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Bugakhwe San community of Khwai: mapping its own territory

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The focus in this paper is on the Bugakhwe in eastern Ngamiland, northern Botswana. Throughout my fieldwork research, the San concept of territoriality has shown itself to be in conflict with that understood by other ethnic groups and even more by government officials and tourist operators. This conflict of perception is manifested in the history of Moremi Game Reserve and lack of knowledge about San/Khoe geographical locations in what my informants refer to as 'Khwaai' (Moremi Game Reserve and its vicinity). This study aims to understand the substantive issues concerning the history of 'River Basarwa', and their interpretation of settlement history within the Okavango Delta. The area that the Bugakhwe elders claim as their territory is much larger than where they have been confined to over the last thirty odd years. Through oral testimonies and sketches of maps drawn on the soil, the Bugakhwe explained their movement from one place to another and reasons for movement. The paper, therefore, argues that counter-maps can serve several critical functions in addressing issues related to the protection of indigenous peoples' land rights and local knowledge.

The Okavango Delta is Botswana's major wetland, essential to the people who live around it and to the tourism industry. The area forms the resource base not only for large populations of African mammals, birds and other small animals but also for the livelihood of thousands of men and women inhabiting this area. Among them are San groups of people often referred to as 'River Basarwa'. Interestingly, conservationists have taken a great interest in the preservation of the Delta and its fauna and flora and less interest in the many different people who call themselves the Delta people.

This presentation is part of a large study for my doctoral thesis, covering the Okavango Delta and the panhandle area down to Moremi Game Reserve and its vicinity.[1].My focus in this paper is on the Bugakhwe, 'River Basarwa' in Eastern Ngamiland.[2] Throughout my fieldwork research (between 1997 and 2001), the San concept of territoriality has shown itself to be in conflict with that understood by other ethnic groups and even more so by government officials and tourist operators. This conflict of perception is manifested in the history of the Moremi Game Reserve, as the problems encountered today by the Basarwa of Khwai are a result of a prolonged conflict over territory (See Bolaane 1998, 200; Taylor 2000; Saugestad 2001).

This study aims to understand the substantive issues concerning the history of 'River Basarwa' and their interpretation of settlement history within the Okavango Delta.

To understand what the people of San origin say in interviews in Khwai, one has to constantly bear in mind that the area they talk about and claim as their territory is much larger than where they have been confined to over the last thirty odd years. It embraces, in addition to the present settlements (NG/19), large parts of the conservation areas known today as Moremi Game Reserve, the Controlled Hunting and Wildlife Management Areas marked as NG/18, 20, 21 and also the area towards the panhandle of the Okavango Delta (see map 1). Within this large territory there was little restriction on their mobility beyond

what was imposed by the terrain and seasons. The frequent movements and seasonal migration characterising the life of these communities, are the focus of this paper.

Recently the concept of 'counter mapping' has been introduced acknowledging that indigenous peoples making and distributing their own maps using new technology is much less expensive and much more accurate than the old technology that was once totally controlled by the map making powers. Peter Poole, practitioner and advocate of counter mapping techniques, suggests that counter-maps can serve several critical functions in addressing the related problems of protecting indigenous land rights and maintaining high levels of biodiversity. These include, but are not limited to, the following: 1) gaining recognition of land rights; 2) demarcating traditional territories; 3) protecting demarcated lands; 4) gathering and guarding traditional knowledge; 5) managing traditional lands and resources; 6) creating community awareness, mobilization and conflict resolution.

The present paper will document Khwai community's geographical locations and their relationship with lagoons/pools within the Delta through their own 'voices'. While the San have ways of taking you from point A to point B within their environment, ecological research (which still dominates much of the environmental history of the Okavango region) has ignored much of the San knowledge in the production of the Botswana maps (Poole 1995).

