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Environmentalities of Namibian conservancies: how communal area residents govern conservation in return.

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Etosha Pan to the Skeleton Coast

Conservation Histories, Policies and Practices in North-west Namibia

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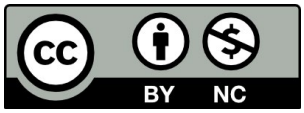

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5. Environmentalities of Namibian conservancies: How communal area residents govern conservation in return

Ruben Schneider

Abstract

This chapter explores how communal area residents in north-west Namibia experience, understand, and respond to their conservancies. Drawing on philosopher Michel Foucault's concept of "governmentality" and specifically its "environmentality" variant, conservancies are understood as localised global environmental governance institutions which aim to modify local people's behaviours in both conservation- and market-friendly ways. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork across four conservancies in Kunene Region, the chapter reveals how local communities culturally demystify, socially re-construct, and ultimately govern a global, neoliberal(ising) institutional experiment in return. Confirming stark experiential discrepancies and distributional injustices, the analysis cautions against a simplistic affirmation of the conservation dictum that "those who benefit also care". Instead, it demonstrates that experiences of neoliberal incentives such as ownership and benefits are a limited predictor of local conservation practices. In the context of Namibian conservancies, "friction" between global and local ways of seeing and being in the world produces novel, hybrid environmentalities characterised in part by what political scientist Jean-François Bayart calls 'the politics of the belly'. The chapter explores how communal area residents seek to opportunistically work the conservancy system to their advantage. It highlights an accountability gap within conservancies which not only entrenches local inequalities, but effectively transfers frictions between global and local environmentalities to the community level where they have the potential to develop into intra-community conflicts.

5.1 Introduction[1]

Namibian conservancies are community-based organisations with limited rights and responsibilities for the governance of natural resources on communal land. They are 'communal property regimes',[2] or 'local common property resource management institutions',[3] to which the state devolves tradeable use rights over game, land, and tourism on condition that communities assume responsibility for the sustainable management and protection of wildlife. After decades of exclusionary, fortress style approaches to conservation linked to alienating colonial and apartheid injustices, conservancies provide a hopeful counter-narrative about the restoration of Indigenous and local rights to land

1 Acknowledgments: This research was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) through a doctoral studentship in the Sociology pathway (2015-2020), administered by the Scottish Graduate School of Social Science (SGSSS). The research benefited from additional ESRC grants for fieldwork and language training (2017–2019). The author would like to thank Bernadette Hayes and Gearoid Millar at the University of Aberdeen for their extremely valuable comments on earlier versions of this chapter. I am particularly grateful to Sian Sullivan at Bath Spa University who provided invaluable support as external examiner and reviewer. A special thank you to Petrus Jansen 'Jakuree' Taurob, my dear friend and field assistant, who played a significant role in facilitating fieldwork in communal conservancies. Above all, I am grateful to all the conservation practitioners and communal area residents who welcomed me so readily into their lifeworlds. It was an honour and privilege to live among you. A heartfelt thank you to you all.

2 Jones & Murphree (2001: 44)

3 Jones (2010: 106)

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and natural resources.[4] Nationally, this social, ecological, economic, and political transformation was enabled by Namibian Independence from colonial South Africa in 1990, with a clear vision to reform apartheid conservation policies and redress past injustices.[5] Through conservancies, black farmers on communal land should receive the same ownership rights and benefits from game that white farmers on freehold land have enjoyed since proclamation of The Nature Conservation Ordinance, 31 of 1967[6] (see Chapter 2). In many ways, the success or failure of the conservancy system at the local level is entwined with the post-apartheid trajectory at the national level. Conservancies thus play a key role in post-apartheid politics and reconciliation.

In the fields of conservation and development, Namibia's conservancies are generally considered a leading example of Community-Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) in southern Africa;[7] celebrated as 'one of the most successful examples of legal empowerment of the poor of the past decade'.[8] With 86 registered conservancies covering almost 20% (163,151 km^2) of Namibia, they are intended to enable over 200,000 rural residents to benefit from a wildlife-based economy.[9] It is undeniable that conservancies contribute significantly to achieving key conservation and rural development goals. In 2017 alone, community conservation generated nearly USD 9 million (N$132 million) in returns for conservancy members, and facilitated over 5,300 jobs,[10] whilst iconic wildlife thrived. Between 1995 and 2016, Namibia's elephant (*Loxodonta africana*) population reportedly grew from 7,500 to around 22,800 (see Chapter 11), with free-roaming desert-adapted lions (*Panthera leo*) expanding their range and numbers (see Chapters 17, 18 and 19).[11] Recent game count figures for the north-west, however, show declines in many wildlife populations, due to the combined impacts of a prolonged drought since 2012, high offtake quotas up to around 2016, and possibly illegal harvesting (as detailed in Chapter 3).[12] In ecological terms, conservancies' success is thus mixed. In socio-economic terms, the picture is even less clear. While some assess the impact of conservancies on rural lives and livelihoods as predominantly positive,[13] an increasing number of studies express concerns.[14]

To further contextualise conservancies and critically assess their political potential for empowering rural communities, it is important to consider 'the alliances and mobilizations'[15] on which the conservancy system depends. First, the shift from fortress[16] to community-based conservation was ideologically controversial with apartheid-era civil servants remaining sceptical about decentralised, democratic governance arrangements as they distrusted rural Africans to use wildlife sustainably. Defying the traditional command and control preservationists, a small but

4 Sullivan (1999: 2)
5 Jones (2010: 107–8)
6 MET (1995: 5), Bollig (2016: 778)
7 Roe *et al.* (2009: 39)
8 Boudreaux (2010: 1)
9 Naidoo *et al.* (2016), NACSO (2018)
10 *Ibid.*, p. 13
11 NACSO (2016: 7–11)
12 NACSO (2022)
13 Jones & Weaver (2009), Owen-Smith (2010), Hoole & Berkes (2010), Boudreaux (2010), Nuulimba & Taylor (2015), Jacobsohn (2019)
14 For example, Kahler & Gore (2015), Mufune (2015), Mosimane & Silva (2015), Silva & Motzer (2015), Bollig (2016), Bollig & Olwage (2016), Schnegg & Kiaka (2018), Kalvelage *et al.* (2020)
15 Brosius *et al.* (2005: 16)
16 In north-west Namibia, the "fortress" version of conservation is not necessarily connected with a particular enclosed area. The entire north is split from southern Namibia by a veterinary cordon fence, the 'Red Line' (see Miescher 2012: 2), and further separated internally by various national parks, as well as hunting and tourism concession areas. Colonial administrations, however, also implemented "fortress-style" conservation in the unfenced, communal areas. When I speak of a shift from fortress to community conservation, the "fortress" should thus be understood metaphorically. It represents coercive and exclusionary forms of conservation practice rooted in an imposed ontological division between (black) people and nature and related myths about "wilderness" (Adams & McShane 1996; Neumann 1998; Brockington 2002; Adams & Hutton 2007: see Chapter 2), including the reified dislocation and dispossession of Indigenous Namibians from their land, wildlife, and hunting rights in the north-west of "Etosha-Kunene" (Bollig & Olwage 2016; Sullivan & Hannis 2016; Sullivan 2017: discussed further in Chapters 12, 13 and 14).

committed circle of progressive government officials and NGO practitioners pushed through the necessary institutional reforms (see Chapters 2 and 3).[17] Different interpretations regarding the extent of decentralisation and communal proprietorship of natural resources, however, meant that policy stances oscillated over time and 'communities received conflicting messages from reformers and traditionalists'.[18] As will be seen in this chapter, community perspectives and experiences reflect these divergent understandings and conflicting communications regarding the status of conservancies and, particularly, the extent of local ownership over wildlife.

