

The Comprehensive Hunting Ban: Strengthening The State Through Participatory Conservation In Contemporary Botswana

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Introduction

It is a simple decision but the ramifications are quite complex.¹ Contestations over the nature of conservation have emerged as key fault lines between the state and citizens in postcolonial Botswana. In January 2014 the government enacted an indefinite, nationwide ban on hunting, covering both subsistence and commercial practices.² This transition from a consumptive-use model of wildlife conservation to a non-consumptive, preservationist approach indicates a significant shift in the country's long-term conservation and rural development strategies. However, this change in conservation policy is not occurring in isolation, but rather is embedded in a global environmental movement wherein conservation efforts are often constructed as apolitical—a discourse that strips out the ideology and politics of these policies and practices in favor of the appearance of a technocratic approach.³ Similarly, global- and national-level conservationists often deploy the politically neutralizing rhetoric of the common good in justifying the restrictions and regulations associated with conservation policy.⁴ However, as Kelly notes, there are instrumental uses for this kind of discourse as, “the ability of conservationists and participating governments to use environmental arguments to dispossess people of their land and resources has allowed this form of expropriation to rise at an alarming rate”.⁵ Thus, critically engaging with a seemingly technical policy decision provides great insights into the political nature of these choices.

In fact, a nuanced understanding of the politics of conservation recognizes that it may “distribute fortune and misfortune at the same time”.⁶ As such, access to land and natural resources is mediated through social and political institutions.⁷ Grappling with how advantage and disadvantage is meted out provides insight into the working of politics at the local, national and global level.

In Botswana, debates exist regarding the origins of the hunting ban and the long-term environmental implications of the decision. However, it does seem clear that the introduction and implementation of the hunting ban has fundamentally altered the tenets and operation of Community-Based Natural Resources Management (CBNRM) in Botswana, in terms of both policy and process. CBNRM is, at least in theory, grounded in the notion that local knowledge, local management and local buy-in for conservation are necessary and beneficial. Using Botswana and its hunting policy as a case study, this chapter explores how these global and national narratives of participatory conservation mask deeply directive and center-focused environmental policies and examines the political implications of this tendency.

¹ Department of Wildlife and National Parks official, Gaborone, 25 September 2013, interview by Annette LaRocco

² An important caveat to the nationwide nature of the hunting ban is that it does not apply to freehold land—meaning hunting is still permitted on privately-held, independent game farms. Most of these are found in western Botswana. While this is a significant element of the policy that warrants analysis, it is beyond the scope of this chapter, which focuses on Community-Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) policy and the hunting ban.

³ Büscher 2010; Ferguson 1990

⁴ Brockington 2002

⁵ Kelly 2011: p. 6966

⁶ Brockington/Duffy/Igoe 2008: p. 737

⁷ Peluso/Ribot 2003; Twyman 1998

In this chapter, the hunting ban provides a useful lens through which to interrogate the reproduction and strengthening of the state in rural areas, by considering state-led reorganization of social-ecological institutions such as CBNRM, local responses to these changes, and the problematic power dynamics that have emerged through the imposition of top-down decisions on what has supposedly been a participatory and bottom-up institutional structure.

The following sections will provide contextual background regarding participatory, community-based approaches to conservation in Southern Africa and then present the specific case of Botswana. From there, the chapter will trace Botswana's history with hunting, describe the policy decision ending hunting throughout the country and then introduce the various ways in which this decision reverberates within communities. It closes by highlighting the unique and illuminating position of elephants in this debate. It ends with a consideration of how the hunting ban severely limits the participatory element of community-based conservation, which in turn restricts alternative avenues of resource control, thus empowering state-led initiatives over local socio-economic organization.

Methodology

The scale and nature of the wildlife estate in Botswana makes it a particularly intriguing case study of the politics of conservation policy. Approximately 39 per cent of Botswana's land area is zoned for conservation⁸ and it is the second most conserved country in the world, after Tanzania.⁹

The government's decision to end hunting is not only noteworthy because of the sheer size of Botswana's conservation estate, but also because this reverses a longstanding policy of sustainable use, otherwise prevalent throughout Southern Africa.¹⁰

This chapter's empirical findings are derived from research conducted in Botswana's Northwest District, a region also referred to as Ngamiland.¹¹ While the hunting ban has been implemented nationwide—and has national impacts—its ramifications on CBNRM are particularly salient in Ngamiland. The globally unique Okavango Delta ecosystem is found in northern Botswana and the bulk of Botswana's multi-million dollar commercial safari hunting industry operates in this area.¹² This region is home to the largest concentration of lucrative charismatic megafauna in the country, and also experiences high levels of human-wildlife conflict.¹³ For these reasons, CBNRM was seen as a critical conservation and development strategy in Ngamiland. Moreover, the district is home to some of the most prominent community-based organizations benefitting from the CBNRM program in the country.¹⁴

The findings of this chapter are informed by approximately 130 semi-structured interviews conducted in Botswana between August 2013 and April 2014. Village field sites in Ngamiland were selected on the basis of proximity to the conservation estate and the presence of CBNRM community organizations. Additional interviews were conducted in the district capital, Maun, as well as the national capital, Gaborone. Informants include local residents living in conservation-adjacent communities engaged in CBNRM by means of a community trust. Interviewees in these communities included village and community trust leaders as well as those ordinary residents—men and women with no connection to the official structures of village life. Also interviewed were government officials from the Department of Wildlife and National Parks, the department tasked with

⁸ Barnes 2001: p. 141

⁹ Director of the DWNP, Gaborone, 28 March 2014, interview by Annette LaRocco

¹⁰ Lindsey et al. 2007

¹¹ Tlou 1985

¹² Mbaiwa et al. 2011; Thakadu 2005

¹³ DWNP official, Gaborone, 25 September 2013, interview by Annette LaRocco

¹⁴ Lepper/Goebel 2010; Mbaiwa 2004; Mbaiwa et al. 2011

conservation policy at the local level, as well as at the national headquarters in Gaborone.¹⁵ In addition, the author spoke with elected Members of Parliament representing Botswana's conservation-heavy northern constituencies, conservation practitioners, private sector tourism operators (both hunting and photographic), academics, and local conservation and development activists. Interview data was supplemented by analysis of media reports, government documents and academic literature.

Tracing participatory conservation efforts in Southern Africa

What is participatory conservation?

