

INTRODUCTION

Waiting for the Flood



In Botswana's sparsely populated Ngamiland district, bordered to the south, east and west by the harsh expanses of the Kalahari Desert, floodwaters travel annually from the highlands of Angola, arriving in the region's hottest, driest season. On reaching the panhandle, where no rain has brought relief for months, the floodwaters fan out, filling the channels and floodplains of the Okavango Delta, and transforming the desert into a verdant wildlife sanctuary. The floodwaters and the vegetation they support attract a huge diversity of Africa's iconic fauna, and in the dry season hundreds of thousands of mammals, birds and reptiles – one of the highest concentrations of wildlife in the world – converge on the delta. In the past few decades, the abundant wildlife and exquisite beauty of the landscape have attracted high-paying international tourists, around whom the region's economy is based. Coffee table books and tourist marketing enthuse in extravagant language over this 'miracle oasis', praising the 'unspoilt wilderness' of one of Africa's 'last remaining Edens'.

In this arid nation where rain is so scarce and revered that the national currency carries its name, *pula*, the coming of the flood in the midst of the intense seasonal dryness does seem nothing short of miraculous. In the sprawling village of Maun, the region's capital, locals talk of little else in the weeks preceding the flood's arrival. Each edition of the Okavango's weekly newspaper, the Ngami Times, has front-page coverage of the level of the flood. Anyone who has travelled from the upper reaches of the river is quizzed extensively on the exact progress of the waters. National

Geographic writer Kennedy Warne (2004: 61) neatly captures the central role the flood plays in people's lives: "The English discuss the weather; we discuss the water", one [Maun local] told me. "Before it comes, we drink beer and talk about when it will arrive. When it's here, we drink beer and talk about how much has come. When it's gone, we just drink beer and feel sad".

Much beer was consumed on the hot Sunday afternoon in June 2007 when I accompanied a group of Maun residents up the dry Boro riverbed to check on the flood's progress. Six carloads drove out of town along the rough dirt road that winds its way through the mopane scrub (*Colophospermum mopane*). The cars held a diversity of nationalities and people of all ages, as is typical of a Maun gathering. There were a number of expatriates from South Africa and various parts of Europe; there were Batswana (citizens of Botswana), including a MoNgwaketse woman and her MuYeyi husband; and there were white Batswana – the subjects of this study – including, among others, two brothers, Richard and Tony, who were to become key interlocutors in my research.

We drove until we found water, and the first tentative rivulets of the flood elicited great excitement from the group. Tony piled all the children into the back of his Land Cruiser and took them further upriver to where the water was deep enough to fish. Richard started a fire and people began to *braai* (barbeque) beef and *wors* (sausage), which was washed down with great quantities of beer and spirits. A number of other groups from Maun drove past during the afternoon in search of the floodwaters and weekend revelry. Many stopped to greet and talk to members of our group on their way past.

The more that was drunk during the course of the day, the more animated the talking, joking and storytelling became. Recounting narratives is central to Maun culture, and white Batswana hone their skills in endless drinking and storytelling sessions. Childhoods spent in the bush among the wildlife, work in the tourism industry and the prevailing frontier culture, where risk-taking and adventure are par for the course, provide endless material for their rich narrative culture. White Motswana Luke, for example, had everyone in hysterics recounting the time he was camping on a small island deep in the delta in the course of a fishing trip. He woke in the morning after a big night drinking whisky to find a lioness fast asleep in the shade of his tent. He was aching to urinate, and he waited and waited, but the lioness did not budge. He eventually had to try and relieve himself through the gauze of the tent, which was disastrously unsuccessful, and he spent the next miserable hours in a baking hot, urine-soaked tent, waiting for the lioness to move on.

The stories then turned to childhood calamities. Richard told of one afternoon in his school holidays when he was relaxing in a hammock. His brother Tony came walking past and said ‘eh, Richie, don’t move’, and he looked down to see a bright green tree snake slithering under his hammock. Within minutes the brothers had caught the snake and made a plan to cook and eat it, curious as to what such a creature might taste like. Their father and stepmother were out shopping in town, so the boys skinned the snake, found a big pot and, with much difficulty due to the nerves that kept the snake wriggling and twitching long after it was dead, crammed it into the pot and closed the lid. Just at that moment their parents arrived home, and their stepmother – who considered the kitchen strictly her domain – came storming in to investigate what the brothers were doing. She lifted the lid and the snake exploded out of the pot like a coiled spring. Being fresh from Johannesburg and new to rural Botswana, their stepmother was both terrified and furious. She took the dramatic measure of throwing the pot and the knife into the garbage, a very unusual act of wastefulness in Africa, and forbade the boys from ever touching her cooking utensils again.

Storytelling is central to white citizens’ sociality and is an important means of asserting and performing senses of belonging to the Okavango. Through their descriptions of emplaced events and interactions with endemic species – and particularly through their emphasis on humour above risk and danger – their intimate knowledge of and connection to place is reinforced. The references to well-known people and places, along with the imagery, expression and language used, evoke subtle layers of meaning and emotion that bolster the cohesion of the group. In this way, storytelling and joking are central to the experience and performance of senses of belonging.

Some hours and many stories later that afternoon, a Motswana man approached our group. He had a bottle of wine with a screwdriver sticking out of it, which he was having trouble opening. We all laughed with him about his dilemma, and one of the expatriate women walked with him down to her car to try and find a corkscrew. She was sitting in the car with the man standing beside her when he pulled a large knife from his pocket with which to try to open the bottle. Suddenly, her boyfriend – a white citizen from our group, who had been upriver playing Frisbee when the man approached us – ran shouting to the man with the knife, before aggressively pushing him away from his girlfriend. He had seen the knife being pulled and, not knowing the situation, had falsely assumed that the man was attacking his girlfriend. A number of our group immediately ran to the car to diffuse the situation. The friends of the Motswana man with the

knife also rushed to the scene. Everyone was stressed and agitated and talking on top of one another. One of the Batswana men expressed his anger, claiming that white people always assume black people are criminals. On hearing this, one of the white women became very distressed and tried to explain that while it was an overreaction on the part of the white man, it had been a genuine misunderstanding. She ended up in tears with the frustration of being accused of being racist, when she defines herself in starkly oppositional terms. The same Motswana man then started asking the MoNgwaketse woman and her MuYeyi husband in Setswana, the national language, why they chose to spend time with racist white people. They responded trying to calm him down and assure him this was not the case.

After several minutes of heated discussion, the Batswana men returned to their car and drove away up river. The white citizen who had misinterpreted the pulling of the knife was mortified. He was filled with regret for having suspected the man of ill intent and particularly for pushing him. As a man of liberal political views and general respect for his fellow citizens, he was deeply distressed that the men had assumed his actions were founded on racist beliefs. Everyone in the group was upset and uncomfortable. They talked about the confrontation for some time, with different people describing their perception of events and how the misunderstanding had transpired. The man involved felt his actions were purely the result of his being intoxicated, which he claimed had led him to act rapidly and instinctively without thinking. He fervently denied that he had acted out of any sort of racialised assumptions, despite the accusations of the Motswana man and his friends. Approximately an hour later, the Batswana men involved in the incident drove back to where our group was sitting. Everyone was calm by then, and the white Motswana man responsible went to the car and spoke with the men. He apologised for his mistake and shook hands with the man he had pushed, before the group drove away back towards Maun. While the situation ended peacefully, all who were present were left with a sense of discomfort and unease. Despite the intensity of the events, I seldom heard the matter discussed after that day.

This incident was the only of its kind that I witnessed in my fourteen months of ethnographic fieldwork in the Okavango. While the events that unfolded that afternoon were anomalous to the highly valued peaceful public culture, they evidence the presence of underlying interracial tensions. While many white Batswana deny any sense of insecurity regarding their place in the nation, they are certainly aware that they are not considered to be authentic Batswana by all other citizens. Living among

the many white Zimbabwean immigrants who have lost their farms and homes serves as a constant reminder that belonging is never guaranteed. Yet, despite this, the majority of white citizens identify strongly as Batswana and claim to feel very much at home in the Okavango. The inherent insecurity of being a white minority in postcolonial southern Africa has, I suggest, led white Batswana, whether consciously or inadvertently, to develop a range of cultural values and practices that serve to strengthen their senses of belonging.

The incident with the knife is instructive in this regard and brings to light the core issues surrounding emplacement and belonging for the Okavango's white citizens. To begin with, the collective obsession with the natural environment – in this case manifest in the celebration of the flood – serves as a reinforcement and performance of connections to place. The many stories told and retold of specific incidences occurring in the bush affirm and display an intimate familiarity with the Okavango. In addition, white citizens' professed aversion to racism, and attempts to foster good relationships across the broader community, can be read as efforts to ensure an ongoing welcome in the nation. White Batswana construct collective identity against white settler-descendants in South Africa and Zimbabwe, many of whom they consider to be disrespectful in their treatment of Africans. They frequently claim that Botswana generally, and the Okavango particularly, is unique in southern Africa in regard to what they see as positive interracial dynamics. They maintain that the far less violent and intrusive colonial history of Botswana has resulted in a culture of mutual respect between black and white. While the incident described above belies their desire for racism to be absent in the Okavango, the fact that this heated encounter was resolved through discussion and negotiation is significant. The public culture of the Okavango's white Batswana is to suppress and critique behaviours perceived as racist. This practice accords with the 'popular obsession with the state of *kagiso* and the centrality of the practices of reconciliation' among the broader national community (Gulbrandsen 2012: 174). *Kagiso* refers to peace and harmony, while the related term *kagisano* means staying together in peace. Within Tswana cosmology, *kagiso* is causally linked with the much-valued emotional state of coolness that in turn ensures prosperity and health for people, animals and crops. 'This means that *kagiso* is not only the concern of parties directly engaged in a conflict. Conflicts are indeed always a collective concern because they give rise to destructive "heat" (*mogote*) that threatens all' (Gulbrandsen 2012: 174). The sincere distress shown by the individuals involved in the incident that afternoon, and their reluctance to discuss the matter subsequently, are best understood in light of the high value placed on peaceful

coexistence, and the discomfort precipitated by forced recognition of the presence of racially based tensions.

