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IMPERSONAL MARKETS AND PERSONAL COMMUNITIES? WILDLIFE, CONSERVATION, AND DEVELOPMENT IN BOTSWANA

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1. INTRODUCTION

During the 1980s and 1990s conservation policies and agencies in Africa came under severe criticism. In several countries, the evidence of increased poaching in the 1970s and 1980s pointed to the inability of wildlife departments to manage their habitats and wildlife populations. The government departments, critics argued, relied on top-down bureaucratic approaches that excluded local communities.² It seemed that a conservation practice based on exclusionary national parks, game reserves, and other sorts of protected areas was not functioning properly. This critique of state managed ‘top-down’ conservation provided an impetus for the emergence of Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) in southern Africa. To its proponents, CBNRM embodied the core sustainable development ethic—balancing material development and environmental conservation, and doing so by taking into consideration the needs of local communities.³

In Botswana, CBNRM broke new ground in the early 1990s by integrating wildlife management, rural development, and tourism.⁴ Often singled out as an African success story because of its stable economy and democratic institutions, Botswana has many of the characteristics that bode well for sustainable development. The dominant aspects of Botswana’s economy are diamond extraction and its livestock industries, but with national parks and game reserves occupying seventeen per cent of its total land area and with a further twenty-two per

¹ School of International Service, American University, Washington DC. I am grateful to Goran Hyden, David Leonard, Dennis Galvan, Arielle Levine, and the two reviewers for their comments. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 2004 Breslauer Symposium on Natural Resource Issues in Africa at the University of California, Berkeley.

² DAVID HULME & MARSHALL MURPHREE, *AFRICAN WILDLIFE & LIVELIHOODS: THE PROMISE & PERFORMANCE OF COMMUNITY CONSERVATION*, at 1 (2001).

³ The current trend towards CBNRM in southern Africa started in the 1980s with Administrative Management Design for Game Management Areas (ADMADe) and the Luangwa Integrated Resource Development Project (LIRDP) in Zambia, and the Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE) in Zimbabwe. Since the late 1980s and early 1990s, Namibia, South Africa, and Botswana also have implemented CBNRM projects.

⁴ CBNRM became possible only after a number of policies and ‘guidelines’ were implemented over two decades. The first was the Tribal Grazing Land Policy (TGLP), an attempt at privatizing the grazing commons. For a cogent policy and academic critique of TGLP, see PAULINE PETERS, *DIVIDING THE COMMONS: POLITICS, POLICY, AND CULTURE IN BOTSWANA* (1994). The areas not economically viable for cattle ranching were set aside for other uses. One of the unintended consequences of TGLP was to distinguish these areas from the wildlife dominated areas. The Wildlife Conservation Policy of 1986, designed to encourage the economic utilization of wildlife, designated these areas (not useful for cattle) on twenty-two per cent of Botswana’s land, setting them aside exclusively for wildlife utilization or land uses compatible with wildlife. To rationalize the consumptive use of wildlife through devices such as hunting quotas in Controlled Hunting Areas (CHAs), all CHAs were rezoned in 1989. The entire country has been divided into 163 CHAs, of which 43 have been zoned for wildlife uses that include commercial and community managed wildlife use (photographic and hunting safari) areas, livestock areas, and un-designated areas.

cent designated as wildlife management areas, Botswana is also well-placed to benefit from nature tourism. The population of the Ngamiland District in northwest Botswana, where CBNRM was initially implemented, is about 140,000, with fifty per cent of the population in villages of less than 500 people. Tourism accounts for about forty per cent of employment opportunities in the region and increasingly shapes local political economies and livelihoods. With a sparse population and vast areas designated for wildlife protection, the prospects for CBNRM in Botswana were high.

Experience with CAMPFIRE in Zimbabwe, seemed to show that, unless material incentives accrued to rural communities, conservation would be an uphill task.⁵ Botswana's CBNRM projects, therefore, adopted elements of CAMPFIRE, specifically seeking to increase the economic value of natural resources and transfer the resulting benefits to rural communities. Communities were encouraged to collaborate with private safari operators to manage natural resources and to share economic returns.⁶ There are now more than eighty organizations in more than a hundred and twenty villages involved in these initiatives.⁷

After a decade, however, 'high expectations' with communal conservation and in particular CBNRM gave way to 'cautious optimism,' and there have even been some calls for its 'wholesale rejection.'⁸ In Botswana, as elsewhere, CBNRM did not fully deliver the fruits it promised, either in terms of conservation or in terms of rural development.⁹ Looking ahead and reflecting on this experience, proponents of communal approaches have agreed that 'one size does not fit all' and that CBNRM should be one among other conservation strategies. It is also important, they argue, to distinguish 'communal' approaches from CBNRM, so that analysis of and conclusions about those specific projects introduced through international sponsors and implemented in the short-term are not confused with evaluations of more general claims about the importance of local empowerment and participation in African conservation.¹⁰

In this article, the ongoing discussion and re-evaluation of CBNRM is taken one step further by imagining a second-generation of communal approaches. In the beginning, CBNRM was an attempt to realign the rules and responsibilities of resource management and rural development among state, markets, and local communities, each understood as an ideal type. Here, contrary to this earlier assumption,¹¹ state actors, private firms, and community based

⁵ One of the major criticisms of CAMPFIRE in the 1990s was its 'aborted devolution' wherein the districts continued to decide access to material benefits from resource management rather than local communities See HULME & MURPHREE, *supra* note 2.