Participatory, or community-based, conservation came into vogue among conservation practitioners in the early 1990s as a reaction to the preservationist and exclusionary, 'fences-and-fines' approach to wildlife conservation, perhaps best described as "fortress conservation".¹⁶ While articulating the shortcomings of fences and fines, conservation practitioners and scholars highlighted the need to incorporate social justice into ecological arrangements.¹⁷ Community-based conservation was the subsequent response to the preservationist, fortress conservation model.¹⁸

As a counter-narrative,¹⁹ community-based conservation emphasizes a people-centered approach and seeks to consider economic and social development needs alongside biodiversity conservation. Community-based conservation was conceived as an attempt to reintegrate the previous dichotomization of human society and environment, thus bridging the nature/culture divide. The ethos behind participatory conservation is that those communities closest to protected areas bear the most significant costs of conservation, and thus should see direct benefits from these efforts. Moreover, the theory suggests once these communities begin to see economic and social benefits from conservation policies, they will invest in and protect their surrounding natural capital. These initiatives were viewed as win-win—both as conservation policies and rural development programmes that allowed community participation in decisions regarding land-use, resource-use and conservation beneficiation.²⁰

The notion of community involvement in resources management quickly spread across Southern Africa. With its genesis primarily identifiable in Zimbabwe's Communal Areas Management Program for Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE) (which is itself a highly distinct and richly studied program),²¹ other initiatives began to sprout in neighboring countries, including Botswana, Zambia, Namibia, and South Africa, often under the auspices of western donor funds.²²

However, acknowledging the problems of fortress conservation does not mean that community-based conservation initiatives are inherently the right answer. The last two decades have illustrated that these programs have had mixed and varied results, often tied deeply to the

¹⁵ The author was fortunate to gain access to a wide swath of DWNP employees, from the Director of the department to middle management, all the way to the frontline public servants working in Ngamiland. This spectrum allowed for an in-depth understanding of the department's thinking with regard to the issues of hunting and CBNRM

¹⁶ Brockington 2002

¹⁷ Brechin et al. 2003; Brosius et al. 2005; Ghimire/Pimbert 1997; Hulme/Murphree 2001

¹⁸ Adams/Hulme 2001

¹⁹ Leach/Mearns 1996; Roe 1991

²⁰ Brosius et al. 2005; Fabricius et al. 2004; Hulme/Murphree 2001; Western/Wright 1994

²¹ While beyond the scope of this paper, for further discussion of CAMPFIRE and its complexities see Alexander/McGregor 2000; Child 1996; Duffy 2000; Murombedzi 1999, 2001; Murphree 1995, 2001, 2005; Rihoy et al. 2010; Taylor 2009

²² Murombedzi 2004

local and regional political contexts into which they were embedded. Many have fallen far short of the theoretical ideal of participatory conservation.²³

Problems of participatory conservation in practice

Many scholars have examined the problematic assumptions and shortcomings of community conservation in practice.²⁴ In particular, community conservation requires the local application of global concepts, ideologies and policies. This involves the deployment of a set of assumptions and practices, as well as regulatory and disciplining strategies to bring behavior in line with these positions. Twyman suggests that even with the use of participatory language, the top-down approach to conservation and development prevails, creating a situation where wildlife management becomes, in fact, “people management” and centrally determined priorities continue to be enacted upon rural populations.²⁵

Moreover, CBNRM has most frequently been promoted in communities with a history of dispossession and land alienation, which often exist in a fraught relationship to the central state.²⁶ In these instances, participatory processes are highly problematic—characterized by paternalistic programs focused on gaining compliance to state-level prerogatives rather than genuine input from local constituencies.²⁷ Additionally, the totalizing and essentializing concept that communities are organic, homogenous units and representative of the interests of conservation- adjacent residents has been scrutinized. In fact, so-called communities²⁸ are diverse, dynamic, complex and often highly stratified.²⁹ As such, access to resources within them is socially differentiated.³⁰

Despite the widespread characterization of these rural communities as inherently local and bounded in a singular, often remote place, they are demonstrably connected to a global system.³¹ Moreover, the conventional, depoliticized discourse of CBNRM fails to address the importance and power of the local political and historical contexts into which CBNRM programs are introduced, and occludes the potentialities of elite capture of benefits that is commonplace in many CBNRM programs.³² Participatory conservation emerged from within a historical moment characterized by shifts in development policy toward participatory, decentralized approaches emphasizing capital and global markets. This aligned with the widespread ideological positions of the northern donor community; reduction of the state, economic incentives for behavioral change and local governance were all commonplace buzzwords of the 1990s. In the years since, significant critical engagement has shown that much of the logic underpinning community-based conservation was highly theoretical and idealized, often bearing little actual correlation to the way such schemes operated in the real world.³³ Indeed, from within the context of CBNRM policy, rural people are often blamed

²³ Nelson/Agrawal 2008; Murombedzi 2004; Nelson 2010; Rihoy/Maguranyanga 2010

²⁴ Alexander/McGregor 2000; Agrawal/Gibson 2001; Blaikie 2006; Duffy 2000; Nelson 2010; Ribot 2004; Twyman 1998

²⁵ Twyman 1998

²⁶ Bolaane 2004, 2013; Magole 2009; Taylor 2001a

²⁷ Twyman 2000a, 2000b

²⁸ Bearing this important critique in mind, for brevity’s sake throughout this chapter I will use the word ‘community’ to refer to those villages engaged in CBNRM initiatives. This recognizes that these communities are inherently complex and imbued with rich social, political and cultural contexts that cannot adequately be done justice in such a short piece.

²⁹ Agrawal/Gibson 2001; Leach et al. 1999; Twyman 1998, 2000b

³⁰ Leach et al. 1999; Peluso/Ribot 2003

³¹ Agrawal/Gibson 2001; West 2007

³² Alexander/McGregor 2000; Murombedzi 2004

³³ Swatuk 2005

when projects fail, despite the structural and institutional barriers to success that are prefigured by those in power.³⁴

Whether along strictly preservationist lines or as part of a community-centered approach, conservation processes create people and spaces that are highly dependent on the commodification of natural resources through capitalized global industries, most notably ecotourism.³⁵ In a sense, conservation brings the rural to the global market, and vice versa.³⁶ From within this context, presenting CBNRM initiatives as win-win for all those stakeholders involved becomes suspect.

