



The Khwe of Namibia

Foragers Between Game, Tourism, and Politics

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Abstract. – The Namibian Khwe Bushmen live in the Bwabwata National Park, where they are highly affected by the park's history and conservation activities. Following Ingold's dwelling perspective, the world comes into being because a person is continuously interacting with his/her environment. This contrasted with building, in which (wo)man constructs the world cognitively before (s)he can live in it. We apply a third notion, lodging, to refer to a situation in which people live in an essentially foreign environment. In this, many changes in the environment of the Khwe are triggered beyond their control, instead of through their interaction with their environment. [*Bushmen, Namibia, conservation, dwelling, tourism*]

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Living in the Environment

In a TV interview some years ago, an African biologist softly chided his European colleagues: "You would rather turn all of Africa South of the Sahara into one great game park." They remained silent as they knew he was right (Fens 2007: 5). Indeed, Northern views on Africa, its "inventions of Africa", are extremely ambivalent. On the one hand, the news pictures an Africa of famines and deep poverty, rich dictators, diamond wars, and genocide. On the other hand, wildlife programmes exude a totally different Africa, of animals, naturally, but also of (usually white) people trying their hardest to preserve precious wildlife resources. These are considered part of our world heritage, not the property or responsibility of Africans themselves. The implied message is very clear: Africa is wild and has to remain that way, through our concerted (Northern) interventions. But there are people on the continent too; in fact we all have our roots and origins in Africa. Nowhere do these two images of Africa come together more clearly than in the issue of people and parks, in the complicated interaction of people with more distant cultures compared to ours, and the way the world has organized Africa's wildlife into parks.

We present here the case of the Khwe Bushmen¹ of the Caprivi Strip in Namibia, as one example of interaction in order to glean some of the complexi-

1 See for the diversity in naming these groups in general Kent (1996; 2002) or Barnard (1992) and for the difficulty in categorizing and classifying them Biesbrouck et al. (1999).

ties in the people-and-parks dynamics. As a (former) hunting-gathering culture, this case study fits the general discussion on hunters and gatherers in various places around the world, and as such is part of a long-standing anthropological discussion. Our discourse starts from Heidegger's notion of "dwelling," which was put forward by Tim Ingold in his seminal work "The Perception of the Environment. Essays in Livelihood, Dwelling, and Skill" (2000). Dwelling, in this approach, means "the immersion of the organism/person in an environment or life-world as an inescapable condition of existence ... From this perspective the world continuously comes into being around the person" (Ingold 2000: 153). In this way, the often-cited difference between cognized or perceived environment versus effective environment is seen as a construct, and conflated in the unifying notion of dwelling. Not only is the effective environment always the result of human-ecological interaction in whatever way or fashion, there is also the perennial problem of whose vision of the environment is superior: the *emic* vision of the people in question or the purportedly "objectified" *etic* by the community of observers. The dwelling perspective views man and the environment as mutually constituted and emerging in interaction, and thus collates the view of humans imposing their views on nature with the environment imposing its form on humans.

Ingold contrasts this with "building," the notion that man has to construct a world before he can live in it. This latter perspective starts from the notion of man and his environment as *a priori* givens that then interact. "Human beings inhabit discursive worlds of culturally constructed significance, laid down upon the substrate of a continuous and undifferentiated physical terrain" (Ingold 2000: 172). In this perspective, man takes cognizance of his environment, creates an understanding of it, and then engages with his environment in order to live in that world and maximize his chances of survival. "The essence of the building perspective [is] that worlds are made before they are lived in" (Ingold 2000: 179).

For Ingold, "dwelling" and "building" are different paradigms, diverging fundamental ways of thinking about the relationship between *Mensch und Umwelt*, in the terms of Von Uexküll, the founder of ecology. However, in our view they can both be used as concepts, not as total approaches, at least in an analysis of the Khwe situation. In so doing, we will need a third one too, the notion of "lodging." People who lodge live in an essentially foreign environment; in ecological terms this implies that people, when confronted with a given environment or a given change in environment which is beyond

their control and did not happen as a result of their interaction with that environment, have to adapt to changes or new circumstances. In the lodging concept, the environment is dominant and people have to shift their way of life according to its contingent properties and independent changes. Here, the environment is not only discernible as something beyond human society, but also as an independent variable impinging on and informing human existence. Thus, we use these three notions as analytical concepts relevant to the different historical situation of the same people to understand their reactions to the changes in their environment.

To illustrate this with a contemporary issue: climate change is seen as "dwelling" if we focus on the human factor of global warming, both as "culprits" and in our attempt to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Seen as "building," it would recognize that a mix of human and geo-climatic processes are intertwined and now are hard to change, so we can estimate that whatever the reductions, we would still have to build higher dikes, at least in the Netherlands. As "lodging," the immediacy of a financial crisis now would block our vision of a long-term future, and the focus on economic matters of the here and now would block our evaluation of the long-term threats.

In analyzing these changes, we use the method of "critical event analysis" (Long 1997: 7): a critical event occurs when people are confronted or become aware of their confrontation with the limitations of the solutions they have in their cultural toolkit to deal with the situation at hand. Their situation has drastically changed and they have no way of going back to their old situation, nor can they use their former solutions for the new problems. However, critical events need not always be viewed as destructive, they can also mean new opportunities hitherto undreamt of, the eventual costs of which will have to be assessed later. Critical events also have to be perceived as crucial for survival, as the issue of climate change shows. What is continuously at stake between dwelling, building and lodging is the transformation of the cultural understanding people have of their environment and of their own interaction with that environment, and with each other. In our example, when sea level rise floods an island, or hurricanes proliferate, that is a critical event.