In a continent stricken with interracial and ethnic unease, where a sense of insecurity pervades many white populations, white citizens' claims to positive community connections and deep senses of belonging raise a number of questions that I explore in this book: What elements constitute and enable belonging and emplacement for white Batswana of the Okavango? How do they connect to the social and physical environments of their birth and upbringing despite or, indeed, as a result of nationalist discourses and identity politics? How are individual and collective identities constructed to augment belonging? To what extent are the strident claims to belonging an outcome of insecurity and an active means of strengthening ties? What is the influence of their work in the safari tourism industry on their place within the nation? In sum, in this book I explore experiential autochthony for white Batswana through analysing the day-to-day processes of emplacement within both the physical and social environments through which individuals develop a sense of belonging to their homeland. This study is intended to coalesce with the whiteness literature's endeavour of challenging notions of whiteness as either universal or as an 'empty cultural space' through fleshing out the particular cultural values and practices of one white community (Frankenberg 1993: 192). Through this case study I aim also to contribute to related literatures on settler cultures, the anthropology of place and tourism studies.

Naming White Batswana

Before discussing the theoretical underpinnings of this research, a brief note on nomenclature is required. In postcolonial Botswana, the use of the terms Batswana (plural) and Motswana (singular) extends beyond the original signification of those of Tswana ethnicity to refer to all citizens of Botswana, regardless of their ethnic or racial background. White citizens consistently and unselfconsciously use these terms when referring to themselves. A white Motswana would normally refer to him or herself simply as a Motswana, without the racially specific designation 'white', and yet the problem with using this alone is that despite generations of living in the region, white citizens still unquestionably remain a discrete community. This is both in terms of their cultural difference to other ethnic groups, but also in the sense that white citizens, with few exceptions, marry and have children with other white people. (They are not endogamous, however, as the very small population of white

citizens, in conjunction with the high numbers of resident expatriates, means that for the most part white citizens marry other white people not originally from the Okavango.) I avoid using the term European, as white Batswana see themselves very much as African, rendering this geographic identifier inappropriate. My research is specific to the white citizens of the Okavango, and I must emphasise that claims made are not applicable to whites living elsewhere in Botswana. My reference to white Batswana throughout the book should, consequently, be read as shorthand solely evoking this regional community. I also wish to emphasise that while those to whom I refer with the collective term 'white Batswana' share common cultural values and practices, the group is constituted by great internal diversity. This, I hope, will be made clear through the divergent experiences and perspectives of the individuals described.

Regarding Batswana more broadly, I specify the particular ethnic community from which an individual or group derives where possible. There are instances, however, such as in the vignette above, where I do not know the particular background of an individual or group. In such cases I use the generic terms for citizens: 'Mo/Batswana'. Batswana of all backgrounds frequently use the terms black and white and, as a result, in citing interlocutors and particularly in instances where race matters, I at times use the phrase 'black' Mo/Batswana. While the designations black and white are problematic and connote an essentialised notion of race, they are terms commonly utilised by my interlocutors. Rather than being used in a derogatory manner, however, the terms are seen by many Batswana as simple descriptors differentiating people who perceive themselves as belonging to discrete groups. In the social sciences it is accepted that race is less a fixed biological category than a historically contingent and socially constructed function of power, yet the concept has great tenacity in popular usage. Racial categories have been deeply internalised in southern Africa, where they are seen as biological facts, not arbitrary social constructs. Despite the emphasis on civic rather than ethnic citizenship, Batswana still strongly subscribe to racial identifications in distinguishing European- and African-derived peoples. Consequently, while I am concerned my usage could be construed as reinforcing a divisive form of categorisation, at times it is necessary to use these emic terms.

Theorising Autochthony

While a cornerstone of anthropological research has been the study of indigenous people's connections to the environments of their birth and upbringing, analogous studies for white populations in postcolonial Africa and other settler contexts have until recently been rare. This is certainly the case in Botswana where the various Bushmen- and Bantu-language groups have been subject to extensive anthropological research. These studies have been conducted by some of the discipline's most renowned scholars, ranging from the classic works on the Tswana by Isaac Schapera (1970, 1947, 1938), to more recent research by Ørnulf Gulbrandsen (e.g., 2012) and Jean and John Comaroff (e.g., 1991, 1985), along with Richard Werbner's (e.g., 2004) work on the Kalanga. The Kalahari has hosted an endless stream of anthropologists working with the Bushmen, including Richard Lee (1979; with Irvén DeVore 1968), Lorna Marshall (1976), Edwin Wilmsen (1989), Alan Barnard (2007, 1992), Jacqueline Solway (2009, 2006, 2003, 2002), Megan Biesele (e.g., 2006), Sidsel Saugestad (2001) and Robert Hitchcock (2006, 2002, 1996). Solway (2006: 9), in fact, suggests that 'the San are arguably the most thoroughly documented group in Africa'. With the exceptions of Russell and Russell's (1979) ethnography of Afrikaners in Ghanzi, and Isaac Mazonde's (1991) work on white pastoralists in the Tuli Block, Botswana's white citizens have been largely overlooked by anthropologists.

The relative absence of studies of settler communities' connections to place is perhaps less an oversight than an indicator of an apprehensiveness concerning the recognition of the connections of settler-descendants to extra-European territories. Regardless of the complex politics, white citizens feel very strongly about their links to their African homes. For white Botswana, their sense of belonging is based less on a sense of historical connectedness or politically determined rights than on the much more prosaic experiences of daily life. Developing connections to the place of one's formative years is, to a significant extent, an inevitable aspect of living and being in the world. Far from deterring a sense of connection, the construction of individuals or groups as outsiders often stimulates even more emphatic articulations of belonging, catalysing greater efforts to cement connections. In his article contending that autochthony is usefully understood as a form of capital, Hilgers (2011: 49) suggests that the 'manipulation of belonging and the act of investing in this capital are ways, among others, of securitizing the conditions of life'. As such a conspicuous minority associated with histories of racialised privilege, there is insecurity inherent in white Botswana's position within the nation

that informs their emphatic assertions of belonging. These sentiments are important to document and analyse.

If a case can be made for looking at white citizens' place within African nations, the question remains as to which analytical and discursive tools can best be employed to explore these connections. Much like indigeneity, meaning 'born inside', the term autochthony connotes nativeness and the connections between a people and their homeland. In its Athenian origins, autochthony evokes images of people born of the earth of their native lands (Rosivach 1987). Translated literally, autochthony refers to the connection between self and soil (in the Greek 'auto' refers to self and 'khthon' to land). It encapsulates notions of unique relationships to land that engender loyalty, high levels of patriotism and a shared bond and sense of community among citizens. From its earliest usage, autochthony has had political overtones and, in the Athenian context, 'autochthony was used as part of democratic ideology, asserting the political equality of all citizens and the superiority of even the humblest citizen to any non-citizen' (Rosivach 1987: 305). This has strong parallels in the rhetoric of the Botswana state where notions of autochthony and citizenship are conflated through the decree that all citizens –including those who happen to be white – are indigenous and entitled to privileges denied to those constructed as outsiders (more on this below).

Leaning on the work of Olaf Zenker (2011), I utilise autochthony as an overarching concept encompassing the ties of people to their homelands. Zenker (2011) compellingly argues that autochthony discourses are constructed as either individualised or collectivised; the former being appropriate for contexts whereby the individual is understood as born to a territory, which, as a consequence, attaches them to a group/nation, much as in the schema of civic citizenship. This Zenker (2011) contrasts with discourses of collectivised autochthony, wherein the causal logic is reversed through a strong sense of group identity and shared descent legitimising claims to a territory, which in turn provide the (somewhat backgrounded) individual their rights, as is the case in ethnic models of citizenship. Zenker (2011: 75) suggests, therefore, that indigeneity is a rather specific form of collectivised autochthony:

Widely accepted working definitions of the term “indigenous people” within the international discourse of politics, law and (at least partly) anthropology emphasize four criteria, namely first-comer, non-dominance, cultural difference and self ascription (Saugestad, 2001: 43). These definitions reveal “indigeneity” to be a variant of collectivized-autochthonous ethnicity that has been marginalized by dominating later-comers aligning

with, and often running, the state, in which this discrimination has taken place.

White Batswana are clearly not indigenous, and yet the broader concept of autochthony is highly evocative and useful in an analytical rendering of their relationships to their home in northern Botswana.

In grappling with questions of discursive representation, I have considered removing the concepts of autochthony and indigeneity altogether. A politically less contentious means to explore white belonging would perhaps be to focus on the meaning of citizenship. Within days of being in the Okavango I knew the citizenship status of every individual I had met, as it arose in conversation so frequently. The very small proportion of citizens to expatriates, the desirability of the Okavango as a place to live and work, the stringency of the nation's immigration policies and the substantial benefits accrued to citizens, all render citizenship status highly significant. However, citizenship has proved contentious and highly problematic in numerous African nations, as cogently demonstrated in the volume edited by Sara Dorman, Daniel Hammett and Paul Nugent (2007). Botswana scholar, Deborah Durham (2002: 139), goes so far as describing citizenship as 'one of the most vexing problems in Africa'. Such studies demonstrate that while citizenship purports to confer 'equal protection of the laws, guarantees of a right to belonging, entitlement to participation, and full access to the social provisions of the state', in many instances it privileges some citizens while alienating others (Young 2007: 254). Moreover, discourses of autochthony permeate those of citizenship, ensuring that those deemed 'native' are benefited, while 'strangers' are denied (Hickey 2007: 83). Along with these theoretical complexities, while white Batswana are certainly attached to Botswana as a whole, their connectedness is first and foremost to the specific region of the Okavango. As a result, the nationalist connotations of citizenship fail to properly encapsulate the empirical situation. By contrast, autochthony is a rich concept that has at its core connections of a people to the land. For white Batswana, birth and upbringing in the Okavango and close ties to the land are absolutely central to their identity, rendering autochthony a desirable discursive tool through which to explore their position.