Community conservation in Botswana

Botswana's conservation estate has proven to be a very lucrative national resource, as wildlife tourism is the second largest economic sector in the country, behind diamonds.³⁷ Aligning with the broader regional trend towards community-based conservation identified above, since the early 1990s conservation policy in Botswana has incorporated a participatory approach in the form of CBNRM. Yet, throughout CBNRM's two-decade history, meaningful participation and decentralization have often been found lacking.³⁸

There are a variety of mechanisms whereby significant decentralization can be stymied by those in power, many of which are apparent in this case.³⁹ Unlike other local level conservation arrangements in Southern Africa, CBNRM in Botswana has never been afforded a permanent legal status enshrined in law. In fact, the program operated for nearly two decades without even a policy framework, as the official CBNRM policy only came into force in 2007.⁴⁰ As such, since brought into practice in the early 1990s, CBNRM has remained subject to ongoing top-down restructuring of the terms of governance. Communities have little legal recourse to contest *ad hoc*, top-down alterations to the conditions of conservation systems in the country. Thus, scholars have suggested the central government's rhetoric with regard to community-based conservation has never met the on-the-ground reality of top-heavy conservation decision-making and centralized beneficiation from conservation resources.⁴¹ Magole argues that CBNRM in Botswana has more in common with statist conservation approaches than the participatory rhetoric implies, noting "in its current format, CBNRM stands to benefit the government much more than the people it claims to support".⁴²

In fact, if fully participatory CBNRM were implemented in Botswana it would have the potential to challenge the central state's ability to collect revenue from productive conservation areas for the national coffers, and set a precedent for community-level beneficiation and management of resources, at the expense of national level institutions.⁴³

Natural resource policy in Botswana broadly considers three categories of resource: minerals, land and wildlife. By law, all natural resources are national resources, held in trust by the government on behalf of all citizens.⁴⁴ This was crucial in Botswana's early postcolonial development, as the nation's mineral reserves were used to drive growth across the state, not just in the areas home to the most lucrative mineral deposits.⁴⁵ Thus Botswana's hegemonic control of conservation practices is in line with the state's unitary approach to development and pro-growth

³⁴ West/Igoe/Brockington 2006

³⁵ Duffy 2002; Kelly 2011

³⁶ West 2007

³⁷ AtIhopeng/Mulale 2009; Thakadu 2005

³⁸ Blaikie 2006; Madzwamuse 2010; Magole 2009; Poteete/Ribot 2010; Rihoy/ Maguranyanga 2010; Swatuk 2005; Twyman 2000a

³⁹ Poteete/Ribot 2010

⁴⁰ DWNP 2007; Rihoy/Maguranyanga 2010

⁴¹ Blaikie 2006; Poteete/Ribot 2010; Swatuk 2005

⁴² Magole 2009: p. 608

⁴³ Poteete 2009; Rihoy/Maguranyanga 2010

⁴⁴ Molomo 2008

⁴⁵ Molomo 2008; Tlou et al. 1995

economic orientation.⁴⁶ This nationalized discourse is then deployed in the state-building project, which seeks to transcend regional and ethnic identities. As Poteete notes, CBNRM policy, which implies superior local rights to benefit from a locally-derived resource, exposes an incongruity with potentially problematic repercussions.⁴⁷ As communities adjacent to Botswana's diamond mines adopted the language of CBNRM in pursuit of greater income remaining in their areas, the decentralization of wildlife revenues began to threaten the centralized model on which the Botswana state had been built.⁴⁸

As such, the series of maneuvers that have led to the recentralization of CBNRM appear to have little to do with environmental management but are in fact in response to political imperatives as "at least some BDP [ruling party] politicians would rather dismantle CBNRM than compromise on mineral policy, despite the risk of antagonizing wildlife communities".⁴⁹

The historical trajectory of Botswana's conservation policies illustrates a tendency toward centralization often in spite of CBNRM initiatives, and a reluctance to relinquish meaningful responsibility to rural dwellers, despite participatory rhetoric.⁵⁰ Perhaps what holds the hunting ban to be particularly noteworthy amidst even the *longue durée* of Botswana's state-led conservation is its sweeping scope—covering the entire country without any particular regard to local context in rural spaces, or the vast variety in cultural and economic practice of rural dwellers.

A brief history of hunting in Botswana

Hunting in Africa has long been stratified—with the sporting activities of colonial whites viewed as hunting proper while black African subsistence hunting for the pot was constructed as poaching.⁵¹ The creation of this artificial distinction allows for the structuring of one behavior as deviant while the other is deemed acceptable.⁵²

Historically, Botswana is the only country in Southern Africa to have national legislation regarding subsistence hunting. While always proscribed in various ways, hunting had existed as a customary right among the largest Tswana-speaking groups in the pre-colonial era. With colonization, the colonial authorities and traditional leaders slowly began to hem in hunting rights.⁵³ However, hunting remained an important part of cultural heritage, particularly among some of Botswana's smaller and non-dominant ethnic groups such as the San.⁵⁴ For the San, hunting was viewed as both an economic and a cultural activity, as hunting occupied an important place in social ceremonies and meat exchange was as an important tradition.⁵⁵

Under the 1979 Unified Hunting Regulations, Special Game Licenses (SGL) were introduced.⁵⁶ These licenses permitted their holders to practice subsistence hunting. The main objectives of the SGL were two-fold: to legalize hunting among the poorest segments of Botswana's population and to provide food security to rural people through the consumption of meat or sale of

⁴⁶ Magole 2009; Rihoy/Maguranyanga 2010

⁴⁷ Poteete 2009

⁴⁸ Poteete 2009; Good 1996, 1999, 2008; Rihoy/Maguranyanga 2010

⁴⁹ Poteete 2009: p. 298

⁵⁰ Madzwamuse 2010; Taylor 2001a51

⁵¹ Adams 2009; Adams/Hulme 2001; Dickson/Hutton/Adams 2009

⁵² Anderson/Grove 1987; Brockington/Duffy/Igoe 2008; MacKenzie 1988

⁵³ Spinage 1991

⁵⁴ The term 'San' refers to the diverse group of indigenous, traditionally, hunter-gatherers living across Southern Africa. The terms 'Bushmen' and 'Basarwa' are often used in Botswana, but both terms are fraught. I opt to use 'San' in this chapter as this was the term most of my self-identified San informants asked me to adopt when referring to them in English texts

⁵⁵ Hitchcock 2001; Madzwamuse 2010; Taylor 2001a, 2001b

⁵⁶ This section relies heavily on the work of Hitchcock 2001.

meat to increase cash income. While some in government suggested that the SGLs were always meant to be a temporary poverty-eradication measure,⁵⁷ by the mid-1990s there were over 2,000 SGLs issued throughout Botswana's remote areas. Some recipients had been receiving them every year for nearly two decades.