Secondly, conservancies are not only the creation of a small, progressive circle of committed Namibian community conservation advocates. As a true child of the 1980–1990s, they are also a product of the global neoliberalisation of conservation.[19] The 1992 Rio Earth Summit marked a shift in global conservation policy towards more "people-centred" approaches and an inclusion of wider social, economic, and political goals.[20] As a result, fortress conservation and its artificial separation of people and nature was replaced by a 'consensus around sustainable use as a legitimate wildlife management strategy'.[21] Community-based conservation was the new mantra and, where possible, fines, fences, and firearms were to be replaced by incentives aimed at winning the support of local populations living in and around wildlife areas. More specifically, the neoliberal "innovation" of the conservancy model is the idea that newly devolved rights enabling communities to earn an income through the commodification of wildlife and landscapes would lead to local valorisation of wildlife and thus to conservation-friendly behaviours. As such, conservancies not only combine conservation and rural development goals, but also integrate local people, their land, and resources into the market.[22] To the extent that they aim to 'produce both environmentally and market-friendly subjects',[23] they can reasonably be considered 'civilizing projects'[24] and projects of 'improvement'.[25]

Third, the space for conservancy reform opened up by Namibian Independence and reinforced by an enabling international environment characterised by debates on sustainability and local integration, was further instilled with emergent thinking about common property resource management. According to Jones,[26] the legislation for conservancies was directly influenced by the late Elinor Ostrom's (1990) design principles for self-governance of common pool resources. Since Ostrom's principles are based on a combination of game-theoretical, rational choice and behaviouralist approaches, however, she admits that her theory is limited to situational and observable variables 'rather than internal, in-the-mind, subjective variables, which are far more difficult to measure'.[27] Her theory consequently fails to consider sufficiently how historicity, social interactions, and divergent local experiences and meanings shape the impacts and outcomes of common property regimes (as further discussed in Chapters 6, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17 and 19). The institutional arrangements she inspired run the risk of reproducing these limitations, as Dressler

17 Jones & Murphree (2001: 40, 54), Jones (2010: 113)
18 Jones & Murphree (2001: 54)
19 The neoliberalisation of conservation captures 'the increasingly hegemonic influence' (Fletcher 2023: 3–4) of the global political-economic programme of neoliberalism (see Harvey 2005) within the global conservation movement. It is characterised by several trends, including the growing dominance of alliances of big international NGOs, corporations and financial institutions, the privatisation of nature reserves, the devolution of resource control, and the commodification of natural resources which can be traded through market-based instruments (MBIs), such as payments for environmental services (PES). Whilst neoliberalism is often associated with the rolling back of regulation, Fletcher (2023: 10) argues that neoliberal conservation is, in fact, 'an "anti-regulation machine" purporting to reduce state regulation while actually expanding it'. See also Sullivan (2006), Igoe & Brockington (2007), Brockington & Duffy (2011), Büscher *et al.* (2012).
20 Carmen *et al.* (2015: 182)
21 Newsham (2007: 145) in Jones (2010)
22 Sullivan (2006), Bollig (2016: 773), Sullivan *et al.* (2016: 14)
23 Holmes & Cavanagh (2016: 204)
24 Dressler & Guieb (2015: 332)
25 Li (2007)
26 (2010: 109)
27 Ostrom (1990: 37–8)

and co-authors[28] forewarn with regard to CBNRM more generally: 'being scaled up as a global pre-packaged solution to local problems, CBNRM's near universality may lead to its demise'. The danger of rolling out conservancies as unproblematic, charismatic travelling packages[29] across different socio-cultural contexts in Namibia should not be underestimated: it neglects the complexity of global-local interactions and the unpredictability of hybrid institutional outcomes mediated by culturally and individually variable experiences and understandings of the world.[30]

This chapter aims to shine a light on how communal area residents in north-west Namibia experience, understand, and respond to their conservancies. It is an attempt to show how rural communities culturally demystify, socially re-construct, and ultimately govern a global, neoliberal institutional experiment in return. Drawing from Foucault's governmentality[31] concept and its 'environmentality'[32] variant as applied to processes of environmental governance, I frame conservancies not only as common property regimes or community-based organisations, but as localised global environmental governance institutions. Just as environmental governance processes 'are primarily designed to modify human behaviours that affect biodiversity',[33] an environmentality lens reveals that conservancies aim to modify the behaviours of communal area residents in both conservation- and market-friendly ways. My somewhat critical reading should not be misunderstood as a denunciation of conservancies, nor of their architects, committees, members, or support workers, for whom I have the utmost respect for their work. I hope instead to contribute to a candid conversation in Namibia about divergent experiential realities within conservancies, and the ways in which conservancies might be supported to come closer to meeting communal area residents' priorities and fulfilling *their* visions of "socio-natures" (on which, see Chapters 12, 13, 14 and 15).

The materials presented in this chapter, e.g. interview transcripts and fieldnotes, derive from year-long ethnographic fieldwork conducted in close collaboration with two Namibian NGOs and four communal conservancies in the Kunene region between March 2018 and March 2019. They comprise almost 300 days of participant observation and over 80 interviews with communal area residents, rangers, and conservation practitioners.[34] Based on these materials, I challenge the conservation dictum that "those who benefit also care". Instead, I show that local experiences of structural incentives like ownership and benefits are only a limited predictor of local responses to conservation. Before presenting the empirical flesh of this argument, however, I briefly explain how, in theory, different environmentalities in the conservancy model aim to manage natural resources and 'conduct the conduct'[35] of rural communities.

5.2 Environmentalities of Namibian conservancies

The first application of Foucault's (2007) governmentality concept to global institutions of environmental governance was Luke's (1999) characterisation of the Rio Earth Summit as a novel environmentality.[36] To the extent that conservancies are a product of the horizontal and vertical

28 (2010: 12)
29 cf. Brosius *et al.* (2005: 5), Tsing (2005)
30 Millar (2014: 3)
31 Foucault (2008: 176, 218) framed governmentality as 'the art of government', and a 'general style of thought, analysis and imagination' which entails various particular modes of 'conducting subjects' conduct', e.g. biopolitical, neoliberal, disciplinary, sovereign, and truth (Fletcher 2010: 178).
32 Environmentality can be understood as governmentality related to the environment, a 'green governmentality' (Luke 1999) or a conservation governmentality. It is as generic a term as governmentality and, thus, the way in which it aims to 'conduct conduct' also depends on its particular mode, e.g. biopolitical, neoliberal, disciplinary, sovereign, truth (Fletcher 2010, 2017).
33 Salafsky (2001: 185)
34 Schneider (2022)
35 cf. Foucault (1991: 102)
36 Fletcher (2017: 312)

integration championed at the summit and in its aftermath, it is fitting to use the same theoretical approach to analyse how this vision is implemented in a specific context. For the subsequent application of environmentality to the conservancy model, I draw on Fletcher's enlightening discussions of the concept.[37]

Formally, the conservancy model reflects a neoliberal environmentality, a mode of environmental governance which uses structural incentives, i.e. devolved ownership and benefits from wildlife, to change local behaviours in conservation- and market-friendly ways.[38] The neoliberal environmentality of conservancies thus represents an external, legal type of intervention. Assuming self-interested, rational actors, the change in ownership is supposed to alter the cost-benefit ratio of engaging in environmentally harmful practices, particularly illegal hunting, in favour of conservation. Wildlife that is protected and secured can then be safely marketed and commercialised along with the region's spectacular landscapes via profitable ecotourism and trophy hunting industries. The income gained through public-private partnerships is administered by the conservancy and accrues to registered members as benefits. Benefits may be distributed to individual members in the form of employment, meat, and occasional cash payments; or distributed collectively in the form of communal development projects, such as upgrades to schools, livestock kraals, or water infrastructure. The neoliberal environmentality of conservancies employs the market as the model for local behavioural change. The effect is an extension of market logics to more-or-less previously "unintegrated" or marginalised rural populations, and an opening-up of "their" untapped natural resources to global processes of commodification and capital accumulation.[39]

Locally and on a more informal level, the conservancy system also reflects a disciplinary environmentality which aims to produce 'environmental subjects—people who care about the environment'.[40] Conservancy members become environmental subjects when they internalise desired norms and values, such as local ownership, protection, and sustainable use of natural resources. Internalisation of norms and values is achieved through education and outreach, fear of deviance, and subtle but omnipresent threats of violence.[41] Communities then self-regulate their practices in the logic of Foucault's Panopticon (i.e. self-surveillance) model of power. As discussed by Li[42] in relation to governmentality, due to the impossibility of universal coercion and regulation, disciplinary environmentality 'operates by educating desires and configuring habits, aspirations and beliefs'. In contrast to neoliberal environmentality, where rational actors protect wildlife out of economic self-interest, the disciplinary mode of environmental governance aims to achieve an internal 'subjugation' of the hearts and minds of local people who support conservation because they 'care'.[43]

In practice, neoliberal and disciplinary environmentalities interact. The extent of ownership and benefits goes to the heart of rural lives and livelihoods. In Namibian conservancies, neoliberal and disciplinary environmentalities merge because devolved ownership over natural resources—the structural incentive—is not merely an economic mechanism but a social and political value, linked to redressing colonial and apartheid-era injustices. As mentioned, through conservancies, black farmers were putatively to receive the same ownership rights over game as white farmers,[44]

37 Fletcher (2010, 2017)
38 Sullivan (2006)
39 *Ibid.*, Fletcher (2010)
40 Agrawal (2005: 162)
41 Neumann (2001: 327)
42 (2007: 5)
43 cf. Fletcher (2010)
44 Despite the empowerment rhetoric around conservancies, significant structural differences exist regarding the land distribution and rights between Indigenous communal area farmers and settler freehold farmers. As Sullivan (2002: 164–65) explains, freehold farmers not only own the most productive land in southern and central Namibia which holds around 70 per cent of all "game" in the country, but their rights are also inalienable as they 'effectively and legally own the capital constituted by their land and the resources on it'. Whilst settler freeholders are thus free to turn their rights over huntable game into individual profit, the rights of Indigenous and local farmers

partially restoring Indigenous access, use, and control of natural resources. When local people accept the CBNRM narrative and experience or perceive genuine ownership and benefits from wildlife, then environmental degradation—especially illegal hunting—becomes (in theory) immoral and unethical. While the production of an environmental ethic and the diffusion of related norms are objectives of a disciplinary mode of environmental governance, in the Namibian case they are achieved through a combination of neoliberal and disciplinary environmentalities. The neoliberal incentives reflect social and political values that, over time, are accepted, internalised, and translated into two distinct social norms: pro-environment and pro-market.