⁶ CBNRM is an instrumental conservation and development approach, perhaps best exemplified by the pithy statement that 'if wildlife needs to survive, its needs to pay for itself.'

⁷ Nico Rozemeijer, *CBNRM in Botswana: Revisiting the Assumptions after Ten Years of Implementation*. Background paper presented at the World Parks Congress in Durban (2003). Available at: <<http://www.cbnrm.bw/CBNRMInBotswanaforWPC2003.pdf>> (last visited: August 05, 2004).

⁸ Arun Agrawal & Clark C. Gibson, *Enchantment and Disenchantment: The Role of Community in Natural Resource Conservation*, 27 WORLD DEVELOPMENT 629-649 (1999).

⁹ Rozemeijer, *supra* note 7.

¹⁰ Marshall Murphree, Communal approaches to natural resource management in Africa: From whence and to where? Keynote Presentation at the Center for African Studies. Breslauer Symposium on Natural Resource Issues in Africa (March 5, 2004). Available at <<http://repositories.cdlib.org/cas/breslauer/murphree2004a>> (last visited: August 5, 2004).

¹¹ It might seem obvious that actors in the market do not function only according to the invisible hand, state actors do not only apply legal rational impersonal rules, and community actors are not only driven by norms of reciprocity. However, these perspectives are often not reflected in academic and policy debates.

organizations are assumed to be driven by multiple rationales that can be used to organize and manage collectivities. States, markets, and communities, in other words, *each* behave according to a combination of logics, whether it is the pursuit of legal rationality, profit maximization, or the reciprocal accommodation of personal preferences. Understanding the ‘implementation’ of CBNRM, thus, entails making sense of interactions among multiple actors each motivated by a mixture of institutional logics.

To establish the plausibility of this proposition, the article focuses on the distribution of material benefits, which is one of the main sources of conflict in CBNRM projects, both within communities and with external actors.¹² For many safari operators in the Okavango Delta, staying in business these days often means negotiating contracts within community wildlife management areas. To gain access to community areas, safari operators have to convince rural communities through a tender process, whose guidelines have been established by the CBNRM project. This makes the selection of safari operators by local communities a critical ‘site’ for analyzing the way different institutional actors behave according to different institutional logics.

The analysis is based on evidence from five communities in the northern sandveld of the Okavango Delta: Seronga, Gunitoga, Eretsha, Beetsha, and Gudigwa (see Figure 1).¹³ These places have been increasingly involved in the CBNRM process since the mid 1990s.¹⁴ The villages were classified as having high economic potential for both hunting and photographic safaris, in part because they are adjacent to Chief’s Island, one of the most sought after commercial wildlife areas in Botswana.¹⁵

[Place Figure 1 about here]

2. CONCEPTUALIZING MARKET EMBEDDEDNESS

The idea of embeddedness was originally developed by Karl Polanyi and is now generally used as an analytical and ideological foil to the notion of self-regulating markets.¹⁶ Those who use the term usually want to highlight what they consider to be the regressive implications of the penetration of society by market institutions, or what they sometimes call the ‘disembedding’ qualities of markets. Disembedding is the removal of social objects from the

¹² ‘Benefits’ is a technocratic and reductionist term used by CBNRM policy makers. These ‘benefits’ are critical nodes of distribution and closely intertwined with communities’ access to money, power, and prestige.

¹³ Map adapted from University of Texas map collection <http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/Africa/botswana_pol95>.

¹⁴ This area in Ngamiland is the poorest district in Botswana. The five villages, adjoining settlements and cattleposts discussed here, are predominantly composed of the minority Wayeyi, Humbukushu, and Bukagwe ethnic groups.

¹⁵ There are five broad ecological zones in the Okavango Delta—perennial swamps, seasonal swamps, seasonal grasslands, intermittently flooded land, and dry land. Resource use and livelihoods in the northern sandveld influence the shape of the hydrological pulse, which in turn has effects on vegetation and wildlife populations throughout the Delta. Water from the Okavango River first enters Botswana in Mohembo, 95 kilometers from Seronga. The river spills over near the village of Seronga, spreading across 15,000 square kilometers twisting waterways, islands, floodplains, and lagoons.

¹⁶ According to Polanyi, economic actions were ‘embedded’ before capitalism in community, politics, and religious activities. Economic relationships were managed either through reciprocity among kin or friends, or through distribution by the state or a similar central/communal authority, and did not constitute a separate social sphere. Rather, the economic system was submerged in general social relations. Markets were merely an accessory feature of an institutional setting controlled and regulated by social authority. KARL POLANYI, *THE GREAT TRANSFORMATION: THE POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC ORIGINS OF OUR TIME* 43-55 (10th ed. 1970).

sphere of the 'social' into the sphere of the 'market.'¹⁷ Contemporary applications of embeddedness can be thought of as a critique of the under-socialized or atomized-actor ideas characteristic of neo-classical economic choice theory, and their purpose is, thus, to assert and demonstrate that economic life has a complex social character.¹⁸ When actors are embedded in a network of ties to each other, even weak ties, their relationships are the basis for the formation of social capital. When the ties are close, as they are in the multiplex social relationships associated with family, religion, and community membership, "trust" is established as a basis for transactions to take place.¹⁹

