

Identity, Guns, and Nineteenth-century Globalization: An Examination of Botswana

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Abstract: In 2019, the Botswanan government reversed the hunting ban instituted in 2014. The ban had met with stiff opposition within Botswana and widespread critique. Some condemned the excessive influence of the international conservation community. Many focused on the negative impact of large herds of elephants on the physical environment and remote communities of the Northeast. However, although framed in terms of conservation concerns and the economic viability of remote communities, the controversies surrounding Botswana's hunting policies reflected a much longer history of occupation, and discourses of power. By the mid-nineteenth century, new forms of global consumption and trade were transforming the economic and political map of southern Africa. For much of the region, hunting, cattle, and guns were at heart of these changes. Often issues of sovereignty and power were articulated in terms of access to land, access to animals and access to weapons. Likewise, group and individual identity also became embedded in rights in animals and rights in weapons. This article examines the role of hunting and herding as a local experience within a global economic context. As such it looks at the multiplicity of roles and actions involved in composing nineteenth century hunting parties, gaining access to animals, as well as dividing and distributing goods and compensations. In so doing it considers as far as possible, the motivations and strategies of those involved at various levels. It also argues that rights in animals, access to the global economy and resources are essential to understanding both the nineteenth century ivory boom and current debates.

Introduction

For at least two centuries hunting has been a significant and contested part of the economy of Botswana and nearby countries. Disputes over rights in water, land, and animals have highlighted issues of resources, location, ethnicity, and occupation. Khama III of the Bamangwato was directly addressing these issues upon the declaration of the Bechuanaland Protectorate in 1885 when he declared that the three things his people enjoyed were "their cultivated fields, their cattle stations and their hunting grounds." He then asserted that hunting rights were an important part of his sovereignty and his people's patrimony: "Certainly, the game will come to an end in the future; but at present it is still my country and while it is still there, I hold it ought to be hunted by my people. What I wish to explain is that my people will not be prevented from hunting in all the country except where the English dwell."¹ His assertion of his people's hunting rights was especially true with regards to the world's largest land animal, the elephant.

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By the mid-nineteenth century, new forms of global consumption and trade were transforming the economic and political map of southern Africa, as indicated by the British declaration of the Bechuanaland Protectorate. For much of the region, hunting, cattle, and guns were at the heart of these changes. Often issues of sovereignty and power were articulated in terms of access to land, access to animals, and access to weapons. Likewise, group and individual identity also became embedded in rights in animals and rights in weapons. Although animal products had always been a significant part of local and regional exchange, an increased demand for *karosses* (hides), ostrich feathers, and ivory also corresponded with the formation of new groups of multi-ethnic internationalized hunters and herdsmen who were linked to global markets. More widespread consumption of items such as guns, powder, tea, cloth, and sugar served to alter diets, identities, and hierarchies of power.

Hunters, Poachers, Guns, and Governments

In our own era, conflict and views on the desirability of elephants reflected and continued to reflect age, occupation, education, and location. As such, positive perspectives on elephants closely parallel those most able to benefit from global flows of revenue in the form of tourism and employment in the conservation industry as well as those most able to implement technological improvements on their farms and ranches. In this sense controversy surrounding recent conservation concerns and discourses over the economic viability of remote communities also echoed a much longer history of occupation and discourses of power.

With a particular emphasis on the nineteenth-century ivory boom, this article studies the hierarchy of resource use and hierarchy within ivory hunting parties. In further exploring hunting and herding as a local experience within a global economic context, it analyzes how globalization and efforts at centralization were a significant part of the conflict over resources. As such, it looks at the multiplicity of roles and actions involved in composing hunting parties, gaining access to animals, as well as dividing and distributing goods and compensations. In so doing, it considers, as far as possible, the motivations and strategies of those involved at various levels. By using the published accounts of European hunters and colonial officials, this piece shifts the examination of hunting parties to delve into the ways in which hunting and the ivory trade incorporated its members into the Tswana state and international systems of commerce. Many of the questions posed in this work were shaped by fieldwork in Botswana during the 1990s, additional research conducted in Botswana, Namibia, and England as well as repeated return visits to Botswana, Namibia, and Zimbabwe. It also owes much to the previous work to a large number of scholars, especially those based in Botswana.²

Identity, labor, and status were often closely aligned. In nineteenth-century southern Africa, many groups faced rapid integration into global structures of trade and an influx of material goods. As identity, labor, and status were situated in a set of relationships and practices that were often both historically and politically bounded, rapid changes in local conditions can often lead to substantial changes in identity and status. Frontiers, such as those created by the expansion of global commercial capitalism and the demand for ivory, were places where groups interacted and identities could be recast.³ Hunting and trading groups

(which often followed the pattern of earlier raiding parties) often strained existing hierarchies as they offered access to guns and meat and new points of access to regional and global markets.

Nineteenth-century European narratives created a fixed hierarchy of hunting, with the aristocratic trophy hunter sportsmen at its pinnacle. This in turn reflected structures of power, land tenure, and rights to environmental resources. Likewise, hunting, landscape, and preservation had begun to evolve into questions of national pride. Within this context, hunting for subsistence and commercial gain connoted low status and criminality.⁴ Echoing the laws on poaching and land use implemented in Europe, colonial laws attempted to limit local hunting practices with implementation of permits and the designation of certain species as royal game. However, many groups in the region also stressed their right to control the land and its resources as well as the peoples hunting within their territory. Even during the waning days of the nineteenth-century ivory rush, Tswana sovereigns asserted their right to dispose of elephants and other game as they saw fit. Yet the region contained a multiplicity of peoples who did not have the same relationship to either the Tswana leaders or these enormous creatures. This has led to areas of cooperation and well as conflict in acquisition and distribution of resources.