In reviewing de la Cadena and Starn's edited volume, *Indigenous Experience Today*, Trigger and Dalley (2010: 57) suggest that research is required to address the question of whether, over time, discourses and sentiments of indigeneity are established in those groups considered to be 'settlers, migrants, and visitors'. This question arises on account of the volume's suggestion that indigeneity is best understood as fluid: it is conceived by the various authors as 'a process; a series of encounters;

a structure of power; a set of relationships; a matter of becoming, in short, and not a fixed state of being' (de la Cadena and Starn 2007: 11). Consequently, Trigger and Dalley (2010: 57) suggest that there is theoretical value in testing the indigeneity concept in settler-descendant contexts. My investigation attempts to contribute to this emergent area by theorising autochthony in terms of relationships and processes of connection, rather than as a static identity category. My conceptual apparatus has resonance with scholars who have similarly applied the term to European peoples. Zenker (2009) explores autochthony in Northern Ireland; Kenrick (2011) compares Scottish crofters with their deep connections and historical ties to land with indigenous peoples; while Ceuppens (2011) describes the mobilisation of the term by the Flemish majority in Belgium. While indigeneity and autochthony have come to be associated with non-European peoples, it is worth bearing in mind that the concept of autochthony is European (Greek) in origin, and consequently has strong cultural resonance within many European-derived communities.

No matter how ripe for re-conceptualisation the concept of autochthony may be, the use of the term in relation to European descendants in Africa remains problematic. Colonial histories of structural inequality, appropriation of land by settlers and the violent domination of African people reached their zenith in South Africa under apartheid and have had destructive echoes in much of southern Africa, particularly in the areas of present day Zimbabwe, Zambia and Namibia. As ethnic minorities implicated in histories of colonialism, racism and the attendant economic and social privileges, the various white populations' senses of belonging to the African nations of their birth are often challenged, and unsurprisingly so. On account of these histories, autochthony is not a neutral term in Africa and has been mobilised to differentiate between the colonisers and colonised. While it is not popularly utilised in English-speaking nations such as Botswana, it is highly politicised in the Francophone countries of Africa (Ceuppens and Geschiere 2005: 386). Yet, its appropriateness for the particular relationships to place among the white Batswana makes it a desirable concept to employ. Within the context of my research, a pragmatic way around this problem is to differentiate between analytic applications of the term as either political or experiential. Experiential autochthony I use to refer broadly to the relationship of an individual to their homeland. While experiential autochthony certainly encompasses the politics of belonging, it is distinguishable from much of the recent literature on autochthony discourses that places its emphasis very much on political identities. This latter application I refer to as political autochthony.

Political Autochthony

Political autochthony refers to the mobilisation of notions of insiders and outsiders, natives and foreigners, within the politics of belonging. In the past few decades, as globalisation has increased the flow of people and goods across borders, an increasing obsession with boundary maintenance has led to the politicisation of autochthony and belonging throughout the world. The majority of anthropological work on autochthony in the African context explores the political mobilisation of the concept, describing how identity politics and discourses of belonging and exclusion are invoked as a means of access or denial of rights to political power and economic resources (e.g., Geschiere 2009; Dorman, Hammett and Nugent 2007). In describing the politics of belonging in Cameroon, Geschiere and Nyamnjoh (2000: 448) suggest that:

autochthony can best be studied as a trope without a substance of its own. It can be used for defining the Self against the Other on all sorts of levels and in all sorts of ways. Autochthony discourses tend to be so supple that they can even accommodate a switch from one Other to another.

In this interpretation autochthony is seen as a political tool; as a relational trope with shifting criteria, rather than as something definable with substance. This is the point at which experiential autochthony departs.

Experiential Autochthony

While mobilisations of notions of political autochthony are critical to document and analyse, the term can be analytically useful in additional ways. Beyond the exclusionary politics encapsulated in political autochthony, experiential autochthony refers to the primary and practical experiences of individuals or groups in relation to the social and physical worlds in which they are born and raised. Experiential autochthony encompasses the kinds of connections forged between people and their homelands that are in many cases inevitable, and occur despite, albeit in dialectic with, the politics of belonging. These include familiarity with the natural and social environments, the knowledge and skills developed within these contexts, and the emotional and spiritual connections to place and the community. This usage of autochthony by no means excludes the politics of belonging. As Yuval-Davis (2004: 216) argues, '[c]onstru[cting] boundaries and borders that differentiate between those who belong, and those who do not, determines and colours the meaning of the

particular belonging'. In other words, inherent to experiential autochthony is a community's experiences within the unfolding identity politics of a nation. Yet, experiential autochthony's utility is in that it allows a conceptual space to provide another dimension to the political domain.

Experiential autochthony allows for both an exploration of the subjective experiences of white Batswana, and for a shift from a focus on the collective to the individual. It resonates with Zenker's (2011: 71) conceptualisation of individualised autochthony, which foregrounds the individual's connection to a territory in the present moment. Similarly, in her research into a sense of belonging among settler-descendant Australians, Miller (2003b: 415–16) suggests we need to look beyond the politics to the personal. Belonging, she argues,

is not something that is given as a right or bestowed as a privilege. Nor is belonging something that is tied in any way to land ownership or length of residency. It is not inherited or accumulated. Nor is it something that simply happens to us. Rather, it is an existential opportunity – an opportunity that presents itself, not merely to a chosen few, but to all Australians, whether they are non-Aboriginal or Aboriginal, native-born, refugee or visitor. The responsibility for actualising the possibility of belonging remains the task of each and every one of us.

Thus while political autochthony for the most part concerns itself with the collective, experiential autochthony is particularly useful in exploring the experiences of individuals. This is particularly pertinent for minority groups, including settler-descendants, who persist in developing strong connections to their homelands, despite not being the 'natives of choice', as Handler (1990: 8) puts it.

Informing my use of the autochthony concept is the debate in recent years surrounding the closely related term, indigeneity. Adam Kuper (2003) triggered much heated discussion through his critique of the category 'indigenous peoples' on the basis of its mobilisation in essentialist terms. Kuper (2003: 389) suggests 'indigeneity' has a detrimental impact through its utilisation as a euphemism for ideas of the primitive, while Solway (2006: 8) has warned of the risk of its conflation with notions of marginalisation and powerlessness. Moreover, both Kuper (2003: 391) and James Clifford (2001) critique the term's definitional validity through pointing out that historical evidence suggests that many of the world's so-called indigenous peoples have distant histories of migration. To this end, and in regard to concerns about the divisive and exclusionary potentials of the concept, Clifford (2001: 482) asserts the following:

An absolutist indigenism, where each distinct “people” strives to occupy an original bit of ground, is a frightening utopia. For it imagines relocation and ethnic cleansing on an unimaginable scale: a denial of all the deep histories of movement, urbanization, habitation, reindigenization, sinking roots, moving on, invading, mixing –the very stuff of human history. There must be, and in practice there are, many ways to conceive of “nativeness” in less absolute terms.

In light of these critiques, I use the term experiential autochthony in the sense of the processes and relationships within an individual’s connections to the places of his/her birth and upbringing, rather than looking for stable identity categories. My use cuts across ethnic specificity to describe an ontological set of processes and relationships. This opens up the applicability of the concept on an analytical level to those, such as migrants and minorities, who would not otherwise be considered under its banner. This challenges the correlation of autochthony with essential cultural or ethnic features, and with notions of marginalisation and primitiveness. It also displaces the links of autochthony with the deterministic criterion of descent, as individual experiences of birth and upbringing are given credence beyond genealogy. I hope it is clear that in proposing recognition of white Batswana experiential autochthony, I am neither suggesting any sort of competing claim to others’ belonging, nor suggesting that these ideas should be used as a platform for any sort of rights. Nor, indeed, are the white citizens themselves. White Batswana are not engaged in a ‘politics of recognition’ in Charles Taylor’s (1994) sense – namely, advocating for greater rights to collective identity and cultural expression in the public sphere – and they do not seek any rights or privileges beyond those they receive as citizens. Nor are they involved in the kinds of disputes that have led to articulations of settler connections to place within competing claims to land of indigenous people and settlers in Zimbabwe (Pilosof 2012; Rutherford 2004), Australia (Trigger 2003), New Zealand (Dominy 1995) and elsewhere. Yet, they feel very strongly about their status as native to the Okavango, and it is these sentiments that I wish to document and explore.

Emplacement and Belonging

In discursively operationalising experiential autochthony among white Batswana, I rely heavily on two related concepts: emplacement and belonging. Emplacement I use to refer to the inevitable aspects of the relationships of people to the social and physical environments of their

birth and upbringing. It is important to emphasise my inclusion of social environments within this definition of emplacement. The spaces we are born into are necessarily peopled, and our understanding and perceptions of these places are determined to a large extent by the cultural patterns instilled by the people surrounding us (Casey 1996: 18; Ingold 1990: 220). Thus while emplacement studies tend to emphasise connections to place, I believe the culturally determined nature of these relationships necessitates the inclusion of the social environment within its conceptual reach. The notion of the inevitability of emplacement within my definition also requires comment. While directed by cultural patterns, I use emplacement to refer to those aspects of connections to the natural and social environments that are not matters of volition, but rather are inevitable outcomes of living and being in the world. Our cognitive, sensory and emotive experiences of our early environments are the foundations upon which we build meaning. Lowenthal (1985: 39) describes this in the context of memory and comprehension:

The surviving past's most essential and pervasive benefit is to render the present familiar ... Without habit and the memory of past experience, no sight or sound would mean anything; we can perceive only what we are accustomed to. Environmental features and patterns are recognized as features and patterns because we share a history with them ... The perceived identity of each scene and object stems from past acts and expectations, from a history of involvements.