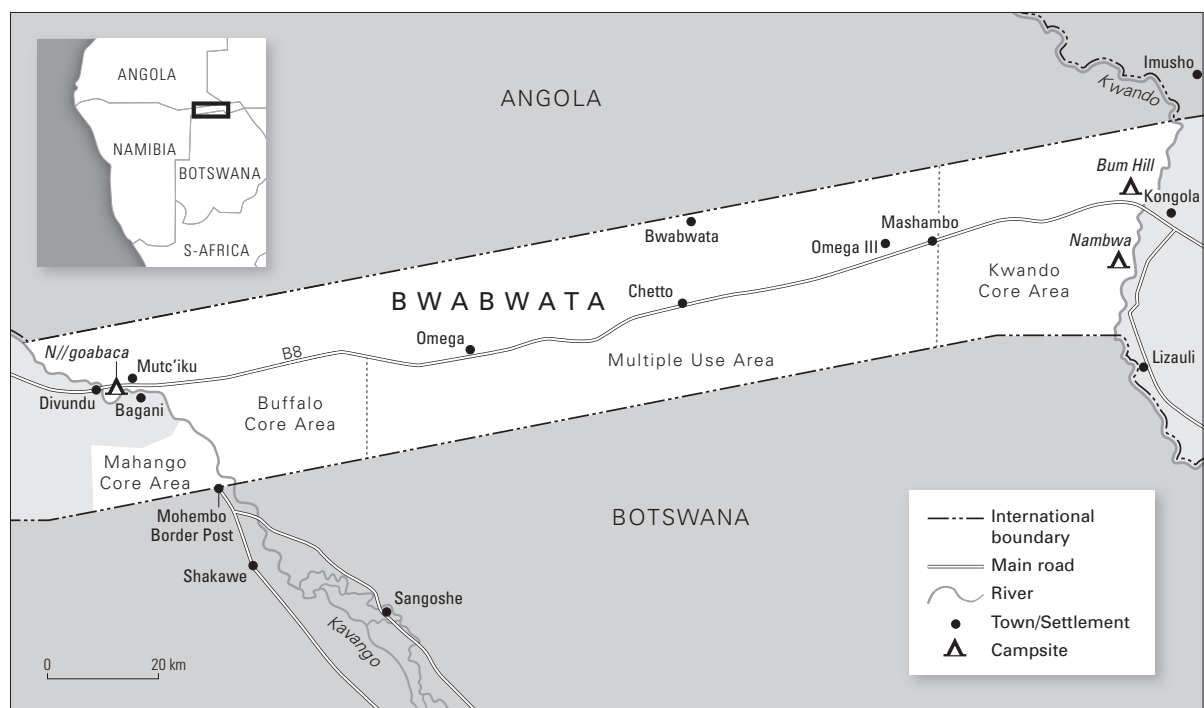
Though Ingold uses various cultural forms in his examples, his main data stem from nomadic societies, for several reasons. One is that his own original fieldwork was among Siberian reindeer nomads; the other is, evidently, that nomadic societies show the largest contrast with our own building-dominated society and, as such, furnish the most productive

comparison for fundamental-theoretical purposes. This tallies well with our case, in which a basically hunting-gathering society lives in an environment which has been changing rapidly, maybe not ecologically but in political dynamics that have markedly informed the Khwe dwelling, building and lodging in the Caprivi Strip. A succession of critical events within a fifty-year period has tested the survival skills of the Khwe to the limit. Examples of such critical events are the creation of a wildlife reserve/game park, the outbreak of war in the area, the spill-over of a foreign war, the violent outburst of an independence movement, the denial of their own traditional leadership, the introduction of novel (community-based and transboundary) conservation initiatives and marginalization after independence. Considering their present insecure livelihoods and their failure to secure food and a safe environment, it is tempting to view them as passive victims struggling to adapt to external critical events with a limited and ancient cultural toolkit and an internal cultural weakness, i.e. as lodgers. However, this would lose sight of a continuous adaptation to external factors as an example of the most important skill of Bushmen societies, namely flexibility. Shifting between the three modes of adaptation, they show themselves masters of survival, building modern solutions based upon both traditional cultural skills and solutions offered by external parties.

The Hunting Days

Game must have been relatively abundant in the old days. Forever gone, but remembered by the old men who used to be hunters, hunting as a way of life bore some definite characteristics for the Khwe of the Namibian Caprivi Strip. The Khwe used to inhabit an area that today covers four different countries: Angola, Zambia, Namibia and Botswana (Suzman 2001: 54). Bwabwata National Park is at the centre of this area. Life in West Caprivi prior to independence is not as well documented as that of some of the other Bushmen groups for two reasons. First, they did not fit the stereotypical image of pure and foraging Bushmen and, second, West Caprivi is geographically remote and has been kept isolated for military purposes (Boden 2009: 29). In total around 5,500 people live in Bwabwata, most of them Khwe (around 4,000), Vasekele !Xun (around 300) and some Mbukushu, the latter living mainly on the western side of the park. In this area ten villages, mostly based on former army camps, plus some smaller settlements spread across the park house the Khwe (Suzman 2001: 54).

In the old days, their hunting territory included parts of Botswana, Namibia and Angola but this has changed drastically. They used to hunt a rich fauna in an area with few human groups. "The richness of wildlife provided meat all year round for large



Map 1: Bwabwata National Park

groups of people. They move fast and are able to walk long distances” (Gusinde 1966). Large groups meant several thousand in total, with the core area being between the Kavango and Kwando rivers, the cultural area of what is now Divundu, southern Angola and Caprivi, and including an area of north Botswana. Bwabwata National Park is at the core of this area (see map 1).

From the early twentieth century onwards, West Caprivi and its surroundings were a region of shifting relationships and struggles between pre-colonial and colonial states and the people living there. Numerous migrations and displacements took place and the Khwe lived on the periphery of the realms of several Bantu groups. This contact extended back over several centuries, which means they are not recently acculturated but have an older, more hybrid culture. Some of them were clients, servants, or slaves (Taylor 2008: 318; 2009: 418). They formed a loose conglomerate of semi-nomadic hunters and gatherers who had been in contact with stock owners and agriculturalists for a long time, especially through the Bantu-speaking Mbukushu who joined the greater migration territory of the Khwe during the 1800s. The Khwe reacted by moving southwards within their territory, became reliant in a semi-dependent position on the Mbukushu, were enslaved² by them or sold to slave traders in Angola.³ Hunting and gathering was always one of the major economic activities of the Khwe but they shifted between a variety of economic activities, including agriculture. In pre-colonial times they practised agriculture in addition to hunting and gathering and traded with various neighboring groups (Orth 2003: 134–137). According to Diemer (1996: 19–20), it was the Mbukushu who taught the Khwe agriculture but Orth (2003: 142) claimed that they learned it from their (grand)parents, which emphasises their economic independence. Their social organization follows the more or less classic foragers’ society with small settlements, being semi-sedentary, and moving every few years. Led by family heads, the groups were small, as were the families, with small extended families as the main unit. There was a nuclear family with resident daughters-in-law and occasionally sons-in-law. Descent was not marked, as larger groupings were more of a residential than of a lineage nature, and no strict hierarchies were recognized as the leadership was not apparent. The situ-

ational leadership, known from other hunting-gathering societies, was restricted to medicine men as recognized specialists and there seem to have been few tasks so difficult as to warrant occasional leadership. Hunting was considered an inherited quality given by the gods, only marginally perfectible by exercise and magic, and families eagerly watched their growing sons for signs of hunting prowess.

