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FLUID BOUNDARIES: CONSERVATION, ENCLOSURE, AND OWNERSHIP IN
THE BAHAMAS

BY

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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This dissertation examines how people negotiate rightful ownership and access to contested space undergoing governance change. Based on 24 months of ethnographic research on protected area conservation in The Bahamas, this dissertation explores how people maintain and transgress material and symbolic boundaries as the west side of Andros Island transitions from a locally-valued commons to globally-valued protected area. In response to growing global concerns over declining fisheries and vulnerability of small island nations, the Bahamas Government has declared large tracts of land and sea as protected areas throughout the archipelago nation. Andros Island, as the largest and most rural island, has been reconfigured as an ideal location for protection, as an island

both abundant in natural resources and vulnerable to change. In Andros, access and ownership claims are managed through multilayered customs and laws including long-standing oral tenure institutions. Conservationists, Bahamian residents, scientists, and resource users claim rights of access to resources and space through socially embedded processes which create, impose, maintain, bridge, transpose and dispute boundaries. Discernible differences exist in each person's claim, not only in the types of boundaries marked by individuals from different social spheres, but in how people enact a sense of entitlement and rightful claim through different ideas of legitimacy and belonging. My research finds that personal and social attributes such as class, race, and social and economic status inform how people: 1) perceive the environment as well as policies of protected area enclosure, and 2) negotiate particular spatial and social boundaries including property claims, knowledge claims, resource access rights, and belonging. What constitutes a rightful claim of access and ownership is not a fixed phenomenon, but reflects fluid social positioning, such as racial identity, kinship, and knowledge performativity. Ignoring the divergence in how people make claims can lead to a mismatch in resource management strategies, (and ultimately to failed policy initiatives), as well as loss of material and symbolic wealth and security among people living near protected areas.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

The Caribbean comprises a series of island nations, seemingly isolated from mainland (and by implication mainstream) politics, trade, and language. However, the Caribbean has been critically engaged with flows of people, goods, ideas, and linguistic practices for centuries, most horrifically through the trade of enslaved Africans. As a Caribbean nation, The Bahamas represents a point-of-contact of the land and sea, of the northern and southern hemispheres, of cultures, and of peoples historically traveling far from their original homes whether colonist, enslaved, or tourist and conservationist. Like other island regions, The Bahamas is a place of transition, political domination, rebellion, colonization, independence, as well as a homeland to a population of about 365,000 people. This fluidity is central to marine conservation from the mobility of resources themselves to the international market for fish, as well as the intersection of multiple and layered forms of resource governance.

This research examines the ways Bahamian residents, scientists, resource users, and conservationists negotiate material, social, and symbolic boundaries linked to conservation policies dependent on establishing protected areas, or what I here call enclosure conservation. Individuals who are positioned differently socially (with regard to class, education, gender, occupational and racial distinctions) maintain, cross, and transgress boundaries in very different ways. Discernible differences exist, not only in the types of boundaries marked by individuals from different social spheres, but also in their methods of engaging with them. Who feels entitled to access natural resources such as

fisheries, land, fresh water, or the sea, and how do people enact this sense of entitlement with respect to ideas of legitimacy and belonging? I argue that what constitutes a rightful claim of access and ownership is not a fixed phenomenon, but reflects fluid social contingencies such as racial identity, kinship, and knowledge performativity. Ignoring the divergence in how people make claims can lead to a mismatch in resource management strategies, (and ultimately to failed policy initiatives) as well as loss of material and symbolic wealth for people living in and near protected areas.

My theoretical position is that Bahamians claim rights of access to resources in the context of protected area conservation through socially embedded processes used to create, impose, maintain, bridge, transpose or dispute boundaries. I found that personal and social attributes such as class, race, gender, and social and economic status inform how people: 1) perceive the environment as well as policies of enclosure, and 2) negotiate particular spatial and social boundaries including property claims, knowledge claims, resource access rights, and belonging. This research focuses on how people experience and talk about Change: change of the land and sea itself through climatic events, conservation practices, and adjustments in governance; change in the ways people use and claim access to resources; and changes in how people are thinking about these entitlements.

ANDROS ISLAND AND THE WESTSIDE NATIONAL PARK

Situated within the 100,000 miles of ocean and over 700 cays that make up the Commonwealth archipelago of The Bahamas, Andros Island is often described as more sea than land. Stretching 100 miles long and 40 miles wide, Andros is the largest and

least populated island in the nation. Although considered one island, that land itself is pocked with large bodies of marshland, extensive mangrove habitat, and tidal caves commonly known to residents as Blue Holes. Just off the eastern shore lies The Tongue of the Ocean, an oceanic trench dropping from 10 to over 6,000 feet deep. On the west side of the island begins the Great Bahamas Bank, a vast and shallow bank of sand that sweeps west 50 miles to The Biminis and south nearly to Cuba. The Great Bahamas Bank is the epicenter of the Bahamian fishing industry. Whether from the small and tenuous Androsian sponge fishery to the national and highly lucrative spiny lobster fishery, it is to the Great Bahamas Bank that fishers drive their boats to harvest the sea's resources. Sportfishers from around the globe travel to the bank to experience the excitement of casting for the aptly named bonefish (*Albula Vulpes*), permit (*Trachinotus falcatus*), or shark. Although much of the west side of Andros remains uninhabited save one lodge and the occasional make-shift shelter for seasonal hunting, fishing boats—large and small, local and beyond—populate the islands' horizon throughout the year. It is to the shores of Andros, The Great Bahamas Banks, that Bahamians and tourists alike come to fish, making claims of access and ownership to marine resources. Use of the region has altered significantly over the years from early sponging, shipwrecking, and turtle harvesting through the early 20th century to agriculture, tourism and drug trafficking more recently. The changing land and seascapes are venues for dispute, resolution and negotiation of difference.

A popular tourist destination, the Bahamas conjures up images of sun drenched beaches and crystalline blue oceans. These paradisiacal images mask complex socio-cultural processes that govern access to resources and property throughout the Bahamas

including Andros Island. Throughout the Bahamas, Androsians have a reputation as exceptional seafarers, fishers and storytellers—able to navigate complex waterways and thrive in an area that is not quite solid ground nor fluid sea. Unlike other areas in the Bahamas where tourism has dominated, foreign ownership of resources is still fiercely contested in Andros.

Bahamian waters are governed by a public trust principle, in theory allowing all Bahamian residents equal access to the sea. In practice, complex claims of ownership and access to marine resources are nested within a hierarchical framework of tenureship including government regulations as well as customary laws. Access to marine resources is linked to notions of “rightful” ownership and often communicated through oral pathways loaded with meanings about gender, race, place, and belonging. As international and national conservation agencies in partnership with the government enclose large tracts of coastal waters—once considered a marine commons for island residents and Bahamian citizens—governance of resources shifts in scale and structure from localized negotiation processes to top-down and transnational regulation. What is considered a “rightful claim” to resources also shifts in scale and meaning.

In 2002, The Bahamas National Trust (BNT) joined with Androsian conservation organizations, Andros Conservancy and Trust (ANCAT) and the Bahamas Sportfishing Conservation Association (BSCA), to propose the Central Andros National Park (CANP) system on Andros Island. As part of that system, BNT named 300,000 acres of western low lying coastline and marine habitat as the Westside National Park (WNP). As soon as the Bahamian government granted the proposal, the partnership joined with The Nature Conservancy (TNC) to develop a plan to expand the WNP northward. In 2009, TNC , in

partnership with BNT, ANCAT, and BSCA proposed a significant extension of the original WNP. After a well-funded rapid ecological assessment of the area, several outreach campaigns, and extensive discussions among conservationists and scientists, the proposal was submitted to the Bahamas government in the fall of 2009. At the very last minute, a head staff member at BNT decided to dramatically increase the proposal boundaries to include the entire west side of the island—over twice the original proposed area. The newly proposed park extended along the whole western coastline of Andros, from the southern to northwestern most tips of the island (see Figure 1). The Minister of the Environment announced the government's approval in October 2009 during The Bahamas National Trust's 50th year gala celebration. The preliminary boundary lines were established, enclosing the entire west side of Andros as a protected area.

To promote the expansion and develop a management plan for the larger WNP, The Nature Conservancy spearheaded a rapid ecological assessment (REA) of the largely uninhabited west side of Andros in 2006. The REA on Andros was funded to a large extent by the Kerzner Marine Foundation, an international marine conservation organization spearheaded by the luxury resort developer Sol Kerzner, owner of such well-known resorts as Sun City in South Africa and Atlantis in the Bahamas. Kerzner's involvement highlights the linkage between conservation and tourism, profit and environmental protection.

For the REA an interdisciplinary team of international researchers gathered evidence on the area's environmental worth such as biological diversity, ecological habitats, and freshwater reserves. Of particular interest to the conservation agenda were the populations of hawksbill, green, and loggerhead sea turtles, including the only known

aggregation of juvenile loggerhead (*Caretta caretta*) turtles in the Wider Caribbean (TNC 2006, website). The research team discovered that the west side may also provide important nursery habitat for various shark species and habitat for the endangered West Indian Pink Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus ruber*) (ibid).

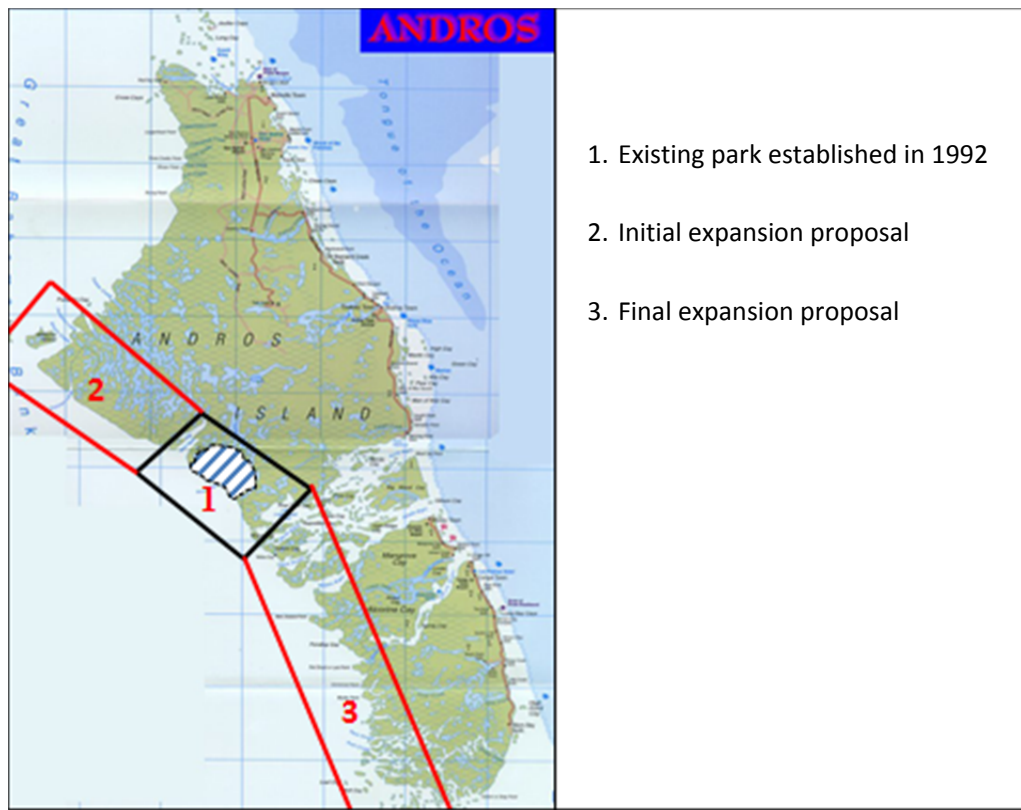


FIGURE 1: MAP OF ANDROS ISLAND. EARLY MARINE PROTECTED AREA HATCHED IN BLUE, SUBSEQUENT EXPANSIONS IN BLACK AND RED.