Thomas Tlou incorporated hunting into concepts of ethnicity and the creation of the Batawana polity in northwest Botswana.⁵ Alec C. Campbell, Jeff Ramsay, Barry Morton, Fred Morton, and T. Mgadla have constructed detailed histories of Botswana. These works documented the political structures of Tswana government and considered the importance of the nineteenth-century ivory boom in building the Tswana state.⁶ Within these works, membership in the Tswana *kgotlas*, the construction of ethnic and religious groups, and access to technology shape identity. These works also note that conversation—and particularly conversations concerning elephants—continue to be interwoven with questions of authority, identity, and use. In contrast, anthropologists Robert Hitchcock and Edwin Wilmsen have studied the peoples of the Kalahari and Northwest Botswana with an eye to advocacy, development, and illuminating the region's history outside the Tswana *kgotlas*. They along with Robert Gordon have historicized the process by which certain peoples in remote areas were labeled and identified as Bushmen and then stereotyped as having certain attributes.⁷ They have also detailed the efforts of the government at centralization and the unequal distribution of resources in the region.

Distribution of technology has often been closely associated with globalization, hierarchies of resource use, and distribution. It has also been a significant element in both the creation of status and the establishment of patron-client relationships in much of southern Africa. This is especially true of guns. Bill Freund notes that trade in nineteenth-century Africa was marked by both the intensification of commerce and “improved weaponry” that “assisted the expansion of the hunting of both animals and men.”⁸ In *Guns, Race, and Power in South Africa*, William Storey asserts that between 1857 and 1881 over 300,000 guns entered the Cape Colony and Natal for personal use.⁹ He argues that guns were crucial to the establishment of hierarchies of race in southern Africa as well as a common part of the material culture of everyday life.¹⁰ For many, “to buy a gun was to become modern.”¹¹ In pondering this phenomena, Storey also contends that the acquisition of firearms intertwined with commercial imperialism and the ivory trade as

an acquired need and a sign of status in much the same way as the use of tea and sugar.¹² He also links them with the spread of commercialism and capitalism. As Storey explains, “guns were not only property, but were also a capital investment that could be easily moved, sold, and used.”¹³ Moreover, while Storey describes hunting “as a violent expression of masculinity,” he outlines the ways in which skill in tracking and marksmanship shaped and sometimes even inverted patron-client relations.¹⁴ This sometimes happened as European hunters became dependent on lower status “shootboys” and trackers to find game and even at some points to survive.

Control over firearms as points of privilege and expression of fear is a common theme in studies of imperialism and colonialism. This is especially true in the context of hunting. John M. MacKenzie’s *Empire of Nature* details the ways in which hunting in Europe was gradually restricted to the elite and became of a mark of masculinity and class status. Likewise, large tracts of land in Britain were reserved for the exclusive use of the elite for this purpose. Britain’s nineteenth-century empire then globalized these romantic notions of nature. Mackenzie also notes that initially commercial hunting and hunting for the pot often financed the expansion of empire and helped the British acquire local allies. Over time, as commercial hunting and intensive hunting stripped a region of wildlife resources, colonial officials restricted the hunting rights as an extension of both imperial control and notes of science.¹⁵ In his study of the hunting culture of the Bisa people of Zambia’s Luangwa Valley, Stuart A. Marks emphasizes the continuity of the imperial cult of nature among missionaries and development officials in both the colonial and the postcolonial Zambian state:

These transient non-Africans seemed blinded to the ground swells of local conversations and strategies by their attempts to (re)create Africa in their own image and to maintain their places as privileged strangers. During the 1960s in Zambia, I hear echoes of these conversations again among some foreigners and retained colonials drafting development plans in that newly independent state. Supported by donor assistance, these experts were engaged in initiating programs based exclusively upon external economic values as the most appropriate contribution for wildlife within the new Zambian state.¹⁶

Marks remarks upon the Zambian government’s focus on receiving revenue from tourists and in removing and controlling troublesome local residents. This is, in part, because the ‘troublesome’ residents and their hunting remain at odds with much of the current framing of hunting, Africa, and African wildlife. In this, the Bisa residents had moved from being hunters to being poachers as the resources of the region were no longer constructed as belonging to them, nor were they considered proper stewards of the region’s natural resources. In a similar vein, Jane Carruthers and Jacob Dlamini have demonstrated the ways in which the creation of South Africa’s Kruger National Park grew in part out of Afrikaner nationalism, perceptions of landscape, and prevailing myths about race and environmental use.¹⁷ Dlamini’s *Safari Nation* builds on this to demonstrate that “nature was not simply the physical environment, but the ideas that flowed from that environment—ideas about access, entitlement and value. Who had access to the natural environment?”¹⁸ Dlamini then considers “who was entitled to nature’s produce” and how this was entangled with questions of political rights and rights in a polity.