Despite this, the SGL program faced significant headwind. Some politicians argued that SGLs were conferring special rights to a specific class of people at the expense of all citizens, thus invoking Botswana's statist development approach to highlight the incompatibility of SGLs with the country's modern and difference-blind orientation.⁵⁸ Others invoked moral and animal rights-based arguments suggesting that the hunting authorized by the SGL system was inhumane. Another commonly-held view in government circles was that hunting was a primitive activity, the practice of which reflected badly on Botswana's reputation as a developmental darling.⁵⁹ Importantly, there are ongoing semiotic struggles involved in conservation wherein a whole host of values, normative positions and symbolic meanings are attached to particular resources or environmental practices, such as with hunting.⁶⁰

Therefore, within government, the reliance on wildlife for subsistence is associated with backwardness and hunting is seen as primitive, undeveloped and cruel. By 1996 the SGL system had fallen out of favor. In Ngamiland in particular, CBNRM was introduced as an alternative mechanism through which communities in Botswana could benefit from the consumptive use of wildlife.⁶¹

Special Games Licenses, which legitimized subsistence hunting, were swapped out for CBNRM and a quota system beginning in 1996. This meant individual hunting rights were exchanged for communal access to wildlife resources through community trusts.⁶² In addition to the problems of sublimating an individual right to a wider corporate body, the amount of meat available under the new quota system decreased significantly, leaving many unable to meet subsistence needs.⁶³

After the transition from the SGL system to a quota system, commercialized safari hunting became a key economic feature of CBNRM communities. From the early stages of CBNRM in northern Botswana, communities worked in cooperation with a safari hunter to utilize and monetize a hunting quota. In these communities, CBNRM as a concept became associated with hunting and the distribution of hunting quotas as commodities.

Hunting ban and its political implications

The hunting ban is all the more intriguing in Botswana because the consumptive use of wildlife has been the norm throughout Southern Africa for decades. Brockington, Duffy and Igoe observe:

the international hunting fraternity remains a powerful force behind conservation today. Countries that prohibit hunting (Kenya and India) are unusual for doing so.⁶⁴

⁵⁷ A view still commonly expressed in my interviews with government officials circa 2013–2014.

⁵⁸ Molomo 2008; Saugestad 2001; Solway 2002

⁵⁹ In interviews with government wildlife officials, hunting was frequently referred to as primitive, backward and as a relic of another time before Botswana became a middle-income country.

⁶⁰ Taylor 2002

⁶¹ In Ghanzi and Kgalagadi Districts the dispensation of a small number of Special Game Licences continued until the advent of the hunting ban in 2014. Regional Wildlife Officer for Ghanzi and Kgalagadi, Ghanzi, 11 February 2014, interview by Annette LaRocco

⁶² Taylor 2002

⁶³ Taylor 2002: p. 478

⁶⁴ Brockington/Duffy/Igoe 2008: p. 47

Thus, the decision to *end* hunting, rather than maintain the status quo, can provide a glimpse into how the state goes about controlling and governing its people, territory and resources, and how those citizens respond. The hunting ban in Botswana was enacted through a presidential directive. It was not brought to a vote in parliament, nor was it processed through the cabinet. It was a decision made with relative opacity. In fact, several of the elected Members of Parliament representing areas with high densities of wildlife conservation and commercial safari hunting were unaware of the decision until after it was announced by the president in *kgotla* meetings⁶⁵ in their constituencies.⁶⁶

The official justification for the hunting ban is that Botswana has seen a steady and unexplained decrease in wildlife populations. As one senior member of the Department of Wildlife and National Parks notes:

Well the hunting ban was taken in with solid reasons behind it. As I indicated we have these [wildlife population] declines that have been picked up. In many of those cases we are not really sure why there are these. But we always are on side of caution in Botswana. I think the precautionary principle is what guided the hunting ban. We felt there was a need to understand what was happening to our wildlife populations, in an atmosphere free of the challenge of having to manage legal hunting.⁶⁷

However, this claim has been vehemently contested by many members of the academic community, as well as in the public debate playing out in the media. In fact, skepticism regarding the supposedly scientific basis for the hunting ban featured prominently across a wide variety of stakeholders, including even private sector operators working in the non-consumptive tourism sector,⁶⁸ those standing to gain access to more wildlife concession areas with the end of hunting. Thus many respondents view the official justification as obscuring political motives for the ban. While perhaps the most sweeping environmental regulation to come about in this manner, the implementation and execution of the hunting ban show remarkable continuity in the way state deals with CBNRM-related issues.

In fact, the hunting ban is the latest in a series of decisions aimed at redefining the terms of governance in rural Botswana in favor of the central state and away from local level resource users. Other changes include: the introduction of a 65 per cent/35 per cent sharing scheme for all community-based conservation funds wherein the bulk of the profits go to the central government, the imposition of template constitutions on all community-based conservation organizations throughout the country, and the increased role of the Botswana Tourism Organisation in the tendering process for community conservation concessions.⁶⁹

The hunting ban and the façade of CBNRM

The hunting ban is significant in demonstrating that the rhetoric of participation belies the top-down nature of CBNRM in Botswana. Putting aside the debates regarding the impetus for the

⁶⁵ Kgotla meetings are traditional town-hall type meetings held throughout Botswana. For a detailed description of how kgotla meetings operate, and how they may be used strategically by the government see Gulbrandsen 2012. For further information regarding the questionable “participatory” nature of kgotla meetings, see Mompoti/Prinsen 2000

⁶⁶ Member of Parliament, Gaborone, 23 September 2013, interview by Annette LaRocco; Member of Parliament, Gaborone, 26 September 2013, interview by Annette LaRocco

⁶⁷ Deputy Director of the DWNP, Gaborone, 14 October 2013, interview by Annette LaRocco

⁶⁸ Photographic tourism operator, Maun, 16 November 2013, interview by Annette LaRocco

⁶⁹ DWNP official, Gaborone, 25 September 2013, interview by Annette LaRocco; Photographic tourism operator Maun, 9 November 2013, interview by Annette LaRocco

ban, the manner in which it was enacted sharply departs from the stated tenets of CBNRM both in the way it came about—top-down rather than consultative—as well as its predicted impacts—increasing apathy and potential environmental degradation among conservation-adjacent communities.