People now speak sadly of the decline of the area’s wild animals, much more so than of the demise of their own way of life (cf. Kusimba 2003). As Popo, an informant from Chetto explained: “We considered the wild animals our property, like we do now our domestic animals” (Diemer 1996: 51). Considering the nostalgia that usually surrounds reminiscences of hunting days, the Khwe are remarkably equivocal about their changed lifestyle. Hunting was never an easy job, and never very captivating. The main method used by the Khwe was running with a spear behind animals. Spear hunting, or rather spear running, was an option during the rainy season when the mud-filled *omiramba* (parallel drainage lines covered with grass and separated by forests) slowed down giraffe, kudu and impala. For the rest of the year, running did not mean catching animals in flight but chasing those with less-efficient cooling such as the bush pig and the eland, wearing them out kilometre after hot kilometre. Hunting was basically endurance running unless one had good hunting dogs, but they seem to have been quite rare; they demanded also a sizeable share of the meat themselves and were mainly used for hunting vervet monkeys, honey badgers, mongoose and other small predators. Hunting with bows and poisoned arrows was well known but – at least in the memories of today’s old men – never prevalent. As one of them, Magninka from Chetto, explained, this was too difficult:

There have never been many Khwe able to hunt this way ... shooting is hard too, although you can hit the animal everywhere because the poison will do the work ... Although there were very few hunters with bow and arrow they were not higher valued than spear hunters (Diemer 1996: 53).

The poison used came from two worms and plant extracts. Snares, traps, and pits were used sparsely.

A good hunt, i.e. the killing of a large animal, was normally a collective effort (in times of hunger or for a funeral) and it was only possible if there were several good hunters in one family. With the help of the family, the animal was brought back to the clearing in pieces and *biltong* (dried meat) could be made of the remainder. As the Khwe lived in nucleated settlements, they were careful not to over-

2 When relationships developed in the context of incorporation and subordination between the Khwe and Mbukushu, these were complex. “Slavery” is often used but oversimplifies the relationship (Taylor 2009: 421 f.).

3 Taylor 2009: 419–423; Robins et al. 2001: 53–75; Suzman 2001: 55.

hunt their immediate surroundings. It was extremely important to respect wildlife near the clearings, so that hunters could hunt within a day's walk, having been alerted to the presence of an animal by other family members collecting food in the area. This resulted in the area being abandoned after a killing and strict rules about avoiding the resting and breeding locations of animals.

Their hunting territory was managed by the head of the family and never overlapped with other families. As usual among hunter-gatherers, the oldest man in the family had to eat first and then the others could eat, including the hunter himself. It was the family head's responsibility to ensure the proper division of the meat, as any infraction of these rules brought about a complex series of rituals to purify the culprit. All decisions about gifts to the ancestors were also made by the family head. The head would try to reach a collective decision for a hunter, involving all adult male family members, excluding the women and the hunter himself. As hunters, they had considerable knowledge about the animals themselves. Wild animals were considered to be smarter than domesticated ones, since "domesticated animals are stupid because they did not smell that humans wanted to kill them" and the hunters allotted themselves a crucial role in the domestication of animals, bringing the "stupid ones" to the Mbukushu (Diemer 1996: 62 f.). One remarkable characteristic is the notion of smell as crucial for the animal itself. Animals that are better able to smell humans than other animals have a soul, our informants claimed. Especially the impala, steenbok, bush pig, eland and tsessebe had a soul in this way, but the large animals were like humans anyway:

A lot of animals live in families, like people ... the elephant and buffalo go looking for a dead relative like people do and they try to protect the dead animal against people ... the zebra and the eland cry before they are killed like people do ... the buffalo attacks people or lions that are hunting for this animal (Diemer 1996: 64).

Sometimes unusual behavior is attributed to the knowledge animals have of humans: an elephant killed a hunter when it smelled at the hunter's house that the family was having disagreements. The snake is the angriest towards man, and the eland is the closest. It has a great soul because it communicates with the gods in the hope of getting mercy. The hunter was not allowed to kill the eland while it cried and had to sneak closer and finish the animal off with a spear, hidden from the sight of the eland.

Some animals are not really animals in their eyes: some wild dogs and many hyenas, especially the ones that attack humans, are in fact medi-

cine men in animal shapes. Being about the only specialists, their role is important but diffuse. Medicine men used their knowledge for slowing down animals, for rain-making and for bush medicines to make certain parts of meat edible or to protect the hunter. *Veldfood*, the South African name for bush crops, used to be important, and still is today, more so than hunting. The Khwe can still recognize and collect a large array of tubers, leaves, and edible twigs.

A Turbulent History of Critical Events

The Caprivi Strip is a weird piece of colonial wheeling and dealing that was meant to connect the German colony of Süd-West Afrika (now Namibia) with other German holdings on the east coast. In 1880, just a few years before the rape of Africa in Berlin, the Imperial Chancellor Leo Graf von Caprivi obtained the Strip from the British Empire in the Helgoland-Zanzibar Contract in exchange for the islands of Zanzibar and Helgoland, the latter in the North Sea (Fisch 1996: 12 f.). The Strip runs from west to east along the Namibian border with Angola and Botswana as far as Zambia, effectively linking the west of Southern Africa with the east, and the Kavango and Kwando rivers with the Zambezi. The Central African Lozi-speaking groups of East Caprivi like the Mafwe have neither cultural nor historical connections with most of Namibia. Politically, they have been marginalized in Namibia, just as the Khwe. Such a geo-political piece of land is bound to have a turbulent political future and this is definitely the case for the Caprivi Strip. International politics continues to dominate Khwe life to a great extent.