Nineteenth-Century Ivory

Hunting rights, and rights in wildlife have long been at the heart of sovereign power, militarization, firearms, and citizenship. They have also been crucial in shaping people's daily life and relationship with the environment. The late Alec Campbell argued that ivory trading allowed Tswana chiefs to acquire guns which allowed them to attract followers and arm themselves against Afrikaner encroachment and the forces of the *Difaqane*. He also notes that it was the exchange of ivory that allowed Tswana chiefs to rebuild their cattle herds in the aftermath of the *Difaqane*.¹⁹ The international trade in ivory had already reshaped Tswana society before 1885: the *Difaqane* impressed upon the *dikgosi* (chiefs) the need for guns that in turn necessitated a need for international trade in ivory and skins. The *dikgosi* attempted to rebuild their power by controlling the ivory trade and claiming power over the distribution of guns. However, people also set out to acquire guns and cattle for themselves and skirt the restrictions of the *dikgosi*. As Tlou and Campbell's *History of Botswana* states:

However, his subjects saw how ivory could buy cattle and wanted guns to hunt for themselves. As elephants became scarce, people started to sell ivory at night direct to traders in exchange for guns. They used the ivory they hunted to buy cattle for themselves. The herds of elephants were soon destroyed, first on the Orange River, then on the Molopo River, and so northwards through each *kgosi's* country until no elephant remained in south-eastern Botswana.²⁰

Considered in this way, elephant hunting was both essential to questions of state power, trade, and local control and environmental use.

Although nineteenth-century European adventure tales might paint it otherwise, hunting has seldom been an exclusive occupation. Prior to the ivory boom, Tswana people hunted for trophies and game hunting constituted a significant source of skins and meat.²¹ Hunting is also interwoven with farming in terms of the removal and threats to crops. During the nineteenth-century hunting, however, was linked to various forms of international consumption. Tales of the exotic provided tourists, funds, fame, and status. For many Europeans, adventure, redemption, science, and spirituality defined the African landscape and intertwined with the search for souls, specimens, meat, and profit. While searching for elephants, hunters shot other game, ate their meat, and preserved their heads. Likewise, they sold ivory for financial profit and paid their fellow hunters in meat. This meat was also sometimes shared with local communities. Frederick Courtney Selous records several incidences of men joining the hunt in the hopes of garnering meat. Selous mused, "I think that the advent of the fair-skinned stranger, who supplied them with such an abundance of meat, and what they prize above all earthly blessings, fat, will ever be remembered by them with feelings of unmitigated pleasure."²² The most evident hierarchy was in the distribution of the kill with the European hunter taking tusks/head and first choice of meat. Europeans also took the heart of the elephant as a sign of their status. Trackers, carriers, and others working on the hunt were then allowed to take fat and meat with the leftover being left to local people and or scavengers. Gordon-Cummings, who moved through the region during the 1840s wrote:

It was ever to me a source of great pleasure to reflect that, while enriching myself in following my favorite pursuit of elephant hunting I was feeding and making happy the starving families of hundreds of the Bechuana and Bakalahari tribes, who invariably followed my wagons, and assisted me in my hunting, in numbers varying from fifty to two hundred at a time. These men were often accompanied by their wives and families and when an elephant, hippopotamus, or other large animal was slain, all hands repaired to the spot, when every inch of the animal was reduced to biltong, viz., cut into long narrow strips, and hung in festoons upon poles and dried in the sun; even the entrails were not left for the vulture and hyenas, and very bones were chopped to pieces with their hatchets to obtain the marrow with which they enriched their soup.²³

The nature of the hunt also allowed for multiple interpretations of relationships and the distribution of resources. On a local level hunting provided a means of subsistence and supplementation of diet, but it also was a means of asserting authority and power over resources. Bringing guns and often offering powder and meat, adventurers utilized local guides to gain knowledge of the landscape.²⁴

Gordon-Cumming's account of trade and hunting gives insight into the complexity of the intergroup dynamics these activities created. Afrikaners, Griqua, and others were essential in the creation of hunting groups and not only did they have their own hunting parties, but provided overland transport of goods and established trading posts. During the twentieth-century colonial administrators would despair over the role of these same groups in the illegal biltong trade. In the nineteenth century, it also spoke to the notion of created needs as the lists contain items both of luxury items and goods of protection and sustenance, such as ammunition, guns, cows, and goats:

In the years when prices of cattle are low, these traders occasionally vary their line of march, and forsaking the Boers for a season, load up a suitable cargo, and direct their course for the Bechuanaland tribes from whom they obtain ivory, *karosses* (skin cloaks) and ostrich-feathers, along with various curiosities for which they obtain ready sale in the Grahamstown market, where good ivory averages 4s to 4s6d per pound. *Karosses* vary in price from 1/. to 3/. each, according to their size, kind, and quality. Ostrich-feathers used to fetch from 5/. to 6/. per pound, but partly owing to the feathers being less worn by the votaries of fashion in London, and partly to the late disturbances throughout Europe, the prices have greatly fallen. The articles required for trading with the Bechuana tribes are beads of all sizes and colours, brass and copper wire, knives and hatchets, cloth for both sexes, ammunition, guns, young cows, and she-goats. The two latter the trader obtains in barter from the Boers, Griqua and Koranna tribes, more adjacent to the colony. Some writers have erroneously stated that snuff and tobacco are a good circulating medium among the tribes in Southern Africa, but in course of my experience I can scarcely remember ever having obtained the smallest trifle in barter either, not even a drink of milk. The natives have certainly no objections to receive these articles when given gratuitously.²⁵

The trade in a variety of wildlife products with Tswana groups reflected a complicated web of trade with Afrikaner and colored communities. It also demonstrates that trade in ivory was not carried out solely for items of conspicuous consumption such as beads, cloth, and wire, but also more essential items such as hatchets, knives, ammunition, guns, cattle, and goats. These valuable items were received in exchange for ivory which until the nineteenth century many Tswana peoples placed in the same category as bones.