This 'history of involvement' ensures that the place and people of our birth and upbringing are indelibly inscribed in our identities. As Setha Low (2003: 77) points out, the environments of our youth are 'imprinted in our imaginations as given, even natural, and taken for granted'.

The inevitability of emplacement means that it occurs regardless of the politics of belonging. Processes of emplacement ensure that white Batswana have familiarity with and knowledge about the African people and cultures they live alongside. In addition, they are familiar with and knowledgeable about the physical and natural environments of the Okavango's settlements and wildlife areas, as well as the local climate, flora and fauna. Consequently, a certain level of connection for white Batswana to their nation is an automatic consequence of their upbringing. This is not to say that emplacement is the same for all people living in the same area. While there are strong patterns of common experiences leading to shared knowledge and skills, emplacement is very much contingent on individual experience.

It is also important to note that emplacement, like belonging, should not be conceptualised within a moral framework that suggests it is necessarily positive. The exclusionary implications of the politics of belonging and, in the same vein, the potentially negative implications of emplacement should be recognised. For instance, deep emplacement can lead to insecurity among white Batswana, who feel that their highly specialised skills within the Okavango environment, and the tight community structures characterised by high levels of interdependence and mutual support, can make starting a life elsewhere extremely daunting. This kind of outcome of deep emplacement suggests that it is important to avoid assuming it is always a beneficial ontological state.

Related to emplacement is the concept of belonging. While emplacement refers to the inevitable aspects of relationships to the place and people of the homeland, belonging encompasses the more elusive senses of connection and acceptance, which are not only individually contingent, but are also entrenched within the politics of belonging. Belonging is a term that is constantly used, but difficult to define. Put simply, to belong is to have a positive sense of connectedness. How this is achieved and what it means for different people is, however, complex and divergent. Belonging is multifaceted and operates on numerous levels: from the subjective realm of individual emotions; to the social level of connections with others; to the structural level of political positioning. Intrinsic to the concept is the relationship between self and other. This other can be an individual, family, community, society, nation or place. It is through the collective identities formed at these various levels that belonging is most often articulated.

What it means to belong, and the routes to finding belonging, vary between individuals and groups and are affected by numerous variables, including history, politics and economics. On an individual level, belonging is influenced by subject positions, such as gender, social class and ethnicity, as well as the individual qualities of personality, political beliefs and values. Miller's (2003b: 415) casting of belonging as an 'existential opportunity' suggests individuals and communities have a certain amount of agency in determining the degree to which belonging is attained. Belonging can be envisaged on a spectrum ranging from weak ties to a deep sense of connectedness, and all grades in between. The most basic level of belonging is achieved for virtually all individuals simply through familiarity. That which is known is generally associated with the aspects of belonging encapsulated in notions of safety, ease and comfort. A higher level of belonging is characterised by membership, association, affiliation and acceptance, which coincide with the space for self-expression. Deeper levels of belonging still are attainable through the sense that

we are adding value and contributing to our worlds; that we are needed and, at the greatest depths, indispensable. Belonging at this level ‘chimes with commitment, loyalty and common purpose’ (Crowley 1999: 18). In relation to a region or nation, higher levels of belonging extend beyond formal membership to the personal and voluntary commitments characterised by positive sentiments of sharing and reciprocity (Crowley 1999: 18). In this vein, Yuval-Davis (2004: 216) suggests that ‘neither citizenship nor identity can encapsulate the notion of belonging. Belonging is where the sociology of emotions interfaces with the sociology of power, where identification and participation collude’. Consequently, research into belonging requires that both subjectivity and structure are taken into account.

Botswana

Achievements and Ongoing Challenges

In order to understand how political and experiential autochthony, emplacement and belonging operate for white Batswana in the Okavango, it is important to locate their particular circumstances within Botswana more broadly. Over the past several decades, Botswana has been widely acclaimed an ‘African success story’. A British protectorate from 1885 to 1966, economically it has risen from the second poorest country in the world at the time of Independence, to consistently maintaining one of the highest rates of growth in gross national product in the world (Edge 1998: 338). This has been fuelled by the discovery of high-grade gem-quality diamonds, in addition to the growth of the beef export and tourism industries. Botswana is unusual in southern Africa for its genuinely free-market economy, characterised by a strong private sector and lesser state intervention relative to the capitalist-statist models elsewhere (Leysons 2006: 38). Botswana also boasts a functional liberal democratic political system that scores highly in the Afrobarometer survey for civil and political liberties (Leysons 2006: 38). It has an effective and professional bureaucracy, some provision of social welfare services and has appeared in the top third of countries for lack of corruption in Transparency International’s reports since 1998 (Poteete 2003: 461). Recent highly controversial cases addressing the thorny issues of minority rights and freedom of the press have demonstrated the judiciary to be free and fair (see Botlhomilwe, Sebudubudu and Maripe 2011: 342 on the press; Nyati-Ramahobo 2002b and Good 2008 on minorities). State provision of free education saw school attendance reach 88 per cent by 2005; an impressive achievement

considering that the population was among the least formally educated in the world at the time of Independence (Good 2008: 91). Also commendable is the state's facilitation of access to health care and water across the vast land area, which has been well serviced by transport infrastructure (I. Taylor 2003: 223). Prominent anthropologist and long-term observer of Botswana Richard Werbner (2004: 15) observes that 'the public sphere is thriving ... and it is energized by critical demands for more open democracy, good governance, and a responsible press'. Werbner (2004: 2–3) contends that:

for citizens of Botswana themselves, the emerging postcolony is surprising, a new polity exceeding their past expectations and largely, if not wholly, desirable. The country's postcolonial development is hopeful and, in being full of potential and capability, is welcomed by citizens; it is increasingly being realized through a relatively open society that sustains values of civic virtue and civility in the public sphere.

This buoyant view of Botswana characterises the medium through which my Australian colleagues and friends have familiarity with Botswana: the novels of Alexander McCall Smith. His charming characters in *The No. 1 Ladies' Detective Agency* series paint a picture of an idyllic African nation, unperturbed by the poverty and warfare that plague neighbouring nations. I have been asked on numerous occasions if the sentiments of these novels resemble contemporary realities in Botswana. While McCall Smith's (2005 [1998]) representation of Botswana is overwhelmingly positive, my answer is: yes, to an extent they do. Both the nation's proud and patriotic citizens, and those familiar with Botswana, tend to believe that there is something special about the country. The absence of serious conflict, the slow pace of life, the extremity of the climate and landscape, and the cohesion these conditions seem to inspire, all contribute to the charm of the nation. In this vein, after decades of critical engagement, Solway (2003: 486) describes Botswana as the 'Disneyland of Africa'.

The kinds of idyllic representations of Botswana proffered by the state and many of the nation's highly patriotic citizens are, however, only part of the story. Below the surface, this highly stratified society, characterised by extreme disparity in wealth distribution along with entrenched discrimination on the basis of ethnicity and social class, is riven with growing tensions. While it certainly fares well in relative terms, it is important to recognise that the comparisons are drawn against African nations suffering some of the most challenging social, political, economic and environmental conditions globally. Good (2008: 1) rightly points out that when 'apartheid and one-party dictatorships characterised the region,

and ethnic conflict, military coups and collapse occurred elsewhere, the image [of Botswana as an African miracle] claimed some credibility’.

Botswana’s many achievements are marred by profound inequities in the distribution of benefits from the mining, tourism and beef industries, and the gap between rich and poor continues to grow. A third of the population still live below the national poverty line, with unemployment at 26.2 per cent and particularly affecting youth (GoB and UN 2010: 20). The Gini coefficient is a statistical measure of the distribution of wealth across a nation’s populace, with zero denoting full equality and a score of 100 allocated to the most inequitable of societies. Botswana, with a 2013 figure of sixty-three, occupies the dubious position of the fourth least equitable nation in the world (CIA World Factbook 2013). Good (2008) attributes this disparity to the diamond industry, which has enabled great capital accumulation, but at the cost of economic diversification. The industry contributes little in terms of employment – a mere 3 per cent of formal sector jobs – as diamond production is capital rather than labour intensive (Manzungu, Mpho and Mpale-Mudanga 2009: 210). Good (2008) describes Botswana’s economy as one of the most mineral dependent in the world and warns that the finite nature of the resource, along with the complacency it has encouraged in the development of alternative industries, lends to a bleak economic and social outlook in the longer term. While the government recognises this issue and has placed economic diversification at the centre of its policy concerns (GoB 2013), mineral dependency is deeply entrenched. A corollary of the lack of investment into other areas is that the nation is unable to meet many of its basic needs, such as food and electricity provision. Botswana retains a huge reliance for such goods and services on South Africa, importing some seventeen billion rand’s worth in 2004 (Good 2008: 17).