Namibia was given as a protectorate to South Africa after the First World War, and the South African government increasingly treated it as an integrated province. Especially in the densely populated Ovambo area in the north of Namibia, the South African army steadily increased its counterinsurgency campaigns and made regular inroads into Angolan territory. Also in the Kavango area, as in West Caprivi, a *cordon sanitaire* was gradually installed along the long border. Internal apartheid strategies dictated a maximal separation between the main part of the Bantu population, i.e. the Ovambo area, and the centre of the white settlement, central Namibia, Windhoek and Herero country. Thus, the Etosha National Park, created in 1907, served a dual purpose, namely protecting a unique ecosystem around the Etosha Pan and regulating traffic between the Ovambo Bantustan and the south. The Caprivi Strip,

as another potential area of conflict, was made into a protected zone, through a string of conservation measures as political relations between South Africa and Angola worsened. The South Africans were planning to create a homeland for the Khwe east of the Kavango River but at the request of the Department of Nature Conservation, the South West African administration announced that the entire area between the Kavango and the Kwando rivers would be the West Caprivi Nature Park in 1963, changing it to the Caprivi Game Park in 1968. A likely reason for declaring West Caprivi a nature conservation area was not to protect its natural resources but to control population movements along the Angolan border because of independence movements in Zambia and Botswana and the war of liberation in Angola. The Khwe had permission to reside in the new park but their options for hunting and gathering or practicing agriculture were substantially limited.⁴ From the 1940s onwards, foreigners and whites became significant actors and symbols in Khwe-Mbukushu relationships, mainly because of their role as protectors of the Khwe and as promoters of the differential treatment of the two groups, in which the South African administration repeatedly undermined Mbukushu political authority. This was important in the shaping of Mbukushu and Khwe identities (Taylor 2009: 430 f.).

From the 1950s onwards, the police post in Rundu (200 km west of the Caprivi Strip) controlled the Caprivi Strip, but this changed when the Portuguese colonial empire collapsed in 1974. The South African apartheid regime followed a policy of destabilization of the newly independent Southern African countries and the Caprivi Strip proved to be of clear strategic importance, providing access for the South African Defence Force (SADF) to Angola, Botswana and Zambia. Around 1975 the SADF stopped all habitation along the entire border between Angola and Namibia, with the forced removal of some 40,000 people, and then invaded Angola. In the Caprivi Strip this meant that the military was in full command with military posts in Rundu and Katima Mulilo at both ends of the Strip. The Khwe had to resettle in army camps, the most important being Camp Alpha, which was later renamed Omega in 1973. Their arrival in the area must have been seen as salvation by the poverty-stricken community of the Khwe. The SADF started recruitment campaigns for trackers in the bush and Bushmen had little choice but to join since they would be sent back if they refused to enlist in the army. In the sec-

ond half of the 1970s the military presence expanded tremendously, which had a huge impact on the Khwe's social and economic life (Boden 2009: 51–52; Orth 2003: 133). Special forces, such as Police Unit K (Koevoet = crowbar), were created in 1978 and they and elite paratroops were responsible for the clearance of the area. In 1974 a Bushmen battalion was trained and saw action in 1976. Omega recruited both Vasekele !Xun from Angola and Khwe in functions such as trackers and infantry soldiers for the camps. About 80% of the Khwe population was employed in the camps, with Omega as the hub, housing about half of the population of West Caprivi (Gordon 1992: 186), totalling some 850 soldiers, 900 women and 1,500 children in 1981. By the end of the 1980s Omega housed 4,500 Bushmen, the largest Bushmen settlement in recorded history, making the Khwe a sedentary people dependent on cash. The squatter camps around the bases and the Khwe were almost totally supported by the army: the children went to army schools, while the adults were on the army's payroll. This was the heyday of the Khwe but the boom was short-lived. The political situation changed: Angola became less of a threat and the SADF retreated to South Africa. Some 3,500 Bushmen left the Caprivi Strip in March 1990 to remain with the SADF and were relocated to Schmidtsdrift in South Africa, not feeling safe after independence with their former enemy, the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO), as the main political party (Suzman 2001: 56).

The Khwe's lives today are still coloured by memories of these times. Positive developments are recognized but are often seen as being too slow and unstructured because of external changes. Between 1991 and 1996 most of the Khwe were resettled in four villages and given seeds to grow crops, and periodically food aid, combined with structural aid such as schools and water wells operated by solar pumps. Older people with the right documents received pensions and helped support their extended families. In 1992 a Community-Based Natural Resource Management project (CBNRM) started in the West Caprivi Game Reserve and required game guards, resource monitors and members of a steering committee, who received an income and became a voice to be heard. Then trouble began in 1996 with the outbreak of the lung disease Contagious Bovine Pleuropneumonia amongst cattle in northern Botswana. This resulted in the slaughter of all the cattle the Khwe owned and which were their reserve in times of hunger, and used for ploughing and trading for cash if necessary. Tourism projects near the Kavango and Kwando rivers failed to generate money, not only because of a lack of tourists but also be-

4 Boden 2009: 39 f.; Brown and Jones 1994: 85; Orth 2003: 132.

cause of land claims by the Mbukushu. And living in a game reserve meant not being allowed to hunt large game and having no way of defending themselves and their crops from elephants that destroyed the bush and their gardens.

Their deep involvement with the SADF has tainted the Khwe ever since. Heyday as it may have been, they sided with the “enemy”, and still bear that stigma inside the new state. Thus, the Khwe are still denied recognition and autonomy as an ethnic group and cannot have their own autonomous political structure (traditional authority). Armed conflict involving the Caprivi Liberation Army (CLA) in East Caprivi and fighting in Angola between rebels from União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola (UNITA) and soldiers from the Forças Armadas Angolanas (FAA) caused enormous security issues for the Khwe. In both conflicts, the Khwe were suspected of collaborating with enemies of the Namibian state, such as the CLA and UNITA (Boden 2003: 166). The Khwe were threatened by the Namibian Defence Force (NDF) and the Special Field Forces (SFF) during searches and interrogations in the Caprivi Strip and they made up a large part of the several thousand refugees in Botswana between 1998 and 2000. There was another exodus after the UNITA attacks in Namibia in 2000. The Khwe suffered from conflicts involving UNITA rebels, the FAA, the NDF and the SSF, and were always suspected of supporting the enemy. They still pay for their “day in the sun”.

Abraham Bok, the headman of the village of Chetto in the middle of the Caprivi Strip, told the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) in March 2006 about the food shortages his people were facing. During fieldwork in Chetto between 1994 and 1995 (Diemer 1996) he was a firm believer in the CBNRM project and actively supported the protection of game, but to the IFRC he later said:

I know it's illegal to hunt, but I would rather leave my family for 4 days, walk in the bush and come back with some antelope meat. You can't expect me to sit and listen to the agonizing screams of my little children at night. It's painful.

Today there are still deep fears in the community and a serious distrust of the Namibian government. There is a myth in Namibia that the Khwe are enemies of the state and this has resulted in their exclusion from development and resources. The Khwe believe they are being denied an equal position in society (Boden 2003: 195 f.).