*ADAPTED FROM: [HTTP://WWW.THE-BAHAMA-ISLANDS.COM/ISLANDMAPS/ANDROSMAPH.HTML](http://www.the-bahama-islands.com/islandmaps/androsmaph.html)

Environmental value was calculated based on a range of measures which spanned important ideas about territoriality as well as vague notions of value-through-scarcity. Indices used to highlight the worth of the west side spanned global and regional significance in terms of the health of reefs worldwide as well as threatened local livelihoods. In 2005, TNC described the west side park as, “a rare opportunity to protect

pristine Bahamian wilderness” (TNC 2005), emphasizing the impression of a globally significant, undisturbed, unused, and unmanaged habitat in need of protection.

Any distinction made between local and global is complicated by the social and material fluidity among island nations and the Caribbean in particular. The emblematic island is bounded (and battered) on all sides by sea, and exposed to outside forces, such as climatic events, foreign speculation, and resource extraction. Although seemingly remote and estranged from the wider world, island residents have been engaged in international trade for centuries, first through shipping or the slave trade, later for resource extraction and tourism, and more recently, as central points of convergence for international players in development, conservation, and drug trafficking. Islands can be seen as a place of assemblage (Ong and Collier 2005), where any distinction between local and global has long been complicated by time and the fluidity of people, goods, and the ocean itself.

THE SHIFTING COMMONS

Andros is the largest island in the Bahamas: its area is larger than the rest of the nation’s islands and cays combined. The west side is considered “Crown Land,” government land held in trust for the people of the Bahamas by the Queen of England. Crown land holds important meaning for many Bahamians as land available to those making a “rightful claim.” At the heart of the matter is the complex and socially contingent notion of “rightful.” The west side of Andros has essentially remained unclaimed by any one individual (with one noted exception I will discuss in later chapters), instead operating as a coastal commons encompassing both land and sea. Andros residents viewed the west side of Andros as a locally used commons used by

residents and other Bahamians for fishing, sponging, straw harvest, and other resources for over two hundred years (Albury 1975). With the growing international concern over environmental issues and the state of the oceans, conservation agents identified the area as an empty and unused (and thus not-yet-damaged) natural resource with global environmental importance and claimed it as a government-owned and managed protected area. Conservation agents, residents, and resource users have become authors in how the area is imagined and utilized. The Nature Conservancy defined the west side of Andros as a "global asset," (TNC 2006), thereby challenging local perceptions of marine resources, ownership, and access rights. In the course of just a few years the largest commons in the Bahamas was transformed from a public good for Bahamians, commonly shared by the people living and working in the area, to an international resource of tremendous symbolic and material value to the broader world. The change was swift, but it was subtle. No infrastructure was built immediately and some residents did not even know about the debates regarding rightful access to Androsian resources. The west side remains remote for many, only accessible to those with a boat or seaplane so there is little opportunity to witness the transition. In other ways, the move to enclose the western coastline was jarring. Essentially, the enclosure of the west side of Andros acted as a transfer of property from the public domain to a quasi-governmental organization with a conservation agenda. Within the course of one evening and at the request of one conservation official, the Bahamas government redefined the west side commons as a protected space with restricted access (although the details were not yet determined until many years later). Authority over the area shifted from central government and regional custom, to The Bahamas National Trust and with the authority, transferred the rights to

determine access: thus, the western coastline of Andros shifted from public space to managed land under the purview of BNT.

SOCIO-CULTURAL ASPECTS OF PROTECTED AREAS

Previous research on the socio-cultural aspects of protected areas has illustrated that as the systems of governance change, so do people's notions of property rights, belonging, social networks, and economic conditions shift in scale and content (Bene & Tewfik 2001, Carrier 2003, Sen and Nielson 1996). My dissertation research examines these changes with respect to contested claims of belonging and access. In response to the question: *how do people make resource claims in context of a large scale enclosure conservation project*, I examine how various claiming processes are influenced by—while simultaneously influencing—social networks, parameters of belonging, identity, and physical space. Conservation processes such as protected areas create social frameworks as they re-allocate resources, define working relationships, facilitate particular alliances, and distribute power. My research illustrates that in Andros, for residents, conservationists and scientists to make claims of resource ownership and access, they must establish legitimacy through particular social processes tied to a shared conceptualization of natural space. Whether a claim to contested space is viewed as legitimate depends on how individuals are positioned within social and cultural relationships—with the marine environment and each other. In this way, the notion of a legitimate claim is a dynamic process involving and contingent on social networks and linkages to the environment through experiential and scientific knowledge, through blood ties and bodily experience.

Drawing on other scholars' work that links the seascape with Bahamian identity and belonging (Stoffle and Minnis 2007), I suggest that in order to establish "rightful" access to resources, Bahamians must engage in boundary work (Gieryn 1983; Johnson 2007; Lamont and Molnar 2002), those processes that serve to create, manage, challenge and span boundaries in authoritative sources of expertise and knowledge, such as claiming generational and scientific knowledge, and familial links. My research suggests that Androsians use oral documentation of their historical ties—and thus claims—to the landscape and ocean through narratives of personal and familiar belonging and experience. This type of attachment to the land and sea contrasts with those of researchers and conservationists who produce their own claims of legitimate authority through access to privileged forms of knowledge and broader global networks.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Spatial and social boundaries reflect differences in people's social configurations, as well as in how they make access claims and use the land- and seascapes. By exploring conceptualizations of tenure and access to contested space among residents, resource managers, policy makers, and scientists in Andros Island, this research asks:

- 1) How do people negotiate spatial and social boundaries within the context of the west side of Andros as it transitions from a locally valued and governed commons to an internationally valued and regulated protected area?*
- 2) How do residents, managers, policy makers, and scientists make resource claims, and how is the legitimacy of these claims recognized differently given differing notions of belonging and jurisdiction?*
- 3) How do institutions, including behavioral and legal systems of governance, reflect the ways people engage with and respond to the change in governance?*
- 4) How do people—in different geographic and social positions in relationship to the West Side National park—think and talk about conservation, property, and ownership?*

5) As resource use as well as the ways people imagine themselves and the region, shift in scale, how do scientists, residents, resource users, and managers understand, mark and negotiate spatial and social boundaries with regard to marine resource decision-making?

In addressing these questions, I will show that the effort to establish the WNP on Andros Island has led to controversy over rightful access to resources, questions of belonging, foreign ownership, and what it means to claim Bahamian identity. I will also discuss how conceptions of rightful access and belonging are charged with ideas about gender, race, and place (Bethel 2001; Rheingold 2002).

ENCLOSURE CONSERVATION

Globally, there is growing concern over deforestation, habitat destruction, and declining wildlife and fish populations, and species extinction. In an attempt to more effectively protect natural resources, resource policy has shifted from single species protection to a broad-scale ecosystem approach to management. Enclosure conservation—the demarcation of an area placed under certain restrictions for the purpose of protection—has gained momentum in recent years as a tool to protect valuable habitat and species and mitigate negative impacts from overharvest. Historically, there has been a shift in protected area management from state-mandated restricted access preservation areas in which no extractive activity is allowed (the “fortress approach”), toward increased stakeholder participation, multiple use zoning, and decentralized management (Pugh and Potter 2003). In an attempt to more effectively protect natural resources, policy has shifted from single species protection to a broad-scale ecosystem approach to management.

The act of enclosure is one of exclusion and or retention, retaining a specific resource while keeping other elements out. Touted as a “whole ecosystem approach to conservation,” protected areas have gained in popularity over the last decade as effective policy tools (Lubchenco et al. 2003). Increasingly, protected area policy is used internationally to protect wildlife and fish species, habitat, and important natural, cultural, and historical resources. Protectionist approaches have sought to gazette off areas of land and sea for the purpose of limited and specific uses, often excluding traditional users and residents for the benefit of an elite few.

COMMUNITY-BASED ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT

Community-based conservation (CBC) emerged after conventional, top-down protected area conservation tactics failed to achieve conservation goals, while often further marginalizing borderland communities. In the past, the belief was that safeguarding biodiversity could be achieved through the preservation of natural resources rather than conscientious management techniques. The gazetting of protected areas sometimes reduced entire communities to the voiceless disenfranchised poor. Early conservation focused on zero-take and no extractive use policies. Rampant non-compliance of conservation regulations coupled with a growing awareness about social injustices arising from restricted resource use led to new and innovative conservation strategies. In the early 1990's, participatory approaches gained in popularity and conservation agents are now more likely to incorporate some component of CBC into the plan. Collaborative management or a

cross-scale approach recognizes the inherent complexity of natural systems and generates institutional linkages to address these complexities on several levels.

If conservation issues are complex-systems problems, they have to be addressed simultaneously at various scales...Hence, cross-scale conservation requires linking institutions horizontally (across space) and vertically (across levels of organization). One can identify a broad range of variations within this approach, and linkages are context specific and therefore difficult to predict.

Berkes, 2004: 625

Conservation managers have long argued that people require adequate incentives to preserve the natural environment or the costs of conservation will be too great to overcome (Geoghegan and Renard 2002; McNeely 1988; Renard 2001; White 2002). Top-down protection mandates, followed by ineffective enforcement have only led to community/protected area conflicts that increase monitoring costs and reduce effective management (Peter, et al. 2011). Without adequate enforcement, protected areas offer little in the way of protection and can be a tremendous drain on limited resources. This is particularly true for marine systems because they represent classic characteristics of a commons such as of boundary fluidity and shared or access to resources.