The use of embeddedness in network-oriented scholarship, as well as in anti-market studies, does not give adequate attention, however, to the full range of Polanyi's original conception. According to Polanyi, all societies include a mix of three ideal types of institutions; for reciprocity, redistribution, and market exchange. For any particular institution, a mix of elements from the ideal types is brought together and shaped by a complex blend of politics, culture, and ideology. Markets as social institutions, then, under this view, cannot have the self-regulating properties of an ideal type of exchange institution. Rather, they reflect particular meanings particular societies associate with land, labor, and money, which Polanyi treats conceptually as 'fictitious commodities'²⁰ Also integral to Polanyi's conception of embeddedness is the idea of double movement, whereby successful challenges to and redefinitions of land, labor, and money can evolve into counter movements.²¹ The potential for double movement in the contemporary context can be seen in the social capital²² created by Islamic organizations and anti-globalization protests, as a response to the neo-liberal economic consensus of advanced industrial societies, as well as in the micropolitics of local people's livelihood struggles.²³

2.1 Embedded Markets In Rural Africa

In recent years, especially in the aftermath of macroeconomic reforms in the 1980s and 1990s, there have been challenges to the sharpness of the distinction between states and markets. The emerging consensus is that price signals often do not provide sufficient incentives for efficient economic activity; likewise, governments lack the information or flexibility to correct market failures. While both state and market are essential mechanisms for social coordination, they work best when they are "embedded" in networks and associations that cushion risk and build trust among the relevant economic actors. In the particular context of Africa, scholars have

¹⁷ Why disembedding is considered negative, however, is sometimes a matter of ideological persuasion.

¹⁸ Economic sociologists, such as Mark Granovetter, resurrected and popularized this interpretation to argue that social relations stabilize exchange relationships. See Mark Granovetter, *Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness*, 91 AM. J. SOC. 481 (1985).

¹⁹ MARK GRANOVETTER & RICHARD SWEDBERG, *THE SOCIOLOGY OF ECONOMIC LIFE* (1993).

²⁰ POLANYI *supra* note 15, at 73.

²¹ POLANYI *supra* note 15.

²² BEN FINE, *SOCIAL CAPITAL VERSUS SOCIAL THEORY: THE POLITICAL ECONOMY and SOCIAL SCIENCE AT THE TURN OF THE MILLENNIUM* (2001).

²³ Polanyi's key weakness, according to Hart, "is his agnosticism on the question of the social and political forces through which the double movement is constituted in any particular juncture." Gillian Hart, *Geography and Development: Development/s Beyond Neoliberalism? Power, Culture, Political Economy*, 25 PROG. HUMAN. GEOG. 816 (2001).

argued that capitalistic markets are more pervasive in the lives of Africans and are becoming the main institutional basis for livelihoods. But while markets in Africa are increasingly pervasive, they are not, according to some Africanists, classically capitalist. Nor do they work optimally, either for improved livelihoods or for development. Due to downsizing and reduction in resources, states have a limited capacity to make up for market deficiencies and impose even less coordination and discipline. The net result is a high degree of 'local inventiveness.'²⁴

People who try to understand markets in Africa have turned to ideas about 'wealth-in-people' and 'wealth-in-things' to identify a specifically African mode of accumulation. To make a long story short, the scholarly consensus is that investing in personal relations in African societies has often been more important as a basis for livelihood and wealth accumulation than adherence to colonial and post-colonial economic institutions, which were imposed and which are grounded in 'modern' values and institutional practices.²⁵ In the following sections, analysis of the ways in which different actors dynamically undertake calculated investments in social relations and cultivate shared expectations of reciprocity will bring a sense of 'agency' to the idea of embeddedness in the context of CBNRM.

3. MARKET EMBEDDEDNESS IN THE NORTHERN SANDVELD: INVESTING IN PEOPLE AND INVESTMENTS IN CATTLE

Cattle were the epitome of social and symbolic capital; the capital that linked a material economy of things to a moral economy of persons, and so constructed a total economy of signs and practices.²⁶

Cattle were the media through which men shaped their social biographies. These were spoken of as the only heritable wealth of real worth.²⁷

"*Modimo o o nko e metsi*" is a common refrain among Batswana. It means "A God with a wet nose." The production and exchange of cattle gave form to the pre-colonial political economy, and remains closely intertwined with post-colonial politics in Botswana. The pre-colonial polity was also managed through controls over the agricultural cycle. The chief regulated the process of giving out seed and, thus, allowing ploughing. In this way, a chief was able to extract tributary labor, which also provided surpluses for later redistribution.²⁸ The term *kgosi*, which is associated with ruler, king, and chief, also denotes a rich man who dispenses patronage.

²⁴ Jane Guyer, Traditions of Invention in Equatorial Africa. Paper Prepared for the Joint African Committee of the Social Science Research Council/American Council of Learned Societies (1995).

²⁵ Jane I. Guyer, *Wealth in People, Wealth in Things- Introduction*, 36 J. AFR. HIST, 83 (1995). See also SUZANNE MIERS & IGOR KOPYTOFF, *SLAVERY IN AFRICA: HISTORICAL AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES* (1977); IGOR KOPYTOFF, *THE AFRICAN FRONTIER: THE REPRODUCTION OF TRADITIONAL AFRICAN SOCIETIES* (1990). The arguments in this article were more specifically inspired by contextual studies of rural Africa. See GÖRAN HYDÉN, *BEYOND UJAMAA IN TANZANIA: UNDERDEVELOPMENT AND AN UNCAPTURED PEASANTRY* (1980). See also SARA BERRY, *NO CONDITION IS PERMANENT: THE SOCIAL DYNAMICS OF AGRARIAN CHANGE IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA* (1993).

²⁶ Jean Comaroff & John L. Comaroff, *Goodly Beasts, Beastly Goods: Cattle and Commodities in a South African Context*. 17 AM. ETHNO. 196, 206 (1990).