The Park and Khwe Survival Strategies

Ecological Strategies

During the 1960s and 1970s the South West African Administration (SWAA) felt the need to have more control in the Caprivi Strip (Suzman 2001: 55), leading to the removal of all Mbukushu as part of an apartheid strategy. However, in contravention of the Odendaal Commission, the area did not become a homeland for Bushmen but a nature park. In 1963 the West Caprivi Nature Park was established (Proclamation 67 of 1963) under the Directorate of Nature Conservation (DNC) (Brown and Jones 1994: 3), and an ecological survey was made of the area. The term “nature park” was upgraded in 1968 to “game reserve,” implying a higher level of protection (Proclamation 19, 1968) but with the same borders. In the same year, however, the SADF occupied the area, so the DNC never achieved effective control, and despite its official tutelage of the wildlife, the Ministry of Wildlife Conservation and Tourism had no access to its own area until the retreat of the SADF in 1990. Nominally it remained a park although it was effectively a military base.

From that time onwards, the Ministry (now called the Ministry of Environment and Tourism, or MET) started to manage the park, which housed not only game but also some 4,000 people. This created interest in the area among other ministries, but the MET remained the main supporter and it drew up a CBNRM project, a type of project that became fashionable at that time. There was game present, though not abundantly. Studies done by the Ministries show that animal numbers were below carrying capacity, with the exception of elephants. The CBNRM project aimed at cooperation between rural communities and the government in the management of the resource base, with the local communities benefitting from the exploitation of the park due to the sustainability of its wildlife. In practice this has meant setting up a Community Liaison Office, and the CLO or project field manager has to liaise with the MET and the local communities and train and support community game guards. In development jargon, the conservation-related enterprises consist of community-run campsites, safari operations, game capture (trophy hunting), game cropping and employment in tourism enterprises.

The game situation is not yet at the level required to make it a viable park. Assigning the area as a park has meant that the Khwe cannot hunt the elephant, rhino and giraffe, but are (relatively) free to hunt other animals. The three large species were not of great importance in their diet in any case so they

have adapted quickly to the new regulations, sometimes borrowing a rifle from the police to hunt more effectively. SADF occupation has not only brought employment, it has also encouraged a lot of hunting with rifles, with the military being sometimes keener to shoot than to eat. The rhino seems to have borne the brunt of this trigger happiness, and the species has been practically eliminated. For the Khwe, this shooting has made no sense but they are powerless and have no means of protest. Of all the army actions, this is the only one they complain about, as they see that “their wild animals” have been taken from them.

The wildlife in Caprivi Game Park belonged to the state, which changed with the conservancy legislation in Namibia in the mid-1990s when the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) favored a conservancy in this area, although they believed this was an unlikely scenario (WWF 1997) and with funding from WWF-US, USAID and the MET, the NGO Integrated Rural Development and Nature Conservancy (IRDNC) started to implement CBNRM in West Caprivi in 1992. IRDNC would become an important player in the area until today. When the conservancy application for West Caprivi was prepared in 1996, with the support of IRDNC, the process was terminated by the government. A letter from MET to the informal Chief Kipi George in December 1996 explained that the legislation for communal area conservancies expressly excluded proclaimed game parks or nature reserves as part of a conservancy (Boden 2003: 183; Rousset 2003: 6–14). So even though Bwabwata never became a conservancy, Brown and Jones (1994: 84–95) recommended a CBNRM project for West Caprivi in 1994 and many of today’s projects in Bwabwata can be traced back to this, including trophy-hunting, community campsites, the community game guards and other tourist developments. When the MET released a plan to change the status of the Caprivi Game Park into Bwabwata National Park in 1999, this was done to improve the management and nature conservation in the area and to allow the communities to benefit equally from wildlife and tourism. To represent the community in Bwabwata, it was decided that the best option was to establish a residents’ association, which evolved into the Kyaramacan Association (KA). The IRDNC wanted to start building up confidence among the Khwe through the KA. It is a CBO that represents *all* inhabitants of Bwabwata. However, it turns out that KA is mostly considered and embraced by the Khwe who, due to their political marginalization embrace KA to disassociate themselves from other groups, especially the Mbukushu, and have their interests represent-

ed (Koot 2013: 112–115). KA is heavily involved in executing the CBNRM programme, that is favored by most Khwe as they see them as relating to the Khwe’s traditional culture. For example, Joel Boyongo explained in 2010 that “(w)e are rich. I am not talking about shops and houses and so, but we are rich in our culture ... This monitoring (of wildlife) is not from today, no! It’s from our forefathers.”

Here it is tempting to see the Bushmen as the natural conservationists, based on the romantic image of the Bushmen being a part of nature. However, the way that hunter-gatherers consider themselves as custodians of their environment is very different to the scientific notion of conservation. The two should not be confused. Hunter-gatherers do not consider themselves responsible for the survival of wildlife species, as in their worldview, humans are insignificant and only a small part of the ecological equation. They need to keep up a dialogue with their environment by maintaining a balance in their relationship with its various powers and looking after it through direct engagement with the parts of the environment (Ingold 2000: 68 f.; cf. Fennell 2008). From this point of view, rhetoric about hunter-gatherers as if they were the “true conservationists” does not make sense, but this is widespread amongst stakeholders such as NGOs, government, and donors as we experienced among the Bushmen. However, we doubt this for two reasons. First, CBNRM originally started here as an anti-poaching strategy. Why would this be necessary if the Khwe were protectors of animals? Second, many people in Bwabwata told us they would still like to hunt if they would be permitted. Interestingly, various Bushmen today see *themselves* as the natural conservationists, which is an adapted Romantic idea originating in the West. In their perception it makes sense to build on this idea, because it opens doors in the conservation movement that is such a dominant power in their environment today.

