Chief, Hunters and San in the Creation of the Moremi Game Reserve, Okavango Delta
Multiracial Interactions and Initiatives, 1956-1979

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Preface and Acknowledgements

In the 21st century nature conservation and development in Africa have become topical issues because of the challenges arising from the need to balance wildlife conservation and the presence of humans within or adjacent to areas designated as game reserves and national parks. The challenge for African governments is protecting biodiversity while ensuring sustainable livelihoods for marginal communities. African countries have also become increasingly receptive to foreign pressure through international conservation organisations to evaluate their policies on fencing, mineral exploitation and the conservation of fauna and flora. In response to this pressure some countries including Botswana have signed international conventions that propose to monitor biologically diverse areas such as the Okavango Delta in northern Botswana. Botswana has set aside a large proportion of land as protected areas. Among the protected areas is the Moremi Game Reserve, a significant park located within the Okavango wilderness, recognized as one of the world's most ecologically important wetlands. As a Ramsar site, the Okavango is subject to international coordinated management and protocol with regard to its exploitation and utilisation. Rich with numerous and diverse wildlife and vegetation species the Okavango provides a variety of subsistence economic activities for different cultural ethnic groups who occupy the river basin. These groups include the San indigenous people, who are amongst the most marginalized in southern Africa.

In response to the vulnerability of their economies, African countries have attracted international consultancies, in some cases commissioned by the World Bank, to address tourism development. Although diamond mining has generated most of the revenues to develop infrastructures and services in the country, Botswana is now regarding tourism as a long-term component of its development. The government has produced a range of policy statements and development frameworks that have assisted in guiding the tourism industry forward. However, nature conservation and tourism development in Botswana and other parts of the continent have increasingly attracted international NGO advocacy in support of local indigenous organisations or community-based land rights movements. A good recent example is that of the San taking the Botswana government to the High Court (2004, 2006) contesting the removal of the inhabitants of the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (CKGR). The CKGR issue, like the Masaai land claim in East Africa, has remained a contested issue, and is far from being resolved given the continuous local and international media coverage and academic publications.

This book, a history which might be called a 'biography of Moremi' is a study that examines the historical and contemporary links in wildlife conservation. It demonstrates how the history of game parks in Africa has involved complex inter-relationships among governments, local advocacy groups (NGOs), and international conservationists in trying to reconcile first, conflict between wildlife conservation and the livestock economy; and