Studies confirm the need for adequate and persistent enforcement of resource regulation rather than stiff one-time penalties. Indeed, evidence illustrates that severe penalties for infractions are not as effective as the high risk of detection (Abbot and Mace 1999), further strengthening the need for effective monitoring and enforcement mechanisms.

Understanding non-compliance on both the household and community levels is central when integrating stakeholders into a conservation project (Ostrom 2002).

Clear communication among stakeholder groups and managers is crucial for effective implementation of conservation projects (White, et al., 2002). This is of particular importance when trying to engage often-marginalized sectors of the community, such as women (Otsyina and Rosenberg 1999); but it must be noted that total inclusion is impossible given available resources and the complex nature of human systems. For a variety of reasons—logistical, social, and individual—it is not possible to have full representation within any group. Within one sector of the community, there exists several motives for resource use, decision-making, and regulatory compliance (Futemma 2002; Ostrom 1999; Trist 2003). Even within one community relying on one industry, such as fishing, variation among members exists (Renard, 2001), emphasizing the need to recognize heterogeneity.

De-centralization of authority through participatory conservation is often presented as beneficial when circumstances allow for adequate and appropriate participation among community members (Pimbert and Pretty 1995). “*In particular, we need to empower all stakeholders to fulfill their role in protected area management*” (IUCN 2006). However, there are significant critiques, including Berkes’ point that natural and human systems are highly complex, elusive and ever-changing (Berkes 2004; Berkes 2007). Ribot (2004) emphasizes the role of hierarchical power within environmental agendas: “Participation in the exercise of environmental regulatory powers transform local people into ‘environmental subjects.’ It is an important part of the development of environmental consciousness” (Ribot 2004: 12).

Decentralized management or community conservation is a product of a specific socio-economic history as well as the global spread of conservation movements (Igoe

2004). Decentralized systems must traverse multiple scales and can result in profound inequities. Research on protected area management emphasizes the integration of complexity (Berkes 2007) as well as the importance of recognizing difference in peoples, places, and institutions (Ostrom, et al. 2007), in order to accommodate overlapping claims to property (Dressler, et al. 2006; Nygren 2005; Sultana and Thompson 2007).

Within the context of the Bahamas, Stoffle and Minnis (2007) address some of the impacts of MPAs on resident communities, specifically examining the effects on community agency, resilience and identity. The authors document century-long resource use patterns, arguing that marine protected areas may either threaten or support subsistence and community stability depending on implementation approaches.

THE MARINE INFLUENCE

Protected areas (PAs) have a long history and wide presence in the shape of parks, nature reserves, wildlife sanctuaries, and other protected terrestrial places (Hulme and Murphree 2001); however, as instruments of conservation, they are relatively new to marine ecosystems. With the proposal of marine protected areas (MPAs) throughout the Bahamas (the Westside National Park included), The Bahamas transposed a land-based model of regulation onto the fluid and unbounded sea. Historically, the Bahamas, as an island nation reliant in the surrounding sea for survival, regulated resources through functional limitations such as season and gear restrictions.

The ocean is fluid, eternally mobile. As such marine ecosystems offer different challenges from those of terrestrial areas and require different management approaches due to intrinsic geographic and social concerns. Ocean currents circulate the globe, a mobile and mutable thoroughfare; the breath of tides punctuate every day. An observer is

required to view the ocean from a distance, from a point of land or floating vessel, around which the ocean shifts multi-dimensionally. In contrast, the viewer is able to stand firmly on a bit of ground, observing from a fixed point. Time changes the composition of the seascape, from sea bottom, up the water column, to the visible surface. From moment to moment, the marine area changes in any number of ways: in temperature, shape, depth, salinity, and biomass. On land, while the components of the landscape do change over time, it is often at a far slower rate. Terrestrial habitat can be imagined as a flat two-dimensional space, across which wildlife moves. In comparison, we are able to see only a fraction of the ocean environment—the thin film of water lying on the surface. The fathoms below are usually impenetrable and invisible without specialized equipment. The vastly different visual perspectives between land and sea space mark our own perceptions of and relationship to each environment.

Under such different conditions (of visibility, of materiality, of meaning), what types of enclosure are appropriate? How do we mark or zone, let alone monitor and enforce enduring boundaries? What is the appropriate scale of management to protect mobile populations and a rapidly changing marine environment? The fluid nature of the marine environment requires specific marking strategies. Tracking mobile populations across MPA borders requires additional technology and a thorough understanding of marine ecosystem processes. All too often, conservation managers disregard basic site-specific environmental and social conditions, attempting to transfer, wholesale, terrestrial protected area designs onto marine seascapes in the hope that enclosure of an area will successfully regulate interactions between people and the land and seascapes.

Conservationists, resource managers, and scientists promote protected areas as policy strategies that are able to mitigate the threat of overharvest and habitat destruction. Thus, MPAs are widely promoted for marine systems as solutions to declining fisheries and marine degradation (Agardy 1997; Botsford, et al. 2003; Roberts, et al. 2005). Some studies comparing marine protected areas with non-protected areas suggest greater species diversity and abundance within protected area boundaries (Halpern and Warner 2002; Polunin and Roberts 1993; Roberts, et al. 2001; Roberts 1995). In a Caribbean research study, “The density and biomass of larger grouper species were significantly greater in the no-take marine reserves and lightly fished areas than in the more intensively fished areas (Chiappone, et al. 2000: 261). These same scientists, however, often simplify both the biological and the socio-cultural aspects of protected area conservation (Campbell, et al. 2009; Christie 2004, West, et al. 2006; Wood, et al. 2008).

Marine Protected Areas, like other PAs, do not develop as isolated enclosed units, but have strong social, scientific and ecological links to surrounding peoples and places. There is a continued call for research on the social effects of PA conservation (Agardy 2000; Agardy, et al. 2003; Chan, et al. 2007; Christie 2004; Cordell 2006; Jentoft 2000, 2007; Mascia 2003; Oracion 2005). Some effects, intended and unintended, include restricted access to resources, shifts in land tenure, geographic and cultural displacement, and changes in the ways people view and use their environment and the world (Mascia 2003; McCay 2002; Orlove and Brush 1996; West and Brockington 2006; Wilson 2007). They intersect with concerns about the needs and rights of indigenous peoples as well as women and other vulnerable groups (Agarwal 1997; Brockington, et al. 2006; Brosius 1999a; Brosius 2004).

In essence, enclosure conservation regulates human activity as well as the areas set aside for protection. By allocating rights of access to a select (and *selected*) few, enclosure can limit how an area is used and by whom. The decision-making processes involved in delimiting access and user rights are culturally embedded, intensely social, and dialectic in nature. In this way, PAs are not simply governed by social institutions within a particular regional context, such as resource tenure, hierarchical authority, or regulation. Rather, protected areas can be described as social processes in and of themselves (Walley 2004). Not only are enclosed areas shaped (bounded) by biophysical processes—by the contours of the earth, climate patterns and migratory pathways—but by the very ways we imagine enclosed space. Protected Areas are produced through the act of exclusion and the demarcation of boundary lines. What is included inside the boundary verses what is excluded affects the dynamics of exchange: the fluid and ever-changing interactions between humans, wildlife, and their habitats.

THE WEST SIDE OF ANDROS AND ENCLOSURE IN THE BAHAMAS

The west side of Andros is a broad plain of mud and sand, interspersed with thick red and black mangrove stands, stretching like a flat tongue onto the Great Bahamas Bank. Tidal creeks spread across the coastline: some just narrow enough to let a boat slip through, others stretching wide enough to strain the eye, making the far bank appear hazy with heat vapors. The larger creeks, with their fast flowing current, bear a striking resemblance to rivers: only the salinity level and tidal fluctuations distinguish the broad water bodies as marine features. The horizon is a thin, barely perceptible line between sky, limestone outcroppings and mud. Fishermen frequent the area for commercial and

subsistence fishing; however the west side is valued most highly for its extensive bonefish flats. Bonefish (*Albula vulpes*) have fed Androsians for centuries and more recently, sport anglers from around the world travel to Andros to fish for bonefish and other species, generating \$1.9 million annually for the nation (Fedler 2010).

The west side is notorious on many fronts. For some Bahamians, the west side is a place of beauty and bounty. It is also a site of lawlessness where piracy and drug smuggling avoids detection. Bahamian fishing boats sit on The Great Bahamas Bank, just off the west side of Andros, harvesting crawfish, sponge, and conch. Drug runners have found the tidal estuaries of the west side ideal for eluding authorities while transporting goods. Other than the small settlement of Red Bays on the northern tip, there exists only one permanent structure along the entire 100 mile coastline, Strathorne's fishing and hunting club, The Westside Lodge. The sea washes over the land—half mangrove, half mud, changing the landscape, altering geological features used for navigation, and erasing most signs of any human habitation.

Marine protected areas in The Bahamas have followed a general neo-liberal evolution from strict no-use or no-extraction policies, under top-down government control, to multiple-use zoning and more decentralized governance (Pugh & Potter 2003). Early MPAs in The Bahamas, such as the Exuma Cays Land and Sea Park, were zoned as “no-take” (i.e. no extraction allowed) areas, limiting access solely to recreational tourism and some scientific research (Ray 1998). The marine reserve network proposed later in The Bahamas, such as the 2000 protected area in The Biminis, followed these same guidelines, attempting to restrict all extractive use in the bounded area. Lack of community support for the MPA and significant development pressures led to a

withdrawal of The Biminis' proposal (Gruber and Parks 2002). Although BNT suggests that they will manage the Andros WNP through multi-zoning regulations that allow for some resource extraction, the management details are undeveloped and Androsians are suspicious given a long history of "No-Take" policies.

PROPERTY RIGHTS AND ACCESS

Rules, laws, and social norms, such as property rights systems of governance, affect human behavior and natural resource use (McCay and Jentoft 1998b). Marine resource decision-making is influenced by property-rights. Property rights and the ability to use them, affect people's relationships with the environment and thereby affect conservation. This research draws heavily on Macpherson's (1978) statement of property as "an enforceable claim" and emphasizes Ribot and Peluso's (2003) focus on the ability to derive benefits from such a claim.

Macpherson (1962, 1978) makes the important link between the acquisition of property and the enactment of power. Ribot and Peluso (2003) explore further the implications of power as it relates to property through social positioning. Focusing on the capacity for access and benefit from property highlights the importance of power differentials among people and emphasizes the "intensely social nature of property" (Rose 1994; Bohannon 1963; Malinowski 1935), particularly in a fluid and unbounded marine environment.