Both Tswana and European hunters employed Tyua and other groups labeled “Basarwa” or “Bushmen” to shoot and track game. These groups acquired feathers and other items for the Tswana and for Europeans in exchange for guns, tobacco, and a share of the meat for themselves. Even though white hunters often depicted themselves as bringing down elephants with a single shot either to the shoulder or the heart, they seldom worked alone. Often multiple shots were fired at once in an effort to fell the beast and escape harm.²⁶ In northern Botswana and Namibia, porters and guides became even more necessary in those areas infested with tsetse. Many of these people became skilled hunters who were not only familiar with local methods of hunting, but European networks as well. The Afrikaner hunter Hendrik Van Zyl, who helped to establish the Afrikaner settlement of Ghanzi in 1874, employed over a hundred “Bushmen” and many of whom acted as “shootboys.” In 1892 when the Germans outlawed arms trade with Africans in their newly acquired territory, “Bushmen” continued to bring guns into their territory from Angola and once the Kalahari was hunted out in terms of ivory, they continued to trade arms for ostrich feathers.²⁷ As David Livingstone noted in the Afrikaner Republics to the south “the natives know well the source of their power. Guns and ammunitions are purchased with great avidity.”²⁸

Ivory, Guns, and Government: Hierarches of Labor and Use

Hunting and the arms trade remain closely connected to political power and hence frequently had bearing on the ways in which labor and resources were directed. Having been pushed northward by the *Difiqane* and the rise of the Afrikaner Republics, Tswana used trade and exchange to build their military power and to help keep control of local groups. Tswana chiefs received a portion of all the year’s hunted game (*dihuba*). Likewise, they sought control of local traders and trade routes. They also sought to gain control over local groups and their actions. The primary trade routes for the sale of ivory, skins, and feathers into the international market consisted of those that went northward into the Portuguese territory of Angola and southward towards British territory in southern Africa. The Tswana and Mbukushu remained the primary negotiators in this exchange, the Mbukushu dealing with the Portuguese trade through Benguela and the Tswana directed resources south into British territory through white traders.²⁹ The Mbukushu directed resources through a group of mixed ethnic origins referred to as the Mamberri.³⁰ By the reign of Khama the white traders occupied separate distinct quarters at Shoshong and at Lake Ngami.³¹ Traders and missionaries occupied a niche as the purveyors of guns, as Moremi told Schulz during Schulz’s 1884 trip through Moremi’s territory:

Kimberley had great attractions for him, and he told us that it was from Kimberley that he had obtained all No. 2 breech loading muskets, over two thousand in number. He had sent through the intervening hundreds of miles repeatedly

engaging the best traders he could get to purchase guns for him. Armed as he now was, and possessing plenty of ammunition, he looked forward with perfect calmness to the next Matabele invasion.³²

Popular travel accounts from the nineteenth century effectively illustrate the connection between guns, cattle, hunting, and land. Although the stated purpose of Livingstone, Chapman, Baines, and Selous were different, they all involved guns, hunting, and the collection of a great deal of ivory. In the case of Baines and Chapman, it also meant extra efforts to obtain oxen and slaughter cattle to provide extra payments of meat and the ability to collect and transport both the ivory and the artistic/scientific equipment that was part of the expedition. Frequent negotiations needed to be carried out for goods and for permission to hunt as well as the way in which the expedition would be conducted and distribution of spoils. Baines stayed and negotiated with the Griqua and Bastaard leaders who had pushed northward into Namibia. He noted tensions over the slaughter of animals around watering holes. He also recorded the difficulties of various groups negotiating for land. Selous appeared before Lobengula who teased him about elephant hunting. Baines faced challenges from members of his party when they entered territory that they believed was dangerous.

Despite images of lone European explorers pushing into uncharted lands, these were multiethnic, multinational group endeavors that required a multiplicity of skills and knowledge. Selous notes the prevalence of Afrikaner ivory hunters in the region of Botswana and Zimbabwe. Griqua, Khoi, Afrikaner, "masarwa," and "black shots" were prominent in ivory hunting expeditions.³³ Selous was instructed in elephant hunting by Cigar, a Khoi man who had once been a jockey at Grahamstown. Cigar in turn had been taught by another famous hunter, William Finaughty. Selous compared Cigar favorably to the Afrikaner hunters saying, "he continually allowed me the first shot - and never tried in any way to over reach me or claim animals that I had shot, as is so often done by the Boers."³⁴ In describing those who accompanied him, Charles Andersson mentions that two of the men that took part on his Okavango expedition had participated on such expeditions previously, one of them from Madeira and the other Malabar. He then dismissively states that "The rest of my servants being native attendants, distinguished of no remarkable quality (except for Kampjie and Tom, both capital trackers and interpreters) I pass them over in silence. I have only to add that besides several other barbarous tongues, my men spoke Damara, Hottentot, Sichuana, and Portuguese, languages most likely to come into requisition."³⁵ Selous also expressed admiration for his trackers and carriers.