²⁷ *Id.*, at 203.

²⁸ *Id.* at 202.

As in other agro-pastoral societies, cattle have historically been given a social and moral significance in Botswana far beyond their economic value. The number of cattle a man owns defines his wealth and indicates his status and prestige.²⁹ In the past, cattle were vital for praying to ancestors, in the transfer of bride price, and for other rituals. Today, cattle are still used as payment by a man's family to the family of his prospective wife, or provided as compensation for the loss of a family member, especially at funerals. Cattle also act as security against misfortune. In times of need they can be sold or exchanged for other goods. Cattle are dependable. They are largely self-producing. And they are mobile in the face of drought and danger. Cattle, in short, make an ideal basis for the stable storage, exchange, and seemingly spontaneous growth in wealth.³⁰

Communities living in the Okavango Delta lacked a unitary state until the middle of the nineteenth century. They were dispersed settlements, none powerful enough to impose their rule on others. Chiefs maintained power through social relations, such as marriage ties, performing the intercessory role between ancestral spirits and the community. Shrine and ritual objects were handed down from one chief to the next to mark the continuation of chieftainship.³¹ And the material basis of chiefly power was the circulation of cattle. Batswana rulers established political clientage by integrating newer followers through the exchange of cattle. Local chiefs extended their power if they were good hunters or possessors of cattle, which became the basis for patronage.

The *kgosi* lent a portion of his cattle to ward headmen. This patronage rested upon the *kgosi*'s personal decision, and could be rescinded by him at any time. Accordingly for a headman who was a commoner not only his office but also, to a great extent, his economic base depended on his personal loyalty to the *kgosi*.³²

The practice of *mafisa* was one of the most important devices for exchanging cattle within local communities. It was at once a method of surplus expropriation, a mechanism of social welfare and redistribution, and a way of establishing relations of exploitation. Wealthy farmers gave one or two beasts to poorer farmers on a long-term basis. Those who received the heifer were responsible for taking care of the cattle and in turn could keep the milk and use the offspring for ploughing. Farmers could also keep every third or fourth offspring to build up their own herd.³³

When asked whether they had cattle, and if so from whom, most people in the northern sandveld villages mentioned the names of a few from whom they got *mafisa* cattle. As elsewhere in Botswana, most of the cattle in the northern sandveld were owned by a minority.³⁴

²⁹ In Botswana, cattle accumulation is usually a man's prerogative. Women are expected to focus primarily on agriculture and domestic activities.

³⁰ Comaroff & Comaroff, *supra* note 26, at 201.

³¹ THOMAS T. TLOU A HISTORY OF NGAMILAND 1750 to 1906: THE FORMATION OF AN AFRICAN STATE (1985).

³² ØRNULF GULBRANDENSON. POVERTY IN THE MIDST OF PLENTY: SOCIO-ECONOMIC MARGINALIZATION, ECOLOGICAL DETERIORATION AND POLITICAL STABILITY IN A TSWANA SOCIETY (1996).

³³ Cattle also circulate on a need basis, where households who lack draught animals approach those with sufficient animals. *Go tsenya mabogo* (putting in hands) was one way for cattle owners to lend cattle in the community.

³⁴ The chiefs of all the villages, for example, such as KM, TH, a powerful board member of OCT, and the local representative of OCT. To protect the anonymity of respondents, names of community members interviewed, especially with regard to the renewal and re-tender process have been changed. In the northern sandveld villages, the chief along with the dominant lineages have historically also been the richest and the elites have continued to play the role of benevolent patrons.

In Botswana, inequality in the ownership of cattle is not a recent phenomenon. Chieftaincy was consolidated during the 1890s and with it the ownership of cattle also became concentrated.³⁵ Since the early twentieth century, western Tswana states had begun to exercise their control over groups of people who were fleeing the Mdebele, especially during the *difaqane* in the 1930s.³⁶

3.1 Rupturing the Cattle Complex

*Madi a hetotse matshelo a batho. Madi a re tshedisa matshelo a a botoka. Go na le ditlhabololo ka gore madi a teng. Madi a tlhabolotse temo-thuo ka gore o kgona go thapa batho go lema masimo, go teratelela masimo gore o sireletse dipeo. Fa madi a le teng re kgona go reka letloa le le tshwarang ditlhapi le go pagama mekoro re ya ko mafelong a a farologaneng.*³⁷

Translation: Money has changed peoples lives. Money has put us in a better stage. There is development because of money. Money has improved farming through hiring other people to plough the fields, buying fence and seeds. Through money we can now buy fishing nets to catch fish and boats to travel to different areas.

The year 1996 in the northern sandveld is always associated with cattle lung disease or bovine pleuropneumonia (CBPP), a disease that affected all the cattle in the Ngamiland District. The last previous case of CBPP in Botswana was in 1939. To prevent the spread of the sickness, the government killed over 400,000 head of cattle and constructed new veterinary cordon fences to separate the cattle of Ngamiland from the rest of the country and from wildlife. The destruction of was traumatic. “We wept like children,” said GN, one of the village elders in Seronga. “The cattle were like our children and we could not bear to see them slaughtered. They had to drag people away from the *kraals*[livestock enclosure] when they came to pick up the cattle,” he added.