Finally, it must be noted that there are further strategies of environmental governance or modes of environmentality visible in conservancies: namely, sovereign and truth environmentalities. The former refers to environmental 'governance through top-down creation and enforcement of regulations'[45] which is evident in traditional fortress conservation approaches, as well as more recent forms of militarised conservation,[46] green security,[47] or green violence.[48] I discuss sovereign environmentalities in detail elsewhere.[49] Truth environmentalities refer to environmental 'governance in accordance with [a] particular [local/cultural] conception of the nature and order of the universe'.[50] They can include alternative and often hidden practices that are based on Indigenous people's traditional ecological knowledge, intrinsic valuations of nature, and essential human-nature connections or non-dualistic ontologies.[51] The concept of "truth environmentality" captures the circulation of these alternatives under the surface of any localised form of global environmental governance, such as conservancies[52]—as explored in Chapters 12, 13, 14 and 15. Although sovereign and truth environmentalities work through the conservancy system, they do not reflect conservancies' original modes of governance or primary operating logics. For the purpose of this chapter, therefore, I focus on local experiences of neoliberal and disciplinary environmentalities as they reflect the original and guiding logics of conservancies. Nevertheless, Indigenous (truth) environmentalities overlap and interact with these dominant modes of environmental governance. Therefore, I return to truth environmentalities when I discuss how communal area residents in Namibia demystify and socially re-construct their conservancies' localised forms of global environmental governance from below.

5.3 Local experiences of conservancies' environmentalities: The pivots of ownership and benefits

The neoliberal incentives of ownership and benefits are the pivots of the conservancy system. They largely determine whether communal area residents experience their respective conservancy as empowering or disempowering, and whether they support or resist the vision of conservation and development put forth by CBNRM. The underpinning logic is simple: people who genuinely feel they own and benefit from wildlife, will value it and, in turn, support its sustainable use, rational management, and protection.[53] Locally, this logic has also become stated common sense, as one conservancy manager told me: '[t]hat is the bottom line: with no incentives, no conservation'

remain severely restricted, ironically not least through their membership in a 'communal property regime' (Jones & Murphree 2001: 44). In other words, in practice, black farmers on communal land can never have the same ownership rights over game as white farmers on private land (also see Chapter 3).

45 Fletcher (2010: 178)
46 Lunstrum (2014)
47 Kelly & Ybarra (2016)
48 Büscher & Ramutsindela (2016)
49 Schneider (2022)
50 Fletcher (2010: 178)
51 See Sullivan & Hannis (2016)
52 Sullivan (2019)
53 See discussion in Sullivan (1999: 1, 2003) and Bollig (2016: 772)

(#35, 29.9.2018, Welwitschia Conservancy[54]). While a sense of ownership and (real or perceived) benefits are the preconditions for successful CBNRM, in practice conservancies are unable to realise these ideals for all their members.

5.3.1 Benefits

In the eyes of Nangolo,[55] an ovaHimba farmer living with his family and livestock in the mountains, Witgat Conservancy represents unfulfilled hopes and promises:

> [y]ou see, the conservancy is just like a photo to us. It is like a road sign that tells you about a turn coming up ahead, but the sign never goes to the turn itself. It always remains on the pole where it was put first. The sign itself will never reach the turn. The conservancy is just like that. It is just like a photo we are told belongs to us while it belongs to the bosses themselves, the white people who are eating[56] from it. (#62, 14.11.2018, Witgat Conservancy)

By contrast, Emma, an ovaHerero farmer from the same area, compares Witgat Conservancy to livestock her family owns and depends on for their lives and livelihood:

> […] the conservancy is our cow that we milk. If that cow wasn't able to give us milk, we would no longer have a livelihood. […] We say we live from the conservancy because my father [a Community Game Guard (CGG)] fed us from the conservancy until he passed away and now my brother [a Community Rhino Ranger (CRR)] took over and continues to feed us from the conservancy to this day. […] We were raised by the conservancy. Our conservancy is like our cattle that we drink milk from. (#68, 15.11.2018, Witgat Conservancy)

Although living in the same village, Nangolo and Emma share two strikingly divergent narratives about the nature of the conservancy, their perceived ownership over it, and the extent of benefits they derive from it: the conservancy is like a misleading road sign to one and a life-saving, paternalistic cow to another. This experiential gap has been a consistent theme throughout my fieldwork. Every new encounter with a community area resident was like throwing a loaded dice that had only two sides. Local people seemed to either love or despise their conservancy, although there was a tendency towards the latter. Individuals who do not benefit are acutely aware of the distributional injustice, as expressed by a Damara/ǂNūkhoe farmer:

> [w]e feel angry and unhappy because we don't benefit. The main purpose of the conservancy was to bring benefits to us, assist us in times of need, and give us money when they are selling wild animals. But look at us, we are dying of thirst. They should drill boreholes and bring water closer to us. But the Government and those people of the conservancy are eating the money while we are just left. I am getting angry when I speak about these things. (#55, 18.10.2018, Mopane Conservancy)

Such narratives are not surprising. In a study of local perceptions towards poaching in a conservancy in Namibia's north-east Zambezi region, Kahler and Gore[57] found that 75% of survey respondents (n = 56) did not think benefits from wildlife were distributed equally. Based on a case study of a conservancy close to my fieldwork area, Schnegg and Kiaka concluded that 'the conservancy has

54 The names of the four Kunene conservancies studied—*Welwitschia*, *Mopane*, *Witgat*, and *Camelthorn*—are pseudonyms to protect participants' identities. I selected these pseudonyms as they reflect some of the most prominent plant and tree species in the study area, as well as the names that local people commonly use to refer to them. Whilst I selected these pseudonyms for their apparent ease and neutrality, there is always a risk that changing place names might be locally perceived as political, especially in the ethnically and linguistically diverse Kunene region with its historical experience of oppression, in-migration, and related fears of loss of place and culture (see Sullivan 2003). I want to emphasise that no political meaning is attached to the selection of pseudonyms here.

55 All interviews are number coded (#1-81) and all names of interview participants are pseudonymised to ensure anonymity and protect local informants.

56 In otjiHerero the verb *okuria* means both 'to eat' and 'to benefit'. I discuss these meanings further in Section 5.4 on conservancy capture and the 'politics of the belly'.