"Property rights" are complex and can include a variety of rights. The "bundle of sticks" metaphor facilitates the imagery of many rights packaged within one bundle. Property rights can include any or all of a bundle: for example, the right of access to a

particular space, to knowledge, to the market, or to capital. Property rights can also mean the right to restrict access to any of these things; the rights to use, to transfer, to sell; or the rights to make and enforce rules (Schlager and Ostrom 1992). How we think about and practice property emerged from our own social and historical frameworks (McCay 2000). In The Bahamas, how people claim property varies depending on such shifting and socially embedded characteristics as racial identification, class positioning, networks, and family. The ability to enforce property claims hinges on the ability to establish legitimacy of those claims within these social frameworks. This research embraces a broader definition of property to include not just ownership rights, but also “rights of access,” which takes into account the ability to access, use, and benefit from an area, not simply to own it (Ribot 1998). Feelings of entitlement to property and property rights may not reconcile with the reality of who is able to access and benefit from property in The Bahamas. At the core of this research lies the tension between the perceived entitlement to resources and space and the actual capacity to access that property.

CUSTOMARY TENURE

Although scholars argue that existing tenure systems can strengthen marine conservation objectives (Cinner and Aswani 2007), tenure institutions are deeply influenced by historical and socioeconomic conditions, as well as people’s relationships to the environment, family, neighbors, and the broader world (Aswani 1999; Aswani 2005). In many parts of the world, there is a growing awareness among conservation agents of the importance of customary tenure. However, in order to create a successful

protected area, there remains a need for greater understanding of the social contexts surrounding tenure institutions (Carrier 1987).

ENCLOSURE AS SOCIAL AND SYMBOLIC BOUNDARY WORK

Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) come about through enclosure. The essential purpose of enclosure is to delineate some form of geophysical and regulatory boundary—limiting and defining a protected space, while controlling people's behaviors with regard to that space. Enclosure policies regulate both physical access and behavior within designated bounds, deeming certain actions appropriate, while others fall within a forbidden realm. Moreover, this demarcation is carried out through social and political processes that depend on other, decidedly social boundary matters.

Boundaries can be understood as: socially constructed lines that mark institutionalized social difference, claim inclusive or exclusive status, and work to define legitimate belonging to a particular geographic or social space (Pachucki et al. 2007). Increasingly, scholars are addressing boundary work as both social and symbolic mechanisms that delimit individual and collective identity (Ashmore, et al. 2004; Gerteis and Goolsby 2005), nation-state creation and identity (Gerteis and Goolsby 2005; Rivera 2007), societal and physical boundaries such as the nature/culture divide (Curry 2007) the expert/lay divide (Wynne 2004 [1996]), and class, race and ethnicity (Carter 2005; Fordham and Ogbu 1986; Jackson 2001; Lareau 2003).

Boundaries perform a division, whether as a physical enclosure of space or as a mental construct, such as group membership or belonging. MPAs are sometimes characterized as social constructions (Fall 2002; Fall 2003; Walley 2004); protected area

boundaries execute property claims through marking, of space and time, of the material and immaterial. As enclosed areas, MPAs demonstrate the conceptual divide between what Fall (2002) calls, “nature,” the area under protection, and “culture,” the human threat. In her exploration of the notion of a nature/culture boundary in relation to fisheries management on the Northern Great Barrier Reef in New Zealand, Curry (2007) asks how different stakeholders perceive particular boundaries, such as the nature/culture divide and community membership. The author found that the ways people viewed particular boundaries affected the ways they viewed fishery management approaches for example. Protected area conservation emerges from the assumption of an existing boundary between human and nature; a world view that is profoundly linked to peoples’ historical experience with their environment, their own social groups and the broader world (Bradshaw & Bekoff 2000).

As Tsoukala (2008) illustrates in her work on football hooligans and terrorists, boundary creating processes often serve to emphasize the identification and construction of social threats. Through select image representations and language, target groups are represented as separate or alien from core ideologies and to some degree responsible for particular social concerns. These boundary creation processes become relevant when examining how certain groups are identified and constructed as principal threats to the environment, as well as when assessing claims to knowledge and understanding about the system at hand.

BOUNDARIES OF KNOWLEDGE

In the context of enclosure conservation policies, boundary work is particularly relevant to the process of knowledge production and legitimizing particular forms of knowledge, particularly scientific knowledge in comparison to “local” or “experiential knowledge” (Gieryn 1996; Johnson 2007; Mermin and Gieryn 1999). Recently, conservation agents and resource managers have attempted to incorporate experiential knowledge into policy decisions, often under the rubric of participatory conservation schemes. The notion of expertise expands to include various forms of knowledge (for example that of resource users as well as scientists). However, there remains a perception—as well as social reality—among many scientists and policy makers that scientific knowledge is legitimate while experiential knowledge is unfounded, anecdotal, and biased (Salter and Hearn 1997; Wilson, et al. 2003). Basic mistrust between scientists and resource users fuels long standing miscommunication and conflicts. Differing methods of data collection and analysis contribute to the lack of mutual understanding (Dobbs 2000; Finlayson 1994). Science studies scholars such as Jasanoff (1987) document how different forms of knowledge have been privileged over others, underscoring that significant boundary work is performed to maintain the scientific legitimacy and supremacy of certain knowledge. Jasanoff states that science has come to be perceived as “the provider of ‘truths,’” and has maintained this distinction through various means including highly restricted membership to the scientific community, “gatekeepers,” shared norms among scientists, and complex informal networks which allow for the organized flow of information only among members (Jasanoff 1987: 196). Collins and Evans (2002) explore the implications of expanding and legitimating various

types of knowledge, identifying different types of expertise and asking whether there are appropriate limits to “non-expert” participation.

Johnson’s (2007) dissertation work concentrates on the links between boundary work (particularly boundary making, spanning and management) with cooperative management of northeast U.S. fisheries. Johnson found that cooperative research did allow some boundary spanning between science and “non-science,” often by fitting experiential knowledge into scientific knowledge models. Johnson also notes that cooperative research projects maintained and endorsed the hegemony of science by emphasizing the boundary between science and “non-science.” Johnson documented extensive evidence of boundary spanning among fishers and scientists, such as when scientists incorporate fisher’s knowledge in certain realms of practical expertise such as data collection and gear technologies. In other arenas, however, boundaries between science and “non-science” were strictly reinforced and maintained, such as proposal writing and permitting processes. Moreover, the author argues that cooperative research can be seen to act as a “boundary institution one that enables communication, translation, and mediation across the boundary between science and non-science (Johnson 2007: 408). Jasanoff (1987) also argues that language is a chief means of conveying and persuading authoritative legitimacy (see also Gal & Irvine 1995 for a broader discussion on the relationship between language and the construction of ideological boundaries).

ISLANDS AND THE LITTORAL: IMAGINED SPACE AND CONNECTIVITY

Central to this research on marine enclosure, boundary work and property on Andros is the concept of the island—and the larger archipelago of The Bahamas—as both

could be considered an “imagined space” (Franks 2006:1) and “living laboratory” (Beighton 1966) Kuklick 1996),. Also relevant is the island’s role in resource extraction, and in the production of identity and belonging among residents, resource users, managers and scientists (Dodds and Royle 2003; Peckman 2003). Islands hold a unique position in our imagination, offering us contrasting possibilities of tropical paradise and escape as well as backwardness and alienation (Lal 2000). Connell (2003) defines three foundational elements associated with islands: isolation, separateness, and small size. The notion of an island as a small, bounded landmass allows people to feel in control of their environment. Secure in their ability to manage the space, people begin to imagine that utopian society may be possible. Connell shows that the utopian ideal of the tropical island remains strong even in light of significant contradictions to the imagery of a remote and isolated paradise. Within the Euro-American imagination, there is a multi-dimensional quality to islands: as a controllable laboratory, fantastic paradise, or venue of stark depravity (for example, the iconic “children’s story,” Lord of the Flies) The island features prominently in artistic and literary dreams throughout history.

Franks writes about the linkages between islands and utopian fantasies.

Referencing, Thomas Moore’s (1516) *Utopia*, Franks identifies islands as the ideal location for social experiments. One only needs to read the accounts of past adventurers to get the distinct idea that the island is a place of bounty, an open access commons, primed for harvest. Resources and people are free for the taking, whether it is breadfruit and women in Sir John Barrow’s (1961) *Mutiny of the Bounty*, or scientific specimens for Darwin’s legendary journey, or the detailed accounts of Trobriand Island culture for

Malinowski (1929, 1935). Darwin himself showed a scientific fascination with island systems.

For people living in the Caribbean, the island holds vastly different meanings including those relating to rootedness and dispossession. In the Bahamas, settlement dates back a mere 200 years from the time of European explorers touching down briefly while looking for gold before venturing on. For a period of time, Spanish and British colonists tugged at the islands attempting permanent claims until the late 1700s when British loyalists flooded the archipelago bringing with them new world ideas, language and slaves. These new arrivals planted (literally through agricultural production) roots, made families and tried to build permanence on the “ephemeral islands” (Campbell 1978). Playwright Ian Strachten describes about his writing in a blog post, “This is the song of my islands, pleasure house of venal gods, stomping ground of gangsters, house of the somnambulists” (Strachan 2012). For many Bahamians the islands represent a strange—as in alien and new— but familiar (home)land in which people are relative newcomers while making claims for indigeneity, of belonging, in a land inundated by visitors.

THE SOCIAL LITTORAL

Because of the circumscribed and finite boundaries of islands, both natural and social scientists have flocked to island shores to examine natural and social processes. Aside from the obvious consumption of scientific collecting so common in the natural science world, there is another form of consumption inherent in research—the possession and consumption of knowledge. Through the process of documentation, knowledge is symbolically as well as practically acquired and consumed.

As a discipline, anthropology has exploited the concept of the island as a place in which to create and redefine theoretical models often relevant to “mainland” societies. Whether perceived as “point of contact,” (D’Arcy 2006) a “place of consumption,” (McClintock 1995; Mintz 1985; Sahlins 1983), a “constructed paradise,” (Rodríguez 2004,), a tool for nation building (Whitehead 1995), or a “crucible for creativity” (Franks 2006), the island represents an idealized bounded space. The Bahamas archipelago thus offers itself to a project examining shifting social and spatial boundaries.