The cattle lung disease dislocated in one stroke the material basis for the dominant agro-pastoral mode of production. More importantly, it undercut the social relations of domination built around cattle. One of the immediate effects was the collapse of farming and an increased monetization of production, consumption, and social reproduction.³⁸ The government established a cash compensation program for the culled livestock, paying 500 Pula (\$100) per animal for seventy per cent of the value of animals and another thirty per cent as compensation in kind. The state disbursed a total of 44 million Pula. Some of the funds were devoted to labor-based relief and development projects in which people were paid to work on tasks such as the de-bushing of roads, but the majority of cattle owners opted to receive cash. These changes in the local political economy further changed labor relations. “There was a lot of money that was suddenly available in the community,” said Mr. Banda, the headmaster of Ngambao High School in Seronga. The sale of labor for wages became an increasingly important income source after

³⁵ PETERS, *supra* note 4,

³⁶ Recently in southern African historiography there has been a debate about the Afro- or Zulu-centric views about the centrality of *difaqane* ('forced migration' in Sotho) or *mfeqane* ('the crushing' in Zulu) as the moment of great chaos or radical transformation. Historians have begun to question whether the 'history' of southern African people begins with the *difaqane*, but there is consensus that this was an important historical moment for understanding pre-colonial state building processes in southern Africa. See THE MFEQANE AFTERMATH: RECONSTRUCTIVE DEBATES IN SOUTHERN AFRICAN HISTORY (Carolyn Hamilton ed. 1996).

³⁷ KM, Seronga (January 03, 2002).

³⁸ Elders remember similar crises during an outbreak of locusts and TseTse in the 1940s and 1970s when local livelihoods were adversely affected.

the slaughter of the cattle and this, together with a lack of draught power for agriculture, reshaped patterns of production and accumulation.

In the past people grew millet, sorghum, groundnuts and there were good harvests. These last few years the harvests have not been good...these days life is difficult because of money. For someone to survive he/she should be working. Since most people are not working they have a hard time.³⁹

The transformation affected both wealthy and marginal families as market considerations became increasingly relevant in funeral rites, marriage ceremonies, and the domestic division of labor.⁴⁰

Several local elites recognized at this point that cattle could no longer be relied upon as the major form of investment. Since the early 1990s, more than thirteen small shops selling household commodities, like toothpaste, soap, soups, and other household items exported from South Africa, have opened in the northern sandveld villages. There has also been an effort to have Seronga designated as a sub-district headquarters, which would bring more government resources and private sector investment. In anticipation of the tarred road and electricity listed in the 2000-05 District Development Plan for Seronga, “prospectors” began to arrive to scout out islands for potential development around the northern sandveld.⁴¹ This was the local context into which CBNRM inserted itself.

4. MARKET ACTORS AND CBNRM IN BOTSWANA

When a Natural Resource Management Project (NRMP) was first suggested as the means for introducing and implementing CBNRM in Botswana, the reception was mixed. Under the CBNRM policies safari operators who wanted access, whether for hunting or for photographic tourism, also had to deal with local communities. Specifically, this required them to enter into legally binding agreements with communities which were often remote. For most safari operators in the Okavango Delta this was a high price to pay for securing wildlife concessions. When the NRMP consultants retained by the United States Agency for International Development came to the northern sandveld in 1993, to convince local communities of the benefits of CBNRM, community members were also skeptical. The discussion at the village *kgotla*⁴² in Gudigwa was especially testy. The *Bugakwe* were not ready to forego their special hunting rights. “Hunting is our birthright, and we will not give it up” said Amos, one of the elders in Gudigwa.

After the CBPP outbreak, and especially after spending most of their compensation monies, however, people began to pay more attention to the CBNRM idea. The projects gained

³⁹ Interview with GM, local community member, Seronga, November 16, 2001.

⁴⁰ PETER GESCHIERE. THE MODERNITY OF WITCHCRAFT (1997).

⁴¹ What was holding back investment, according to investors, was the lack of a “management plan” for the area. A management plan would provide guidelines for sustainable resource use and formalize property rights that could be a basis for private investment.

⁴² The *kgotla* is a customary institution, undertaking administrative, consultative and judicial functions. Local community members congregate at the *kgotla* to ask and hear about local developments, including announcements about new legislation and policies. The chief settles disputes among community members at the *kgotla*, including the problem of stray cattle. Historically open only to men, everyone can now attend *kgotla* meetings. See ISSAC SCHAPERLA, A HANDBOOK OF TSWANA LAW AND CUSTOM (1955).

some acceptance since they were potentially an important source for collective and individual material benefits, such as employment, transport, meat, and help with funerals.

4.1 Investing in Personal Relationships: One Face of Embedded Markets

In April 2001, when the *kgosi* (chief) of Gunitsoga passed away, there was an elaborate public funeral lasting several days. All the chiefs of the Okavango region attended and people came from as far as Gaborone, Botswana's capital, to pay their respects. The local safari operator was also in attendance, along with his managers. He not only paid for the casket but also gave money enough for two cows. Usually at funerals it is only chiefs and immediate male relatives who speak, but in this case the safari operator was one of the first to address those who had gathered to express their condolences. In his speech, he expressed his gratitude to the people for allowing him the privilege of contributing to the chief's funeral.⁴³

After the funeral, this behavior had rival explanations. Some praised the safari operator's gesture. He had shown he was one of them and that he cared for local people. Others pointed out that, if it had been a funeral for a common person, the safari operator would have been absent. Either way, the presence and contribution of the safari operator were powerful symbolic gestures, showing benevolence to the community and conferring standing as someone who would be there in times of need.