Gulbrandsen (2012: 116) similarly describes diamond wealth as augmenting inequalities in Botswana. The state has implemented numerous policies with diamond revenues that at first glance appear to facilitate extraordinary opportunities for all citizens. Yet, on closer inspection, many such policies have further enriched the elite, while bypassing the poor or locking them into welfare dependency. Prior to the discovery of diamonds, pastoralism formed the backbone of the economy, and cattle continue to hold profound economic and symbolic importance for much of the population. Consequently, since Independence the state has channelled vast diamond revenues into developing the industry. Despite its mantra of ‘diamonds for development’, many government initiatives, and particularly the Tribal Grazing Land Policy (TGLP), have, in fact, compounded inequalities. The TGLP has encouraged the commercialisation of the cattle industry and fenced farming in lieu of the traditional

communal lands model. This has resulted in the cattle ranching elite benefiting from 'dual grazing': that is, utilising both the commons and their own exclusive-use land to ensure the best pasture and rested fields for their herds (Manzungu, Mpho, Mpale-Mudanga 2009: 215). Furthermore, the communal land remaining is monopolised by wealthy cattle owners through the drilling of private boreholes, resulting in exclusive-use rights. Gulbrandsen (2012: 13) describes huge ramifications for rural communities in terms of loss of cattle facilitated by 'this translation of common property into individual wealth'. While only 10 per cent of households were estimated to be bereft of cattle in the 1940s, a staggering 74 per cent of rural families were without cattle in 1991, despite the ongoing significance of cattle to local economies (Good 1993: 224). A large body of evidence summarised by Magole (2009b: 619) concludes that the TGLP has failed in its stated aims of increasing productivity, preventing overgrazing and increasing equality in rural regions, and has in fact exacerbated these latter problems. Despite the considerable evidence of the policy's failure, the government continues to support it, which Magole (2009b: 624) attributes to the 'land-grabbing opportunity it offers the rich and powerful'.

Alienation from the commons resulting from the TGLP, in addition to land lost to conservation and tourism and limited formal employment opportunities, has led to 19 per cent of the population being dependent on government welfare (GoB and UN 2010: 20). This has been particularly detrimental in the case of remote area dwellers – particularly the Bushmen, who have been removed from their traditional lands to settlements where hunting and gathering is not permitted, and where the social malaise and indignity of welfare dependency have resulted in growing social issues, such as alcoholism (I. Taylor 2003: 225). The destitute allowance of around P210 per month is intentionally below the national poverty line in order that it not discourage the seeking of employment, yet the job market simply cannot provide work for the vast numbers of unemployed (Good 2008: 84–85). The state recognises the issue and has numerous policies aiming to eradicate abject poverty; however, their goals are far from being reached (GoB 2013).

Severe poverty and inequities of wealth are certainly evident in the Okavango. 'According to the 1996 United Nations (UN) human poverty index, close to half (40.6 per cent) of the inhabitants of the Okavango region live in "human poverty" (a composite measure of long and healthy life, knowledge, economic provisioning and social inclusion) (UNDP 2005, 2000)' (Mbaiwa, Ngwenya and Kgathi 2008: 160). Welfare dependency is high and has surpassed arable agriculture and livestock keeping as livelihood sources in some parts of this largely rural district. Ongoing rural

poverty is attributable to a number of factors, including a lack of employment opportunities, the community's vulnerability to disease, limited access to educational facilities and poor soil quality, and the high prevalence of wildlife, posing challenges to agricultural activities (Mbaiwa 2005a: 166). The epidemic of Contagious Bovine Pleuro Pneumonia (CBPP) in the mid 1990s led to the government destroying all cattle in the region, the devastating impact of which continues to be felt. Moreover, self-sufficiency is often not possible within the predominant practice of dry farming in Ngamiland, where crop yields are low, necessitating the undertaking of mixed livelihood strategies (Bock 1998: 30). The dynamic nature of the Okavango floods further contributes to poverty, as channels dry up sporadically, leaving previously irrigated regions dry, while other areas are flooded. The precarious conditions endured by the rural poor exist in stark contrast with the vast wealth accumulated by those involved in the region's lucrative tourism industry. Such inequities have serious social ramifications, and Good (2008: 90) argues that the 'stress of living at the bottom of the social hierarchy, the stress of disrespect and the lack of personal esteem, produces sickness and death'.

Sickness and death have been all too pervasive in Botswana in recent years owing to the HIV/AIDS epidemic; infection rates of which have been among the highest in the world. In southern Ngamiland 16 per cent of the total population is HIV positive, with 13 per cent of the community infected in the north (Kgathi et al. 2006: 12). The disease has 'eroded gains made in reducing morbidity and mortality, and reduced life expectancy by more than 10 years' (GoB and UN 2010: 20). The magnitude of the impact of HIV/AIDS on households results from its affecting primarily the 'most productive cohorts' over the long term (Kgathi, Ngwenya and Wilk 2007: 300). This has meant the loss of labour and employment, which has greatly exacerbated poverty, while leaving high numbers of female-headed households, displaced children and orphans. The pandemic has placed particularly high burdens on women in caring for the ill (Klaims 2009: 6). Yet, the government response to HIV/AIDS has been swift and extensive, with vast resources devoted to education campaigns and the provision of free antiretrovirals to all of those infected – an accomplishment that has impacted morbidity rates significantly. For further discussions of the HIV/AIDS crises and its implications in the Okavango see Kgathi et al. (2007, 2006, 2004) and Mbaiwa (2005b).

In addition to poverty, inequality and the AIDS crisis, Botswana has challenges in relation to its political system, which is said to be impeded by 'an authoritarian culture, [an excessively] powerful state structure, an absence of organized and politically oriented groups, paternalistic representation, a submissive mass media, and elitist party structures' (Molutsi

and Holm 1990: 339). Many of these characteristics have developed on account of the fact that despite free and fair elections, the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) has governed since Independence. On the lack of viable alternatives, Ian Taylor (2003: 216) blames, 'interminable intra-party faction-fighting, internal splits, an unfavourable electoral system (i.e., 'first past the post'), feeble organisational structures, and poor capacity to promote alternative policies'. In addition, opposition parties struggle to attract funds for their campaigns owing to the unlikelihood of winning elections (I. Taylor 2003: 218). The vast diamond wealth of the state has, by contrast, been central to the BDP's electoral success, where it has co-opted elite support with policies such as the TGLP, while securing the support of the poor through welfare programmes.

Since the inauguration in 2008 of President Ian Khama, a former Commander of the Botswana Defence Force, the BDP have increasingly been accused of autocratic rule and a lack of accountability. Commentators are particularly perturbed by the government's seeming intolerance of dissenting views (Botlhomilwe, Sebudubudu and Maripe 2011: 336; I. Taylor 2003: 220). This has been evident in a clamping down on the press, manifest in the government's proposal for a new Media Practitioners Act described as 'draconian both in intent and content' (Botlhomilwe et al. 2011: 340). In a recent controversial incident, the government expressed its contempt for media scrutiny through its withholding of advertising from certain newspapers critical of its actions (Botlhomilwe et al. 2011: 342). While the courts ordered the government's withdrawal of contracts unlawful, such actions have led to scholars suggesting that 'what has long been described as an "African Miracle" is quickly degenerating into an autocracy manifesting itself in the form of personalised rule, abuse and/or misuse of power and intolerance of divergent views, which has implications for the democratic principle of freedom of press and expression' (Botlhomilwe et al. 2011: 346). Disillusionment with such an emerging paradigm has, however, led to a number of powerful MPs breaking with history in developing the first faction to leave the BDP, forming the Botswana Movement for Democracy (BMD), who have joined the Botswana National Front (BNF) and Botswana People's Party (BPP) in founding the Umbrella for Democratic Change. The BDP majority has been diminishing over the years at each election, and many believe the possibility of a genuine challenge to the BDP's dominance, or at least to its complacency, is finally emerging.

Compounding the lack of political opposition is the weakness of civil society organisations, which has resulted in limited effective opposition to the government's agenda. According to Ian Taylor (2003: 221), factors contributing to the lethargy of civil society are the absence of an

Independence struggle, the economic and political stability of the nation since that time, and the hierarchical nature of Tswana culture whereby people customarily defer to rulers. Additionally, many of the nation's elite, who would ideally pose challenges to government through civil society organisations, are employed within the civil service or parastatals – with the former explicitly denied the right to engage in partisan political activities (Molutsi and Holm 1990: 328). Those civil society organisations that are in operation are readily co-opted by the state, particularly through state provision of financial grants. A prime example of this lies in state sponsorship of minority cultural groups, where funding is provided for dance, song and other tokenistic performances of alterity that not only control such groups through financial co-option, but also endow the state with a facade of multiculturalism in lieu of the provision of more meaningful rights and recognition (Solway 2011).

On a social level, while Botswana has remained free of interethnic violence, identity politics have burgeoned in recent years. With its strong economy and stable government, Botswana is an 'island of prosperity in an ocean of downturns and uncertainties' and, consequently, attracts many illegal immigrants, particularly from Zimbabwe (Nyamnjoh 2006: 18). Many Batswana resent the increasing numbers of immigrants, and xenophobic sentiments are on the rise. In the Okavango, xenophobic attitudes are directed not only to those migrants at the lower end of the socioeconomic ladder, but also towards expatriates, who have long dominated the upper echelons of the tourism industry. The mostly white expatriates are resented as they are seen as monopolising the industry, exporting profits and importing racist attitudes – a situation on which I elaborate in Chapter Two.

In addition to tension between Batswana and other nationals, contestation between the politically dominant Tswana and ethnic minority groups – by whom I mean all those of non-Tswana ethnicities – have come to the fore in recent decades. Historically, the Tswana incorporated minority groups into their *merafe* (nations – sing. *morafe*) as lower status subjects, from whom they extracted tribute and labour. These existing hierarchies were considerably strengthened by the British administration's empowering of the eight Tswana *merafe* in the protectorate years through the Chieftainship Act, which rendered all non-Tswana groups subordinate to regional Tswana chiefs. The inequities were institutionalised further at Independence, when it was decreed that the only languages to be taught in schools were Setswana and English. That the Bechuanaland protectorate was at this time named Botswana, meaning place of the Tswana, is telling, as despite Botswana's claims of distancing itself from ethnic citizenship, it is one of only four out of fifty-three

African states to name the nation after the dominant ethnic group (Young 2007: 249). Nonetheless, the state prides itself as a liberal democracy committed to civic citizenship through providing equal rights to all on an individual rather than collective basis. Indeed, at Independence, ‘the Tswana-dominated ruling group managed to win hegemony by capturing the population – with no significant coercion – into a nation building discourse of universal progress’ (Gulbrandsen 2012: 191). Central to this was the ‘moral and political leadership of a nation-state that was overwhelmingly oriented towards Western modernity, national unity and antitribalism’ (Gulbrandsen 2012: 192).