Among impacted communities, responses to the hunting ban in the initial months following its introduction were varied. While most individuals were unhappy with the incumbent loss of income, employment and game meat, occasionally respondents viewed the hunting ban more generously, hoping that it was undertaken in their best interest in the long term. Yet, an interesting caveat to this divide is nearly all respondents, even those willing to give the ban the benefit of the doubt, took issue with how the decision was announced, enacted and implemented. One man insisted:

We were not consulted. We heard over the radio where they mentioned something like we were causing a decline in animal population. We were not informed about the animals which were endangered and the ones which were not. The ban was a top-down decision.⁷⁰

Concerns were not limited to the lack of consultation at the beginning of the process. There was a consistent, pervasive belief that the ban would lead to more arrests and incarcerations in their area due to increased poaching activity and a heightened presence of law enforcement in place to monitor the ban. This is indicative of the way in which conservation-adjacent communities perceive their interactions with state authority, particularly with regard to wildlife. Specifically, policies limiting hunting have the impact of criminalizing an activity viewed as a safety net and, for some, an important aspect of cultural identity, further marginalizing hunting communities and reducing the regularity of game meat. Moreover, since January 2014, it appears that hunting continues regardless of the regulation, albeit in a more clandestine, less socially controlled manner.⁷¹ Taylor (2002) describes that in these instances of increased regulation and restriction, hunting becomes “hidden”,

making hunting a hidden activity encourages wasteful practices, such as leaving the skins in the bush to hide incriminating evidence, or leaving some of the meat if it is too much for a lone hunter to carry. It simultaneously acts to undermine the ability of the village as a whole to regulate such hunting practices, as keeping activities out of the public arena makes it all the harder to exercise accountability in restricting abuse.⁷²

Taylor’s study took place over a decade before the hunting ban but his analysis continues to reverberate in the contemporary Okavango Delta. One informant involved with commercial hunting and tourism suggested it was “naïve” to believe that poaching levels would not be exacerbated by the decision to end hunting, which bars conservation-adjacent people from benefitting from wildlife legally.⁷³ Furthermore, beyond increased illegal hunting, the ban disconnects people from surrounding resources. Addressing this, an MP from Ngamiland directly engaged with the language of CBNRM to suggest that it is the failure to involve communities in environmental decisions and management—not the continuation of hunting—that will lead to environment catastrophe for Botswana’s wildlife populations:

⁷⁰ Local resident, Boro, 25 November 2013, interview by Annette LaRocco, translation by Emmanuel Mogende

⁷¹ Local resident, Mababe, 4 December 2013, interview by Annette LaRocco, translation by Emmanuel Mogende; DWNP Anti-Poaching official, Gaborone, 31 March 2014, interview by Annette LaRocco. This is still relatively anecdotal because enough time has not elapsed to conduct a rigorous survey.

⁷² Taylor 2002: p. 485

⁷³ Hunting tourism operator, Maun, 13 November 2013, interview by Annette LaRocco

You're going to encourage disorder because you are not allowing or empowering the owner [sic] of these products to manage and to have determination of it ... So even if they don't shoot themselves, they'll turn a blind eye if they see someone with a gun going into the bush because it's a source of bitterness for them.⁷⁴

The informant referred to communities as the owners of natural resources, while in fact, all natural resources are legally owned by the state. However, this discursive choice is interesting because it indicates a tension surrounding notions of ownership and the rights of citizens within the state. The erosion of collective environmental controls in communities ostensibly engaged in CBNRM is both counter-intuitive to the program and pernicious. While once empowered to believe CBNRM gave them some modicum of local control, the hunting ban deepens processes of alienation of people from the land and resources that surround them, fuelling the source of bitterness as noted above.⁷⁵ Moreover, the hunting ban is a sweeping nationwide policy with no consideration of local contexts, specific environmental imperatives or historical social-ecological arrangements, negating all the benefits intended to result from CBNRM. Contrary to the tenets of CBNRM, the implication of the hunting ban is that it will operate the same way across the country, encompassing highly varied ecosystems and without regard to local perspectives .

There is a belief among those rural and remote populations that the terms of participatory conservation in Botswana have been fundamentally disrupted without their input. As noted earlier, with the advent of CBNRM, the vast majority of the Special Game Licenses were revoked with the tacit understanding that rural communities (as opposed to rural individuals) would be able to benefit from wildlife through the CBNRM program. By selling a community hunting quota to a hunting operator, the village would have access to money, employment and game meat. Among the rural dwellers interviewed, this was seen as a compromise with the government. As they understood it, at the government's request they agreed to relinquish their Special Game Licenses, which had empowered individual citizens to take advantage of wildlife resources, in exchange for a system that would allow meat and monetary benefits to accrue to the community at large.

However, with the implementation of the hunting ban, these rural citizens felt that the terms of this compromise had been altered without their consent or knowledge. Not only have their individual rights to meat utilization been prohibited, but communities no longer receive either monetary or caloric benefits from safari hunting. As with the transition from SGLs to the quota system, the hunting ban placed increasing limits on local residents' ability to benefit from wildlife, especially direct consumption of game meat. For many conservation-adjacent citizens, the steady removal of hunting rights ignores the historical environmental stewardship they believe they had practiced for generations, often using discourse about future use and sustainability that would be recognizable to any typical conservationist. As a *kgosana* said:

We suspect that tourists and the Department of Wildlife acted in concert to have hunting banned. To me, wildlife is like cattle; they are kept to sustain our livelihood. But we consume our domestic animals sparingly with our future needs in mind. The same goes for wild animals.⁷⁶

Conservation practices and discourses can become part of the framework through which people imagine themselves within their environment. These shifts in environmental subjectivities are important in the study of the political impacts of conservation policies.⁷⁷ Conservation policies

⁷⁴ Member of Parliament, Gaborone, 26 September 2013, interview by Annette LaRocco

⁷⁵ Molomo 2008

⁷⁶ Kgosana (Headman), Boro, 25 November 2013, interview by Annette LaRocco, translation by Emmanuel Mogende

⁷⁷ West/Igoe/Brockington 2006

work to shape and position people's perceptions of belonging relative to land, territory, resources and the authority invoked over them. Emerging from the research is local communities' reliance on various repertoires to protest perceived top-down conservation decisions like the hunting ban, which they viewed as allied with the interests of tourists rather than local people. In particular, claims of autochthony, for example, the invocation of the status of being a "Son of the Delta"⁷⁸ and rhetorics of belonging and indigeneity call on local ethnic identities and histories and are juxtaposed against the dominant national paradigm of a homogenous state presented by the central government.⁷⁹

This invocation is particularly noteworthy on the part of San communities and is encapsulated in this statement from a resident of a conservation-adjacent village in northern Botswana: "Those who make policies don't know how we interact with the animals ... We, the San, know about conservation. We come from far living ... together with animals and other resources we need."⁸⁰

This worldview is attempting to weaken the state's unequivocal claim over conservation enactments such as the hunting ban by appealing to logics of local history and ethnic identity, and the rights of local people to assert authority over their surrounding environment.