Okavango delta peoples

The Okavango Delta peoples consist of several ethnic groups, each with its own identity and language. They are Hambukushu, Dxeriku (Gcereku), Wayei (Yei), Bugakhwe, //Anikhwe and Ts'exa (Tsega, Ts'ixa) (See Bock 1993; Bock and Johnson 2002; Tlou 1985; Heinz 2001 & Larson, 1989). The Wayeyi, Hambukushu, and Dxeriku, are Bantu speaking people who have traditionally engaged in mixed economies of millet/ sorghum agriculture, fishing, hunting, and collection of wild plant foods, and pastoralism. The Bugakhwe, //Anekhwe and Ts'exa are people of San/Khoe origin who have traditionally practised hunting, collection of wild plant foods and fishing. Bugakhwe utilised both forest and riverine resources while the //Anekhwe mostly focused on riverine resources. Within the past 20 years many people from all over the Okavango have migrated to Maun, the headquarters of the district of Ngamiland, and in the late 1960s and early 1970s Hambukushu refugees from Angola were settled in the area around Etsha in the western Panhandle. The Okavango Delta has been under the political control of the Batawana (Tswana tribe) for several hundred years. Apart from the Batawana, the other groups of people who have traditionally lived in the edges of the Delta are the Bakgalagadi, Ovaherero and Ovambanderu. Such ethnic groups of people were savanna pastoralists, and were few in number. (See Bock 1993; Bock and Johnson 2002; Tlou 1985; Ross 1987).

All the people I have spoken to, whatever their ethnic affiliation, have emphasized that Basarwa were the first in the land, or, as is commonly expressed, were created by God first. The interviews show that Basarwa traditionally lived in bands composed of extended families that moved around following animals, and collecting veld foods. Those whose lives were associated with the sandveld (mostly Ts'exa groups) congregated in a large village in summer, and de-segregated by family to waterholes in the winter, when there was not enough water to sustain a large village. The *'Basarwa ba noka'* ('River Basarwa') who lived around the rivers and islands of the swamps (//Anekhwe and many Bugakhwe) did not follow such a defined annual cycle, as they were not regulated by water shortages. Oral data show that the people of Mababe[3], who identify themselves as Ts'exa ('Sand Basarwa'), are the earliest inhabitants of this large territory under consideration. Both the Bugakhwe of Khwai and the Bayei of Sankuyo state that they found the Ts'exa of Mababe when they arrived in the area.

People of San origin in both Khwai and Mababe talk about and claim as their territory an area that embraces, in addition to the present settlements, large parts of Moremi Game Reserve and Chobe National Park. Within this large territory there was little restriction on their mobility beyond what was imposed by the terrain, seasons and tsetse flies; therefore seasonal migration characterised the life of these communities. It is within this context that the concept of the 'Old Khwai' or just Khwaai[4], which keeps coming up in the interviews among the Bugakhwe of present Khwai[5], should be understood.

Similarly the concept of 'Old Mababe' for the Ts'exa group of Basarwa covers an area larger than the present village of that name. It stretches from where the village is today as far as Xweega and Xanxo (present day Savuti) in the Chobe area, a distance of roughly 100 km. Informants talk about seasonal movement within this general area and remember the names of several old sites. In the dry season they would move northward towards Xanxo to areas rich in game and good for hunting and in the rainy season they would move back southward to settle in ecological zones rich in veld products and good for cultivation of crops. For them, all this large area was Mababe, their territory. Thus the concepts of 'Old Khwai' and 'Old Mababe' and what they meant to the people, in contrast to other role players in the area, such as the managers of the tourist game lodges, politicians and bureaucrats in Ngamiland, constitute the underlying problem of differing perceptions of the history of the area (Barnard 1997).

Bugakhwe pattern of migration down the Panhandle

The Bugakhwe of Khwai village say they have moved from the Gudigwa/Kabamukuni area for two reasons

(a) maltreatment and oppression by their neighbours, the Bakgalagadi, who, as they put it, wanted to enslave the Bugakhwe. Bakgalagadi are remembered for the brutal manner in which they coerced Basarwa labour and kidnapped women and children.[6]
(b) the prevalence in the area of the "tsetse fly disease" (*trypanosomiasis*) which caused a heavy death toll among the Bugakhwe.

In the early part of the twentieth century, possibly as a result of changing distributions of tsetse fly, and possibly also due to their relationship with dominant groups part of the Bugakhwe bands moved to the north eastern fringe of the Delta along the Khwaai River. One of the local architects of Moremi Wildlife Reserve affirms that most of the Basarwa communities moved from the Beetsha/ Gabamukuni/ Gudigwa area before tsetse fly became a problem in the swamp area. To confirm the presence of the settlements of Basarwa in the Okavango Delta, Isaac Tudor observes that, "a group of River Bushmen, like the //Anekhwe had homes in the swamps prior to the establishment of Moremi Game Reserve".[7]