Almost all the men on these expeditions, regardless of origin and ethnic identity, hunted and carried arms. Therefore, although hunting (particularly elephant hunting) involved a combination of techniques, by the second half of the nineteenth century it most frequently involved the international firearms trade. The history of hunting was seldom separate from changes in technology and warfare. In southern Africa, Afrikaners and groups such as the Griqua and Bastards were the shock troops of European occupation, but also key players in the expansion of the guns and ivory trade. Elephant-hunting Boers as well as missionaries were connected with the expansion of the international economy and most particularly the arms trade. David Livingstone and Robert Moffat both supplied guns and ammunition to the African

leaders with whom they worked. Despite the fact that Afrikaners carried out a substantial arms trade themselves, this angered the Afrikaners who attacked and destroyed Livingstone's house in Kwena territory.³⁶ Livingstone complained that although the Afrikaners themselves sold guns, "English traders sold those articles which Boers most dread, namely arms and ammunition and when the number of guns amounted to five, so much alarm was excited among our neighbors that an expedition of several hundred Boers was seriously planned to deprive the Bakwains of their guns."³⁷ African leaders demanded guns and powder in exchange for hunting rights and African workers required them in exchange for their labor.

Many African leaders wished to acquire guns to protect themselves and their cattle. Missionaries and mine labor played a role in achieving this goal, but commercial hunting seems to have spread these weapons most effectively. On the high veld and into the Kalahari, mounted expeditions tracked game. The leaders of the Tswana groups (Bangwato, Bakwena, Batawana, and Bangwakeste) devastated by the forces of the *Difiqane* gained control of the ivory trade and the associated weaponry. They divided the territory of the Kalahari, often enslaving the local populations, and built effective military/hunting states.³⁸ These states claimed rights to ivory in the region and the associated production of dried meat or biltong. Many participating in the hunt saw themselves as independent agents. Those who controlled the guns, powder, and horses had a different perspective. Baines mentions only a small group of "Bushmen" that were "so far from the Hottentots and the Bechuanas as to be independent from either."³⁹ He also mentioned in passing the wholesale slaughter of animals at water holes and the casual murder of people who fell into these categories.⁴⁰

Distribution of guns and hunting rights played a role in both Tswana states and the bordering states of the Ndebele and Afrikaner Republics. Many groups had an interest in limiting the use of the guns to groups loyal to the state and state power, but this was often in conflict with maximizing the profit from the hunt. Tswana leaders often sent out Bakgalagadi clients to hunt and employed local "Bushmen/Basarwa" as well.⁴¹ Unlike groups who obtained access to Tswana cattle, these groups sometimes saw themselves as essentially independent and under no obligation to the people with whom they hunted (although as mentioned earlier were often highly valued for their knowledge):

In fact their knowledge of field and forest lore reaches the highest pitch of perfection, and were it not for their unstable characters, they would make invaluable associates of all of the classes of mankind that have to seek their existence in the desert. But I believe that there is hardly a case on record where a Mosaro has associated for any extended length of time with either a native tribe or a white hunter. Influenced by an invisible power of some unknown attraction to the desert, a Mosaro will leave the best employer without warning, and not take anything he is not entitled to in the shape of goods . . .⁴²

Even if groups attempted to disassociate themselves from hierarchy, however, they could not always escape tribute and taxation. Leaders often limited the access of outside hunters and traders to local resources and local people. In some cases, this was part of a larger effort to control the indiscriminate slaughter fueled by international hunting parties. Allegedly, Lobengula, once made the point: "Now it happened there were many sea-cows—

hippopotami—in one of the king’s preserves, and he said to all the hunters, Selous included, you must not shoot sea-cows there, for I want them for myself. When you hunters come across game, you are not satisfied with a little, but you kill it all.”⁴³ Leaders often acted to keep the traders in their territories and attached to them. Outsiders who wished to hunt in the territory of the Batawana had to pay tribute to Letsholathebe in ivory and hippo teeth. Likewise, citizen and subject people of the Batawana also had to provide Letsholathebe with a tusk, a wing, and teeth of elephant ostrich, and hippo kills. Moreover, Letsholathebe instructed his people to drive the animals away and refuse traders guidance and transport when they did not have his permission to trade and hunt.⁴⁴ Certain people were marked as part of the hunting complex in terms of both goods and labor:

The Makalahari (or poor men) and Bushmen who are slaves of the Bechuana in the towns live on game and roots. Their tribute consists of skins and certain parts of the animals killed....The manufacture of karosses continues to be one of the great industries of the Bechuana, and these skins are retailed at a high profit by traders in Kimberly market. Tiger skins are brought from the north, but deer skins, blesbok, koodoo, or more commonly springbok, may be obtained elsewhere. Jackal skins and cat skins are among the softest (sheepskins also made in karosses - make excellent bed)...every shot and spear mark carefully patched.⁴⁵

The economic and social relationship between various groups was often quite complicated. This was true especially true in regard to cattle, guns, and wildlife products. Although frequently subject to severe abuse, those called “Basarwa” supplied significant amounts of ivory, rhinoceros horn, and ostrich feathers. They also acted as porters for ivory and other support for traders and hunting groups. This changed the power structure and nature of the hunt itself as these groups “traded skins for gunpowder and were able to obtain guns for their own use, either on loan or through clandestine trade with itinerant hawkers. The acquisition of cattle through trade also altered relationships and the rhythms of work. Increased amounts of cattle in a region often led to hunting becoming a seasonal occupation for many groups labeled hunter gathers.”⁴⁶