Island space is marked by its proximity to the sea and its abundance of shoreline. Island environments enforce a particular spatial perspective in the ways people perceive their environment. Surrounded by ocean on all sides, landscapes come into being, into our awareness, through their relationship with the ocean (Ritchie 1977). The littoral, the point where ocean meets land, signifies a spatial and symbolic delineation—between marine and terrestrial worlds and all they characterize: the familiar and strange, the habitable and utterly uninhabitable, the safe and the dangerous, the material and the fantastical. The coastline is a place of constant change, death and rebirth (McCay 2009, Stoffle & Minnis 2007, Stoffle & Stoffle 2007). Bounded by sea and geographically and metaphorically removed from the mainland, islands, as a transitory liminal space (McCay 2009; Raffles 2003) are able to inhabit a fluid middle ground for the human imagination. The fluid boundaries of the beach are constantly in flux, changing daily as tides shift and seasonally with the weather, wind, and currents. The shoreline marks the entire periphery of an island, yet it changes radically both temporally and spatially. The coast changes over time, claiming and depositing sand, nutrients and biota. The ocean is temperamental, able to shift in the course of minutes from a terrible angry froth to a gentle lapping. The

ocean can take lives in an instant and give life in the form of food. . The island, by its very definition, begins and ends with the littoral. Moreover, marine protected areas encompass much of the littoral in order to cover a wide range of habitat and rich biodiversity (Sobel and Dahlgren 2004). By examining the enclosure of a littoral space in Andros, this research addresses the important and unique relationships island residents have with their marine environment under conditions of constant change.

This research expands on Stoffle and Stoffle's (2007) work addressing the littoral as an important social and biological gateway for Caribbean islanders. The authors argue that these spaces provide important services to island residents in Barbados and the Bahamas in terms of nutrition, environmental education, and cultural memory. The authors contextualize the littoral as a "social-ecological place" (Stoffle and Stoffle 2007: 547), and maintain that it allows for crucial adaptation and learning opportunities for residents. The littoral, with its social and biological connection to the sea, stands as a gateway to the marine world, and as such, has become central to island communities throughout the Caribbean. Pointing to the littoral's socio-ecological significance, the authors suggest that it is important to maintain people's access to the littoral rather than close it off to all human use through enclosure conservation. The importance of the littoral is evident in Andros as well. The WNP in Andros threatens to limit access to the entire west side of the island—an area that residents have relied on as a "social-ecological place" for generations.

FLUIDITY AND THE LITTORAL

*here beside the sea,
life's fresh-born
and the fresh sea smells –*

*the waves rolling away,
renewing away...
a natural power,
an unseen source, a force mysterious, omnipotent –*

*by the side of the sea,
I weigh me, know my true size,
Strength—know my potential
Through humility;
The waves within me join the sea –
Water within me, wash
As I watch the sea...*

I retune my heartbeat, find the middle sea

*from Poems to Sit on To Shell Peas
Obediah Michael (Smith 2003): 43*

The physical geomorphology of Andros Island lends itself to the depiction of Andros as a littoral space. The island rises just feet above sea level; and much of that land spends a good deal of the year as a submerged wetland of mangroves and mudflats. Navigational pathways shift over the course of hours due to tidal fluctuations, and entire settlements have been forced to move as the sea carves out new sand banks and blocks access ways to churches, schools, and homes. Prior to 1960 there were few roads. Each settlement remained isolated from the rest of the island. Residents traveled by boat, sculling over the shallow bays to see family, celebrate deaths, obtain medical treatment, and transport goods. Settlements were forced to be self-sufficient to a large degree, relying heavily on the sea for survival. Residents fished and farmed their food, collected and carried water from nearby sources, built schools and churches, and depended on neighbors during lean times and crises. While geographically isolated in some ways, Androsians developed complex and extensive networks, often based on the sea. The sea

became each settlement's life source for food, for transport, and for any connection to the rest of the island and the wider world. Fishermen fished along the coasts and transported their catch to Nassau and Florida. People looked to other settlements and other islands for social partners. The young traveled to Nassau or to Florida to find employment. Social connections are made fluid by the marine conduit.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

My research focuses on how people negotiate contested space in the Bahamas, in the context of increasing pressure to protect and manage resources through enclosure conservation. I traveled to Andros Island to study how Androsians, international scientists, resource managers, and conservation agents communicate about resource claims, asking broadly: *How do claims of ownership and access to resources reflect an individual's personal experience and social positioning through their conceptualizations of race, nationality, authenticity, and belonging?* What is the relationship between claiming processes and notions about identity and belief systems? What does it mean to own property in a social and geographical littoral: as an islander, a Bahamian, a man or woman, as a descendent of a colonial past of slavery and failed plantations, as an inhabitant of an ephemeral island chain?

In Chapter Two I discuss how islands are represented and the multiple discourses surrounding *islandness*. *Islandness* is an elusive concept which suggests very specific, but contradictory imaginaries, which have to some degree been configured historically through visitor encounters. Conservationists often depict islands as vulnerable spaces with abundant yet finite resources. Implicit within this framing is the call for

greater conservation engagement, such as is occurring in Andros Island. Chapter Three delves into the biogeography of Andros Island and the placement of conservation projects within the context of a small archipelago nation situated between the United States and Wider Caribbean. I explore the meanings and implications of marine conservation efforts in Andros as well as the social and natural histories of the area. It is also in Chapter Three that I describe the various types of tenure in The Bahamas and place these institutions in a historical context. Using several examples of ownership claims in Andros, I examine notions of “rightful” ownership as it relates to belonging and legitimacy within negotiating processes. Chapter Four outlines the governing framework of conservation in the Bahamas such as the agencies involved in resource management. In Chapter Five I ask, and attempt to answer, the question: *Who has the power to create enclosures in the Bahamas?* I discuss the role of well-connected elites central in shaping marine conservation projects through enclosure regulations. The section highlights my own engagement with a private land holder on the west side of Andros, and asks how his exclusive claims to the terrestrial and marine resources of the littoral otherwise within the domain of the planned marine park have become legitimized through historical, political and social processes. Focusing on the role of power within boundary making processes, I draw on the interaction between two individuals with different social positioning within Bahamian society, as they work to claim space and belonging in Andros Island. Chapter Six broadens the scope to look at conservation symbols, using Guy Debord’s theory of Spectacle to re-examine how science can obscure inequitable social stratifications and daily practice. Using the example of National Geographic’s 2009 research expedition into the Blue Holes of Andros, I explore the relationship between science and Spectacle in

creating perhaps misleading notions of place, identity, and culture while undermining apparent conservation goals. In Chapter Seven, I seek out the “Real Bahamas” in all its representations, paying close attention to contradictions and linkages among belonging, citizenship, and authenticity. I ask why the “authentic” holds so much value for people regardless of social location. Finally, for the sake of clarity, I outlined my methods extensively in Appendix A.

LIMITATIONS AND A NOTE ABOUT THE RESEARCHER

The Bahamas has a history of colonial domination and racial oppression. The nation is relatively young, having established independence in 1973 under a bloodless “revolution” spearheaded by the all black People’s Liberation Party. While Bahamians with historical ties to Africa have achieved a degree of political voice, the economic resources remain primarily within the grasp of a minority of European descendents. How do decision-makers establish authority within this complex framework of historical racism?

Over the years I returned to The Bahamas to do research, my own social positioning had changed with noticeable implications to my research. My initial visit to the Bahamas was to The Biminis. I spent three months in Bimini and immersed myself in Bahamian culture and the art of social science research. I was new to both, and in the end had managed to lose my footing as both tourist and researcher. I fell in love with a carpenter working on the Bimini Bay Resort and later married him. Despite my own fierce resistance to romanticizing, or worse yet, exoticizing anthropological field research and The Bahamas at large, I had blurred my own boundaries between life and work,

social science and daily experience. I read back at my own field notes of the time: what emerges most clearly is my own inexperience, as well as my social positioning as a white American female field researcher. From the start, I was aware of my position within the context of The Bahamas' history of colonialism and complex and fluctuating relationship to America. The United States holds the complicated roles of protector, bully, financier, super-mall, fashion and media center, scientific authority, and wealthy neighbor. To many Bahamians, the United States represents modernity and liberal politics, opportunity and racial violence, moral degradation and the endless opportunity to get-rich-quick. Based upon my appearance and experience, I was assigned several (some of which I can only guess) locations within the Bahamian social framework. These shifted as I aged and as my own social networks changed. As a student, I was respected for my education and for being a "striving woman." As a white person, I was sometimes suspected of duplicitous, consumptive, and exploitive aspirations. Occasionally, I was awarded some level of authority and access to people's time and information. As a woman, I was a curiosity and object of interest, but sometimes not taken seriously. Men did not seem to consider me a threat, despite my obvious whiteness, my education, and other social affiliations, while women were initially suspicious and more reluctant to speak with me.

Men were willing to be interviewed about resource use and decision-making processes. More difficult to access were the women, especially older women who viewed me with wary suspicion. They wondered why I wanted to know about "men's business." I was in my 30s, unmarried without children. After befriending two women in particular, Sherry, the gregarious bartender at the local ramshackle hangout, and Duckie, the owner of a small take out restaurant catering to the north of the island, I was able to ask

questions about how they perceived me when I first arrived. Duckie explained to me that I appeared “senseless,” a woman in her 30s acting like a teenager without serious commitments. How could I possibly still be a student, she wondered? How could my family let me waste so much time and stray so far from home? But then, “American’s are like that, the white ones anyway. Y’all have no sense. Guess you don’t need it to get by.” Sherry was blunt, “I thought you had just come to get yourself some.” She paused for a long time and said, “But then you asked so many questions. And writing in your little book” she laughed her great booming laugh and put her hands on her hips as she faced me.

Only later, after marrying a Bahamian national, did I realize how dramatically my own relationship to the country and the people calling the islands home had altered over the years. Because of my marital ties, I was again a curiosity and afforded some greater access, perhaps because of my evident “investment” in and connection to the country. I was commonly asked if we would be moving back “home” to the Bahamas after school. Any research must be placed within the context of these social and linguistic exchanges. Where people place themselves and become placed by others—socially, politically, linguistically and racially—influences how people talk about his or her own (and other’s) roles in the social and political systems as well as in relation to conservation ideologies.

CHAPTER 2

METHODS

INTRODUCTION

In this section, I describe the research sites and methods I used to gather data for my dissertation research. I first provide background information on my research approach and list my research questions. I then describe in detail why I chose Andros Island and the Westside National Park as well as its role within the greater Bahamas conservation plan. After outlining the main agencies involved in planning and implementing the West Side National Park, I layout the methods I used to gather data in response to my examination of how people make resource claims as an area transitions from a commons to a protected area.