57 (2015: 54)

made ǂKhoadi ǁHôas a better place for elephants as well as for some people'.[58] They criticised the fact that the largest part of the revenue, some 84%, did not stay with the conservancy or translate into community returns, 'but goes to enterprises in Windhoek or abroad and to the state'. They argued that this immense distributional injustice, 'experienced by almost all inhabitants', leads to frustration, grief, powerlessness, and despair.[59] At a national level, the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism (MEFT) and the Namibian Association of CBNRM Support Organisations (NACSO) note that the biggest governance challenges are financial mismanagement and a failure on the part of 'conservancy elites' to engage the wider membership.[60]

5.3.2 Ownership

The perception and actual distribution of benefits is closely linked to local experiences of devolved ownership over wildlife. To the extent that the state grants ownership rights to rural communities and maintains the authority to (de-)gazette conservancies, i.e. grant and revoke their status as a recognised community organisation, the paternalistic relation with the conservancy may be extended to the State. Friedman[61] even argues that paternalism is a 'structuring structure'[62] in Namibia that mediates state-local relations. The following account by Hosea, an ovaHerero farmer and senior manager with a wildlife monitoring NGO, seems to support the paternalism interpretation:

> [m]e as a Namibian and the area I am working in is where I am born and, I mean, the rhino [*Diceros bicornis bicornis*] conservation and the conservation itself is very important to me, yeah, because it's like goats in my kraal. So, your own goats, who must look after them if it is not yourself? So, I allowed myself to look after this wildlife because it belongs to me. […] I mean, I know it belongs to anybody; anybody actually benefits from rhinos, but I mean it's actually a property of the Government. […] So, the Government is like the main umbrella, or the mother, and we are the kid; or we are children. So, you know, definitely, if your parents send you out to look after something or to take care of something, you won't refuse to do it. So, the Government allowed us to look after the wildlife in western Kunene. (#97, 16.2.2019)

Sense of ownership over wildlife, perceived benefits, and internalisation of paternalism seem to be linked. Those who benefit directly from community conservation, like Hosea, the game guards, and the rangers, or indirectly, like Emma above, have a strong sense of ownership and accept responsibility for the protection of wildlife. They also subscribe to a paternalistic hierarchy where the government and/or the conservancy sits at the top and local residents at the bottom. In these cases, the interplay of neoliberal and disciplinary environmentalities successfully produces two novel, overlapping subject positions. On the one hand, the conservancy programme neatly integrates them into the market. Instead of being "only" subsistence farmers, they are also in "regular", salaried employment on which they depend for their livelihoods and which may even contribute to capitalist production. For example, they usually use their income from conservation to increase the number of livestock they have. If they do not have enough children or relatives to herd them, they often employ marginalised wage labourers from either side of the Namibia-Angola border. More than just neoliberal subjects who have been moulded into market-friendly behaviours by structural incentives, some communal area residents might even be considered "capitalistic" in the sense that they own a limited means of production, i.e. livestock, and become employers for whom labour is a cost that needs to be kept low to maximise profit. On the other hand, they accepted their devolved ownership and responsibility for the sustainable management, use, and protection of wildlife. They ostensibly internalised related norms and values, like the valorisation of wildlife

58 Schnegg & Kiaka (2018: 110)
59 *Ibid.*
60 NACSO (2018: 55)
61 (2014[2011]: 23–5)
62 Bourdieu (1999)

and a moral ethic in which wildlife needs to be cared for. Through the interplay of neoliberal and disciplinary environmentalities, then, the conservancy programme successfully produces both neoliberal and environmental subjects.

Furthermore, in situations where the diffusion of neoliberal environmentality among a community is relatively advanced and an influential or large proportion of members have accepted the narrative of communal ownership and benefits, disciplinary modes of environmentality may be stimulated and spread more easily. In other words, within the conservancy model, neoliberal environmentalities (aiming to produce neoliberal subjects) promote disciplinary environmentalities which subsequently aim to produce environmental subjects. For example, although Uahaverako, an ovaHimba resident in Camelthorn conservancy, does not necessarily feel like she owns wildlife and is sceptical about the conservation of game—especially dangerous animals like elephants [*Loxodonta africana*] and lions [*Panthera leo*]—she feels she is socially coerced into accepting the communal ownership and protection narrative:

> [t]he animals were accepted. You are told under the trees [meetings] that the community has accepted the animals. How am I able to escape that [decision] while I am part of the community? So, I am supposed to say that they are mine too. Would you say that they are not mine and run away? (#79, 17.11.2018, Camelthorn Conservancy)

The external, neoliberal incentive and its narrative around communal ownership and sustainable use have become disciplinary. Having grown up in a time when subsistence hunting—arguably also a form of sustainable use—was common, Uahaverako would not normally agree to the new conservancy rules and norms communicated to members during meetings. Yet, it is her fear of deviance and the potential social repercussions that discipline her. Although she is one of the oldest residents in her village, she feels she would no longer be accepted and would have to leave the community were she not to subjectify herself to the new norms. Uahaverako is a strong and pragmatic woman. She might say that she supports conservation in order not to be troubled, but she has evidently not been fully internally subjugated into an environmental subject position as envisioned by a disciplinary environmentality.

Moreover, the diffusion of different environmentalities and related subject positions is as patchy as the local experiences of ownership and benefits are non-universal. In fact, my perception is that community area residents across these four Kunene Region conservancies more often socially re-construct and resist conservancies' environmentalities than subjecting to them. Many people felt they receive few benefits, understanding the ownership incentive more as rhetoric or a "trick" played by the government to convince them to protect wildlife:

> [w]e have been given wildlife to herd [...] it's like you were given a shop to take care of and sell goods in the absence of the owner. (#76, 16.11.2018, Camelthorn Conservancy)

> [t]hey will use that word [communal ownership] because if they don't use that word the wildlife won't have any herders [protectors]. If these people [CGGs/CRRs] don't get paid, who will take the risk of walking in the thorns for free? (#51, 12.10.2018, Mopane Conservancy)

This experiential discrepancy in comparison to those perceiving ownership and receiving benefits is fuelled by legal and policy ambiguity. As suggested in the introduction, this is partly a result of competing perspectives within the environment ministry regarding the extent of decentralisation and conflicting communication received by communities.[63] As communal land formally remains under state ownership, some officials administratively contested conservancies' ownership of wildlife (conferred to them under the 1996 Nature Conservation Amendment Act), insisting that communities cannot own wildlife found on state-owned land; although a legal opinion sought from the Office of the Attorney General confirmed that 'conservancy committees do in fact have

63 Jones & Murphree (2001: 54)

ownership of huntable game'.[64] Given Namibia's colonial and apartheid history, the political currency of (real or perceived) ownership of wildlife must not be underestimated, with the state careful to emphasise full devolution of ownership. For example, the *National Policy on Community Based Natural Resource Management* of 2013 asserts that once a conservancy has been gazetted, 'ownership over wild game and use rights over other game species will be given to communal area residents'.[65] In practice, however, the MEFT retains ultimate ownership and control over wildlife: it not only has the power to de-gazette conservancies but also sets the quotas for how many animals can be harvested per species (see Chapter 14). Without an approved quota, conservancies are not permitted to use or sell what is supposedly 'their' wildlife. In his analysis of the new 'commons' created by conservancies, anthropologist Michael Bollig[66] explains the status quo of ownership like this:

> […] communities gain limited management and transfer rights over game and land. Ownership rights in both instances remain with the state, and the rights devolved to communities have to be negotiated annually (in the case of game quotas) or at less frequent intervals (in the case of land rentals). […] The natural resources "captured" under this regime are moved from a state-owned phase into a community-owned phase, are then commoditized, and finally become privately owned.[67]

At best, communal ownership can be described as limited and temporary. Despite assertive conservation and development discourses that never use such adjectives to qualify the extent of ownership, communal area residents understand very well that they do not fully own wildlife:

> [w]e have to go and ask for permission. […] It is not ownership. It is just a joke. […] Yours [ownership] is just to protect. If you want to eat, ask to get permission. (#45, 10.10.2018, Mopane Conservancy)

> [i]t is like they say: we are a bunch of stupid people. The government can tell the community that the things [wildlife] belong to them but they will not benefit from the things. […] I am not interested in taking care of it [wildlife] because I get no benefit from it. (#25, 23.9.2018, Welwitschia Conservancy)

This perceived deception of communities by the Government is further aggravated by the fact that limited and temporary "ownership" of wildlife is only devolved for certain species of huntable game in north-west Namibia, e.g. kudu (*Tragelaphus strepsiceros*), oryx (*Oryx gazella*), springbok (*Antidorcas masupialis*), and zebra (*Equus zebra hartmannae*). Most high-value species like elephants, rhinos, lions, and leopards (*Panthera pardus*) remain exclusively owned and controlled by the state. This situation adds to the perceived dishonesty of the ownership narrative and the overall injustice of conservation-community or government-local relations:

> [l]ike, for me, let me put it this way, the government says the diamonds must not be touched because these stones have money, they are worth a lot of money. And then the same with the rhinos. They say they belong to them because the rhinos also bring in money. Where are the rhino horns which they cut off? Where did they take them? Why don't they say, take some [horns] and go and sell them so that we can also live from it?! But then they say, no, these ones [high-value game] are for them [government]; and then the baboons which are living under the trees here, the local people, the ordinary people, they must just take the leftovers of what is there. (#59, 19.10.2018, Mopane Conservancy)

The comparison here between diamonds and rhinos is telling because, in contrast to wildlife, there is no ambiguity regarding the ownership of precious stones. Further, despite the empowerment rhetoric of CBNRM, the farmer in this quote likens the treatment of communities to baboons: powerless, dehumanised recipients of arbitrary government sponsorship and regulation. Whereas the South African colonial administration was largely indifferent to the ways in which "natives" in

64 Cited in Jones (2010: 117)
65 MET (2013: 1)
66 (2016: 774)
67 In the final stage of this "capturing" process, certain wildlife species may become privately owned to be hunted and used by individual community members (e.g. through an "own-use" permit) or by commercial operators.

the former homelands defended themselves and their livestock from "vermin", including lions,[68] the post-apartheid government is regarded as having taken back and recentralised control, rather than decentralising it through conservancies.