Below the surface of state rhetoric, however, lies the continuation of historically entrenched structural inequalities, with considerable discord evident between the state’s claims to civic citizenship and the constitutional privileging of the eight dominant Tswana *merafe*. The constitution ensures ex officio membership in the House of Chiefs for the eight Tswana paramount chiefs alone, while national structures are steeped in Tswana culture, from the institutions of governance, to legislation pertaining to land use and distribution, to the use of Setswana as the national language. A number of minority groups feel that their unique cultural ways are under threat by the dominance of Tswana culture and their incorporation into Tswana *merafe*. Minority grievances range from the material through to the symbolic, with entrenched discrimination and marginalisation evident in the inequitable access to land and political representation for minorities, which is illuminated glaringly through the fact that the highest levels of poverty plague those districts dominated by minority populations (Solway 2011: 215). Collective rights and recognition tend to be the sole purview of the Tswana, while minority group languages and cultural values and practices are relegated to the private sphere. As a consequence, Chebanne (2002: 50) suggests that Botswana has witnessed the greatest loss of culture and language among minorities relative to any other African country.

The greatest blight on the Botswana state’s reputation and human rights record has been its treatment of the Bushmen. They continue to be the most impoverished minority in the nation and are given little recognition for their unique history and contemporary circumstances. Particularly controversial has been the government’s forced removal of the Bushmen from the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (CKGR). The CKGR was established by the protectorate government in 1961 with the goal of environmental conservation, but also with provision for Bushmen communities, predominantly the Gana and Gwi, to continue their traditional way of life. Over time the population grew and the government provided Bushmen with basic services, such as water, through drilling

boreholes. The Bushmen practiced varied livelihood strategies, hunting and gathering, along with keeping small livestock, farming and receiving government rations. 'The residents' mixed subsistence practices were seen as increasingly incompatible with wildlife conservation', describes Solway (2009: 327). 'Theoretically, relocation of the Bushmen would enable better wildlife management in the CKGR, enhance its tourist potential, and also enable the government to provide services more effectively and economically to the residents, who would be in more concentrated settlements' (Solway 2009: 327). Consequently, the government began encouraging resettlement in villages built outside the reserve. The communities resisted, but most eventually reluctantly moved, with the exception of roughly four hundred people. In 2002, the government ceased all service provision, discontinued negotiations and commenced strong coercive measures; dismantling people's homes, loading their belongings in vehicles and removing them from the reserve.

By this time the London-based Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO), Survival International, had entrenched itself as the Bushmen's defender and was in the throes of a virulent shaming campaign, going so far as accusing the government of genocide and the pursuit of blood diamonds; neither claim of which was defensible (see Solway 2011). Together the Bushmen and their supporters challenged the government through the high court, demanding their right of return to live in the CKGR. In December 2006, after a lengthy battle, the court ruled largely in favour of the applicants. This was a somewhat hollow victory, however, as the state complied with the judgement in the most minimal terms, allowing only the named applicants to return, in many cases dividing families. The state provided no services, not even water, and forbade the Bushmen both the use of existing government boreholes and the drilling of new ones. Until the 2014 hunting ban was instituted, hunting permits were available by application, but only the narrowly defined 'traditional methods' could be used (Solway 2009: 322). Solway (2011: 230) contends that Survival International's portrayal of the Bushmen as self-sufficient hunter-gatherers prompted the government, who had been so internationally shamed by the NGO, to comply so literally and harshly with the claim for rights to hunt and gather in the reserve. The fraught ongoing battle between Botswana's first people and the state continues and demonstrates the contentious nature of minority relations in Botswana in the current period.

While many of the nation's minorities feel politically disempowered by the Tswana-centric governance, the way in which these battles are fought warrants mention. The Okavango's largest ethnic group, the Wayeyi, have been working for decades towards securing rights and recognition for

their community, as I discuss in detail in Chapter Four. Of the Wayeyi's campaign, one of their leading activists, the current Deputy Vice Chancellor of the University of Botswana, Lydia Nyati Ramahobo (now Saleshando) (2002b: 706) writes that the group's persistence is attributable 'to patience, to a democratic attitude and to a peaceful determination on the part of the disadvantaged peoples of Botswana'. Significant here is the notion of 'peaceful' action, which conforms to the societal idyll of *kagisano*. Legal redress and negotiation are the tools utilised in lieu of the violence seen in so many other parts of Africa (Werbner 2002: 118). Solway (2002: 713) suggests that 'it is precisely because of the liberal state's effectiveness, not its failure, that formerly subordinated groups have self-identified and pursued the challenge to rewrite the basis of their inclusion in the nation state'. Thus while minority grievances are ongoing, disputes are for the most played out peaceably and are being taken seriously by the government, which is a significant point of difference to parallel issues in some other parts of Africa.

Ngamiland's Ethnic Constitution

Botswana is comprised of great ethnic diversity, being home to at least twenty-three ethnolinguistic groups (Chebanne 2002: 47). The unequivocal dominance of the Tswana in the public sphere masks the fact that minorities together constitute similar if not greater numbers than those identifying as Tswana (Gulbrandsen 2012: 210). While I briefly describe each of these groups, it is important to bear in mind that as ethnicity is socially produced, group borders are porous and continually subject to change. Many of Botswana's groups have historically been closely integrated, with high levels of cultural exchange and intermarriage. Nomenclature of the various ethnic groups is not a straightforward matter either, with many different spellings and pronunciations in circulation, along with contestation surrounding instances where self-identifications are incommensurate with the names attributed by other groups. The San/Basarwa/Bushman is a case in point. Until recently, in self-reference they have used the particular ethnolinguistic and clan names in lieu of any collective term. The state, however, refers to the group as Basarwa; an amended version of the previous century's widely used appellation Masarwa, which is seen as pejorative on account of the prefix (Ma-) that is normatively applied to 'things' rather than people in Setswana (Barnard 1992: 8). (Significantly, this prefix continues to be used in the Setswana moniker for white people, Makgoa, as I discuss in Chapter Five.) Bushmen and San are the other commonly used terms for the collectivity,

and despite having been externally imposed and perceived historically as derogatory, growing numbers of those designated as such are advocating for their utility and reimagining in a positive light (Solway 2011: 217; Hitchcock and Biesele n.d.). Throughout the book, I use the more specific group names where possible, and Bushmen in reference to the collective, as it is both the term most commonly used in the Okavango (I seldom heard the term San) and appears to be increasingly favoured by scholars working closely with these communities (e.g., Solway 2011, 2009; Bolaane 2004: 400; Barnard 1992: 8).

The Bushmen are the Okavango region's first inhabitants. In his comparative ethnography of the Khoisan of southern Africa, Barnard (1992: 121) notes that at least thirty groups are reported among the eastern and northern Bushmen (with the high number reflecting at least some discrepancies in nomenclature). Among the larger groups are: the Bugakhwe, many of whom today live in Gudikwa and Khwai villages, and who have traditionally hunted, fished and gathered in the riverine, forest and sandveld environments; the Xanekwe, who are often referred to as BaNoka or River Bushmen and are riverine people, who have traditionally lived around the panhandle and along the Boro and Boteti rivers; the Ts'exa, a sandveld-oriented community residing mainly in Mababe, Sankuyo and Phuduhudu villages; along with the Ju/hoansi of the XaiXai area, and small numbers of representatives of other groups (Bock 1998; Tlou 1985). Archaeological evidence suggests that Bushmen communities have lived in the delta region for 10,000 years or more (Tlou 1985: 8).

Ngamiland is also home to numerous Bantu-language groups. The BaKgalagadi are traditionally closely associated with the Bushmen and share similar mixed livelihood strategies, including hunting and gathering, small-scale livestock keeping and agriculture. The largest and longest established Bantu-language group in the region are the Wayeyi, who constitute approximately 40 per cent of the region's population (Nyati-Ramahobo 2002b: 686). With a cultural capital in Gumare, the Wayeyi live predominantly in and around the townships of Maun, Tsau and Nokaneng, as well as Sankuyo in the delta, and the panhandle villages of Sepopa and Seronga. The Wayeyi, like the HaMbukushu, Subiyu and Dixeriku of the region, are riverine people, who have traditionally engaged in a mixed economy of agriculture, fishing, hunting, collecting veld products and, to a limited extent, pastoralism (Bock 1998: 28; Tlou 1985: 16). The HaMbukushu live predominantly in the panhandle region and have traditionally been lauded as powerful rainmakers. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, approximately 4,000 HaMbukushu moved to the Etsha region in the western panhandle fleeing war in Angola. Small numbers of Otjiherero-speaking Ovambanderu and OvaHerero pastoralists also

settled in Ngamiland as refugees, although they arrived around the turn of the previous century, and were fleeing subjugation under authoritarian chiefs and German colonists in Namibia.

All of these various groups have historically been integrated into the Tawana *morafe*. The BaTawana are a subgroup of the Tswana people, who are constituted by eight dominant *merafe*: BaNgwato, BaTawana, BaKgatla, BaKwena, BaNgwaketse, BaMalete, BaRolong and BaTlokwa. The BaTawana established the first centralised state in Ngamiland when Prince Tawana split from the BaNgwato and moved to the area with his followers subsequent to civil war at the end of the eighteenth century (Tlou 1985: 33). The term BaTawana is confusingly similar to Batswana, the plural term for all citizens of Botswana. In order to minimise confusion, I capitalise the first initial of the ethnic group's name (i.e., BaTawana), while leaving it lowercase when using the terms for all the nation's citizens (i.e., Motswana, Batswana). The BaTawana continue to politically dominate the region and are a patrilineal community of pastoralists, whose royal centre is the town of Maun. Within Tawana sociopolitical organisation, households together form a *kgotla* (pl. *dikgotla*) or ward that has at its head the *kgosana* (hereditary headman). Together the various *dikgotla* form the Tawana *morafe*, headed by the *Kgosi* (king). The Tawana *morafe* incorporates all citizens, regardless of their ethnic background, into its sociopolitical structures. The *kgotla* is the central institution in Tswana political life. It refers to the political unit of the tribal council and court, as well as to the physical meeting area of the council. The *kgotla* is a forum where all manner of grievances are aired, political issues debated, ceremonial activities conducted, laws promulgated and judgements brought down by the Chief and tribal council (see Gulbrandsen 2012; Peters 1994; Schapera 1938). It is, in theory, a democratic forum where along with the Chief exercising his authority, villagers are provided the opportunity to directly express their concerns. Yet, women, minorities and youth have not traditionally held speaking rights, and some scholars suggest it is more often than not 'a vehicle to mobilize political support for decisions already made by the community's political elite' (Molutsi and Holm 1990: 326).