Between the years 2003 to 2009, I spent a total of 24 months in five locations throughout The Bahamas (The Biminis, Eleuthera, Abaco, New Providence, and Andros) studying the social and linguistic dimensions of enclosure of marine commons in an archipelago nation. For my master's research I worked as a field researcher for a large interdisciplinary NSF-funded research project, The Bahamas Biocomplexity Project (BBP). Although the focus of the BBP research was different from my own, the data I gathered during that period were valuable in fleshing out and contextualizing my own particular examination of the human dimensions of protected area conservation. I spent the final 12 consecutive months performing my dissertation research in New Providence and Andros Islands. There I focused on how people negotiate ownership of contested space in an area undergoing change from a locally-valued commons to a globally-valued protected area.

In 2006, Bahamian conservation agencies and The Bahamas government began to discuss expanding the existing Westside National Park. My doctoral research examined how people understood, practiced, and experienced various claims of access and ownership to the land and sea resources in the context of the newly proposed park expansion in Andros Island, The Bahamas. Complex and sometimes overlapping claims to property rights reflect the peoples, places and institutions involved in protected area conservation, often leading to evolving structures of power and authority. My overarching question is: As the west side of Andros Island *transitions from a locally valued and governed commons to an internationally valued and regulated protected area, how do scientists, conservation agents and Androsians negotiate spatial and social boundaries?* Within this context, I look specifically at how *people—in different geographic and social positions in relationship to the West Side National park—reconfigure ideas about conservation, property, and belonging.*

METHODS

I employed a mixed-methods ethnographic approach because it best served the complexity of my research (Bernard 2006: 298). My central research methods were: archival research, participant observation, semi-structured and structured interviews; and participatory mapping. Each of these approaches emphasized a different aspect of my larger research agenda, and illuminated the important ways perceptions of access and ownership differ among people living on islands. Although I gathered data in multiple locations throughout the Bahamas, my focus remained Andros Island and my methods were consistent across research locations, lending continuity to my research.

ARCHIVAL RESEARCH

Archival materials supplied rich historical and formalized context to other ethnographic data I gathered. Using political, scientific, and conservation documents generated during the marine protected area proposal stages, I traced the political and historical processes surrounding the proposed marine protected area (MPA) in Andros and began to classify the various ways in which ownership was perceived, maintained and governed. I designed a cataloguing scheme in order to categorize the various ways marine and terrestrial resources are accessed and used in Andros. This classification resulted in an extensive database of terminology, opinions and practice surrounding the topic of resource ownership and access in Andros and the greater Bahamas.

I collected and analyzed official ownership protocol and documentation such as government legislation, land deeds, litigated resource conflicts, and legally established access to marine and terrestrial resources. I performed archival research at the National Archives, the Bureau of Land and Survey, and the Bahamas National Trust in New Providence and at the Family Island government offices and archives in Andros and other Family Islands. Census data and legislative papers were available at the Government Publication office. I also collected outreach documents and communications referencing MPAs and conservation in the Bahamas at various conservation organizations including The Bahamas National Trust, The Nature Conservancy – Bahamas, and Bahamas Reef Environmental Educational Foundation in New Providence. In Andros, I assembled maps created and used by conservation agents, government officials, and policy makers.

I used interpretive text analysis techniques (Bernard 2006: 473) to compare written texts from government officials and conservation agents regarding how

conservation ideologies may have changed over time as well as the specific language used to communicate ideas about ownership and resource use. Archival material allowed me to trace the Andros Westside National Park implementation process and expansion project from planning phase to actual management practice as well as document how resource ownership is formalized through government and legal processes. Archival documents provided a foundation for the individual accounts of resource ownership I gained through participant observation and extensive interviews.

PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

While in The Bahamas, I participated in the daily activities of residents, conservation agents, and scientists. Alongside residents, I walked, farmed, cooked, cleaned and attended to daily living. I fished Bahamas waters with men and women from the docks and from boats. I crabbed with women in the dense coppice of Andros and swam with neighbors at the beach. I attended church services, funerals, and weddings. I sat on porches, babysat kids, cooked and shared meals with friends and family. I swam in blue holes and dove off reefs with Bahamians, scientists and tourists. I took any opportunity to participate in events including town meetings, holiday performances, beach clean ups, festivals, business activities, and church gatherings. I established relationships with people in the public school system and provided resources, attended performances, and gave talks to students and staff. Whenever possible, I participated in scientific research occurring in The Bahamas, and in Andros in particular. I accompanied natural and social scientists in the field, assisted in gathering data, collected samples, attended scientific meetings, and interviewed scientists conducting fieldwork in The Bahamas. While I

explored all types of scientific research occurring in the area, I focused on those scientists involved with conservation projects, in particular enclosure conservation strategies. Additionally, I developed relationships with people in conservation organizations in The Bahamas and became involved in several projects during the period of my research.

Participant observation allowed me to view the internal dynamics of social groups such as power hierarchies and conflicts, possible tensions and alliances between individuals and within each group (Bernard 2006: 354). I participated in local and national conservation research, conservation meetings, and community events, which then informed interviews and the participatory mapping (Bernard 2006: 213). Direct observation, coupled with participant observation enabled me to verify data gained through interviewing, lessening the effects of reporting bias (Bernard 2006: 413). As is often true with relationships gained through anthropological fieldwork, I grew close with the people I lived and worked among. In the time I spent in The Bahamas, the people I met and observed also became friends and colleagues, family, informants, and valuable critics of my work.

INTERVIEWS AND SAMPLING

For this research, I conducted semi-structured interviews with residents, scientists, and members of the political and conservation communities throughout the Bahamas. These interviews addressed specific questions about resource access and ownership, historical resource use patterns, ideas about “rightful” belonging and engagements with conservation and marine protected areas.

In Andros, I conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with residents. These interviews allowed for quantitative and qualitative analysis of resource use behavior, perceptions of the environment, reflections on ownership and access to resources. Interviews with resource users and decision-makers allowed me to identify particular variables involved in establishing legitimacy of a protected area, as well as explore how a proposed MPA affects the ways people make property claims.

ORAL HISTORIES

Because this research focused heavily on changes of resource use over time, the documentation of oral histories enriches the interview data significantly by contributing in-depth narrative experience over a life history. During the interview phase, I identified individuals to conduct further intensive unstructured narrative interviews relating to people and ideas about resource ownership and use. Focusing on a historical perspective, I asked questions about people's notions of property and "rightful" belonging as well as their experience with conservation projects, and specific use of the region slated for protection. Oral histories allowed for a fine-grained narrative analysis of collected text (Bernard: 475), which provided the essential context necessary to better understand how people think about changing notions of resource use and tenure.

SAMPLING

This research was designed with three goals in mind: 1) to gain a greater understanding of enclosure conservation as a social process with specific and meaning socio-historical contexts; 2) to explore the specific conditions for the Westside National

Park expansion and the effects of enclosure conservation on Androsian communities; and 3) to complicate the common (mis)conceptualization of a conservation conundrum and explore beyond the basic and imprecise boundary: how to facilitate good science and impede bad people? These goals required multiple methodological approaches to sampling and interview techniques and a reconfiguring of my own subjectivities as a white American researcher with training in the natural sciences. At times, my own inflexibility in how it means to “perform” science was my greatest obstacle to conducting fieldwork.

Without the option of conducting a random sample due to the lack of a sampling frame, small communities, and sensitivity of the subject matter, I believed it best to construct a representative purposive sample. Central Andros is geographically heterogeneous, but obtaining representation from each section ensured an unbiased sample to a reasonable degree. *Purposive Sampling* allowed me to evaluate cultural phenomena such as opinions surrounding resource use behavior and gain an appropriate representative sample of people regarding specific categories. (Bernard 2006: 188, 190). I used gender, age, and occupation for this research. Upon arrival in Andros, I drove to each settlement and walked around counting the households. I divided each of the three regions into sub-districts with equal numbers of households, creating maximally heterogeneous clusters. I then used a cluster-sampling method so that the interviews represented equal distribution of households, taking care, as I interviewed, to fill variable quotas of gender and age. I identified what Bernard (2006: 196) calls: “specialized informants,” those individuals knowledgeable about particular resources uses within Andros and attempted to interview them more than once. These interviews with

conservation¹ and government officials², and some local residents³ included more in depth questions about changing access, perceptions of the effects of enclosure strategies, why Andros is seen as such an important site for conservation, how biodiversity science affects the ways people view a place, how conservation affects access and notions of property and belong.

PARTICIPATORY MAPPING

Using GPS and informal mapping strategies such as multiple sketches and walking tours, I worked with residents to create maps of the terrestrial and marine environment and document resource use activities. I was able to return repeatedly to the same individuals over the course of my research in order to gather multiple interpretations of spatial uses and resource claims. I gathered 43 participatory maps ranging in detail, depicting property claims, resource use, naming processes, and boundary markers. Due to the sensitive nature of the conversations, I did not record these mapping sessions, relying instead on detailed notes. I asked questions about resource use, recognizing boundary lines, claiming access to certain spaces, and information pathways. Questions included: “Who is able to claim ownership of certain areas?” “Who has access to resources and in what ways has that changed in your lifetime?” and “How is access established and communicated?” I also asked questions about the newly proposed MPA, and specifically the ways it affected access to resources. I focused on questions about

¹ The Nature Conservancy, Bahamas National Trust, Andros Nature Conservancy Trust, the Kerzner Marine Foundation, and the Andros Sport Fishing Conservation Association.

² The Ministry of Tourism, The Ministry of Marine Resources; Bahamans Education in Science and Technology.

³ In Andros, resource use is limited to medicinal plant use, bonefish guiding, commercial and subsistence fishing, and crabbing.

marking property ownership and access, types of resources used, methods of use, and specific individuals involved in the activity. These participatory maps illustrated historical and spatial narratives as ownership fluctuated over time and space. The documents also provided a systematically gathered alternative reference to area maps used by the Bahamas government and conservation agencies in order to highlight the different ways the environment and resource ownership is perceived, and how this changes under emerging protected area policies. What proved most informative from these participatory maps were the conversations surrounding the mapping processes. The activity of talking about and creating a map allowed for much richer discussions about “rightful” ownership and personal experiences regarding shared ideas.

RESEARCH ASSISTANTS

During my research in Andros, I recruited and trained two research assistants to help with logistical preparations, interview transcriptions, and data entry. Both were Androsians, one male and one female, with very different research and conservation experiences. Rawlins Riley was in his early 30s and had been participating with scientific research projects on the Andros most of his life. A big man with a broad and frequent smile, Rawlins described himself as shy, but could talk himself into any room and was often found playing dominoes at the local hot spot. I had known Rawlins for years in the context of research and national conservation projects, and had worked with him on several occasions in the past in relation to marine research and protected areas. He was viewed by many in the science world as easy to work with, friendly and extremely bright.

I found him to be all that as well as an engaging story teller with un flagging energy and deep love for his home island.