July Mparanyane recalls that when the 1920s waves of Bugakhwe San communities were migrating from the Beetsha/Kabamukuni/Gudigwa area, down the panhandle to settle in 'Old Kwai', there were already pockets of //Anikhwe San communities in the Okavango swamps and today some can still be found at Xaxaba and Jao.[8] Amos Xhwaagae Xako[9], an eyewitness to the pattern of Bugakhwe migration within the 'Old Khwai' area confirmed the movement of people in relation to the advance and retreat of the tsetse fly. Amos who was born at Xwaara (part of the 'Old Khwai' territory) recalls that they (Bugakhwe) had a 'big' settlement of simple structures: beehive huts at Xwaara but people died of tsetse. Human settlement was disturbed and by the 1930s, 1940s up to the 1950s the people of the Okavango Delta had been forced to abandon their homes due to the encroachment of tsetse

(see B.N.A. "Bechuanaland Protectorate Development Plan 1960-1964 and Draft Colonial Development & Welfare Schemes 1960-1964", p.17).

Livelihood strategies

Male informants describe different hunting methods while mapping their territorial area within the Kwando and Okavango controlled hunting and wildlife management areas. At a young age boys were taught to follow their fathers into the bush, to acquire early knowledge about hunting. This was more like an apprenticeship. My informants insist that the Bugakhwe were selective in hunting, so that when they hunted and killed a giraffe they would not kill another big animal like a buffalo. They had different ways of hunting an animal, such as the use of spears and digging of holes to trap some animals. They had no dogs at the time. They would also just chase an animal like a giraffe until it got exhausted and they would kill it with spear. "A spear was our rifle", said one of my informants.[10] Traditionally, when someone killed a giraffe, he would inform others, the households would then move to put up temporary home structures where the animal had been killed. "For us, hunting was our farming area"[11] said one of the elderly men. The idiom emphasised the importance of hunting as a survival strategy to these people prior to the establishment of Moremi Game Reserve. According to one of the more vocal informants,

> since a giraffe is a big animal and we did not have fridges to store the meat, families would spend weeks out there, eating, as well as cutting and chopping meat. When we killed an animal, the place became a temporary home because we had no transport to take animal meat to our permanent settlement. That is why we would spend some days drying meat for *digwapa* (*biltong*). This was to make the load of meat light. However, Batswana used this idea that we build homes where we killed animals as a way of despising us and making fun of us. Batawana regard Basarwa as people led by the stomach. Wherever he makes a kill is his home.[12]

This latter stereotype is deeply resented by the Basarwa.

Normally when an owner of a concession in the neighbourhood, for example, in NG/20, invites the villagers to come and have a share of the meat of an elephant that has been killed by sport hunters, men and women with their small children would go and camp out over night to cut and chop the meat and slice some for *biltong*. Thus, as from time to time the villagers move away, the village appears abandoned. However, at the end of the grass-cutting or *biltong*-making exercise, they will return to the permanent settlement. During the Botswana wintertime (June/July) the cutting of grass for thatching is a major activity as they can sell it to lodge owners. Today in Khwai when it is time for cutting grass, the community declares a day at the village *kgotla* meeting to go to the bush. And they will go for up to two months, with dogs, chickens and small babies to particular camps which are still linked with their sites in 'Old Khwai.' This is partly reclaiming the territory. Some of my interviews were actually conducted out there at the grass cutting camps. When they go for grass cutting they resort to their earlier lifestyle as in the case of the old hunting band. They sleep in the open space by the fire to keep wild animals away.

The informants highlight a movement of the Bugakhwe between the riverine area and the sandveld. According to them,[13] Bugakwe did not live far from the river—there was a time when they moved into the river for the riverine products and later moved to the sandveld for the resources not available in the swamps. Veld products included *'mokutsomo, motsentsela, tshita, tsaro, tswii, thobo* and honey. Animals such as *sitatunga* are water animals and therefore the hunting of such animals was always done in the riverine area. This type of livelihood may explain why Heinz has argued that while the //Anekhwe live inside the Delta, the Bugakhwe live on the fringe or periphery of the Delta.[14]

The dates and sequence of migration as well as the order in which the various sites in 'Old Khwai' were settled cannot yet be established with any degree of certainty, but it is clear that the migration involved different families moving in waves over an extended period of time. The attraction of 'Old Khwai' was mainly its ecological similarity to the Gudigwa/ Kabamukuni area—its riverine terrain and its richness in game as well as in veld products. Settlement here would therefore entail very minimal adaptations in their traditional survival strategies. The migration pattern shows that the Bugakhwe of Khwai had always moved close to and along the Panhandle, Magwegqana, Ngoha and Khwaai rivers in the Northeastern Delta of the Okavango.