The lack of ownership and benefits, and the deception and oppression perceived by some communal area residents, contrast strongly with the perceived empowerment of others. But how predictably does this experiential discrepancy produce different degrees of environmental subjectification? In other words, do most people who benefit also "environmentalise", i.e. become 'environmental subjects' who intrinsically care about the environment?[69] Conversely, do those who do not benefit automatically resist conservation? What are the effects of divergent local experiences of conservancies and the limited reach of neoliberal and disciplinary environmentalities? How do communities govern conservancies in return and how do they negotiate distributional inequities?

5.4 Conservancy capture and the "politics of the belly": Frictions between global and local environmentalities

Based on the preceding discussion of local experiences of ownership and benefits as the pivots of conservancies' global environmentalities, one might be tempted to accept the conservation dictum that "those who benefit also care". The problem with this interpretation is that it constructs recipients as passive receivers of global governance logics. To caricature: insert incentives and the stick into any cultural context and at least those who get their bellies and pockets filled will forever act in conservation- and market-friendly ways. In the latter part of this chapter, I show that local experiences of neoliberal incentives like ownership and benefits are, in fact, only a limited predictor of local responses to conservation. The extent to which local people cooperate or resist conservation, or the extent to which they assimilate or reject global environmentalities, fundamentally depends on local desires and practices and the kind of social institutions they shape.

To put it more sociologically, local responses do not only depend on the global structures that conservancies aim to localise, but on the local structures and agencies through which they operate on the ground. In the context of Namibian conservancies, I argue that this friction between global and local ways of seeing and being in the world has produced a novel, hybrid environmentality characterised by what Jean-François Bayart calls 'the politics of the belly'. The politics of the belly is both 'a regime of economic accumulation and social inequality' and 'a "moral economy"' produced by the interactions between Africa and the rest of the world.[70] Following Foucault, Bayart specifically conceptualises the politics of the belly as a hybrid governmentality which mediates 'between the techniques of domination over others and techniques of the self'.[71] Like other forms of institutional (neo-)patrimonialism, patronage, clientelism, or corruption, participation is near-universal due to the network character of the politics of the belly, as well as its principles of reciprocity and partial redistribution of wealth: 'all actors—rich and poor—participate in the world of network'.[72]

68 While Indigenous Africans were prohibited from hunting wildlife and persecuting predators without official permission, it was effectively tolerated if local people defended themselves and their livestock from lions and other predators considered "vermin". This often included the killing of lions through plant-based poisons, spears, and bows and arrows. In one instance, in the 1940s, the Government even supplied rifles and ammunition to the traditional authorities at Sesfontein to enable the community to deal with marauding lions themselves (see Chapter 13). Despite Indigenous Africans' persecution of predators at the time, their restricted ability to do so should be seen in the context of racialised regulations and apartheid ideologies which empowered white settler farmers—and supported their removal of predators from their land—and further marginalised black farmers (Heydinger 2019: 58–80, 140–48).

69 cf. Agrawal (2005: 162)

70 Bayart (2009: xlix-l)

71 Foucault cited in Bayart (2009: xlvii)

72 *Ibid.*, p. 235

Nevertheless, to the extent that these networks are founded upon inequality, they also reproduce inequality.[73]

Before examining in detail how the politics of the belly play out at the local level within the membership of conservancies, it is important to highlight again the unequal power relations and parallel processes of enrichment unfolding between "local" patrimonial networks and "global" networks of State, international NGOs, and the private sector. The real "belly" filled through CBNRM structures is to be found at the level of Namibian and international NGOs, consultancies, and tourism operators, subsidised through major donors such as USAID, the World Bank (WB), KfW and WWF. This structural inequality was built into CBNRM from the start: the policy was driven largely by expatriates and white staff working in the environment ministry since before Independence, many of whom later found employment in the developing tourism industry and/or as CBNRM consultants. In contrast, in the early years of CBNRM, local people were actively discouraged from applying for formal Permission to Occupy Land (PTO) leases that would enable them to participate as entrepreneurs in the growing post-apartheid tourism sector.[74] As conservancies are argued to enable '*land acquisition for conservation* in the non-formal sense',[75] they in practice maintain the interests of conservationists, hunters, tour operators, investors, consultants, donors, and tourists.[76] NGO and consultancy services are a major part of CBNRM business. In addition, most economic transactions derived from tourism in Namibia are controlled by large tour operators, with power concentrated at national and international levels.[77]

Communal area residents, however, remain marginalised from tourism activities and incomes even within their conservancies, due to limited property rights, legal pluralism, public and private land appropriation, limited community capacity, and, as a result, often unequal co-management agreements.[78] Recent research confirms the limited "trickling down" of CBNRM income, both in Kunene and Zambezi regions, with about 16–20% of total tourism turnover captured by conservancies.[79] When I speak of conservancy capture at the local level in the following sections, therefore, it should be clear that what is being "captured" by communal area residents, and what they often fiercely fight over and negotiate through the politics of the belly, are the scraps left after processes of resource appropriation and capital accumulation by the conservation-tourism-development-security nexus. The smaller "bellies" of local elite and ordinary networks discussed in the following sections are thus a direct product of the larger bellies of global networks, as well as the highly unequal global-local interactions that maintain them.

5.4.1 The smaller "bellies" of local elite networks

Conservancies are a prime location of the mediation between the global and the local. As they represent the social institutions which contribute to the production and transmission of particular environmental subjectivities, they can be considered as frictional spaces in which the politics of the belly plays out. I argue that one prevalent and especially impactful articulation of the politics of the belly is when kin-based, patrimonial networks of local elites seize control of the conservancy and its limited benefit flows, what I call 'conservancy capture'. An unemployed ovaHimba shares her account of capture in Camelthorn conservancy:

> [w]e have headmen, the committee, the chairperson, the people who are on top [...] Look, we have lodges and campsites [...] The selected few who have connections to the people collecting the money

73 *Ibid.*, p. 269
74 Sullivan (2002: 158–59)
75 Jones (1999: 47, emphasis added); also discussed in Sullivan (2006: 115)
76 Sullivan (2002: 165, 2023)
77 Lapeyre (2011a)
78 Lapeyre (2011b: 311–12, 2011c: 226–17)
79 NACSO (2015), Schnegg & Kiaka (2018), Kalvelage *et al.* (2020)

> from tourists are the ones who are eating the money. The rest of us who are not committee members or headmen do not see the money. We don't benefit. […] The thing that hurts me the most in this conservancy is when there are employment opportunities. For example, these people just say, let's employ the child of the headman or that child of a person already working for the conservancy. Now, look, my mother and my father are unemployed. But they continue to employ members of specific families and children of those who are already employed. They ignore us. They don't take other people into consideration and that is painful to me. (#78, 17.11.2018, Camelthorn Conservancy)

In the following excerpt, the headman referred to in the preceding quote acknowledges that he is both complicit and complacent in the conservancy's capture, as he benefits indirectly through the employment of his relatives and fails to take action to change the circumstances. He confirms that capture is a challenge, although not a genuine concern to him:

> I told you that the committee is constantly changing. […] When the sitting committee is removed, you are told that they have been mismanaging and not doing their job. […] When you elect the new committee, you hope they will bring change and do a better job. But they are just doing the same. They just do the same the previous committee was doing. Maybe the people on the committee wrote a law that they are following but not sharing with the community [laughs]. As long as my child is employed and getting paid, I can get bread from it. So, we just sit here, even though the bosses are eating the money. (#76, 16.11.2018, Camelthorn Conservancy)

The headman alludes here to an unwritten law regarding benefits. In fact, people often talk about a "law of eating", which basically means that whoever gains access to the benefit flows of the conservancy is expected or even entitled to make use of these opportunities. In otjiHerero, *okuria* means both "to eat" and "to benefit". When people speak figuratively of "eating money", they refer to the illegitimate yet widespread practice of appropriating funds for themselves and their patrimonial networks. They are in fact talking explicitly of a politics of the belly. This is the very opposite of what CBNRM is supposed to be about yet, according to participant accounts, it is one of the key themes of conservancy governance. As an ovaHerero CGG states:

> [t]here were complaints from the community that the money is being eaten by the people who are on the committee. […] The people whom they selected [...] For example, they selected you, me, and one other person, and when we go to the bank together to withdraw money, *pheeeeeewwww* [swiping his fingers over his mouth while blowing out air to indicate that the money is gone with the wind], we finish it. You see? That problem is real. […] The day might come we end up shooting each other with firearms. (#60, 13.11.2018, Mopane Conservancy)

The politics of the belly encompasses virtually all kinds of benefits, from cash, through employment, to hunting. In at least two of the conservancies studied, there were several accounts of systematic over-hunting implicating the highest levels of conservancy management:

> Look, mis-use, for all these years, the men have been hunting more than the allocated quota. (#26, 24.9.2018, Welwitschia Conservancy)

> Look, it is a bit difficult to tell, but you can see that they were fiddling with the numbers. They had close relationships with the [former conservancy chairperson[80]] and they used to manipulate the papers and shoot more. It is a bit difficult to explain. They would tell you that they had shot the number of animals on the quota, but the next day they would come again and shoot more. It seemed they never reached the number of animals they had to shoot. (#33, 27.9.2018, Welwitschia Conservancy)

These statements reveal senior representatives of conservancies to be central players in systematic, illegal schemes of killing wildlife for commercial gain by shooting and selling more game than permitted under their government-approved quotas.[81] These narratives were further supported by

80 Name removed to protect informant's identity.

81 To provide some context, the environment ministry issues annually variable game harvesting quotas to each conservancy. The conservancy committee then decides what portion of the allocated quota is to be utilised for own-use hunting, shoot-and-sell, or trophy hunting. Under the shoot-and-sell system, conservancies, in partnership with

informal conversations with a professional hunter with decades of experience in the region. In my fieldnotes (FN 16.6.2018), I recount his account as following:

> [h]e claimed to have seen "refrigerator trucks filled to the top" with game; springbok, zebras and oryx lying on the ground. Some of the biggest trophies were apparently being "shot for butcheries from Swakopmund to Opuwo". These "hunting parties" weren't shooting animals professionally, according to prescribed hunting rules, but they were shooting from their vehicles; and they would leave injured animals, which they had failed to kill, to the predators. That way, a lot more game was killed than the quotas provided for. [Trophy hunter] reminisced about the time when wildlife along the route from Palmwag to Sesfontein was abundant. According to [trophy hunter], at one point the conservancy claimed to have counted an unbelievably high number of springbok and extrapolated that there were 80,000 animals in the area. As a result, it received a quota of 12,000 for three years. The manipulation of quotas and the subsequent, unprofessional killing of game led to the decimation of wildlife in the area. While people blame the severe drought for the large-scale decreases in game numbers, for [trophy hunter] it is evident that the local people are responsible.

It is important not to accept this account uncritically and make communities a scapegoat for the decline in plains game. In fact, it might even be useful for outside professional trophy hunters to be dismissive of local people's practices to gain an advantage in the competition for coveted hunting permits. Nevertheless, when local and outside testimonies are read together, it seems that conservancy capture and the politics of the belly are not only related to financial mismanagement but extend to natural resource management (NRM) and can undermine conservation goals directly. As conservancy "captors" become focused on exploiting business opportunities and maximising profits, the foundation of community-based conservation is at risk. The imbalance between business and NRM functions at management level is further experienced by ordinary members in the form of an increasingly neglected and slowly disintegrating CGG system, as observed by an ovaHerero farmer and an employee in the hunting industry respectively:

> [a] bad thing I noticed is that our game guards don't go out on patrol anymore. […] In the past, my grandfather and others always patrolled regularly to places like [remote springs][82] and elsewhere. Today, the game guards only receive their information from herders, even when a gemsbok dies in the river nearby. They don't walk around in the bush anymore. (#67, 17.11.2018, Witgat Conservancy)

> Yeah, but they [CGGs] are no longer working. They just stay at their homes and receive salaries. […] They don't do their job. All of them, they are sitting at their houses and wait for their pay. (#38, 6.10.2018, Welwitschia Conservancy)

This perception of a disintegrating CGG system was witnessed across all conservancies studied. Some respondents blamed an unfettered politics of the belly, particularly of a younger, more educated local elite who took over the conservancy management from an earlier, often less formally-educated, leadership.

Yet, in contrast to arguments made by Silva and Motzer[83] and De Vette and co-authors,[84] Bollig argues that there is 'very little evidence for systematic elite capture': rather than a small, wealthy, and powerful elite, committee members and conservancy managers are not considered to be systematically enriching themselves because of their embeddedness in kinship networks to which they allocate benefits in the form of employment.[85] While largely agreeing with his assessment, I would, however, maintain that since committee members are able to allocate locally vital benefits, such as employment, tenders, scholarships, meat, and transportation, they do, in fact, constitute

professional hunters, can shoot game species and sell the meat to generate a cash income. In recent years this system has been suspended in most conservancies due to the context of a multi-year drought and related declines in plains game, that were also connected with high offtake levels (see Chapter 3).

82 Place names erased to ensure anonymity.

83 (2015)

84 De Vette *et al.* (2012)

85 Bollig (2016: 785)

'a small group of powerful people that controls a disproportionate amount of wealth and political power'—Bollig's own definition of an elite[86]—in the form of benefit flows. In addition, I contend that their actions do reflect attempts at systematic enrichment, if not directly for themselves then at least for their kinship networks, which are traditionally conceived as reciprocal across ovaHerero, ovaHimba, and Damara/ǂNūkhoe cultures (and western culture as well) and in which wealth is often shared.[87] The typical members of conservancy committees are male, between 20 and 40 years of age, finished at least grade ten or 12, and—whilst without salaried work—are part of a young, educated elite which eagerly seeks to grow their herds.[88] The latter point is key. As Sullivan explains, in a semi-arid desert environment with frequent localised droughts, a wide, flexible, and reciprocating network of kin is particularly important for pastoralist groups to negotiate access to scarce resources, such as water and grazing.[89] Capturing a conservancy and directing its benefit flows towards one's patronage and kinship networks can, therefore, be interpreted as a systematic strategy to guarantee the survival and growth of one's herd, and thus the accumulation of one's wealth.

The maximisation of profits and economic growth achieved by local elite networks through conservancy capture at the expense of the wider communities' rural development, is a prime example of what happens when a neoliberal environmentality diffuses and combines with a local cultural context characterised by patronage and kinship relations. In other words, conservancy capture is the result of the hybridisation of a new, global mode of environmental governance and a deep-rooted local ordering based on reciprocity among patrons, clients, and kin. Across the study's four conservancies, committee members manifest their rational, economic self-interest as partly neoliberalised subjects by capturing benefit flows and re-directing them to their individual kin networks.[90] When neoliberal environmentality diffuses across a local cultural context that requires reciprocity and distribution of wealth to one's kin, the result is the reproduction of global-local inequalities at the local level, i.e. an exacerbation of local-local inequalities within the community. The visibility of distributional injustice across society further cultivates the politics of the belly. Although most people lament the status quo, everyone who gets a chance seems to participate. This is also true for more marginalised local people who are part of less powerful but nonetheless "hungry" networks.

5.4.2 The even smaller "bellies" of ordinary networks

At the community level, the politics of the belly, or the law of eating, is not only evidenced by elite networks' capture of the conservancy, but also by ordinary members' continuation of banned livelihood activities, as my conversation with Justus, a farmer in Mopane Conservancy, illustrates:

> [f]or example, if someone like me who only has his small house becomes hungry, I usually go around and ask from others who have livestock, but now these people tell me that they don't have any livestock for me [due to drought]. Would it be better if I stole a goat from these people or a springbok from the wild? Or am I supposed to even walk past a dead springbok?! [...] If you regularly steal a wild animal and you chuck it on the donkey cart, take it to [larger village], and sell it to get wasted [as in drunk], then you are doing a wrong thing. [...] We are all stealing. You even hear that there is corruption at Government-level. They are also stealing. The only problem is when you get caught [everyone laughs]. [...] Now how am I supposed to get my share here [in remote village] [laughs]?! [...] Look, there are people who get employed by the conservancy as a secretary or someone else handling cash, and when they are sent to withdraw money, they steal N$20,000 [USD 1,500]. Even when they are identified, they are just removed and replaced by other people. [...] Now, how are people who are never able to sit on

86 *Ibid.*
87 cf. Sullivan (2001: 187)
88 Bollig (2016: 784)
89 Sullivan (2001: 187)
90 Shinovene *et al.* (2020); see also Kleinfeld (2019)

> the committee or be employed, like the elderly, supposed to eat from the conservancy?! (#57, 18.10.2018, Mopane Conservancy)

Justus relates the widespread continuation of banned livelihood activities directly to the mismanagement and corruption of funds at both conservancy- and state-level. He justifies his illegal behaviour by asserting an entitlement to "his share" which, in the perceived absence of distributional, recognition,[91] and procedural justice,[92] he can only claim himself. This is another illustrative example of how local people negotiate and resist conservancies' neoliberal and disciplinary environmentalities. In contrast to conservancy members like Emma, Hosea, or the game guards and rangers cited in Section 5.3 who have successfully turned into environmental subjects, members like Justus resist environmental subjectification by pragmatically continuing to live as they did prior to the onset of community conservation.