Rawlins had a degree in ecotourism from Hockings College and, as one foreign researcher said, “Rawlins is poised to be Bahamas’ next Minister of the Environment. He’s the ‘go-to man’ when it comes to environmental science in The Bahamas.” When I first moved to Andros, Rawlins not only assisted with my research, but helped me find a home, played with my daughter, shared my table and answered endless questions. Born in the small town of Staniard Creek⁴ where I lived for the year, Rawlins had first volunteered with Center for the Environment (CE) at the age of 14. Back then, he carried research gear, loaded and unloaded trucks, and cut trails through the bush for several years until Archie Forefar hired him at the Forefar Field Station staff. From there he bounced between research trips, participating with educational programs on island ecosystems and conservation agendas. Over the course of 15 years, Rawlins worked at Forfar Field Station, Center for the Environment (CE), and finally The Bahamas National Trust, becoming known in the Bahamas conservation world as an authority on Andros ecosystems. He was frequently called on to help with both biological and social science research because he had the rare ability to converse with scientists, fishers, students, and grandmothers about complex ecosystems processes and controversial conservation projects. He was in no way naïve about the political underpinnings of conservation work, but managed to retain his focus on the health of The Bahamas environment, particularly his true love, Andros Island. During my stay, Rawlins worked as the conservation liaison/Andros Park Warden for The Bahamas National Trust. He held a small one room office in the back of the Andros Conservancy and Trust (ANCAT) building. Because of

⁴ Settlement population during time of research was 100 households

this location and his experience with conservation on the island, people often thought he worked with ANCAT, but he was quick to correct that mistake.

Rawlins's well-known association with conservation placed him in a complex position with regard to my research. I was careful to separate my research with any conservation agenda; however people often assumed—based mostly on my own position as a white foreign researcher—that I did have a conservation objective. Traveling throughout the island with Rawlins and talking with people sometimes supported this initial assumption. I grew familiar with beginning any discussion with an explanation of my work and firm statement of my own separation from ongoing conservation projects. In the end, Rawlins's knowledge of the island and its residents was far more valuable than any complexity resulting from his multiplicitous positioning as an Androsian, conservationist, researcher, and Staniard Creek resident.

My second field assistant was a young Androsian woman who had recently lost her job as a primary school teacher. Barely 20, Shanta Brown had very little formal education regarding the marine environment or social sciences, but had a tremendous natural curiosity about her island home of Andros. Shanta did not even claim to be shy and seemed to know everyone on the island. She began as a valuable informant with an interest in my research. She joined me on the long drives across the island, telling me stories about visiting spirits and her strong Christian faith, giving me tips on how to cook ham and cassava soup and curry mutton. Later, Shanta helped me make interview appointments and introduced me to her friends and family in every settlement. She provided important feedback on the questions I asked as well as the ways I was asking them. She pulled no punches and was quick to tell me when I was wrong, which was

often. Working with Rawlins and Shanta gave me greater access to the residents of Andros; but they also provided me with friendship, company and good humor during those long hours in the field.

BACKGROUND TO MY RESEARCH

My doctoral research grew from my earlier work for my master's thesis in environmental policy, in which I examined community support for a newly proposed marine protected area (MPA) in The Biminis, Bahamas. The goals of my master's research were twofold: 1) Define characteristics relating to community support for a government proposed MPA; and 2) Identify informational pathways used for scientific information relevant to The Biminis. I analyzed the data gathered using standard multivariable analysis in order to determine which variables could be associated with support for the MPA. Results indicated an overall support (84%) for the proposed MPA. Interestingly, gender was found to be significant ($p=.01$) with respect to support of the protected area: women in The Biminis were significantly less likely to be in support of MPAs, often stating that the ocean was a common pool resource, in good health and not in need of protection. A second correlation indicated that those people who perceived the marine environment to be degraded were more likely to be in favor of the MPA ($p=0.03$). This suggested that women had not been subject to the intensive outreach campaigns on the importance of marine conservation, which "primary resource users," (e.g. fishermen) had.

In evaluating the possible reasons for these findings, I addressed several contextual factors, chief among them *occupational stratification* and *informational*

pathways used among individuals regarding the marine environment. I theorized that women were not considered primary resource users by groups promoting conservation outreach. Therefore women were not targeted by conservation outreach campaigns. This was further complicated by the fact that Biminite women were important drivers of the fishing industry, even if not primary direct extractors. Although the fishing industry was dominated by male extractors in The Biminis, women represented an important sector of the marine resource market. The fishing community in The Biminis was primarily made up of men; however field observations suggested that women were the leading purchasers of fish for businesses and for the household. Over half of Bimini's restaurants were owned and operated by women (Bahamas Census, 2000) who often ordered directly from the fishers. As household decision-makers, and owners of over 1/3 of the restaurants on the island, women held tremendous influence on the fish market. Outreach campaigns and existing monitoring and regulatory schemes overlooked women because they were not viewed as active harvesters of marine resources; thus women did not benefit from direct outreach or educational efforts. Additionally, gender stratification among occupations (e.g. the vast majority of fishers were men, while the tourism industry was dominated by women) did not allow women to experience resource depletion directly, but only filtered through reduced market availability and lower quality of fish.

My initial work in The Biminis fueled my interest in how people identify legitimate stakeholders within the context of conservation and how this may influence access to particular resources, such as information. By offering a particular sector of society membership to a group, conservation organizers, scientists and educators were

able to determine who may benefit from affiliation with that group. I began to explore these ideas more directly in my doctoral research in Andros Island in The Bahamas.

CHAPTER 3

SITUATING CONSERVATION: ARCHIPELAGOS AND EPHEMERAL ISLANDS

INTRODUCTION

Islands, even tropical ones are often harsh environments, isolated, with a lack of fresh water, unrelenting winds and intense solar radiation. These and other factors have conspired to make islands even more fascinating to the discriminating tourist and especially to biologists.

Campbell 1978: vi

Every year the storm come and the sea come, every year. My children move the TV and things up. I stay and wait for the water to go. The sea right there, see? Right there.

Interview with Bahamian woman, 39, Tarpon Bay Eleuthera 2006

What do we think of when we imagine an island? A vacation destination? A deserted paradise? A kind of Eden—remote, isolated, benign and bountiful? Or does our imagination move to a more threatening vision—of desolation, savagery and chaos? A hellish landscape full of cannibals and demons, dangerous beasts and beastly men? Consistently, an island is defined in relation to its neighbor and border, the sea. Climate change, sea level rise and coastal development underscore the point that islands are not static. Instead, they shift, evolve, submerge, and re-emerge as new entities—materially in their geographic composition, but also in our minds as “mental symbols” (Grove 1995: 9). This chapter is about how islands are represented and the multiple discourses surrounding *islandness*. Within the conservation world, these mental symbols are often configured through various visitor encounters—whether tourist, anthropologist, marine biologist, or developer. The long-standing association of islandscapes as locations of exceptionalism and consumption make archipelago nations idealized contemporary

locations for enclosure conservation. Within the field of mainstream conservation, islands are often depicted as bountiful, yet with finite (and thus vulnerable) resources. This juxtaposition allows for greater engagement among conservation scientists attempting to catalogue and mediate anthropogenic threats such as global climate change or collapsing fisheries.

Employing the techniques of discourse analysis, I examine the ways Andros Island is represented and how these depictions actively reflect particular subjectivities and motivations. I begin this chapter with an overview of how enclosure conservation is a form of island making: creating an exceptional space that aligns with certain ideas about *islandness*. The notion of Islandness is elusive: it conveys the sense of vulnerability and resilience (Campbell 2009), a location of traditional knowledge (Stoffle and Stoffle 2007), and both insular and cosmopolitan (Novacek and Ronstrom 2007: 3). The founder of the Island Institute defines *Islandness* as something that:

[T]ranscends the particulars of local island culture. Islandness is a metaphysical sensation that derives from the heightened experience that accompanies physical isolation. Islandness is reinforced by boundaries of often frightening and occasionally impassable bodies of water that amplify a sense of a place that is closer to the natural world because you are in closer proximity to your neighbors”

Conkling 2007: 191

Conservation organizations emphasize vulnerability and urgency in their discourse, which is often supported by scientific narratives to justify large-scale territory claims. Androsians hold very different images and ideas about the island on which they live. Tourist discourses of tropical paradise inform visitors who come to Andros. Some Androsians shift to accommodate or capture tourist discourse with hope for economic gain. Industry looks to Andros as a source of untapped and abundant resources. I explore how Andros Island has been reconfigured as an exceptional space through encounters

with scientific exploration, tourism, and industry which highlight certain island characteristics—those of abundance, tropicality, and vulnerability. Finally, I offer my own observations using Andros Island as an example of how islands are configured within human imaginations, whether visitors or long time inhabitants.

ISLAND MAKING: ENCLOSING THE EXCEPTIONAL

The government has said that existing legislation will designate 50 per cent of the Bahamas territory as Marine Protected Areas. This coincides with the release of results of a recent survey of coral reefs in The Bahamas, which has revealed their vulnerability to overfishing and climate change.

The Bahamas Investor, March 6, 2012, website

In 2009, The Bahamas National Trust (BNT) in partnership with The Nature Conservancy (TNC) put forth the plan to enclose the entire western length of Andros Island. The proposal took many resource managers and Bahamians by surprise. There had been considerable discussion about enlarging the existing National Park including an extensive rapid ecological assessment (REA) in 2006 involving over 20 natural scientists from a range of disciplines. The plan to enlarge the park northward was well established, although controversial, effort had been made to attract resident and resource user support for the larger park. It wasn't until the eve of the Trust's 50th anniversary gala that the Trust's Director of Parks and Science decided to extend the expansion plan even further—ultimately enclosing the land and sea from the northern to the southern-most tips of the island. The plan was to claim the length of Andros and establish precise boundaries later. When I interviewed the Director, she explained her reasoning for introducing the changed expansion plan so suddenly:

We need to strike while the iron is hot. You can't please everyone. You know Androsians, they're going to complain no matter what.

We don't need more town meetings to know that.

Interview with Senior Conservation Manager, October 2009

In order to make the proposal viable, Andros Island had to transcend the local scale—beyond its daily value for residents, subsistence and commercial fishers to become a valuable space for a broader audience such as the international conservation community and science tourism. Andros had to undergo a spectacular transformation—from a sprawling mud flat known more for its poor schools, bird-sized mosquitoes, and lawless inhabitants than for its biodiversity and toward a scientifically described wonderland brimming with rare and valuable species and high rates of biodiversity. As “imaginable space” (Franks 2006: 1), Andros had to conform to those notions of an island that suggest lavish abundance, under siege. In the next section, I will unfold the discourse surrounding some of these notions and explore any contemporary traces.