In all five northern sandveld villages of the Okavango Delta, the safari operator is commonly called *sefalana*, which denotes a big traditional container of sorghum. According to local custom, community members would give bags of sorghum to the chief after the harvest, in order to fill the container (*sefalana*). Chiefs would then provide protection from evil spirits, famine, and drought. By renaming the safari operator as *sefalana* local people evoke their embedded relationship to patron-client relationship, not to an autonomous market actor.

4.2 Cashing-in Investments in Personal Relationships: the Re-tender/Renewal Debate

In 2000, Wolfarlin, a professional hunter and an owner of WP Safaris, approached some of the community members in the five northern sandveld villages with an offer to establish hunting and photographic safaris. The only way Wolfarlin could accomplish this goal was to persuade the people in the five villages that he would be a worthy partner in the CBNRM project, now managed by the Okavango Conservation Trust (OCT). From October 15-18 the matter was put to a vote on the question of whether the villages would continue their relationship with Wolfarlin's WP Safaris as a "joint-venture partner" or select a new safari company.

In the months leading up to the vote and after the voting, there was intense debate about the issue in the five villages. At the local bars, houses which sold *bojalwa*, a locally brewed beer, in tuck-shops, and at other places in the villages where there were informal gatherings, people got into heated arguments and held competing and divergent positions about renewing the *lakhoo* (white) businessman's contract or going for re-tender. Those who supported the renewal usually argued about the benefits of keeping the current safari operator.⁴⁴ Those who wanted re-tender

⁴³ In Botswana, the powers of chiefs have declined in national politics compared to those of elected officials. However, customary authorities are still important figures in rural communities.

⁴⁴ Highlighting the positive contribution of the safari operator, the chairman of the village development committee (KT) said, "the safari operator has kept his promises to the community. If we go for re-tender, Wolfarlin [the safari operator placing a new bid] will remove all the equipment in the concessions and fire all the employees at the

hinted that improprieties had taken place and spoke of corruption by some of the board members. More often than not, statements made in public were with regard to the “performance” of the safari operator, and whether or not there were sufficient economic benefits from the partnership.⁴⁵

By evaluating the outcome in terms of the economic costs and benefits of their relationship with the safari operator, opposing sides in these remote rural communities seemed to be behaving like rational actors in a market. But after the vote, when state officials monitoring the elections declared that the majority of votes were cast in favor of re-tendering the safari concession,⁴⁶ in effect voting against the current safari operator, it became clear that more was at work, here.

For his part, the safari operator, who obviously disagreed with the election outcome, claimed that the constitution of the Okavango Conservation Trust, which gives it status as a legal entity under Botswana law, did not specify whether the number of villages or total number of votes should be counted to decide the election.⁴⁷ He argued further that, in the light of this legal ambiguity and since all the benefits from OCT are distributed to each village, the election should be determined by counting the number of villages favoring the safari operator, not the number of votes. He also filed a complaint with the Department of Wildlife and National Parks (DWNP) and the Directorate of Economic Crimes and Corruption (DCEC) asserting that there were a number of irregularities in the elections.⁴⁸ In addition to using legal arguments, the safari operator also skillfully exploited his status as *sefalana*. In the previous five years of his contract, a number of key people in the villages, especially OCT Board members, had benefited substantially through for example, through a sitting allowance. Under the OCT constitution, Board members received a sitting allowance to attend Board meetings. “[I]n the past the sitting

(safari) camps. I don’t think the new safari company will be able to employ as many people in the first year.” Interview with KT, Seronga (March, 28 2001). A similar argument was made by KM, who was on the Okavango Conservation Trust (OCT) Board in previous years, “Look at the problems of OCT. It is because of the Board and not the businessman. The JVP (Joint Venture Partner/safari operator) has paid his amount, but the community does not have development. This is because the (OCT) Board has many problems.” Interview with KM, Gudigwa, (20 March 2001).

⁴⁵ At one of the newly opened tuck-shops, the discussion about renewal and re-tender was also about monetary benefits: “We just want more money. Whoever, gives us more money, we will select them.” MK, a member of Seronga’s village trust committee also said “[H]e (the safari operator) promised us a tractor, boreholes, and a training school (for tourism). None of this has happened. Maybe a new safari company will provide us with these benefits.” Participant Observation, Seronga (April 03, 2001).

⁴⁶ Two hundred and six people from the five villages voted for a re-tender, while a hundred and ninety-six voted to renew the existing contract.

⁴⁷ The constitution of OCT is a legally binding document. However, it was drafted by a lawyer who was hired by the safari operator. The constitutions of community-based projects were originally drafted by the USAID/NRMP project and were replicated by several different communities without much deliberation.

⁴⁸ First, he claimed that another safari operator was illegally canvassing for votes. He also claimed to have information about money that was paid to specific people in the villages to vote against renewal. In addition, some of the people working at the safari camps could not vote during the election, since they were not present in their home villages when the voting took place. They were later not allowed by government officials to vote in another village. Finally, during the elections in Gudigwa, there was a shouting match between those who wanted renewal and those who wanted re-tender and during this affray the chief allegedly told people that if they voted for renewal they would face consequences.

allowance was 100 Pula...now the board gets 800 Pula. The workers get much less...but the board gets 800, this is not good.”⁴⁹

In May 2001, the Board voted to count the number of villages (3-2 in favor of the current safari operator) rather than the total number of votes, thus renewing the contract. The debate at the *kgotla* following this decision was cantankerous. BM, the chief’s eldest son, and MP, the nephew of a local district councilor, had mobilized several people to write to the District Commissioner (DC) in Maun to intervene in favor of a re-tender. The mood at the *kgotla* was, therefore, tense. By asking the state to intervene, BM and those who supported a re-tender had gone against the wishes of the elders of the village, who now supported the Board. But BM and MP were not acting alone. They had the support of their age-mates, many of whom had been to primary or secondary school together and now met at the local bars and tuck-shops. The younger generation was frustrated with the lack of employment opportunities in the northern sandveld villages, and with the old ways of the *madalas* (elders). By appealing for state intervention, these young people indicated that they wanted change, even at the risk of disrespecting their elders. The renewal and re-tender debate was, thus, much more than an exercise in market rationality. It galvanized the community and, as each side sought to exploit the ambiguity of legal rules, it created openings for negotiation between the local community, on the one hand, and external state and private actors, on the other hand. In short, it changed existing patterns of collective action and social trust.