Prominent among the waves of migrants was the Seriri family. Kwere Seriri, was born about 1926, at Bodumatau, an island further into the Park, and exhibited strong leadership qualities from an early age. He was recognised as a leader by the community long before he was formally installed as a *Kgosi* (chief) of Khwai village, when the concept of chieftainship developed among the Basarwa of this area.

According to Amos Xako, (who was a few years younger than Kwere), while the Bugakhwe were still in their old sites, which form 'Old Khwai', they had Yei as their neighbours who were residing in the western side of the Bugakhwe sites called Xwaara and //Xam (towards the northern part of the Park). They later moved to Maqhwee, (southern gate of the Park). This was before they moved back to settle in Sankuyo. According to Taylor (2000:90), despite the lack of permanent substantial settlements, this least populated stretch of the Okavango fringe was extensively used by Bugakhwe and as far back as the late 19th century groups such as of the Subiya used it as refugee, fleeing from the Ndebele aggression. The oral information affirms that there was close interaction between the Yei of Sankuyo and their Sarwa neighbours in the old settlements. 'Old Khwai' was therefore more commonly used by non-Basarwa groups as hunting ground, rather than an area of permanent settlement. The Yei in particular, often joined their Basarwa neighbours on hunting trips in the winter months, after having harvested their crops (see Taylor 2000:90). As Amos was using a piece of stick, making sketches of a map on the soil to guide me, he described 'Old Khwai' as, "an area extending from the northern part of Moremi Game Reserve and into the Park area with so many settlements, attached to pools". Amos's testimony emphasises this interaction, which was strengthened by mutual friendship and trade.[15] This should explain why some places like Njakamakata have SeYei names.

Tsetse and the 'Flight to Sankuyo'

Some Bugakhwe families were taking refuge in the old site of the village of Sankuyo in the past prior to the creation of the Park, in an attempt to flee the ravages of *trypanosomiasis* which continued to wreak havoc on the people in 'Old Khwai'.

While mapping the Bugakhwe territory, Amos traces the movement of his people's homestead or village from Xwaara (where he was born) to Xaane. There was mention of other sites further than Xwaara and Xaane.[16] Bugakhwe families are said to have moved later to Karabara and Gubanjo, which, are close to each other and have since become well-known hunting concession areas called 'Seflesh' or NG/20. Penetration of the Delta was difficult because of tsetse fly. The flight is further traced to Njakamakata up to Moremi's kraal. When Amos's family moved to Njakamakata, Kwere's family was by the pool-side, Kabojane, while Sango's family was still at Gubanjo. (See map 2).

All these families had to vacate those places. The main reason for this constant movement was tsetse fly:

> People were moving away from tsetse, to settle in another place with the hope that the new place would be safe from tsetse. These people were relatives. They moved on [down along the

panhandle/Khwaai River] until they reached Khweega pool, while others died on the way., . By then their number had dramatically plummeted. They later moved constantly from the north-eastern belt along the River Khwaai, to the central and southern belt, which is the Park area, and vice versa. People moved on and on. We continued our riverine life style in small settlements. Neither the colonial government nor the Tawana authorities were able to handle the problem of tsetse. Tsetse control became more effective during the time of Seretse Khama, when he brought in white people to come and spray the tsetse infested area [17].

Thus it was only from the mid 1960s that tsetse was effectively controlled in northern Botswana (Davies 1980; Department of Veterinary Services 1957-1967.)

Tlou, observes that a major environmental factor which has greatly influenced the history of Ngamiland is the prevalence of the malarial mosquito, and the tsetse fly, which cause disease in both man and domestic animals. He further argues that the tsetse fly had had the most devastating effects on the Ngamiland population because whereas mosquito-borne malaria affects only humans, the tsetse fly-borne diseases, sleeping sickness (*trypanosomiasis*) and *nagana,* afflict man and cattle alike. And since tsetse fly tended to be concentrated in the swamps and wooded islands throughout the delta, to some extent it influenced the pattern of human settlement and economic activity (Tlou 1985:5).