Nineteenth-century hunters often employed a range of techniques and technology that varied according to environment and the composition of the hunting party. The most obvious demarcations were created by the tsetse zones where it became necessary for hunters to proceed on foot rather than on horseback or places such as the Okavango Delta which necessitated not only knowledge of a different environment, but different modes of transportation such as *mokoros*.⁴⁷ Hunting reflects the distribution and development of technology and the development and exploitation of local environmental resources. In this sense, it is a story of technological innovation and environmental interaction and change. While hunting and ivory trade represented a portion of the arms trade in southern Africa, it also represented adaption to local environment. The Mbukushu were noted elephant hunters. Rather than guns, they used a barbed spear embedded in a piece of wood which they set in the path of an elephant who once he stepped upon the spear was unable to continue and was then brought down by cutting the back tendons.⁴⁸ The technique of slashing the back tendons to bring down the elephant was also used when shooting the elephant as well.⁴⁹ Others in the Okavango Delta were noted for their

skills in hunting large dangerous animals. Weighted spears brought down hippos, driving game into pits, and a type of harpooning technique.⁵⁰ “Bushmen” garnered European admiration not just for their tracking skills, but also for their poisoned arrows, darts, and marksmanship.⁵¹

Into the 1870s, many hunters preferred large-bore muzzle-loaders called *roers*. They could be repaired locally, and black powder was available even in remote areas. They fired a large bullet which was ideal for maximizing the impact on the elephant particularly when shooting them through the heart. They also could be loaded with various types of shot. The use of these guns required great skill as they had a particularly powerful kick back and resulted in shoulder injuries. In the 1860s, changes in armament technology continued to contribute to the shrinking animal population and to more widespread use of guns. In 1888, Charles Rudd, Cecil Rhodes’s partner in imperial expansion, promised the Ndebele leader Lobengula a thousand Martini-Henry rifles. Khama, Lobengula’s Tswana rival, demanded that the British government immediately provide 800 Martini-Henrys and the British secretary of state, Lord Knutsford, explained to the newly-arrived governor at the Cape that the “Tswana should be allowed enough arms and ammunition to hunt game and defend themselves.”⁵² New elephant guns at the end of the nineteenth-century corresponded with hunting for pleasure by European tourists. Nevertheless, older technology remained popular into the late nineteenth-century and onward. Hunting with darts and arrows even served to promote an image of “bushmen” that could be packaged and utilized for both tourism and claims to scientific endeavor.⁵³

After Ivory: Reframing Rights in Peoples, Wildlife, and Land

The end of the ivory and hunting booms, marked by the almost complete disappearance of elephants, reflected that hunting labor was not an exclusive occupation. Peoples involved seldom hunted only one animal or rejected other forms of income. Combined with southern Africa’s Mineral Revolution, devastations of rinderpest, and widespread use of bore holes, it forced people to look at land and resources in different ways. The rinderpest epidemic which entered Botswana in 1896 is estimated to have killed almost 90 percent of cattle in some areas and equal numbers of other cloven-hoofed animals (some peoples protected their cattle by isolating them in remote areas). This altered both the sources of sustenance and the occupation. Hitchcock argues that rinderpest epidemics, the associated cordon fences erected to stop disease, series of droughts, and successive outbreaks of hoof and mouth disease impoverished the Tyua as well as other “Bushmen” and pushed them into other types of work such as mine labor, hauling firewood, and foraging.⁵⁴

Native trade in Bechuanaland has now been ruined by the incursions of the white races. The evidence taken before 1880, the Bataping and Baralong carried on a considerable trade with Kimberly and Barkly in wood, skins, corn and mealies. Even the Makalaka travelled south to work in the diamond mines until they had earned the price of a wife, and I have seen poor natives on their way to Kimberley, their only provision being a bottle of water. The trade is now extinct, and even the employment has fallen off through the misfortunes of the mining companies.⁵⁵

Issues surrounding elephants and labor did not just reflect changes in technology. They also reflected various environmental shifts. As hunters took elephants to the brink of extinction, alteration in prevailing weather patterns shrunk the amount of available surface water further limiting the range of the elephant in Namibia and Botswana's arid climate.⁵⁶ This combined with the rinderpest epidemic to further alter the environment. The shrinking elephant population also brought about its own changes. Elephants were no longer present to dig and create watering holes that were utilized by other animals. In the northeast of the country, the lack of large number of elephants and other shrub eating fauna led to the re-emergence of acacias and riverine forest. This helped to expand the range of the tsetse which in turn limited the territory available for cattle. Much of northeastern Botswana became crown land and game reserve.