4.3 Stirrings of a Countermovement?

The tender/renewal debate was also an opportunity for local communities to pay more attention to issues of participation and empowerment. This was particularly evident during the communities’ election of Village Trust Committees (VTCs), which took place after the new contract had been signed. It was rumored that many, though not all, VTC members had taken “gifts” or benefited personally from the safari operator. A number of these former members were not re-elected, while BM and several other younger community members were elected in their places, thus laying the basis for striking a new balance between the wisdom of the *madalas* (elders) and the interests of the young. The constitution of the OCT, which was written without input from the community and which had been difficult to change until that time, was also amended.

People have been in conflict. They made the constitution in favor of the Board. All the clauses refer to the Board, giving them the mandate to make decisions. We have asked them to change the constitution since it does not include community input. But they said that they didn’t have money to change some of the clauses in the constitution.⁵⁰

Now, with help from a local NGO, the constitution of OCT was translated from English to Setswana and VTC members were ‘sensitized’ about the by-laws. This was the first step, for many, towards taking real responsibility for ‘their’ community trust.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Interview with PM, ex-OCT Board member, Gunitsoga (November 20, 2001).

⁵⁰ Interview with SS, village elder, Seronga (Dec. 16, 2001).

⁵¹ Throughout OCT’s existence, a British donor-supported NGO was providing technical training and support to the five villages. It is noteworthy that the final assessment of the project also supports the perspective that there was manipulation by the private sector. See *Through Our Eyes ACORD’s Experience in CBNRM* (October, 2002), available at < <http://www.acord.org.uk/Publications/ACORD%20Botswana%20Experience%20with%20OCT.pdf>> (last visited August 05, 2004).

For the first five years of OCT, when village level committees were not empowered to take decisions, most of the money earned was not invested in the five villages. But, after the tender/renewal debate, this changed, too. After his contract was renewed the safari operator and some of his managers addressed *kgotla* meetings in each of the villages, promising that they would hire someone to deal specifically with the local communities and their concerns. Construction on delayed projects in Gudigwa and Eretsha was also advanced.

5. CHALLENGING MARKET ACTORS? THE EMBEDDEDNESS OF THE BOTSWANA STATE

The OCT tender and renewal debate also raises interesting questions about the role of the state in CBNRM. In a climate in which there is often distrust between the state and the private sector, the prevailing assumption has been that CBNRM is, first and foremost, about rural development and conservation. From the state's perspective, therefore, as well as that of international donors and conservation NGOs, participatory approaches to conservation help protect communities, against safari operators in this case. Participation is a bulwark against privileging the profit motives of the private sector and against the variety of means—legal, extra-legal, personal relationships, material incentives, and threats of making a trust bankrupt—that actors in the private sector are prepared to use to co-opt and manipulate communities and establish effective control over local people and resources.

During the tender and renewal debate, the behavior of state actors was consistent with these expectations as they applied, at various levels, a number of strategies ranging from court injunctions to visits by the District Commissioner to a stern letter to the local chief from the central minister. In *kgotla* meetings, state officials made it clear that they wanted the trust to act like an egalitarian, efficient, and legal-rational community organization. Wildlife officials advised Board members to follow the rules and do the right thing, which, from their point of view, was not to renew the contract of the current safari operator and instead opt for a re-tender. Berating community members and the board at one *kgotla*, a state official said:

You [the Board] are elected in bad times, because I have a letter from the minister complaining about what the Board did. Now this is your only chance to correct this mistake. You have made a conflict between the private sector and the government because of the Board.

In the end, however, state actors, and especially the wildlife officials who are charged with overseeing CBNRM projects, had limited influence.⁵² The Board signed a new contract with the safari operator. So, what factors shape the state's role in CBNRM projects in Botswana?

5.1. Diamonds Are Not Forever

⁵² There are other instances when actions by local communities seem contrary to economic cost-benefit rationales. In Sankuyu, another community project under CBNRM, the local community decided to select a safari operator who was offering a substantially smaller amount of money rather than the highest bidder. The Wildlife Department withheld the hunting quota of the community (and in turn of the safari operator), because from the perspective of state actors these were economically irrational decisions.

Compared to other African countries such as Sierra Leone and Congo, where conflicts over natural resources have been at the root of civil wars, Botswana's resources, even including its diamonds, have not elicited rent seeking policies for resource extraction by its elites. British colonialism also did not lead to extractive policies that imposed severe hardship on local communities. In this regard, Botswana appears to be exceptional.