Additionally, these rhetorical imaginaries of resistance to the hunting ban utilize the fundamental premise of participatory conservation. They also use historical and contemporary proximity to wildlife to argue that they, conservation-adjacent communities, are more fit to determine how resources are used than decision-makers in far-off, urban Gaborone.⁸¹

Instead of banning hunting, government should engage us to solve any problems concerning hunting activities. We live alongside these animals, we know them better than people from Gaborone or further afield who want to tell us how to live with them.⁸²

This localized rhetorical resistance is interesting when considered with the longer term tendency of the state to limit or not fully enable CBNRM. However, the deployment of identity and regional politics is a particularly fraught strategy because of Botswana's postcolonial nation-building project around Tswana identity, and the state's reluctance to accept notions of indigeneity for discrete populations.⁸³

CBNRM does political work; it empowers centrifugal forces in society. As such, there are structural, state-enhancing incentives to limit its robust implementation. From its introduction to its current manifestation relative to the hunting ban, many of the features of CBNRM—the consultation of communities, the notion of local stewardship being suited to conservation, and the role of social control against poaching—are lacking in Botswana.

Furthermore, despite these lacunae, the discourses invoked around CBNRM linger, as various stakeholders including local residents themselves continue to deploy the discourses of participatory conservation in order to voice objections to the hunting ban and to the manner in which state authorities interact with communities and environments.

⁷⁸ Local resident, Boro, 25 November 2013, interview by Annette LaRocco, translation by Emmanuel Mogende

⁷⁹ Nyamnjoh 2004; Saugestad 2001; Solway 2002

⁸⁰ Local resident, Mababe, 3 December 2013, interview by Annette LaRocco, translation by Emmanuel Mogende

⁸¹ One respondent suggested that those decision-makers from Gaborone were "as good as tourists" because they understood so little about life in the rural areas of Botswana.

⁸² Kgosana (Headman), Boro, 25 November 2013, interview by Annette LaRocco, translation by Emmanuel Mogende

⁸³ Specifically, the government of Botswana does not recognize claims of indigeneity from citizens, especially from San peoples, stating that all citizens of Botswana are indigenous. For a more in-depth explanation of how this has presented difficulties for San populations, see Saugestad 2001; Nyamnjoh 2007; Zips-Mairitsch 2013

Photographic or hunting tourism? Trade-offs and the state

The hunting ban takes the question of sustainable use of wildlife completely out of the realm of participatory, community conservation and places it squarely as the purview of the government. In practice, the decision to end all hunting in Botswana is deeply intertwined with CBNRM policy because the community trusts, which form the backbone of the CBNRM conservation approach, owe most of their income to safari hunting. After the ban was implemented, and hunting quotas were no longer able to be sold, the majority of community trusts in Ngamiland faced financial hardship requiring retrenchment of staff and cutting of services.⁸⁴ This has led many community members, as well as conservation activists and academics, to claim that the decision to end hunting has favored non-consumptive tourism operators at the expense of local Botswana communities. One such conservation activist noted, “what is clear and what is irrefutable is that [the] hunting ban will benefit photographic tourism, and a lot of these photographic tourism investors are very politically connected”.⁸⁵ While hunting tourism made up a smaller percentage of the overall size of the industry, it directly benefitted CBNRM communities to a greater extent than photographic-only operations.⁸⁶ Thus, the perception, as the above quote suggests, is that the decision to end hunting favors large, corporate photographic tourism rather than communities attempting to benefit from the nearby resources.⁸⁷ Furthermore, this view considers the ban not as a technical solution to an environmental problem,⁸⁸ but rather a measure meant to be attractive to a particular Western clientele to whom hunting is both odious and considered anathema to a conservation ethos,⁸⁹ and upon whom the photographic tourism industry depends.

CBNRM refracts the unequal power relations between the state, safari companies and rural communities, rendering the characterization of participatory conservation problematic. In these struggles, the Botswana state, within its pro-growth development agenda, tends to act on behalf of private capital, which in the process undermines social justice.⁹⁰ Decisions made regarding conservation, and CBNRM, are decisions that determine which institutions, individuals, and organizations may benefit from tourism and wildlife resources found throughout the conservation estate. In Botswana, conservation decisions dictate who controls the productive resources of wildlife and land. Thus, statements such as this emanating from CBNRM communities may give pause to the government:

Ngamiland with that rich natural resources is the poorest compared to other areas [in Botswana] where they don't have natural resources. It means that everything that is done in Ngamiland, goes to the Government coffers which is

⁸⁴ Kgosi (Village Chief), Sankuyo, 19 November, interview by Annette LaRocco; DWNP Community CBNRM liaison, Maun, 7 November 2013, interview by Annette LaRocco⁸⁵ Conservationist activist, Maun, 24 October 2013, interview by Annette LaRocco

⁸⁵ Conservationist activist, Maun, 24 October 2013, interview by Annette LaRocco

⁸⁶ Lindsey et al. 2007. See also Mbaiwa 2004, 2005 for further discussion of the dynamics surrounding the photographic and hunting tourism industry in Botswana.

⁸⁷ Most photographic tourism in Botswana adheres to the government's high value, low volume tourism strategy, which puts an emphasis on luxury high-end lodge experiences and clients. This strategy makes it very difficult for communities to compete in such a market, and partnering with private sector companies to run such ventures on community concessions often creates tensions, acrimonious relationships, and unhappiness for both parties. Hunting provided a somewhat different economic model, wherein the community could earn millions of pula directly from selling its animal quota, separate from other joint ventures like lodges. Thus, in interviews, the relationships between a safari hunting operator and a community, and a photographic operator and a community, were often articulated as significantly different from the point of view of local residents.