Since independence, the Khwe have quite calmly accepted the division of the Caprivi Strip into core conservation areas, development areas and multiple-use areas, as well as offering protection to the wildlife. Their villages have profited from external aid as development areas and they have been allowed to collect *veldfood* in the multiple-use areas. Their strategy has consisted of taking advantage of the aid and waiting for profits for the community from the N//goabaca tourism camp and trophy hunting concessions. They have had to be patient concerning these profits, since the development of the N//goabaca campsite on the banks of the Okavango River has been troubled by questions about land rights while tourists are rare in this area. Patience seems

to have been an effective survival strategy in the long run since game proceeds from a hunting concession have been distributed to the villages (Koot 2013: 125–133). Wildlife, which is often a threat to the community, then becomes a movable asset. The Kyaramacan Association made a total of N\$ 2.4 million in both 2006 and 2007 and had 36 tons of game meat distributed to the people in Bwabwata. The Cabinet decided that, because it is in a national park, they should get 50% of this for the Game Products Trust Fund. In 2006, N\$ 100,000 of the N\$ 1.2 million left was distributed to the people via the headmen of the villages, which in some cases created conflict. In 2007, a total of N\$ 300,000 was distributed and every villager, including children, received N\$ 136. People felt that money should be distributed individually rather than at village level, something that was supported by Kyaramacan that encouraged community members to use the money for projects and school fees rather than alcohol (Kamba n. d.). In addition to these financial benefits, 17 local residents were employed for tracking and skinning and meat was distributed to the community. With the N\$ 1.2 million per year, KA was able to pay the salaries of the community game guards and community resource monitors, community projects, a vehicle and conservation-related costs as well as

the salaries of Kyaramacan employees (KA 2009). This way trophy hunting had become the financial engine behind the CBNRM programme. With the introduction of trophy hunting, the Khwe's environment changed in such a way that finances or simply money became an ever-bigger player in that environment, in which also animals had now become financial assets. This could also turn into a potential source of conflict as well, within the community, among KA members, IRDNC, hunting operators, chiefs, and the government (Koot 2013: 133–137).

Economic Strategies

The Khwe have been introduced to a new survival strategy, namely cash jobs, and have become dependent on a cash economy over the last two decades, although before the arrival of the SADF some of them had jobs in the mines in South Africa or on farms in South West Africa. It can be argued that in the past most of the Khwe (except the adult males) did not earn cash but had become used to “being taken care of,” as the SADF supplied them with all their basic needs, including canned meat. This welfare culture ended in 1990 with Namibia's independence. Although food rations were given by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia (ELCIN) between 1991 and 1996, older people often refer to the SWAA food rations as “the only time the government took well care of us.” The pensions received by the elderly, if they were registered, were often an extended family's most secure form of income. During fieldwork in Chetto in the mid-1990s it was strange to see that the elderly people were almost the only ones working their gardens or taking care of cattle. They valued the return of abundant wildlife and knew the importance of passing on knowledge about *veldfood*. The absence of young Khwe in this kind of work was evident. Many have left the area, trying to get salaried positions but ending up living a squatter's existence in the city. Even if they had stayed in the park, they would seldom have wanted to work with cattle or in gardening. They had been alienated from the bush in such a way that, with only 300 inhabitants in Chetto, very few motivated game guards with tracking skills or women with *veldfood* knowledge could be found. (The old headman made sure that youngsters were found to take this spare chance for a regular cash income.) This social gap within the Chetto community has resulted in generational conflict caused by their stay at Omega (of 18 out of 26 families) and at other military bases, which effectively ended the transfer of knowledge about hunting and gather-



Fig. 1: A community game guard.

ing, herding, and gardening. Anthropologists even claimed that the Omega military base was a SADF attempt to assist the Bushmen in a process of guided acculturation (Gordon 1992). South African soldiers were proud of what they had done for these “last representatives of the stone-age” (Douglas 1997: 47). To the outside world, South African army officers would state how they had uplifted the Bushmen even with their paternalistic attitude whereas, for Bushmen soldiers, the army brought jobs and other benefits, such as a clinic and churches for communal support. Tracking was especially important and showed new power relations as the South Africans required the Bushmen to complete a tracking course with a test in which the fundamentals of tracking were taught (Gordon and Douglas 2000: 189–196).

Political Strategies

The new political reality for the Khwe came with the first policeman, who was stationed in Rundu around 1950. This was the first external event to drastically change the lives of the Khwe and effectively meant the loss of their traditional rights, as occupiers of the settlement, to grant permission to strangers to use local natural resources. Gordon (1992) stated that the SWAA hardly ever mentioned the Khwe as inhabitants of West Caprivi since they belonged to the category of “wild Bushmen” living outside the Police Zone. Resettlement caused the loss of both their hunting territories and their right to kill rhino, giraffe and elephants. Compensation came in the form of salaries earned by assisting the police and the periodic shooting of large animals by the police with guns, plus a truck to transport the meat to their overcrowded settlements. This change in rights may have been the cause of an adaptation that would prove important, namely the building of a political institution headed by a chief assisted by headmen who could represent the Khwe community as a whole. The Khwe have understood that if they and others declare themselves to be marginalized victims of external critical events, they must be recognized as an ethnic group with spokesmen to advocate and gain rights on their behalf.

According to Suzman (2001: 62), the Khwe, unlike other Bushmen groups, have established a more centralized traditional authority structure with a recognized chain of succession of leaders since the 1950s. He sees another external cause: the increasing influence of the Mbukushu, who were controlled by the Rundu police. The Mafwe from East Caprivi also tried to claim the territory, as is stated by calling the Khwe “Mafwe Bushmen” (Brenzinger 1997:

25). This political strategy seems to break with the historical tendency of the Bushmen of returning to a dependent relationship with the Bantu in times of need. The present political preference of most Khwe – the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA) party – is not very effective in a SWAPO-dominated parliament.

The construction of a Khwe identity for the 4,000 Khwe in the Caprivi Strip is a strategy to strengthen their position versus other ethnic groups, the state and NGOs, as a dissociated identity (Orth 2003). The MET is seen by the local people as only focusing on conservation, and as being slow and too easily dominated by other ministries. The Caprivi Strip has experienced frequent changes in administrative responsibilities and the last, in 1998, led to Bwabwata being administratively divided west of Chetto. The western part of the park now falls within the Kavango Region and the eastern part is in the Caprivi Region. The Khwe have interpreted this as government action to split their community and it has caused confusion about administrative matters, with people being sent backwards and forwards between offices in the regional capitals of Rundu (Kavango) and Katima Mulilo (Caprivi) (Boden 2003: 165 f.), which are more than 500 km apart. Numerous preconceived but contradicting opinions about the Khwe and their culture put the Khwe down. The Ministry of Agriculture claims that the Khwe could harvest more agricultural products but are not willing to put in the hard labour required. However, fieldwork in Chetto revealed a history of gardening being done on a limited scale using the loose ground around anthills. The connection of Bushmen to hunting in the bush means they are seen by others (for example, the SADF) as deadly, silent trackers and killers, while the same notion of being from the bush means, to the Khwe, ignorance of the outside world and a tendency to be passive, submissive and obedient to others (attributes appreciated by the SADF).