The problem of *trypanosomiasis* is also confirmed by an oral interview with one of the architects of Moremi Game Reserve, Pete Smith, who in the late 1960s worked for the Department of Tsetse Fly Control. He observed that movement of people in the Kwando, Linyati and Okavango Delta were in relation to the advance and retreat of the tsetse fly.

In the 19th century there was rinderpest in this area which came from East and Central Africa, killing wildlife and cattle, and it knocked the tsetse fly back, a lot of it. There were a few pockets left...until the late 1920s and late 1930s when the number started building up and then from the 1940s tsetse fly started pushing people out of the Delta and the wildlife came back. Local communities were forced to move from one place to another, because tsetse fly was rampant in the area... You've got to consider the tsetse fly distribution, which had an influence on the movement of people in the Delta. When we were demarcating the boundary of the Park between Khwaai river and Mohogelo we came across an old village site, where people used to live before the fly pushed them out. The fly belt covered the present South gate and Mohogelo river, near Santawani, that whole area (Moremi Game Park area). When the tsetse got bad people started dying. It was rumoured that Basarwa at an island with a big *motsaudi* tree were dying like flies. Many places were vacated because of tsetse. We started spraying from the late 1960s, to the 1970s and 1980s and got rid of most of the fly.[18]

Interviews with the few surviving elders of the village affirm that most of their elderly people died of the disease caused by the biting of tsetse. One of the generation that was brought up in the Park area reminisces on what their parents related to them about the problems of tsetse in the 'Old Khwai' area. "Our parents came together and decided that families should move to places such as Sankuyo so that we can avoid the disease that was finishing our families."[19] The few surviving families of Kwere, Amos and Sango moved from the north-eastern front, across the game park area, towards the south-east, to the land of the Yei at the old site of Sankuyo.[21] Interestingly, the informants emphasise that, they "were fleeing to Sankuyo" (*re bo re siela ko Sankuyo).*[21] This may highlight the heavy death toll they faced from the ravages of *trypanosomiasis* and hence the need to move fast out of their earlier settlements.

Significance of the Xuku floodplains (Hippo Pool)

A good deal of the oral material collected reflects modes of living and resource use, in Xuku and its vicinity in the 1940s and up to the early 1960s. While at Sankuyo, they

continued visiting their traditional hunting ground at Xuku. The Xuku flood plain is a particularly big pool, known in popular tourist literature as Hippo Pool.

When the older man, Sango, died at Sankuyo, he left behind Kwere and Amos in charge. Kwere who was senior to Amos later left to work in the mines in South Africa. At the end of his 12 months contract he came back to Ngamiland to find Amos and others still at Sankuyo. According to Amos, Kwere returned from the mines at the time when Chief Moremi of Batawana was still gathering soldiers in Ngamiland for the Second World War. At this time Amos left Kwere in charge of the families to go and work in the mines too. From Sankuyo the most attractive place for the Bugakhwe to go to was the Xuku flood plain.

Sankuyo is in a slightly different ecological zone from the riverine 'Old Khwai' and proved not to be that resourceful in veld produce such as *thobo* and honey. Also it was not a good hunting area. Critically, there was a problem of surviving in dryland areas. One way of emphasising this dependence upon the river is often repeated in the oral tradition depicting the temporary sojorn in Sankuyo in the 1940s and 1950s.

> We stayed there [Sankuyo] for 2-3 years; it was a very difficult life. The reason why we eventually left Sankuyo was because of lack of good quality water and there was not plenty of game to hunt. The Sankuyo people had sunk a well [*sediba*] and the baboons used to urinate and defecate in the water. We Bugakhwe don't drink dirty water. So we had to move to Xuku for clean and crystal clear water, plenty of game and our adaptation to the wetlands.[22]

The movement from Sankuyo was to enable them to take advantage of the wetland riverbanks at Xuku. A key factor in being near water was the quantity of game species. It seems that this story about baboons, then, is a comment on quality of the water. Kay describes the water of Khwai River and other lagoons in the Park area as 'crystal clear' (Kay 1962, 1964, see also Ross 1987, Lating 1993, Mallinson 1989, Vendall-Clark 1990).