But Justus's narrative and his ostensible escape from the conservancy's environmentalities also provide hope. Unlike the predatory and harmful resistance by local elite or kinship networks which violate principles of community conservation—such as sustainable use, democratic governance, and equitable benefit sharing—Justus clearly articulates an appreciation of sustainability and social justice. He would only hunt game or pick up a piece from a carcass if he was hungry and unable to acquire meat otherwise. Arguably, his moral compass is intact, for he does not wish to steal a goat from his neighbours but rather takes a springbok 'from the wild' which is formally owned by either of two institutions, i.e. the state or the conservancy, perceived by him to be distant and corrupt. His narrative then points to an Indigenous truth environmentality which coexists and struggles with the conservancy's dominant environmentalities. Rather than subscribing to the conservancy's novel environmental governance which bans unauthorised harvest of game, local people like Justus maintain their more intrinsic, alternative conceptions of both human-nature and local social relations, i.e. sustainable use and no thievery among neighbours, respectively. Although far from the norm, shimmers of truth environmentalities deeply rooted in people's identities occasionally gleamed through, as in Jan's account, an ovaHerero farmer from Witgat Conservancy:

> [t]he reason for protecting these animals is […] because we were born together and we are living alongside them. That little trick of the Government, that story of taking care of the animals because we might benefit from them, only came later. (#61, 14.10.2018, Witgat Conservancy)

Jan's claim to an essential human-wildlife connection that transcends dualistic ontologies suggests an intrinsic, Indigenous ethic of sustainability. Like Justus, who sees through the empty promises of the conservancy and is largely unaffected by either neoliberal or disciplinary environmentalities, Jan's articulation of a truth environmentality also entails a propensity to hunt sustainably for his own use and share the spoils with his neighbours:

> [t]he way we live together here, this gentleman knows that the springbok is like a goat. Neither of us is protecting these animals. We are just watching out for them not to be wasted. I will tell you honestly: if I go and kill a springbok and tell my friend here, we will just put it into the pot, eat it, and keep quiet about it. (#61, 14.10.2018, Witgat Conservancy)

The representation of these alternative conceptions is important in order to emphasise the limits of dominant environmentalities and local people's agency in resisting them. At the same time, they should be neither essentialised nor romanticised: they are not only heterogenous and hybridised, but their outcomes are unpredictable and potentially incommensurate with global visions of

91 'Recognition (in)justice' accounts for people's different epistemological and ontological worldviews. It specifically refers to policies and practices that acknowledge and even promote such worldviews, while avoiding interfering with or altering them (Martin *et al.* 2016). In Namibia's communal conservancies, recognition justice would acknowledge alternative, intrinsic local perspectives and values towards nature that might conflict with dominant neoliberal environmentalities (Sullivan 2006; Martin *et al.* 2013).

92 Schnegg & Kiaka (2018: 110–13)

conservation, security, and development. The commercial over-hunting by local elites and the continuation of unauthorised subsistence hunting by ordinary community members are testament to the unpredictability and potential undesirability of global-local outcomes.[93] But both elite and ordinary articulations of the politics of the belly are forms of resistance that remain hidden. As all community members seek to opportunistically work the system to their maximum advantage, they actively obscure their own malpractices, even if they lament those of others. As resourceful 'organic intellectuals',[94] they know exactly how to exploit their conservancies to maximise their claims to status, privilege, and benefits, i.e. 'brokered autonomy'.[95] Speaking to the Traditional Authority (TA) counsellor cited in Section 5.3.2, who felt that the government treated communities as if they were 'a bunch of stupid people', in reality, it seemed more like communities were taking the government and conservation for a ride. As the counsellor clarified: '[w]e are acting as if we were protecting the things [wildlife], but, in fact, we are not protecting them' (#25, 23.9.2018, Welwitschia Conservancy). To an extent, their dishonest relation and reciprocal deception serves a purpose for both conservation and communities. On the one hand, the government receives communities' "lip service" to conservation, which it requires for the secure commodification of natural resources on communal land and the marketisation of Namibia's celebrated conservation-development-tourism nexus. On the other hand, communities receive associated benefits and, at the same time, are able to continue to defy governmental logics without being held accountable.

To be clear, this neoliberal *laissez-faire* approach is fundamentally unjust as it empowers only local elites who are already in positions of power. Elite networks exploit and accumulate with impunity, while ordinary residents who kill an antelope for the pot are regularly fined or even imprisoned. Local elites are essentially given *carte blanche* to capture conservancies to benefit their kin-based patrimonial networks, while community members at the periphery of these networks are further marginalised. Moreover, the accountability gap is not only problematic because it entrenches local inequalities, but it effectively transfers frictions between global and local environmentalities to the community level where they have the potential to develop into protracted intra-community conflicts.

5.5 The accountability gap: An unfettered politics of the belly in conservancies?

The politics of the belly and other forms of patrimonial governance can be considered a legitimate form of authority or belief, rather than a pathology.[96] In fact, Bayart emphasises that the politics of the belly has 'absolutely no normative connotation'.[97] Arguably, conservancies' hybrid form of governance permits the politics of the belly to simultaneously enable and debilitate local conservation, development, and, above all, empowerment efforts. Nevertheless, across my study area, communal area residents consistently complained about conservancy capture and protested the distributional injustice of the politics of the belly. There was clearly an accountability gap, as NACSO attests:

> [f]requently there is a lack of willingness or ability to enforce decisions and to deal with bad practices. Financial mismanagement and corruption is an issue in point. Many committees have not dealt quickly and effectively with cases of corruption, and police support has not always been forthcoming when requested. […] There has also been a tendency for committees to recycle themselves, without fresh

93 Also see Vaughan *et al.* (2004)
94 Cavanagh & Benjaminsen (2015: 730)
95 Tilly (2004: 14)
96 Pitcher *et al.* (2009: 149)
97 Bayart (2009: lxxvi)

> blood coming in. This enables the same people to build up power bases by representing the committee to outsiders and government, and to receive sitting allowances.[98]

One reason why "eating" committees are not simply replaced is the near-universal participation in the politics of the belly, combined with patronage networks organised along kin and ethnic lines that successfully mobilise their support bases to obstruct any challenges by opposing groups (also see Chapters 6 and 7). I argue further, however, that the main reason why conservancy capture persists, despite widespread discontent and resistance, is a somewhat naïve and idealistic notion that the community itself must hold their committees accountable. While commendable for its empowering spirit, in practice, the principle of leaving rural communities to resolve governance issues entirely by themselves favours those already in positions of power and entrenches local inequalities. Is it really fair to expect subsistence farmers with limited formal education (if any) to hold a new, better educated and sometimes predatory elite to account for complex institutional and financial processes? A conversation with Dimo, a local ovaHerero chief and long-term NGO advisor on conservancy governance, made these dynamics remarkably clear:

> I think, it depends on the Government, how strong they will be regarding the issue. […] The current national policy of conservancies clearly states that the members must hold committees accountable. You understand there? They have to hold the committee accountable. But imagine a guy like [chairperson of Welwitschia Conservancy]. [Chairperson], uhm, we know him as a gangster. He is a guy who [...] he is a very dangerous guy, you know him. He grew up in towns: Namibia, South Africa, travelling there. The guy does not work. But what type of cars is he driving every time [expensive 4x4 vehicles]? So, a poor community member, you are expecting that poor member to hold that person accountable? (#98, 17.2.2019, Mopane Conservancy)

The administrative officer of Camelthorn Conservancy agrees that pitting ordinary members against powerful, educated committees is an unfair match. He feels left alone by the Government:

> [t]here is a problem with the illiteracy among our people. [...] We are just waiting for the committee because we cannot organise a meeting ourselves. We have given that authority to the committee. I don't know what we can do. We asked the committee to call the meeting but they don't. We requested the Government to help but they remain quiet. That is why I say that the Government is somehow hiding something. Or, why else wouldn't it look into these issues? Next year is their [committee's] third and final year. All these past years they never held a meeting. (#80, 18.11.2018, Camelthorn Conservancy)

For the Government and NGOs, intervention in conservancy governance is a risk. Arguably, they have little to gain and much to lose. NGOs have no formal mandate to challenge a committee that was supposedly democratically elected by a conservancy's membership. If NGOs intervened, they might risk forfeiting their legitimacy; although there's a certain irony here that the same NGOs that proposed conservancies and facilitated their proliferation through Namibia's communal areas should not be accountable for their outcomes. While the Government formally has an oversight role and the right to remove a committee and/or de-gazette a conservancy under certain circumstances, by default, it would risk becoming embroiled in local politics and antagonising a powerful local network. In the absence of outside intervention, the community is left to challenge elite networks itself. This can lead to the formation of factions within a community with different networks vying for local hegemony. The intra-community conflicts further reinforce patron-client relations associated with the politics of the belly as networks often seek to mobilise supporters and increase their relative strength vis-à-vis other networks.

Hendrik, an outspoken Riemvasmaaker member of Welwitschia Conservancy, even claims to have been directly threatened by senior committee members, implying that should he continue to commit "libel" against them he might have a road accident in the future:

98 NACSO (2016: 25)

> [t]hey [committee members] are threatening if you go and report them, they say they will find you on the road. The man will apparently kill you. […] I was personally threatened and then I decided if it is like that then each one must live his own life. I on my own and he on his own. (#38, 06.10.2018, Welwitschia Conservancy)

While this is a serious allegation, having stayed with Hendrik for several days at his farm, I have no reason to question the authenticity and truthfulness of his story. At the very least, considering Dimo's account of Welwitschia's chairperson as a "gangster" (interviewee #98), it speaks to the possibility of physical violence in the context of conservancy capture. Threats of violence and violence itself are then part of community-level disciplining that prevents critical voices from being raised, listened to, and acted upon. Sometimes they even risk reinforcing social, economic, and ethnic cleavages with the potential for severe intra-community social conflict, with some respondents even comparing inequitable governance of conservancies to new forms of apartheid.[99] The consequence can be local resignation, a sense of powerlessness, and ultimately withdrawal:

> [w]hat will it help if I get angry? You will just be angry and hurt your heart. I just lead my life. You will never go and approach them [people at the top]. What will you discuss with them? (#37, 06.10.2018, Welwitschia Conservancy)

To be clear, communal area residents are not passive and/or helpless bystanders. Analyses of patrimonial governance often wrongly construct people in such contexts as both unable to adhere to principles of liberal democracy and too passive in demanding accountability.[100] Instead, local people in north-west Namibia are pragmatic survivors who participate and protest in the politics of the belly depending on their opportunities. They demand accountability but struggle to hold powerful networks to account, or to shift the balance of power in favour of their own networks. Some may resign because they have been angry and frustrated for too long.

It appears that a major limitation of conservancies' institutional architecture is its reliance on an unbridled neoliberal environmentality: a mode of strictly market-based environmental governance which includes neither an external, structural incentive against capture—such as a credible threat of government intervention, nor sufficient space for non-neoliberal environmentalities to meaningfully develop Indigenous, social justice oriented environmentalities. As Foucault asserts: '[n]eoliberalism should not be identified with *laissez-faire*, but rather with permanent vigilance, activity and intervention'.[101] Since the market is an 'artificial construct' that was 'actively created' and needs to be 'constantly maintained',[102] to the extent that conservancies are primarily based on a neoliberal environmentality promoting an unrestrained market logic, they need to be contained through re-regulation. Given the adverse outcomes of conservancy capture for both nature and people, it seems that those governing community conservation in Namibia—government, NGOs, committees, and ordinary members—have either forgotten or are severely neglecting their crucial roles in accountability and regulation. When formulating her principles for common pool resource management institutions, Ostrom already forewarned that:

> [p]owerful individuals who stand to gain from the current situation, while others lose, may block efforts by the less powerful to change the rules of the game. Such groups may need some form of external assistance to break out of the perverse logic of their situation.[103]

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99 Friedman (2014[2011]: 76-80) also observed new forms of apartheid, or "neo-apartheid", in the former "homeland" of "Kaokoland". Focussing on the social relations between Namibia's dominant Ovambo ethnic group and the Kunene Region's ovaHerero and ovaHimba, he discusses how "Kaokolanders" often feel that their region is structurally neglected and discriminated against in relation to the allocation of resources, e.g. development and employment. He argues that for many people today the discrimination and inequality among Indigenous groups is perceived more severely than the apartheid under South African rule (also see Chapters 4 and 16).

100 Pitcher *et al.* (2009: 149)

101 Foucault (2008: 132)

102 Fletcher (2010: 173)

103 Ostrom (1990: 21)

The expectation that communities must self-enforce is like asking a mafia family to hold its godfather to account.

This exacerbation of intra-community social conflict can, at least partly, be explained by the introduction through CBNRM of a neoliberal environmentality to the local political economy. This neoliberal environmentality is embodied, in hybridised form, in the politics of the belly and, as such, reinvented by local agencies for their own purposes, i.e. the maximisation of advantages and benefits to one's patrimonial, kin-based networks. As this section has illustrated, however, the hybridisation of neoliberal environmentality through communal area residents does not necessarily make it more socially just. In contrast, it has the potential to increase inequalities and, thus, intensify local cleavages and intra-community social conflict. This situation further reinforces my earlier argument about the need for additional oversight, support, mediation and, if necessary, re-regulation of conservancies. As forewarned by both Foucault in 2008 (originally 1978–1979) and Ostrom in 1990, if inequality is to be opposed, neoliberal environmentality has to be kept in check, irrespective of whether it works through global or local networks.

5.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that when conservancies' global neoliberal and disciplinary environmentalities work through local agencies, they produce a hybrid environmentality characterised by the politics of the belly. I showed how local people experience the pivots of the conservancy system, i.e. the structural incentives of ownership and benefits, emphasising how both neoliberal and disciplinary environmentalities—as forms of environmental governance—interact to successfully produce both market- and conservation-friendly subjects. The diffusion of environmentalities and the production of desired subject positions is limited, however, because of unequal benefit distribution; as well as partial and temporary ownership rights experienced by communal area residents as mere rhetoric to turn goat and cattle herders into "environmentalised" herders of state-owned wildlife.

While there is no doubt that some conservancy members receive benefits, have experiences of ownership, and become neoliberal and/or environmental subjects, I have shown that there is significant experiential discrepancy. The majority of local people do not have experiences of ownership, and many do not receive benefits. But no matter how ambiguous, limited, and temporary the rights, or how uneven the benefits, communities are still in charge of conservation on the ground. By seeing through incentive mechanisms and rhetoric, they demystify environmental governance and re-negotiate it on their own terms through the politics of the belly.

No doubt my critical, Foucauldian framing will raise eyebrows among Namibian conservation and development practitioners. While institutional challenges are widely acknowledged, few question the internationally celebrated and locally praised conservancy programme: the associated silencing of critical questioning is itself a form of disciplining.[104] After all, conservancies are closely linked to the restoration of Indigenous rights and national reconciliation. Nobody argues with that, and neither do I. Indeed, let me be clear that, despite my critical framing, I am a staunch supporter of conservancies. As an idea and a vision, I wholeheartedly believe in them. But as an institution and a socio-political reality, my research experience indicated that they are in urgent need of reform. They still reflect the neoliberal idealism of the 1980–1990s without having recognised its local consequences in the 21st century. They are institutionally rooted in the past and somewhat lost in the present; long derailed but still going. There is a need to refocus on empowerment, not conservation and "development"; and to refocus on people's experiences and everyday realities to champion not neoliberal and disciplinary environmentalities, but 'democratic, egalitarian, and non-hierarchical forms of natural resource management in which local people enjoy a genuinely participatory (if not

104 Koot *et al.* (2023)

self-mobilising) role'.[105] Conservancies should also no longer displace, but instead promote, 'truth' or 'liberation' environmentalities that reflect Indigenous beliefs, intrinsic values, and non-dualistic ontologies, rather than global neoliberal environmentalities. The question that remains is how much of that "truth" remains after three decades of neoliberal environmental governance.

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105 Fletcher (2010: 178)

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