⁸⁸ Conservation practitioner, Maun, 1 November 2013, interview by Annette LaRocco

⁸⁹ Conservationist activist, Maun, 24 October 2013, interview by Annette LaRocco; Photographic tourism operator Maun, 30 November 2013, interview by Annette LaRocco

⁹⁰ Molomo 2008

shared to the whole nation. I think there must be a percentage that stays in Ngamiland.⁹¹

The idealized discourse of CBNRM seeks to devolve this decision-making power. Therefore statements such as the one above—which draws upon the rhetoric of CBNRM—directly challenges the central state’s hegemony over the second largest economic sector in the country, wildlife tourism. Thus, it is not surprising that CBNRM, in practice, has been greatly contested by the central authorities, as it diffuses the decision-making process that dictates control and beneficiation over resources. Interestingly, while many non-consumptive tourism operators will benefit from the ban by gaining access to some new, lucrative wildlife concessions,⁹² quite frequently these informants expressed concerns that ending hunting in wildlife areas unsuitable for photographic tourism would leave these tracts of land vulnerable to poachers and encroachment from cattle.⁹³ This sentiment is often echoed in aggrieved CBNRM communities. Despite calls for a one-to-one exchange of hunting operations for photographic tourism, hunting concessions cannot be repackaged that easily. Consumptive-use tourism can occur in less aesthetically pleasing areas unsuitable for attracting photographic tourists, making such a seamless transition impossible in many areas.⁹⁴ Mbaiwa estimates that a greater percentage of the profits derived from hunting remain with communities, as compared to photographic tourism ventures, though there are significant leakages in both cases. Thus, he views hunting and photographic tourism not as in opposition but rather as complementary economic activities, each suited to different local contexts and community preferences.⁹⁵ Though importantly he notes that both kinds of tourism are plagued by similar problems that vex CBNRM initiatives—racial, gender and class hierarchies, catering to western audiences above and beyond local needs and perpetuating particular notions of environment, wildlife and landscape.⁹⁶

However, the somewhat simple question of whether hunting or photographic tourism is better for communities economically presents a false choice. These two options require different inputs, produce different outcomes and are differentially beneficial to a variety of stakeholders, one of which is the central government. It is not that either hunting or photographic tourism is better or worse, but that the choice to favor one economic activity represents the pre-eminence of one set of interests over another. The question also masks some of the similarities and continuities that exist between both forms of tourist-driven exploitation. One informant in a CBNRM community noted:

Tourism generates a lot of revenue thus growing Botswana’s economy. Hence they [government] seek to make economic fortunes at the expense of the people. It shows that a person’s life is insignificant; animals are more valued. I believe that in the beginning, when the universe was created, a human being was given control over all living things. Nowadays it beats me that all of a sudden an animal takes priority over human being.⁹⁷

Neither approach to utilizing wildlife is inherently good or bad but rather exists within a matrix of policies, ideologies and positionalities, often reflecting the political atmosphere in which these decisions are made. The discourses, then, used to resist and make sense of the hunting ban reveal how, through the very language of CBNRM, the government created a space in which rural

⁹¹ Kgosi (Village Chief), Sankuyo, 19 November, interview by Annette LaRocco

⁹² Photographic tourism operator, Maun, 16 November 2013, interview by Annette LaRocco

⁹³ Photographic tourism operator, Maun, 6 November 2013, interview by Annette LaRocco

⁹⁴ Photographic tourism operator, Maun, 9 November 2013, interview by Annette LaRocco; DWNP official, Gaborone, 11 October 2013, interview by Annette LaRocco

⁹⁵ Mbaiwa 2003

⁹⁶ See Mbaiwa 2005 for a discussion of what he characterizes as “enclave tourism” in Botswana.

⁹⁷ Local resident, Xuoxao, 27 November 2013, interview by Annette LaRocco, translation by Emmanuel Mogende

dwellers were allowed to imagine a state-sanctioned right to influence and participate in conservation. Yet, this space has been periodically hemmed in as the state struggles to reclaim control over these processes. At a local level, resentment has grown around a perceived state bias toward photographic tourism actors at the expense of CBNRM communities, many of which had expressed a preference to continue hunting operations, or at least viewed hunting and photographic tourism as compatible activities. The feeling that Ngamiland, despite its natural wealth, had been left behind in favor of a national development to which they are alienated, characterized rural dwellers' orientation toward the central state.

Hunting and elephants – a call for a compromise

Despite misgivings, communities engaged in CBNRM appeared willing to go very far in accepting the premise of the hunting ban, invoking strongest resistance only in the context of particular, acute affects on everyday livelihoods—specifically, from elephants. In fact, many informants have suggested they would be willing to accept the hunting ban if only the government would carve out an exception for elephants. One local resident noted, “the law is not good, it should have excluded problem animals such as elephants which destroy our fields, crops, and even homesteads. They should have allowed these animals to be hunted.”⁹⁸ DeMotts and Hoon highlight the unique political salience of elephants in northern Botswana.⁹⁹ Over 200,000 elephants live in the two northern-most districts in Botswana¹⁰⁰ the single largest African elephant population on the continent.¹⁰¹ And despite elephants often being construed by Western audiences as gentle, charismatic giants, for conservation-adjacent communities elephants are pests at best and life-threatening hazards at worst. Elephants destroy crops and property, and in extreme though not uncommon cases, kill humans. This perpetual destruction wrought on poor, conservation-adjacent communities exacerbates local–national tensions, as people never feel adequately compensated for hardship. A local resident living next to the Okavango Delta noted:

Just recently, elephants made their way into my garden and destroyed lettuce, green pepper and other vegetables. That dealt a heavy blow to my life. However, I have no problem with living alongside animal but an issue of concern is that we are not adequately compensated for wild animal damages. There is a huge difference between the compensation and damages incurred. Like I already mentioned, I don't have a problem with wild animals mainly because they boost the national economy.¹⁰²

Elephant trophy hunting had, in a small way, helped to ameliorate some of the antagonisms between communities, elephants and the government. One informant, discussing the legalized sale of elephant hunts, noted that “what it did was pay for tolerance”.¹⁰³ Others remarked, “with a hunting quota for an elephant alone you can sustain a community”.¹⁰⁴ The negotiating tactic of

⁹⁸ Local resident, Mababe, 3 December 2013, interview by Annette LaRocco, translation by Emmanuel Mogende

⁹⁹ DeMotts/Hoon 2012

¹⁰⁰ Department of Wildlife and National Parks 2012: p. 31

¹⁰¹ Director of the DWNP, Gaborone, 28 March 2014, interview by Annette LaRocco

¹⁰² Local resident, Boro, 25 November 2013, interview by Annette LaRocco, translation by Emmanuel Mogende

¹⁰³ Hunting tourism operator, Maun, 13 November 2013, interview by Annette LaRocco

¹⁰⁴ DWNP official, Gaborone, 25 September 2013, interview by Annette LaRocco. See for example: “We'd shoot an elephant and bring it to the village and within two hours the whole elephant had disappeared. They eat the meat, boil down the bones for lard, and use the hide, too. They had 23 elephants a year [from a quota]. One elephant approximates about 10 domestic cows. It's equivalent to the community losing 230 domestic cows a year. Who is going to drop off 230 cows for the community to access the same kind of red meat?” Hunting tourism operator, Ghanzi, 24 February 2014, interview by Annette LaRocco

asking—or pleading—for the continuation of elephant hunting at a minimum, may seem infinitely reasonable in the local context. However, when this runs up against the Western moral and ideological backlash against big trophy hunting,¹⁰⁵ as well as the potential for capital accumulation that elephants, as one of the species most revered by tourists, bring to the wealthy elites of Botswana’s photographic tourism industry, it is easy to see why the government of Botswana is unlikely to consider these local demands.