The next major settlement move probably took place in the 1940s, or a bit earlier, when the bulk of the population at 'Old Khwai' moved to the area of the Xuku flood plain which falls within the current boundaries of Moremi Game Reserve. At this time several waves of the Bugakhwe families had already left Beetsha/Kabamukuni/Gudigwa to settle in 'Old Khwai'. These were families such as of Lekgoa Mabengane, Langwane Mabengane and July Mparanyane, all of whom were relatives. July could not remember how old he was when he was interviewed in 1997 but he recollected that he was born at the first appearance of the tsetse fly (*ka tsie ya ntlha*).[23] He was born of a Bugakhwe woman and a Hambukushu man who, together with their children identify themselves as Bugakhwe. According to July his family left Beetsha/Kabamukuni area as refugees, searching for a new place:

> We came running, we were like cattle that had escaped from a kraal (*re tla jaaka dikgomo ditlhagile mo lesakeng*). My grandparents, my parents, my people all died and therefore we the children decided to move to this place as refugees to join other Bugakhwe in 'Old Khwai'. There was tsetse at Kabamukuni up to Caprivi [Namibia/Botswana border]. It was not clear how people died of tsetse, even the white people did not understand it at that particular time. People died of disease from tsetse. I moved to this place with my mother, my wife and my children. My mother's cousin Lekgoa suggested that we move away from Kabamukuni because the family was dying. We came as a group of Bugakhwe to 'Old Khwai', near Chief Moremi's kraal. We lived by the river. Many people were moving to 'Old Khwai' to join Kwere Seriri, their relative.[24]

July, like many, dramatizes their flight from the place infested by tsetse fly. The interviews show that not all Bugakhwe families moved into Xuku. Some, like July Mparanyane's family, remained at other lagoons/pools in the periphery of the larger lagoon.

In the oral testimony, the movement of people within the Xuku/ 'Old Khwai' area is linked with water, the river, lagoons and pools. The river and pools provided them with an assured drinking water supply. They did not have to move for water supplies like many other San groups.

What the community of Khwai refers to as 'the river' is Khwai River, which is a tributary of the Okavango. This is the tributary, which today forms the border between Moremi Wildlife Reserve and the current Khwai settlement. The three lodges in the Khwai area (NG/19) are strategically located along the river Khwai. In the late afternoon various species of game come to drink from the river and provide spectacular scenes for the enjoyment of tourists.

Over the next two decades (1940-60), more Bugakhwe arrived from the Gudikwa/ Kabamkuni area, while at the same time the existing community split into smaller sections, settling around different pools in the 'Old Khwai' area.

Bugakhwe and the politically centralised groups

The Yei and Hambukushu who migrated into the area are said to have recognised the prior ownership of the land by Basarwa, from whom they received permission to settle and use resources such as wild animals. The prior rights of Basarwa were not recognised, however, by the more politically centralised and powerful Bakgalagadi and Batawana, who formed the next wave of immigrants into the area.

The Batawana were to prove a political power more pervasive than the Bakgalagadi. Batawana chieftaincy asserted their presence more strongly in the 1920s by building a kraal at 'Old Khwai', about 10 km west of where the present village of Khwai is. Built by regiments (that included Basarwa) under Chief Moremi who used to move around the whole region of Ngamiland and Chobe on hunting expedition and collecting tax from subject groups, it became known as *Mapako a ga Moremi*, (Moremi's Kraal). Many of the elders in the village still remember where the Moremi's camp was located and identify themselves as among the people who were grouped together with Hambukushu and Yei as subject people (*batlhanka*) to build Moremi's kraal prior to the creation of Moremi Game Reserve. The ascendancy of Batawana control in northern Ngamiland coincided with the increased presence of the colonial government.

Use of local knowledge in annexing the Okavango region

Before the 1920s, Batawana presence in the area west of present Khwai was largely in the form of hunting parties searching for ivory. It was Basarwa who acted as guides for hunting expeditions, as they knew the land best. Specific individuals, such as Kwere Seriri acted as guides for hunting tours of the region by the Tawana chieftaincy.

When the white hunters began exploiting the rich wildlife in the Khwai region from the 1950s, Kwere often acted as a guide. Kwere was introduced to June and Robert Kay in 1958 and served as their guide for crocodile hunting in the Khwaai area. June Kay confirms that her husband Robert did lots of shooting of crocodile with the assistance of Kwere and hailed him for his skill in crocodile skinning. "Kwere would skin continuously for days" (Kay 1962: 148). Kay further affirms that Kwere "who knew the southern Okavango like the palm of his hand", had earlier introduced well known crocodile hunters like Bobbie Wilmot to the area "stiff with crocodile and hippo"- this was a place where a big number of crocodiles would be "shot within very few hours" (Ibid: 142). This area was Maqhwegaana, which consisted of twin lagoons well away from the river Khwaai and a place where the people that Kay refers to as "Black River Bushmen" had hunting camps. Kay views this place as, "the land that was wild and savage and utterly pitiless; one of the last and the greatest strongholds of game left in the world..." (Ibid: 146-147).