Today the Khwe are only able to get benefits through the MET and their approved activities, such as trophy hunting (Boden 2003: 183–185). This shows the dominant position of the MET in relation to the Khwe. Most Khwe – and to a certain degree the Kyaramacan Association too – feel cut off from the government’s top-down decision-making processes and the Khwe have at best become passive participants in development projects (Hewitson 2010: 105–107). Due to various inconsistent and confusing laws by Namibia’s government, there was never any legislation to deprive the Khwe of their land title (LAC 2006: 48). As people live in the park and because of the CBNRM activities, Bwab-

wata resembles the Namibian conservancy model. According to the Legal Assistance Centre (LAC) “(t)he problem is that the ‘planning’ has not included the Khwe as the traditional owners of the land within the park” (LAC 2006: 12). Indeed, the rules and regulations that come with a national park have essentially changed the Khwe’s options in life concerning the development of their environment. All the laws are enabling in some ways but constraining in others. Joel Mbambo, who did not benefit from the CBNRM programme, explained how these laws are part of his environment today and are therefore part of him. However these laws have had the effect of detaching him from his environment as well:

I want to go collect fruits ... We don’t know how to farm, we don’t have cattle. Our tradition is bush, but the law (now) works with the bush ... and this is very difficult, to go in the bush without the law because the law is there in the bush and me ... I agree that the law says the fruits are there in the top, and the tree is big. And I want the fruits. But the law says you cannot cut down that tree ...

Today, most of the Khwe embrace hunting and gathering as well as agriculture but they are restricted in their activities and demotivated because of various laws, inequalities and the destruction of their crops by wildlife. For example, people in some villages are allowed to keep cattle whereas in others they are not, which is seen as a great injustice. In addition, hunting is almost completely forbidden, with the exception of springhare, but when big game destroys people’s crops their requests for compensa-

tion from the MET fall on deaf ears (ACHPR 2008: 76–87; Rousset 2003: 41–46). Most people consider compensation to be a slow and uncertain process. Conservation initiatives have created a protected status for many such animals but elephants, buffalo and hippopotami are causing problems. Between 1994 and 2010 the elephant population in Bwabwata rose from 3,500 to around 8,000 (Hewitson 2010: 63). While most community members appreciate the decrease in poaching, they also believe that the conservation policy blocks other developments. Concerns amongst local people because of rising wildlife numbers, especially elephants, are numerous. People play drums, burn grass, use torches and “chilli bombs” or bang pots and pans in the middle of the night to scare them away. This is dangerous and has even led to some deaths. If they do not try to scare the animals away, their season’s harvest will be eaten and hunger will be the result.

Also in international conservation politics the Khwe were sidelined when the Kavango Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area (KAZA TFCA) was established in 2011. Covering Angola, Namibia, Zambia, Botswana and Zimbabwe, Bwabwata is at the heart of KAZA, for which negotiations had been going on for almost a decade (a Memorandum of Agreement was signed in 2006 between the five countries). The creation of KAZA has increased plans for nature conservation and tourism, with the rationale, just as in CBNRM, that local marginalized people will be able to benefit through jobs. Although support is there from big environmental



Fig. 2: Khwe in Chetto trying to make a living from tourism.

NGOs, local NGOs and CBOs, ministries, consultants and donors, during fieldwork in 2010 it turned out that the Khwe were not even aware of the plans, contrary to much rhetoric about including the local inhabitants of the area (Koot 2013: 138–141).

Cultural Strategies

The Khwe still have connections with the region's wildlife but now maintain a certain distance from hunting. The history of the last fifty years has separated them from their hunting days and their knowledge of hunting is dying out. And, retrospectively at least, they did not like hunting very much. They seem to have been reluctant hunters, not enjoying the excitement of the hunt itself: too much running, too much exertion and too hard anyway. Although they would love to have more hunting rights for economic purposes and to diversify their livelihoods, they seem quite content to see their hunting days as being over. Either the lure of hunting has been lost, or hunting for the Khwe never had the aura of ultimate interest that our industrial society has so easily ascribed to it. Man the Hunter, in the Caprivi became Man the Forager, and the most important wilderness for them to forage in is international politics, the army, the MET, NGOs and related CBNRM projects and even tourists up to a degree. Their past has made them flexible, and the easy adaptation to the influences of the police and the army shows that the Khwe will effortlessly adapt if the advantages exceed the effort involved.

The dominant feeling is one of having been forgotten. The hangover from the hectic army days still lingers and heightens the passivity that characterized them anyway. Isolation and a lack of agency are exemplified by an aggressive hyena that they are not allowed to shoot (only the MET are allowed to do so) but preclude their evening outing to the *cuca* shop, the bar. A return to their hunting days is not an option: even if the MET and wildlife density would allow it, they would have to rebuild their cultural knowledge. This does not mean that the traditional cultural toolkit is no longer useful; for example the old restrictions on wildlife, *veldfood* and the felling of big trees are important to gain the support of the community for sustainable resource management. Their traditions of consensus and of giving the headman or chief the responsibility to reach general agreement on the hunt are useful to oppose roles on users of gardens and cattle herders.

The old habit of adapting to external threats by moving away is less effective than it used to be, as the Caprivi Strip is bordered by two other countries

to the north and south, and two rivers and the Mbukushu and Mafwe to the west and the east. Still, mobility is an important risk-minimization strategy, as shown by the 1990 exodus to South Africa, the departure of the youth, the 1998 exodus to Botswana after security sweeps by the NDF and SFF and the 2000 exodus after the spill-over of the Angolan war, also into Botswana. There are serious limitations to the strategy of mobility because if too many Khwe leave the area, the Caprivi Strip would be more open for the Mbukushu, among others.

Conclusion: People in the Park, a Special Case

Khwe existence has changed drastically in the last fifty years, taxing their long-time adaptive skills to the limit. As more-or-less classic hunter-gatherers they dwelt in their environment, even if they did not fully conform to the stereotype of the “happy hunter.” They were part and parcel of whatever precarious balance there was between man, fauna and flora, a situation enhanced by their low population density, and the ecological diversity of this enormous area. That changed with the coming of the parks during the colonial area, where they lost their agency towards their environment and, disowned of their rights, became lodgers in an ecological and political situation beyond their control. The period of the SADF, the Omega era, was an all-too-fleeting moment in which they lived in the building mode, with prefab housing, regular wages and a job that consisted of finding those tracks that did not belong to the wilds. That short period alienated them politically from the parties that would run the country, and thus denied them agency in their own adaptation to the park situation that now dominates their existence.

