traditional representatives to attend communal conservancy committee meetings symbolises how past conflict between factions have become institutionalised. It might have temporarily satisfied traditional leaders, yet allows old conflict settings to endure.

*Reification* is the process in which a conflict emerges as more than just a couple of unrelated misunderstandings, utterances or loose assemblages of parts. It becomes a unity, more or less coherent and observable as 'this conflict, not that one'. In time this can lead to a process of solidification where internal connections within a conflict become so tight that they can delineate an existence of their own. Involved community members in Kunene, as well as support organizations, are all too well aware of locally manifested conflict. The fact that it exists, and that it hinders effective community conservation, is disputed by no one. And where conflict in Anabeb/Sesfontein increasingly became distinguishable as a separate entity, it has repeatedly been understood as a local vendetta. Furthermore, conflict was framed particularly in relation to discourses of inequality in benefit distribution coming from the conservancy, not in terms of ethnic or religious differences, which touches upon another (apartheid like) discussion that has not been addressed in this study.

Finally, *codification* is the simplification of conflict boundaries. It comes with the simple applicability of codes to decide on conceptual inclusion/exclusion: 'a conflict about the land not the water resources', or 'an ideological conflict not a religious one'. Dominant local factions and national policy makers see conflict in Anabeb as a long-lived *local* issue inherent to rural communities, and not as a *national* problem

## **Conclusion**

Much has been written about conflicts in tourism studies, in terms of how they could be managed and overcome. Yet the structural and persistent character of conflicts is often overlooked and the possibility to steer, manage and understand them overstated. We have argued and illustrated that conflicts can only be understood if one takes into account their histories of emergence and ways by which they become solidified, decreasing their possible pathways. When we understand conflicts as self-

referential modes of ordering we should be able to observe conflicts through dependencies in conflict formation and stabilisation.

This approach to conflicts enables us to be more critical about the hope implied in the management approaches to tourism conflict. Not only do we argue that it is difficult to expect conflict management to resolve conflicts, we also argue that conflict management can have many other effects. It can temporarily tuck away conflicts, or spuriously stabilise a conflict by making it an object of managerial procedures. By institutionalising factions as oppositional, 'homogenous' groups, they can even perpetuate a state of conflict, making it part of official, institutionalised modes of ordering, which may then be reproduced by international voices that make conflict travel far beyond its local context.

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