Kwere's local knowledge was observed by Pete Smith, with whom Kwere had also worked as a guide in the 1960s. Kwere told Smith names of 'all' plants and rivers that he recorded on the Bodumatau area: "I think there is no Hambukushu nor Yei who knew the area as Kwere did."[25] Today the late Pete Smith has a Herbarium collection in his name donated to the University of Botswana for research at the Harry Openheimer Okavango Research Center, Maun, while there is no collection in the name of Kwere. Harry Selby, the renowned safari operator in the region, described Basarwa as "fantastic and unbelievable, when accompanying other people on expeditions, irrespective of being professional hunters, the non- Basarwa remain learners in a hunting expedition".[26] To many people who have worked with Basarwa closely in the tourism industry, their expertise can be noticed immediately in tracking. They are described as a people who can identify spoors of different animals. Many Bugakhwe informants related to me how they can tell if a particular animal is sick or getting tired, or feeling sleepy, just by tracking its spoor.

When the Moremi Game Reserve was being established, several Bugakhwe elders like Kwere Seriri and Lekgoa Mabengane helped the Tawana Tribal Authority and Fauna Conservation Society of Ngamiland with the arduous tasks of clearing the bush and marking the boundaries for the park—what is normally referred to in the interviews as "making cut-lines". According to Pete Smith, "although the official surveyors possessed the modern compasses, Kwere was a better compass, because the architects of Moremi Game Reserve still relied on him, showing them where the "cut-lines" could be marked, by pointing at directions. They were partly involved in helping its creators to set it up". Lekgoa, a Bugakhwe elder who now lives in Maun, confirms their involvement in helping to survey the land, marking boundaries and building roads for the Game Park.

Pete Smith further affirms that different local people were involved in the demarcation of the boundaries of the Park. The job of the Fauna Conservation Society of Ngamiland was later "to work out how far we should go into the swamp from that boundary". The headmen of both Mababe and Sankuyo were involved in the marking of the eastern boundaries to make sure that the Fauna Conservation Society moved as "far away as possible from their hunting areas to establish the Park. "We were not keen to absorb the hunting areas of the Sankuyo people. Their headmen could show us the extent of their influence". The reason given for giving more consideration to the people of Sankuyo in particular had to do with the question of permanency of settlement. Pete Smith argues that: "In those days, Bugakhwe's (San) perception of land was different from what it is now".[27]

The impact of the wildlife conservation measures on the local people is fairly clear. To the Basarwa of both Khwai and Mababe, the development of conservation policies brought severe restrictions on access to land and their traditional mode of life. The creation of Controlled Hunting Areas and Parks in northern Botswana has started a process of disempowerment and alienation from land and wildlife resources for Basarwa. A significant aspect of this process has been the misinterpretation of the history of Basarwa settlement in the area, as testified by the statement by Smith.

Khwai village was removed from the Moremi Game Reserve when it was created in 1963. Clearly their very existence as a people and a community was under threat: the choice was between either moving to Mababe or Sankuyo, thus relocating away from the general area altogether. This they adamantly refused to do on the grounds that the area was their territory. This seems to be the reason why the village has not been gazetted—despite the local authority having recognised the *kgotla* and the village development committee within NG/19 where the village is currently located. This means that it cannot officially be provided with government facilities such as water reticulation, schools and clinics through the Remote Area Development Programme. (See Bolaane 2000). The people of Khwai have since developed new survival strategies in order to be able to stay on in this area. Due to the

limited job opportunities within the tourist industry, they survived by selling thatching grass to the lodges as well as selling baskets and other curios to tourists. Faced with such limited options, towards the end of the 1990s Community Based Natural Resource Management opened up a major new strategy to improve their livelihoods (Bolaane 2001). The Khwai community has since started its own wildlife based project in NG/18, an area that falls within the Bugakhwe mapping of 'Old Khwai'. Their hunting and photographic safari camp is situated within the riverine area of Khwaai.