Globally, notions of elephants and wildlife shifted as well. While various groups within Botswana identified elephants as a source of wealth (tourist companies, wildlife agencies, and the state), others viewed them as a source of destruction (farmers and ranchers), often depending on their position in relation to elephants and the global economy. This in turn is related to who, or what has the right to control, direct and benefit from natural resources. Clive Spinage, a zoologist who has written extensively on Botswana and elephants, has given thought into the ways in which elephants could be domesticated and utilized. He has also given some consideration to the increased number elephants in Botswana. Writing in 1994, he stated:

Up until 1991 the elephant population in northern Botswana was one of the remaining populations in Africa still increasing in the absence of poaching and, with more than 6% of calves in the population, momentarily growing in numbers at near maximum rate. Limitations of habitat would eventually have come to bear on this rate of increase as density levels that may suppose have been witnessed elsewhere in Africa, but this appears to have been averted.

He also notes that the nineteenth-century reduction in elephants led to changes in local woodlands and the increase in elephants would again alter the landscape.⁵⁷ Nevertheless, he also concludes with "We need greater foresight than President Lincoln to save this great beast which Pliny said possesses virtues rare even in man...and the Old Testament: 'He is the chief of the ways of God.'"⁵⁸ Martin Meredith's *Elephant Destiny* provided a popular history of the evolving relationship between people and elephants. Like many international scholars and observers of the 1990s, he examines the question of elephant hunting and culling mainly in terms of ivory, a trope that dates back to the nineteenth century. Meredith concludes, "The role of the ivory trade, meanwhile, remains unresolved. Each year, as ivory stock piles mount the countries of southern Africa campaign for an end to the ban on international trade, arguing that it deprives them of revenues needed to protect their national parks, and wildlife reserves."⁵⁹ This turn begs the question of global consumption of African wildlife and landscapes in the form of tourism versus global consumption of ivory as an item of wealth and exoticism, and local concerns about safety and farming.

Other groups were also reimagined in the wake of the ivory boom. British conservationists who grew concerned about the disappearance of elephants identified Afrikaner hunters as a source of extinction and called for restrictions. H.A. Brydon, a nineteenth-century British

photographer and early conservationist, pointed to breech-loading rifles and “Boers” as harbingers of doom. Writing for a British paper, he claimed that “a party of Boer hunters had driven a herd of 104 elephants into a marsh in the Okavango country and killed every one.”⁶⁰ Similar stories of illicit biltong hunting continue to appear in the records of colonial Bechuanaland and post-colonial Botswana. After the establishment of the protectorate, the colonial government passed a series of game acts which transformed “hunters into poachers.”⁶¹ Nevertheless, peoples of European origin were most likely to be granted freehold tenure. Likewise, in crown lands, they were also the most likely to be granted hunting and other types of concessions. Those with freehold tenure and concession grants could limit grazing, hunting, and foraging on “their” lands. In the case of the freehold, those labeled hunter/gathers provided farm labor. Hunting and foraging took place with the permission of the property owner or in conjunction with farm labor.⁶² For Crown lands, hunting was limited by permits and poaching laws. Those on tribal lands also claimed the right to restrict hunting rights and claim the labor of those that they considered subordinate. By restricting access to game (and particularly combined with less access to lucrative trade items such as ivory), restrictive game laws and a reduction in the amount of actual game rendered those previously engaged in trading wildlife products more dependent on farm and mine labor. Limited economic options also decreased sovereignty of certain groups and reinforced subordinate political positions.

The relationship between hunting, and resources remained complicated during the ivory rush and its aftermath. During the boom, Tswana groups asserted control over both the game and peoples of the region. “Basarwa/Bushmen” groups claimed that their relationship was one of trade and mutual exchange not one of tribute or subordination. However, various Tswana, in turn, claimed rights to Basarwa, their lands, and their wild game. This continued to hold true as Tswana kingdoms became “tribal lands” and finally part of independent Botswana. Moreover, tensions increased as the cattle herds recovered, bore holes extended the reach of ranching communities, and shifts in government and law offered a new means of laying claim to land. In the aftermath of the boom, hunting focused on protection of domestic livestock, scientific inquiry, and tourism. In northern Botswana, tsetse fly control became one of the most lucrative and widespread uses of hunting skills. However, in regions more conducive to cattle herding, hunting and mine labor challenged Tswana claims to Basarwa labor. This was further complicated by the relationship between the Tswana *kgosi* and the British.

For groups focused on cattle, such as the Tswana, the British emphasis on fixed locations and permits represented challenges to sovereignty and established practice. The same was true for British implementation of game laws as well as anti-slavery legislation and challenges in colonial courts designed to assert British control and protection over groups the Tswana considered subject peoples. Elephants, ivory, and other game products ultimately belonged to the state. Currently, the notion of certain peoples as first peoples and hunter gatherers has weight in terms of economics, power, and international status. Yet guns and the international trade in wildlife products often played a significant part in the history of the region. Access to horses and donkeys obtained through trade and the need to perform casual labor reduced hunt times for prized prey such as eland and giraffe. Guns altered the ways in which people lived and hunted in multiple ways. The widespread use of guns hindered those who used bows and

spears by increasing the flight distance of game. Guns aided the killing of large animals such as rhinoceros and elephants. This in turn led to people pursuing new occupations and acquiring different social position and labor. For example, certain groups such as the “Bushmen” along the Nata River began to specialize in elephant hunting and became known for that occupation.⁶³ As the ivory rush commenced, hierarchies were not fixed.