In particular, people in the Global North are often primarily exposed to Africa’s charismatic megafauna like elephants through popular culture including children’s stories, zoos and wildlife documentaries.¹⁰⁶ These representations are highly stylized and emotive, and more often than not remove any mention of the daily human interactions with African fauna. Garland suggests that this perpetuates an attachment to these animals on the part of Western societies, one that is often in tension with the stark realities required to live alongside wildlife. Indeed, African animals are perceived as important members of a global faunal kingdom that belongs to all humanity as a kind of international natural heritage. Yet as Garland eloquently notes:

It is in Africa, however, that wild animals actually live, and on African shoulders that the primary responsibility for maintaining this “global” inheritance falls. The burden that this responsibility represents is substantial, and the terms on which it is undertaken are seldom, if ever, determined by African people or nations alone. On the contrary, African actors participate in the provision of wildlife to the world from a global vantage point deeply compromised by the continent’s history of colonization and association with nature in Western systems of thought.¹⁰⁷

Elephants are a significant touchstone in the debate over the hunting ban. This is exacerbated further by the government’s, and especially the current president Lt General Ian Khama’s, significant efforts to cultivate the image of Botswana as a haven for elephants amidst a time of historical levels of poaching for their ivory. Elephants are central to Botswana’s “marketing of the nation state” in the context of ecotourism,¹⁰⁸ and feature prominently in the country’s international conservation profile. President Khama, who is often personally engaged in setting conservation priorities, is well-known for his aversion to hunting and allegiance to a preservationist style of environmental policy.¹⁰⁹ This has created tension and even backlash in a country with a strong tradition of sustainable use. A prominent community conservation activist noted, “our president is a board member of Conservation International, so you can imagine what kind of ‘insights’ he is receiving from the old bearded white men in California”.¹¹⁰ The attempt to harmonize an international wildlife conservation perspective with the realities of human–wildlife conflict on the ground illuminates the tensions between local and global environmental perspectives.¹¹¹ These are contradictions that a functioning CBNRM program is meant to address. Furthermore, this highlights the global inequalities inherent in conservation, brought to the fore once again through the hunting ban. The question of who the ban is for—the international community or for Botswana—lingers. This tension is very apparent to local communities dealing with the limited CBNRM system, as one young man noted:

¹⁰⁵ See Wemmer/Christian 2008 for further reading regarding western views of elephant hunting

¹⁰⁶ Garland 2008

¹⁰⁷ Garland 2008: p. 52

¹⁰⁸ Duffy 2002

¹⁰⁹ Director of the DWNP, Gaborone, 28 March 2014, interview by Annette LaRocco

¹¹⁰ Conservation activist, Maun, 24 October 2013, interview by Annette LaRocco

¹¹¹ Mbaiwa 2003; Gressier 2012

They [the government] always concern themselves with what the international community says about Botswana. They don't pay attention to how the ordinary Motswana is impacted. I am of the view that the lives of people, who live in a tourism area that generates a lot of money like ours, should be better. The financial success of the wild animal tourism industry in this area should be reflected through the standard of living of its residents. There shouldn't be a mismatch.¹¹²

Conclusion

Conservation to them [the government] is a tool to asserting their power base. It's not conservation for the sake of preserving biodiversity or empowering the local communities.¹¹³

This chapter examined the politics of Botswana's hunting ban in the context of participatory conservation, in this case, CBNRM. The impact of the hunting ban across the country, especially with regard to CBNRM, is complex and varied. However, a common theme which unifies many of the responses to this newly-implemented policy is the role of the state vis-à-vis the rural and remote areas of its territory. The question of how the environment is governed, especially from within an ostensibly participatory approach has emerged as a key site of negotiation of state practices. All of this serves to probe the deep questions surrounding the participatory nature of CBNRM in Botswana, which still claims to put communities and community consultation at the centre of its conservation policy. It also probes whether tenets of the program have ever been actualized in practice. Under the hunting ban, in fact, communities can no longer chose to interface with conservation and the related tourism industry in one of two ways—either consumptive or non-consumptive use—but rather must adhere to state-level mandates, which are seen to promote a preservationist approach favored by many photographic tourism operators and their international clients.

Drawing from extensive data collection this chapter illustrated just how far the state in Botswana has moved from a genuine CBNRM approach, even when considered across a long trajectory of recentralizing tendencies. It is clear that analysis must move away from thinking about CBNRM in Botswana as if it exists in any way except on paper. The hunting ban is fundamentally contrary to the ethos of CBNRM—it eschewed local consultation and marginalized local resource-use preferences—but yet is closely aligned with the way conservation policy is enacted in Botswana. The hunting ban may be contradictory to the tenets of CBNRM but it is not aberrant; it is in keeping with the historical trajectory of Botswana's state-building process, overall political economy, and the manner in which authority is enacted and perceived in rural areas.

Yet importantly, CBNRM also retains some clout in how it shapes imaginaries and resistance to state-centered priorities on the part of conservation-adjacent citizens. And while it does not really exist in practice in Botswana, participatory conservation is still used and deployed as a site of contestation and opposition. CBNRM and the discourses used to embed communities in conservation decisions provide a means for local residents to reject what they view as over-extensions of state authority and capital extraction from the areas where they live, as they articulate grievances related to the hunting ban through the language of participation and local control.

However, the myth that participation—a space for a say in how lives and livelihoods are governed—continues to do useful political work in pacifying discontent in conservation adjacent

¹¹² Local resident, Xuoxao, 27 November 2013, interview by Annette LaRocco, translation by Emmanuel Mogende

¹¹³ Opposition MP from Ngamiland, 26 September 2013, Gaborone, interview by Annette LaRocco

areas is highly controversial. CBNRM becomes a platform upon which rural communities are expected to place all of their development hopes, regardless of the extreme top-down limitations they face in tapping the benefits of their areas. This chapter demonstrates that the state works to restructure and repossess devolved conservation and resource beneficiation institutions found within the participatory paradigm. Decisions such as the hunting ban that deeply impact on rural dwellers are made by a small elite in the capital, while lip service is paid to the norms of community involvement. As it stands now, it is unclear if the hunting ban is permanent. It is evidently indefinite but the structure of the ban and its *de facto*, rather than *de jure*, process of implementation leave it open to reversal if the political winds change in Botswana.

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