Along with the Bushmen and Bantu-language groups, Ngamiland is home to an expatriate population from numerous nations across the globe, although predominately from South Africa. When I commenced this research, I intended to include expatriates in my focus in order to address the position of the white community as a whole. White Batswana and long-term expatriates – particularly those from neighbouring southern African nations – are, at first glance, in many respects indistinguishable. They share many cultural values and practices, live the same lifestyle

and are socially integrated and commonly marry. It soon became clear, however, that there were some fundamental differences dividing the two groups. I first realised the inappropriateness of discursively treating them as a single collectivity when I attempted to write about experiences of crime. While white citizens consistently downplay the issue, white expatriates tend to express great anxiety. This indicates a certain level of ontological precariousness among expatriates, which is also expressed in terms of perennial stress surrounding residency and work permits. The increasingly stringent criteria for obtaining and renewing such permits result, understandably, in considerable concern for those expatriates who have made their lives in Botswana. Along with being free of such anxieties, white Batswana enjoy a host of rights and resources as citizens and constantly articulate strongly nationalistic sentiments, demonstrating the centrality of their citizenship to their identities. While these factors have resulted in my focus on white citizens, the strong integration of expatriates in white Batswana lifeworlds means that I discuss their position and experiences on numerous occasions.

Finally, in terms of ethnic constitution, Ngamiland is also home to citizens whose ancestors derive from India, China, Europe and elsewhere. The white citizens around whom this study is focused constitute a very small minority. In accordance with the emphasis on civic rather than ethnic citizenship, the Botswana census does not include ethnic data. While exact figures are consequently unavailable, it is estimated by community members that there are a maximum of 5,000 white residents living in the greater Okavango region, which is home to roughly 130,000 citizens in total. The vast majority of whites – most believe around 90 per cent – are expatriates who have come to the Okavango to work in the tourism industry. By these estimates, the Okavango is home to no more than 500 white citizens. This small group derives predominantly from English and Afrikaner ancestry. These communities remain discrete in terms of identity, and yet the divisions in the Okavango are somewhat less pronounced than in other parts of southern Africa. There are many individuals from Afrikaans-speaking backgrounds who are strongly integrated into the English community. While I interviewed and worked with a number of Afrikaans-speaking people, the bulk of my interlocutors spoke English as their first language and identified with cultural ways derived from an English-African background. (I use 'English-African' here, as the majority of my interlocutors' trace their ancestry back several generations in other parts of Africa, particularly eastern and southern Africa, rather than directly to Europe). The dominant culture that prevails among the white community in the public sphere is English-derived. Thus when I write of white citizens, unless otherwise stated, I refer particularly to the English-oriented community.

The Okavango Delta

The key natural feature around which the majority of white Batswana make their living is the Okavango Delta. Covering an area between 6,000 and 13,000 square kilometres, depending upon flood and precipitation levels, the Okavango is one of the world's largest inland deltas (Gieske 1997: 215). The waters commence their journey in the highlands of Angola and are carried down the Cubango and Cuito rivers into Namibia's Caprivi Strip, before entering Botswana at Mohembo. River waters flow through the panhandle's large winding main channel before opening out into the idiosyncratic alluvial fan, which is constituted by countless channels, floodplains and islands, the largest of which is Chief's Island. From the main Nqoga channel, waters divide into several tributaries feeding the Maunachira and Khwai rivers, as well as the Santantadibe and the Boro, the latter of which flows first into the Thamalakane River – around which Maun is situated – and then onto the Boteti (Wolski and Murray-Hudson 2005: 1869). It is via the Boteti River that waters peter out into the lowest point of the Kalahari Basin in the Makgadikgadi pans. On account of the low gradient and vast floodplains, the floodwaters move very gradually and peak at Mohembo around April each year, while only reaching their highest levels in Maun some five months later (Gieske 1997: 217).

The system is dynamic and considerable changes occur to the flood's movements year to year, as sedimentation and variable rainfall lead to channel blockages, while new channels are formed by these redirected waters, along with hippo and elephant movements. Further facilitating the system's dynamism is the permeability of the papyrus reeds and sedges that form the channel banks (Wolski and Murray-Hudson 2005: 1869). The Okavango is surrounded by the Kalahari Desert and incorporates a variety of habitats from floodplains, sandveld and grass plains, to acacia and mopane forests. These support great biodiversity, including at least 150 species of mammals, 500 bird and 90 fish species, along with countless reptiles, amphibians, invertebrates and plants. The region's arid nature and high average temperatures lead to an extraordinary evapotranspiration rate of close to 98 per cent (Gieske 1997: 217). Floodwaters recede quickly in such conditions and the verdant floodplains are quickly replaced by dry grass veld. The flood's movements have historically profoundly affected patterns of human settlement, resulting in ways of life very different to those of much of the rest of Botswana (Tlou 1985: 2–3).

The three nations in which the system lies have been working together to manage the Okavango basin since the end of the civil war in Angola. In addition to these states, there are numerous organisations

locally, nationally and internationally that exert influence over the delta's management. In 1994, the Permanent Okavango River Basin Water Commission (OKACOM) was established, followed soon after by Botswana signing the Southern African Development Community (SADC) water protocol, which provides the underlying management principles for all southern African waterways. Considering 58 per cent of the Okavango River Basin's population resides in Angola, 27 per cent in the Kavango in Namibia, and a mere 15 per cent in Ngamiland, international cooperation is of central concern (Kgathi et al. 2006:10). The Okavango has been subject to serious threats over the past few decades, on account of the aridity of the region and the highly sought after nature of water; particularly in light of the critical development needs and pervasive poverty affecting populations living in and around the system. International conservation bodies, most particularly the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), have been heavily involved in advocating for the system's protection, and in 1997 the Okavango Delta was listed as a Ramsar site; Ramsar being an intergovernmental, international convention that aims to ensure wise use and conservation of wetlands globally. In June 2014, the Okavango Delta's application for recognition as a World Heritage Site was accepted, ensuring ongoing international protection. Consequently, the Okavango is a site of alternating contestation and collaboration among its many local and international stakeholders.

Maun

Maun is the Okavango region's capital and largest human settlement. The majority of white citizens have a home base in Maun, while their work for the most part takes place in the surrounding wildlife areas. Maun is many different things to the highly divergent groups living or visiting therein. For the BaTswana, Maun is their royal town, the centre of the Tswana *morafe* and the home of their central *kgotla*. Geographically, the town is formed around the Thamalakane River and is divided into numerous *dikgotla* (wards). White Batswana are not co-localised; their homes are spread throughout these wards, with many demonstrating a preference for living close to the river. Maun is also the regional administrative capital, servicing the greater Ngamiland district, with its estimated population of 130,000. While still officially zoned as a village, Maun is a sprawling town of some 44,000 inhabitants, having experienced rapid growth in the past two decades on account of government development programmes and the growth of the tourism industry.

For many of the tourists passing through, Maun is perceived as a remote frontier outpost. Nine hundred kilometres from the nation's capital, Gaborone, and five hundred kilometres from the nearest regional centre, Francistown, Maun is far from the hub of Botswana's political and commercial centres in the south-east, where the bulk of the nation's two million people reside. Bordered to the north-west by the Okavango system with the Moremi Game Reserve at its heart, to the east and north-east by the extensive salt pans of the Nxai and Makgadikgadi Pans National Parks, and to the south by the vast Central Kalahari Game Reserve, Maun lies in the heart of a vast wilderness zone. For most of the year, Maun is hot, dry and dusty. Goats, donkeys and cattle roam freely, often obstructing the traffic, and safari Land Cruisers share the roads with local taxis and donkey carts. In Maun, the traditional and modern, the local and global, merge in an organic juxtaposition of mud-brick and thatch huts, alongside new government buildings, tourist offices and Internet cafes. Maun's economy is equally diverse, with traditional African subsistence lifestyles coexisting alongside the high-end Okavango tourism that attracts some of the richest and most famous international celebrities. Until recently, Maun was technologically ill-equipped, and isolated as a consequence. It was only in the 1990s that it acquired an automatic telephone exchange and television transmitter, and was linked to the rest of Botswana with a tarred road. At the time of my longest stint of fieldwork from 2006 to 2007, there were still poor medical facilities – although a new hospital was under construction – along with unreliable power and water, erratic telecommunications and limited access to consumer items. Houses did not have addresses and only the main streets had names. On the one hundred-year anniversary of Maun's establishment as the regional capital, the expatriate editor of the local newspaper, the *Ngami Times* (2005), described Maun as a frontier town: 'a town world-renowned for many things – from big game hunting, wildlife, bush and desert safaris, heavy drinking, bachelors, and parties to being the gateway to the wonderful Okavango delta'.

