

Maitseo MM Bolaane, *Chiefs, Hunters and San in the Creation of the Moremi Game Reserve, Okavango Delta: Multiracial Interactions and Initiatives, 1956-1979.*

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This book is Maitseo Bolaane's revised doctoral thesis that was submitted at Oxford University in 2004. Bolaane demonstrates the challenges faced in the creation of a game reserve in the Okavango –one of the world's prized wetlands. She explains that the active involvement of the local African communities in the creation of the Moremi Game Reserve was made possible by the nature of British colonial rule in Botswana which differed from developments in Kenya and South Africa. In Botswana local chiefs were responsible for service delivery in their tribal areas. Bolaane also shows how lack of stringent racial laws and practices enabled the chiefs, white hunters and adventurers as well as international organisations such as the World Wildlife Fund (WWF) were involved in the establishment of the Moremi Game Reserve.

She demonstrates that local colonial government officials in Ngamiland were strongly opposed to the formation of Fauna Conservation Society in 1963 and its establishment of the game reserve. In particular, Robert and June Kay, who had arrived in the country in 1958 and spearheaded the two projects, were maligned and branded 'dangerous agent provocateurs' (p.116) by the local colonial government official. Bolaane indicates that the role of the Kays was not dissimilar to other individuals previously involved in hunting but later became crusaders in wildlife conservation. The Fauna Conservation Society differed from its counterparts in Southern Africa and East Africa because of the multi-racial composition of its membership.

Bolaane devotes a whole chapter to the centrality of the traditional kgotla public forum in Tswana governance in the formation of the Fauna Conservation Society (pp.107-143). She also points out the larger political context within which developments in Ngamiland were taking place. For instance, in the late 1950s as part of preparing Bechuanaland for self-government, tribal councils were formed in various tribal areas, and as democratic institutions they included representatives from traditionally marginalised ethnic groups –subject tribes– in the administration of tribal affairs. The progressive Pulane Moremi's, BaTawana regent, effort to accommodate the subject tribes in governance were resisted by influential and conservative male BaTawana chauvinists but she was able to stand her ground and impressed the colonial officialdom. However, the more marginalised BaSarwa or San remained outside the new political dispensation. Bolaane also notes that 'The name Moremi stood for cultural heritage as well as the BaTawana's reinforcement of control of the Okavango landscape and political dominance in the region' (p.145).

Against tremendous odds June Kay sought and sometimes secured funding from interested fauna associations in South Africa, United Kingdom, and even the United States of America. The WWF was also approached but being an overwhelmingly poor territory with little European settlement, Botswana faced stiff competition from the more endowed Kenya. Nevertheless, under the management of the Fauna Conservation Society the game reserve attracted researchers from South African research institutions as well as international film makers.

Serious challenges faced Moremi owing to numerous factors among which was the conflicting personal vested interests of the Kays. It should be noted that June Kay was also able to publish a number of books based on her experiences of wildlife in Ngamiland. Bolaane also writes that the Kays 'cavalier attitude and loose cannon status were increasingly in conflict with the development of regularized financial structures' (p.187). Eventually, they had to abandon the project they had initiated.

Other challenges faced by the Fauna Conservation Society was that the country's attainment of independence in 1966 led to a number of the Society's capable founding members taking over taxing responsibilities at the newly established North West District Council while others became senior officials in the central government at the new capital –Gaborone. The Society was, therefore, bereft of experienced leadership and its financial situation got so dire that it could not even afford to pay employees monthly wages which severely affected productivity. This led to government takeover in October 1979. 'Although there was much rhetoric about the importance of local interests, the transfer of control of Moremi undermined a major experiment in local, community-based wildlife management in Ngamiland', concludes Bolaane (p.210).

Bolaane devotes the whole of the final chapter (seven) to the plight of the river BaSarwa (Bugakhwe of Khwai) in the establishment and development of Moremi. She argues that while they were persuaded to sacrifice their land for national benefit they lost the most in terms of access to the resources in the Reserve. She says that in June 1997 she met Kware Seriri, a MoSarwa leader who was involved in the formation of Moremi. Kware 'also expressed the common frustration at seeing foreign tourists "enjoying the fruits of our land", while "we sit on the fence", (p.232).

Bolaane tells us that the Bugakhwe have developed new survival strategies by way of selling thatching grass to safari lodges in the area as well as selling baskets and other curios to tourists. She also writes that in the late-1990s Community Based Natural Resources Management (CBNRM) opened up major new strategy to improve Bugakhwe's livelihoods among other communities in the wildlife rich parts of the country. However, Bolaane does not point out the problems that afflicted a good number of these CBNRM initiatives and perpetuated grinding poverty in the communities that were supposed to be the beneficiaries.

Perhaps, mention should have been made that in recent years a tiny section of the country's ruling elite and a small number of well-connected indigenes have muscled their way into the overwhelmingly foreign-dominated tourism industry in the Okavango enclave. Nonetheless, this book will greatly benefit students, policy makers, and the general reader interested in the History of wildlife conservation in Botswana.

Reviewed by Christian John Makgala