Conclusion

The local non-Basarwa communities are ready to recognise the primacy of Basarwa settlements in the area and may even acknowledge the social and economic ties to the past. However, as control of access to the land has become increasingly more important to these societies, the issue of the 'permanency' of settlement rather than 'antiquity' of occupation has assumed greater rhetorical significance. Once again, Basarwa are disadvantaged in this debate since they are still perceived by many as having been naturally nomadic and so could be said to have never really settled anywhere.

Clearly, history and the role of the past in the present, already have social and ideological significance within the area. Different communities have different perceptions of the past, and may for economic reasons as much as any other favour certain interpretations of historical events over others.

Oral testimony shows that the San communities have a way of taking one from point A to point B within their environment. It is therefore important to recognize and acknowledge their input in the production of counter maps. The Basarwa local knowledge evidenced in the counter-maps can therefore serve a critical function in addressing the problems of protecting their indigenous land rights in the Okavango Delta.

Notes

1. Funding for the fieldwork was provided by the University of Botswana/ University of Tromso Collaborative Programme for San/Basarwa Research and Capacity Building

2. Ngamiland is also known as the North West District of Botswana.

3. Mababe is a San settlement in a northern wildlife management area of Botswana. It is located in the popularly known Mababe Depression, on the way to the Chobe National Park.

4. There are two spellings of Khwai. The official records use the spelling Khwai in reference to the current settlement but most of the people interviewed (Bugakhwe, elderly Batawana and even early safari officials) use the spelling Khwaai to refer to old Khwai settlements. I will retain 'Old Khwai'/Khwaai when referring to their old settlements within Moremi Game Reserve.

5. Who are now located at the Northern gate of Moremi Game Reserve.

6. Interview with Joseph Sango, in Khwai, 21/09/97.

7. Interview with Joseph Sango, in Khwai, 21/09/97.

8. Interview with Isaac Tudor in Maun, 12/12/97. See also Cowley (1965) & Taylor, M. (2000).

9. The two sites, Xaxaba and Jao today fall within the Game Park.

10. Amos Xako is one of the few surviving informants who witnessed the movement of Bugakhwe, particularly from 'Old Khwai' to 'old Sankuyo', then into the park area up until they were moved out to give way to the Park in 1963.During the interview Amos would use a piece of stick to draw and map the settlement on the ground. Like most elders in the village, he remembers his place of birth but not his exact date of birth. He has been working for the Khwai River Lodge owners for a very long time, and his name was changed from Xhwaare by those who can read and write when he was recruited to work in the South Africa mines in the mid 1940s. Several of the Bugakhwe of Khwai bear either English names or Setswana names but they still retain their San names, which are hardly ever written on official documents such as the Botswana National Identity card.

11. Thoromo Motlhala, Khwai, 20/06/98.

12. Group interview, 20/06/97.

13. Joseph Sango, Khwai 20/06/97.
14. Thoromo Motlhala, Joseph Sango, Tumelo Sejwara and Lekgoa Mabengane at Khwai, interviewed between 1997 & 1998.
15. Interview with Dr. H. Heinz, 81 years old, 12/12/97, Maun. Heinz maintains that there are a very few 'pure' Xanekhwe surviving because most of them have either died from tsetse or intermarried. Heinz died in 1999. During the July-October 2001 fieldwork, I consulted his personal research material now kept by the Harry Oppenheimer Okavango Research Centre, University of Botswana, Maun.
16. Amos Xako, Khwai, July 1998.
17. These two sites are now commonly known as Four Rivers which are not in the Park.
18. Amos, 26/ 06/97. Seretse Khama became the first President of Botswana in 1966.
19. Pete Smith, Maun, 11/12/97.
20. Lesie Kwere, Khwai, 03/07/97
21. The families trace their movement from what is now the northern part of Moremi Game Reserve, across the park itself to the Maqhwee (southern gate) then to South East of the Park (old Sankuyo site).
22. Amos Xako, Khwai, 04/07/97.
23. Lesie and Keamogetswe Kwere, Khwai 03/07/97 & 04/07/97.
24. Like illiterate elders in other parts of Africa most illiterate elders in Botswana identify their date of birth with time of great events e.g. the World War or plagues like *trypanosomiasis*.
25. July Mparanyane, interviewed at Khwai, 24/06/97..
26. Pete Smith, Maun, 11/12/97.
27. Harry Selby, founder of Ker and Downey Safari hunting company in Botswana in the early 1960s, resident of Maun, 25/02/98 & 24/ 08/ 2001.

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