For white Batswana, Maun is constructed from both an insider and outsider perspective. Working so closely with tourists, they are well-versed in its apprehension as a frontier outpost, yet they also understand its significance within the Tswana *morafe* and as a regional centre. When I asked about perceptions of Maun, my white Batswana interlocutors most frequently described it simply as 'home'. The body of concepts and beliefs that constitute 'home' exist not only as spatial and temporal, but also on a social and political level. The ideology of home encompasses value systems derived from the perceived functions of home, including security, stability and nurture (George 1999: 8). Integral to notions of home are

also familiarity, comfort and autonomy, yet also the obverse, as homes at times become sites of internal conflict and places of anxiety and stress (Sibley 1995: 93). On a sociopolitical level, home connotes belonging in terms of the discourse of nationalism and, conversely, the possibility of insecurity and alienation (Said 1990: 359). For many migrants, 'home is a problematic site, since the reality of home as well as its imaginative projection are vulnerably linked to an entire network of personal, national, social, and cultural identifications' (Roy 1995: 104). Consequently, for white Batswana being 'at home in the Okavango' encompasses a complex ontological positioning; a dialectical vacillation between belonging and insecurity.

Narrating the Okavango

In order to analytically come to terms with experiential and political autochthony for white Batswana, I rely on the notion of narrative. The relationships of individuals or groups with the local community, the state, the local environment and to history are the stuff of autochthony. My primary means of representing such relationships is through the stories and general discourse of white Batswana, and through my own ethnographic narrative. White Batswana are expert raconteurs and spend much of their social life engaged in the exchange of stories. I include these throughout the book, not only to shed light on their thoughts, feelings, perceptions and understanding of their relationships to the local environment, but also as an exemplification of their own strategies and means of developing a sense of belonging through the discursive construction of their identities as Batswana.

In addition, my own narrative is included in the form of ethnographic data and its analysis, through which I explore white Batswana political and experiential autochthony. The nature of anthropological research is such that the type of study undertaken, the questions asked, the information received and subsequently represented, is highly contingent not only on serendipity within a particular historical time and space, but also on the individual researcher's age, gender, personal proclivities, experiences, orientations and so forth. As a seventh-generation settler-descended Australian, for example, an exploration of belonging is of particular interest to me. I recognise the opportunities and privileges I am afforded as a white Australian, relative to the disadvantage faced by many Indigenous Australians. This awareness sits uneasily alongside a sense of connection to the place in which I was born, raised and have lived much of my life. My interest in processes of emplacement and belonging of the

white minority in the Okavango is influenced by this subject position. Consequently, ethnography should always be read, to an extent, as an individual researcher's narrative.

The ethnographic fieldwork from which this narrative has grown was conducted for one year commencing in August 2006, with additional follow-up visits for a month each in January 2008 and November 2012. With a home base in Maun, I spent the fourteen months participating in numerous mobile safaris, sitting around campfires and listening to stories and visiting the delta's elite lodges, all the while observing the dynamics between citizens of various ethnic backgrounds, expatriates and tourists. Community members leave Maun and head to the bush whenever they can, and I spent many weekends camping in the delta, the salt pans of the Makgadikgadi and in the Kalahari. I participated in several fishing trips to the panhandle, and I was fortunate to be invited on a twelve-day trans-Okavango trip, traversing the length of the delta by boat. My investigation of the tourism industry included attending the largest southern African tourism convention, Indaba, in Durban, South Africa in May 2007 with a number of Botswana delegates.

In among the many safaris and time spent with community members in town and in the bush, I conducted over a hundred semi-structured recorded interviews. Interlocutors were drawn from a broad cross-section of the Okavango community, including white Batswana, along with citizens of BaTswana, BaNgwaketse, BaKwena, Wayeyi and Bugakhwe backgrounds. I spoke with a great number of expatriates from southern Africa and many other parts of the world, in addition to numerous international tourists. Botswana-based interlocutors were men and women of diverse age groups and included people working in all aspects of the safari industry: from managing directors to tent cleaners, photographic guides to professional hunters, as well as missionaries, mechanics, health professionals and unskilled labourers.

The pre-existing connections I had from three years of previous travel and work in various parts of southern Africa, in conjunction with the small, closely knit nature of the community, made it remarkably easy to meet people, build friendships and recruit participants. As is often the case with ethnographic research, I became strongly integrated into the community, forming very close friendships and engaging as much, if not more, on a personal as a professional level in many of my interactions. These personal relationships have both facilitated and made difficult the writing of this book. As anthropologists have long recognised, the close relationships that frequently result from long-term fieldwork can make an impartial representation of a community difficult, if not impossible. This challenge is compounded by the complex political position of

the subjects of this study. In writing about white Zimbabweans, Pilosof (2012: 187) points out the careful treatment required to present neither 'an apologist account of white farmers' nor 'a tirade against an unchanged group of racist neo-colonialists'. While some scholars may feel I have only achieved something of the former, and my white Batswana interlocutors something of the latter, my hope is that the inclusion of voices from across the broader Okavango community has allowed for an accurate portrayal of the lives of the region's white Batswana, which takes into account not only the community's self-perceptions, but how they are viewed by other Batswana, along with an analysis that speaks to wider anthropological understandings of the intersections of race, ethnicity, class and power.

While I acquired information through participant observation among hundreds of community members, in this book I discursively focus on a handful of key interlocutors, for whom I use pseudonyms. Brothers Richard and Tony in their mid thirties generously provided me with broad access to their lives, ranging from their thoughts, feelings and beliefs in ongoing discussions about all aspects of Okavango living, to direct engagement with their professional lives. Tony invited me on a twelve-day hunting safari, while Richard arranged for me to participate in a week-long photographic safari he guided with his uncle. Similarly, Luke and Mark, in their forties and fifties respectively, invited me on a number of bush trips where they were guiding paying clients, including the trans-Okavango boating adventure. As a white Motswana woman living in Maun, but having grown up in Gaborone, Grace's insights are grounded in an interesting insider/outsider perspective. Charlotte, by contrast, is a 'born, bred and buttered' white Motswana woman whose experiences have parallels with many of the women who have grown up in the Okavango. Cedric, a white Motswana in his fifties, tends to have rather cynical views that are often in opposition to those held by other white Batswana. His opinions are included throughout, precisely because they are so different to those of the majority of my interlocutors. Like Cedric, Deon's views offer a counterpoint to the Okavango's white Batswana, as he is of Afrikaner descent and spent his early years in the neighbouring Ghanzi district. In addition to these white Batswana, I include the perspectives of Ronny, a 24-year-old MoTawana man working as a barman in one of the tourist lodges in Maun predominantly frequented by white citizens and expatriates. He was one of many Batswana who were unfailingly generous in sharing their experiences of living and working alongside white Batswana. Finally, I include the perspectives of Tshepo, a MoNgwaketse woman originally from Gaborone, whose frankness, humour and perceptiveness illustrate her views as a Tswana woman who, like Ronny, has worked closely over many years with white Batswana and expatriates. In order not to inundate

the reader with a bewildering array of personalities, all other individuals described or quoted will not be named, but will be described using basic demographic descriptors.

Orienting White Batswana Experiential and Political Autochthony

Experiential autochthony for white Batswana is inseparable from their relationship to the natural environment, which I describe in Chapter One. I suggest that their bush preoccupation must be read in light of the complexity of their position as European-descended citizens in postcolonial Africa, where the natural environment provides a less fraught means through which to develop local identifications than the social environment. White Batswana's passion and expertise in relation to the bush is mobilised economically in the form of photographic and hunting tourism, which I explore respectively in Chapters Two and Three. Central to belonging is the sense that one is adding value and contributing to one's community. Through their work in tourism, I describe the ways in which white citizen belonging is enhanced through sharing a vocation that is seen as contributing to the nation's economic and social development and environmental conservation. Their role as hosts to international visitors enhances belonging further through the daily performance of their emplacement in contrast with the palpable foreignness of the tourist 'other'. Conversely, I describe how alienation of the rural poor at the hands of conservation and tourism, disputes over land and resource use and the burgeoning of identity politics in the tourism industry pose considerable challenges to white Batswana's position within the community.

Miller (2003a: 218) suggests that belonging requires 'standing in correct relation to one's community, one's history, and one's locality'. In Chapter Four, I describe how white Batswana mobilise their nation's history and the sociopolitical praxis of the majority Tswana to validate their claims to belonging. On the one hand, white Batswana's frequently articulated love of, and patriotism to, Botswana signals the centrality of national citizenship to their identities, while, on the other, the emphatic nature of this discourse points to an inherent sense of insecurity. I explore the role of the Botswana state in determining identity politics and the ability, or otherwise, for minority groups to achieve equal rights and recognition. While Tswana-centric structures favour ethnically Tswana citizens, I suggest that in stark contrast to many other minorities, the nation's political culture has in many instances directly served to enable white Batswana belonging.

Acceptance in the formal sense of citizenship allows only a limited measure of belonging, however. Higher levels of belonging require connections within the community beyond the rhetoric of the state. In his seminal work on the construction of ethnicity, Barth (1969: 14) points out that the ever-dynamic nature of cultural values and practices renders it necessary to look not solely at 'the cultural stuff' in order to understand a group, but at the boundaries they construct between themselves and others. In Chapter Five, I explore the operation of racial identities in the Okavango and the ways in which they are at times conflated with, and at times overridden by, the more specific identity markers of ethnicity, class and citizenship. White Batswana have maintained a discrete community over time through perceived difference from other Batswana, and I describe the dominant paradigm of limited social integration – most evident in the rarity of interracial marriage, and even close friendships across races – which indicates the persistence of racialised identities and segregation. Yet, white Batswana adamantly claim that relationships with the broader community are predominantly positive: a belief that is central to white Batswana constructions of collective identity and can be read, I argue, as a means to ensure an ongoing welcome in the nation.

Through this exploration of white Batswana experiential and political autochthony, as manifest in their relationships to the social and physical environments of the Okavango, I argue that, in response to the inherent insecurity of their position as a white minority in a postcolonial African state, white Batswana have developed particular cultural values and practices that have allowed them to attain high levels of belonging.