It is also true, however, that poverty, unemployment, and inequality have been rising in Botswana. In 2000, unemployment was estimated at about 20 percent, while *half* the population of 1.6 million was income poor. Poverty is predominantly a rural problem and is especially severe in the Ghanzi, Ngamiland, and Kgalagadi districts, where most wildlife is located. In 1993, it was estimated that fifty-five per cent of rural Botswana were living in income poverty, compared to forty-six per cent in urban villages, and twenty-nine per cent in urban areas. Income distribution was skewed, with the poorest forty per cent receiving twelve per cent of total national income in 1994 compared to fifty-nine per cent for the richest twenty per cent.⁵³ Explanations of these data sometimes attribute Botswana's development failures to a limited absorptive capacity and to the size and spatial distribution of the population. At 1.6 million, the population cannot create sufficient absorptive capacity for domestic production. In many rural places, consumer populations are too small to sustain business on a scale that could have an aggregate impact on unemployment and poverty.⁵⁴ This suggests that in places like the remote northern sandveld villages of the Okavango Delta, the crisis of development could be exacerbated

In fact, a distinctive form of 'high modernist centralized state building'⁵⁵ in Botswana has created relationships of state to society in which paternalistic care-taking and social control stymie empowerment of local communities. The state in Botswana has been particularly adept at the administrative ordering and re-ordering of nature and society. Since independence, the state has undertaken comprehensive planning of human settlements and production relations. Various land use policies implemented through the 1970s exemplify the Botswana state's high modernist leanings. The dominant ideology of the state in Botswana has been as much about reshaping society and nature as about satisfying elite interests. Botswana's political elites, many of who are also cattle barons, have historically supported the livestock sector to the detriment of other economic sectors.⁵⁶ So while in Botswana, as in other African countries, ruling elites have appropriated resources for their own benefit, as seen in the unequal holding of cattle wealth,⁵⁷

⁵³ These development challenges will only be exacerbated with the deepening HIV/AIDS endemic. The HIV epidemic has already reduced life expectancy from 56.1 years in 1970-75 to 39.7 years in 2000-05 and it is predicted to slip further to 29 years by 2010. The change in life expectancy has caused Botswana to slip 51 places down the Human Development Index rankings of 174 nations from an impressive 71 in 1996 to 122 in 1999 and 2000. See UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM, BOTSWANA HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT (2002). Available at <http://www.unbotswana.org/bw/undp/poverty_bhdr2002.html> (last visited August 11, 2004)

⁵⁴ Ian Taylor, Botswana's 'Developmental State' and the 'Politics of Legitimacy.' Paper presented at a conference entitled 'Towards a New Political Economy of Development: Globalisation and Governance', University of Sheffield (July 4-6, 2002) Available at <<http://www.valt.helsinki.fi/staff/mhossain/state/Botswana.pdf>> (last visited August 05, 2004)

⁵⁵ JAMES C. SCOTT, *SEEING LIKE A STATE* (1998).

⁵⁶ PETERS, *supra* note 4.

⁵⁷ Among traditional farming households, 47% have no cattle, and 20% have fewer than 11. While 71% of such farming households own only 8 percent of the total national herd, the wealthiest one percent own roughly 25% of the herd, and the wealthiest 2.5% of farming households own 40%. Cattle ownership is especially gender biased. About 60% of all female farmers have no cattle, compared to 33% for male farmers. The average number of cattle

they have also seen to it that diamond revenues are invested in development activities. The state in Botswana has not aggressively pursued the extraction of resources (such as taxes) from rural communities, because it does not need to do so.

6. CONCLUSION

Market actors in Botswana's tourism sector often complain that there is a lack of business sense in local communities. They are especially impatient with CBNRM projects that mandate community-private sector cooperation and which they believe are inherently more complicated and, therefore, less profitable than private concessions. It is, of course, demanding to work with illiterate rural communities and with 'traditional' decision making, which is often viewed as slow and inefficient.⁵⁸ There is also some truth to the notion that remote rural communities like those in the Okavango Delta lack the sorts of business expertise, accounting skills, and marketing techniques necessary for the successful functioning of modern firms. But it is an oversimplification, as this article has tried to suggest, to characterize rural communities as ignorant and disorganized, without carefully examining the interactions private sector actors and the state have with them.

The experience of the northern sandveld villages in Botswana is also a reminder to the rest of southern Africa that legitimate and accountable conservation regimes do not come pre-packaged and ready assembled for success. The formation of them is a political process.⁵⁹ And in Botswana this process is as much influenced by the state's paternalistic view of local people, as 'children who need to grow up,' as it is by market actors who mask and weave their profit motives through idioms of local reciprocity. The hegemony of these more powerful actors, however, is always in flux. So, rather than reject communal approaches to development, we should pay greater attention to how the prospects for conservation and rural development are actually shaped by interactions among the divergent institutional logics of markets, states, and communities.

In a second-generation version, a communal perspective on conservation and development ought to guard against "naive assumptions of local homogeneity and discreteness,"⁶⁰ and reject simplistic claims that 'if wildlife needs to protect itself, it needs to pay for itself.' Since the relationship between the economic incentives for development and conservation outcomes is politically determined, communal approaches can become mechanisms for more powerful external state or private sector actors to appropriate local resources. But they also have the potential to motivate local collective action, entrepreneurship, and resource management, thus enabling local people to exercise more control over their own future.

owned by female farmers is six, compared to twenty for male farmers. See BOTSWANA HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT, *supra* note 53.

⁵⁸ Remote communities in the Okavango Delta have received inadequate training in organization and fiscal management. However, this article has focused primarily on the 'politics' of establishing local conservation regimes.

⁵⁹ Murphree, *supra* note 10.

⁶⁰ Agrawal & Gibson, *supra* note 8.

Figure 1