This history of dwelling – building – lodging reflects in their position in the park. In itself, ecologically, their presence in the park is not a problem for several reasons. First, the park itself is unusual in having been created more for strategic reasons than for wildlife conservation or touristic purposes. Second, as a game park it has to compete with superior parks in Namibia, such as Etosha and Waterberg or with parks such as Chobe and Moremi in Botswana, all of which are tourist attractions of far-greater renown and diversity. Third, the park is not part of the standard Namibian tourist circuit and tends to be of interest only to those tourists who are passing through the Strip anyway. The Caprivi Strip used to be part of a much larger circuit including the Kruger Park, the Zimbabwean parks, Victoria Falls, a part of the Botswana Okavango, and then the Strip to Etosha. The small specialized conservancies in East

Caprivi near Liamwezi have thrived with the advent of large groups of tourists, and so could the West Caprivi. This tourist route has all but died out and after the proclamation of the KAZA TFCA in 2011 there are various plans to increase tourism activities in the area, although these still have to materialize.

The Khwe are a special case and so is their trajectory from dwelling over building to lodging, influenced as it was by military events that allowed them to enjoy a boom time in the years of fighting between 1974 and 1989. The main memories of the present-day Khwe centre on the army more than on hunting: those were the days! These glory days, however, alienated them also from their hunting and has changed their vision of their relationship with the environment. In terms of the old dichotomy, their environment is hardly natural but mostly cultural, lived in, dwelt in, for various reasons. The notion of a park in itself inevitably implies an interaction between building and dwelling. Though game and nature parks are advertised as realms of unspoilt nature, they are nothing of the sort. Fenced in, dotted with boreholes and high-tech solar pumps, and sporting level roads with regular and regulated access, they are a cultural construction of nature. In Tim Ingold's terms, a park is a built construct where dwelling already takes place. Park management aims at a calculated carrying capacity per species and may import game from other parks or sell animals. But, above all, the animals are protected. For a hunting society, the creation of a park is a sudden modernization, with the possible consequence that there is no longer a place for their way of dwelling in this modernized built nature.

Not only former hunter-gatherers enter modernity in or near a park, this also holds for agriculturalists. Gibson (1999) analyses the choices made by game guards and the communities living near the park they stemmed from. The set of rules and regulations defining the park is a new element that is being dealt with in creative ways. Gibson (1999: 129ff.) ingeniously used game analysis to arrive at the rationale of the decisions by the various stakeholders to hunt or not, showing how the game warden ("scout" in Zambian terms) chooses differently from his kith and kin in the village, with the two parties balancing the net gains and profits against their mutual dependency and loyalty. If a similar game analysis were to be made for the Khwe, the parameters could be similar, salary vs. no salary, bush meat vs. no bush meat, participation in a project vs. non-participation. The results would be different because of the clear differences with the Zambian situation. First, the Khwe have a guaranteed minimal livelihood in distribution and pensions, they lodge now

in the Namibian state; second, the small community easily profits indirectly from the salaried jobs; and third, hunting is not a distraction from tedious other work, as the Khwe in fact did not like hunting that much. At least, the tiring pursuit of endurance running is not an activity they cherished; however, they would very much like to have hunting rights, which would enhance their agency towards the natural environment. Given these factors, the obvious choice for the Khwe is not to hunt the forbidden big animals, surely not elephant, hippo or buffalo – even if these are the animals that are quite destructive –, and also not the large antelopes (these run too fast), but just a few springhares and the occasional duiker. They calculate their inputs and yields quite realistically and just stay put, using their various environmental resources, the projects and, last but not least, the government. As lodgers they know how much their host can tolerate, and what the value of their own presence is in this setting in which their agency is severely curtailed.

The parameter of tourism is just as specific. This park was initially a military zone and has never become a regular tourist game park. It arrived on the scene too late at a time when there was too much competition, and it was off the beaten track and the established tourist circuit. The presence of the military did offer excellent employment options but also depleted the game, as happened elsewhere in military zones. Ample firepower is not a good condition for conservation. So their building phase in these military years meant a new resource and a total redefinition of the environment: the border dominated, not the content. And if any parameter is a built, i.e. constructed, one, it is an international border in Africa, especially the borders of the Caprivi strip. After 1990 the Khwe mode of dwelling in the area changed again. In came other ministries, ELCIN, and of course WWF with IRDNC and the CBNRM project, with food distribution, pension payments, and even some tourists. Plus the occasional anthropologist. So the Khwe had to lodge in this new and changed environment, with an external redefinition of what constituted game, new resources such as gardens, with domestic animals and demands of schooling. New knowledge has been developed, as game wardens, at schools and in dealing with external authorities, while old game-oriented knowledge has become obsolete. The fact that the Khwe do not look back in nostalgia is striking, and one of the main puzzles in the picture. They do not mind their new lodging way of life, and seem more the calculating *Homo economicus*, producing as much return from labour as possible, than the stereotypical Man the Hunter. It might be that their early environment

was lush enough to keep them from developing intricate and communal hunting techniques. The ecology of the Caprivi Strip seems not to have taxed its human dwellers, and their technique of simply running down the number of animals is neither the most common, nor the most appealing.

All in all, the nomadic Khwe have kept changing “houses” in their turbulent history and have had to dwell and lodge in rapidly changing environments. They have indeed lived surrounded by their environment, tapping into new resources at every turn of the wheel of fortune, never initiating but always following transformations, dividing themselves over two countries, ever on the lookout for animals, ever watchful of new food distribution plans. And their future? This is a bit of a moot point. There seems to be little reason not to let them lodge inside the park, in view of their effectiveness and their small effect on the ecosystem, which has grown smaller with the transformation of the environment into an ever-more culturally dominated one. If tourism develops, they might develop from their lodging mode to a dwelling one, dwelling in tourism.

A final word about the CBNRM project. In itself, ecotourism could be an option suitable for this particular region and the Khwe are already taking part in various such projects in the form of cultural shows, craft production and, most important of all, trophy hunting. Research elsewhere in Africa shows that it is not easy to have the local population benefit from ecotourism (a concept hard to define in Africa anyway)⁵. In most cases, the communities near the park are cattle keepers or perform mixed agriculture as a livelihood, which tends to encroach more on the bush than the Khwe do. In this respect, the Khwe case is encouraging as they show considerable flexibility in their adaptation to new circumstances, and still have some of the skills needed for game management. Their small ecological footprint makes them adaptable without putting too much pressure on the environment. Yet, the CBNRM project itself runs the risk of generating inflated expectations and, as a whole, depends on external factors such as the international tourist situation, which is beyond their control anyway.

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5 Cf. Akankwasa 2001; Gesora Ondicho 2006: 49–56; Rutten 2002.

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