Global commercial markets and imperial expansion reshaped nineteenth-century southern Africa. The ivory boom and European hunting accounts represent an early form of modern European consumption and definition of African landscapes and African peoples. It incorporated many places labeled by Europeans as ‘remote’ into markets and fueled the need for guns and other products. For people living in southern Africa, cows, goats, guns, ammunition cloth, tea, sugar, and other items helped to create a hierarchy of status and material goods. Ivory hunting shifted attitudes towards elephants, hunting, and groups involved in the exchange. In the midst of the boom, the Tswana *dikgosi* and other regional leaders sought to centralize control over guns, wildlife resources, and subject peoples. Within the ivory hunting bands, members of denigrated subject groups defied negative characterizations by becoming renowned for their crack marksmanship and hunting skills. The complexity of the hunt often broke down the hierarchy of hunting parties, but the status based on ethnicity, class, and access to world markets was usually restored in its aftermath. The end of the ivory boom brought widespread environmental and economic changes—however, many of the hierarchies of technology and ethnic identity remained.

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Notes

1 Spinage 1992, p.19.

2 The authors of these accounts were agents of empire and as such interested in casting events in southern Africa in terms of images of empire. David Livingstone, a Christian missionary with the London Mission Society cast as the quintessential Victorian hero, emphasized salvation, but was accepted locally because of his access to guns and medicine. Roualeyn Gordon-Cummings who Livingstone enabled with guides and occasional rescue from difficult situations, had previously served in the light cavalry of the British East India Company. Thomas Baines, an artist, accompanied Livingstone and James Chapman. His accounts, images, and exhibits helped to bring empire home. Likewise, Charles Andersson, the Swedish son of British bear hunter and naturalist, Llewellyn Lloyd, worked to expand British trade routes eventually at the cost of his own life. Frederick Courtney Selous actively worked for Cecil Rhodes' British South Africa Company. While Thomas Baines gained from this association, Baine by selling his gold mining concession, Selous led the so called "pioneer column" designed to secure the region that is now Zimbabwe for Rhodes. Hunting and the "scientific" collecting of specimens were part of these expeditions and the activities as well as trading and exchange. Their narratives often enraptured caught the imagination of the British public (Selous was the model for H. Haggard Rider's Allan Quatermain). In this sense, these hunters and their narratives were actively engaged in building hierarchies of ethnicity and labor. However, their relationships with both the Tswana and Ndebele leaders and the members of their own hunting bands was often complex. Archival and field work provide a greater context in which to place these accounts and greater understanding continuity and breaks within these hierarchies. As such it frames many of the questions and considerations in this work and helps to provide a counter narrative to the glory of empire.

3 Challis 2012, p. 272.

4 MacKenzie 1997.

5 Tlou 1985.

6 Ramsay, et al. 1996.

7 Gordon 2000.

8 Freund 1998, p. 53.

9 Storey 2008, p. 16.

10 Storey 2008.

11 Storey 2008, p. 79.

12 In my own interviews conducted in 1994 in northwestern Botswana, men often discussed going to work in the mines in South Africa to acquire money with which to buy cattle and guns. Similarly, less affluent people often requested sugar, tea, and shoes in exchange for interviews.

13 Storey 2008, p.331.

14 Storey 2008, p. 38.

15 MacKenzie 1997, p. ix.

16 Marks 2017.

17 Carruthers 1995.

18 Dlamini 2020.

19 Campbell 1990, p. 13.

20 Tlou and Campbell 2003, p. 164.

21 Hitchcock and Morton 2014, p. 418.

22 Courtney 1881, p. 176.

23 Gordon-Cumming 1870, p. 187.

24 Baines 1864 and Selous 1881.

25 Gordon-Cumming 1870, p. 6.

26 Selous 1881, p. 186.

27 Gordon 2000, pp. 38-39.

28 Livingstone 1974, p. 14.

29 Arellano-Lopez 1998.

30 Hammar and Schulz 1897, pp. 222-23.

18 Livingstone 1849.

32 Hammar and Schulz 1897, p. 300.

33 Often white hunters simply referred to members of their generically as “kaffirs” or even “my kaffirs.” In some cases, this included individuals who had previously been captured by ivory hunters and apprenticed to Afrikaner and English farmers and hunters. There were also cases of independent hunters and smiths who joined the hunting expeditions, sometimes referred to as “black shots.” Storey 2008.

34 Selous 1881, p. 51.

35 Andersson 1861, p. 29.

36 Storey 2008.

37 Livingstone 1858, p. 41.

38 Morton 1997, pp. 220-39.

39 Baines 1864, p. 112.

40 Baines 1864, pp. 60-61.

41 Campbell 1980, p. 211.

42 Hammar 1897, p. 178.

43 Hammar 1897, p. 17.

44 Tlou 1985, p. 71.

45 Conder 1887, pp. 82, 90.

46 Hitchcock 1987, pp. 231-34.

- 47 Selous 1881. *Mokoros* are dugout canoes.
48 Campbell 1980, appendix.
49 Selous 1881, p. 192.
50 Campbell 1980.
51 Baines 1864.
52 Storey 2008, p. 323.
53 Selous 1881, p. 139
54 Hitchcock 2002, p. 797.
55 Conder 1887, p. 87.
56 Vandewalle and Alexander 2014, pp. 98-99.
57 Spinage 1994, p. 195.
58 Spinage 1994, p. 296.
59 Meredith 2001, p. 224.
60 Mackenzie 1997, p. 115.
61 Mackenzie 1997.
62 Guenther 1977, p. 196.
63 Hitchcock 1987, pp. 219-55.