DISCURSIVE TRENDS

In the Bahamas, international and regional conservation organizations have made large territory claims for the purpose of marine protection. These tracts of land and sea, such as the Westside National Park, have altered the physical and social landscape of the Bahamas through boundary making, reduced access, and increased regulation. These controversial claims are justified through the discourse of resource vulnerability and the urgent need for marine protection, particularly within the context of a low-lying island nation, such as the Bahamas⁵. Emotional and sometimes apocalyptic language is often

⁵ For examples, look to news headlines like, “Climate Change: Islands Could Fall off the Map” Godoy, Julio.

2007 Islands Could Fall Off the Map. *In* Inter Press Service (IPS). London: The Independent UK., “Disappearing world: Global warming claims tropical island” Lean, Geoffrey

deployed in relation to environmental events such as climate change (Harre, et al. 1999; Killingsworth and Palmer 1992). In the 2010 United Nation Department Programme (UNDP) Country Programme Strategy for 2010 – 2014, The Bahamas was listed as “extremely vulnerable.” The report describes the nation’s “fragile groundwater” and “thin, coarse-textured and fragile” soils as vulnerable to contamination and exhaustion (UNPD 2010: xi). The report goes on to point to threats from changes in the sea as well such as sea level rise and extreme storms:

The entire country is effectively a coastal zone as no part of any island is sufficiently distant from the sea as to be totally free of its influence. The majority of the population lives within a short distance from the sea, so the vulnerability of its d [sic] livelihood to adverse environmental impacts continues to be of great concern for the country.

UNDP2010: 6

In addition to environmental change, the country is also vulnerable to poverty and biodiversity decline (UNDP 2010: 6:14-17). Protected areas are presented as one mitigation solution to this vulnerability. The report claims that there are currently “too few protected areas to conserve natural resources” and calls for the continued and increased support of both terrestrial and marine protected areas (UNDP 2010: 7, 35). In 2008, The Bahamas government signed on to the *Caribbean Challenge*, a region-wide campaign supported by The Nature Conservancy to protect the health of the Caribbean’s land and sea through enclosure conservation. To date, participating governments in the Caribbean Challenge include: Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Cayman Islands, the Dominican Republic, Grenada, Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines (TNC 2011, website). The challenge calls for protecting 20 percent of

2006 Disappearing world: Global warming claims tropical island. *In* The Independent. Pp. 1-2. London: The Independent UK., “Small island States sound alarm at UN over their vulnerability to climate change” (UN News Center 2011).

marine habitat by 2020. Underscoring the urgency of the plan, TNC writes, “The plain truth: Studies indicate that without massive conservation action the corals of the Caribbean Sea could be gone in less than 50 years, and with the reefs will slowly go the life of the Caribbean (ibid). As conservation discourse emphasizes the region’s vulnerability and fragility, enclosure conservation becomes a feasible solution to the threat of environmental change and degradation. In the process, Andros Island shifts from a “mosquito infested swamp” with “wide sluggish streams” (Charters 1999):18) to an islandscape with valuable and unique habitat teeming with biodiversity.

Andros island contains some of the most undisturbed natural areas left in the Bahamas, including large open areas of tidal flats with thriving bonefish, the third longest reef in the world, and in the Western Hemisphere Andros has the highest number of blue holes found in an area...

TNC 2006, *Andros: the West Side Protected Area* Update No. 2:
November 2006: 2

Conservation agents depict Andros as a “pristine wilderness,” lost in time, and in need of protection. Grove (1995) writes that European colonial expansion is directly and inextricably linked to current natural resource policies and the very way we perceive the environment. He argues that, in an effort to locate God within an earthly landscape, Europeans attempted to develop the newly “discovered” and colonized tropical islands as earthy “Edens.” Soon, islands, in their entirety, were viewed in the colonial imagination as unearthly edenic landscapes. With this heightened sense of ecological and aesthetic value came the fear of loss. Because of their limited land and seemingly fragile position within an unpredictable and sometimes inhospitable sea, tropical islands were thought to be in greater danger of over exploitation of environmental degradation. The representations of islands in literature, tourist promotions, and in conversation convey

underlying ideologies about islands and islandscapes. Because “Islands are ambivalent. Island spaces are complex and contrarian,” (Novaczek and Ronstrom 2007): 3), we have to have a way to unpack the multiple meanings surrounding islands and islandness.

More than simply the language used to convey an idea, discourse encompasses the thoughts, communications, unconscious acts, and conscious practice that construct knowledge. Through discourse analysis, we are able to better understand and situate the meanings of things.

FRAMEWORK

Early linguistic scholars (such as (Boas 1889; Sapir 1949; Whorf 1956) suggested that the ability to constitute social reality lay within the structure and patterning of language; however, the idea of power remained notably absent. As the field progressed, more attention was paid to discourse, such as a conversation, speech, or textual material. Scholars began to recognize that certain individuals may have more power during these engagements than others, particularly those able to control the discourse. Discourse is able to shape social structures; therefore everyone is subjected to its influence. Because discourse is not fixed, but instead constantly transforming through mutual interaction, people have power to shape reality through engagement with discourse. One obvious way in which we see how language is socially entrenched is its association with social power hierarchies. Language is both directly and indirectly related to power: directly in the way it can be used as an instrument and indirectly in its influential power over how people engage with the world and make decisions (Fairclough 1989).

The concept of discourse is used here to describe the language and ideas surrounding a particular topic, such as conservation, ownership, and belonging. Language mediates how we perceive, absorb, interpret, communicate, and propagate political ideologies such as ownership and belonging (Duranti 1994; Hymes 1971; Jakobson 1960). As people engage in dialogue about conservation and property, each person draws on his or her own social practices and ideological perspectives ((Bentrupperbaumer, et al. 2006; Fairclough 1989). Linguistic codes held in common may facilitate cooperation or co-optation of particular ideologies (Irvine 1989). By identifying patterns and links between language and practice, it is possible to gain insight into how social processes may influence the ways people think (Schieffelin, et al. 1998). Mikhail Bakhtin (Bakhtin 1981) reminds us that language is authored by a collective of voices and words, while still allowing for the existence of individual experience. In this way, Androsians, conservationists, scientists, and tourists all become collaborators in their own subjectivities.

Knowledge, practice, and language inform one another, often “contaminating” meaning (Hill and Mannheim 1992). The ways in which knowledge and language are used to convey expertise informs power hierarchies; however these hierarchies are dialectic and subject to existing and ever shifting social structure(s) (Giddens 1979). Language or discourse, “does not simply reflect the world, it also shapes it, fashions it” (Duranti 1994: 139). Therefore, authority or dominance must be achieved through interaction with others (Bourdieu 1991 Duranti 1994). While conservation “experts” work to establish their own legitimacy and authority over ideologies, the “non-experts”

introduce similar contexts and counter-contexts through alternative discourses to mold the ways in which people think and talk about the environment.

Language influences our understanding, beliefs, and behaviors, which in turn affect the ways we communicate. Rather than simply a tool or method of communication, language is action fully saturated by social processes (Duranti 1997: 4-5). Malinowski (1935) focuses on the duality of language and experience, emphasizing the connection between the two: “The real meaning of words, the real capacity for visualizing the contents of a narrative, are always derived from personal experience, physiological, intellectual, and emotional, while on the other, such experience is invariably connected with verbal arts” (Malinowski 1935:46).

ENVIRONMENTAL DISCOURSES

Little research has been done on the relationship between power and language within the context of environmental conservation discourse. Nygren (Nygren 2000) looks at deforestation as an environmental and social phenomenon focused on changing perceptions of appropriate resource use and historically contingent interpretations of development. Others researchers look at how language has been used to manipulate people’s perceptions of environmental events for specific political and corporate goals (Brosius 1999b; Mühlhäusler 2000; Schultz 2001). Hanson (2007) explores the relationships among governmentality, language ideologies, and the production of needs in a Malagasy protected area. Drawing on Foucault, Hanson illustrates how Malagasy residents and park officials communicate and negotiate their needs in relation to a protected area project, arguing that “need technology” is a means of governance used in

conservation projects to establish authority and construct “needy, green subjects” (Hanson 2007: 246). Through specific discourses, park officials and residents were able to exercise local, national and transnational authority as well as political agency through the interpretation and translation processes surrounding participatory management.

In earlier work on how resource managers talk about and interpret the concept of *participation*, Jentoft et al. (1998) found that, not only is the concept of participation closely linked to legitimacy, but its meaning is defined and perpetuated by the participants themselves. Using specific categories of interpretations, the authors track the multiple definitions of participation and the ways in which they are embedded in management policy (Wilson and McCay 1998). In their ethnographic analysis of environmental discourses, Mühlhäusler and Peace (2006) define environmental discourse as, “specific ways of talking about particular environments and their futures” (Mühlhäusler and Peace 2006:458). The authors argue that discourse are not static and emerge from the interaction of all players. For example, the authors found that inherent uncertainty in environmental phenomena may lead to greater use of narrative and rhetoric in discursive events (Mühlhäusler and Peace 2006: 471). Other research has found that the media often relies on hyperbolic images to transmit information and co-generate meaning with the audience (Jagtenberg and McKie 1997). In this way, it is evident that language in general and environmental discourse specifically is a composite of many actors’ ideas, world-views, and experience. Meanings emerge as a collective endeavor, which then affects the individual’s perspective.

In this chapter I argue that such concepts as islandness, vulnerability and belonging can mean different things and be talked about in very different ways. These

different configurations of what it means to live and work on an island reflect individual experiences and motivations. In the following sections, I will examine the various discourses and meanings associated with islands, specifically in the context of conservation, paying close attention to power relationships among actors.

THE CONTEXT: ISLANDNESS AS SEEN THROUGH THE SEA

The Bahamas is made up of over 700 islands and small cays, of which only 17 are home to a population of 368,000 people and are called “Family Islands.” This does not account for the numerous islands that are privately owned either by Bahamian, or, far more common, foreign land holders. Ownership of these “private islands” is complicated by the fact that they are often held by 99 year leases supported by the promise (and practice) of indefinite extensions. The capital of Nassau, located on New Providence Island, holds two thirds of the population, while the remaining 120,000 are spread across the Family Islands. These small outposts are inextricably interwoven with socio-political formation of The Bahamas through geological events, family, political processes, and history; however each island, indeed, each settlement, is striking in its individuality while remaining staunchly Bahamian.

The land of an island—or archipelago—and its people are defined geographically and conceptually by the sea. The ocean forms a natural barrier, a boundary between land and what lies beyond, between civilized (settled) and wild. The Bahamas islands emerge from the shallow seas, bits of limestone outcroppings that stretch below the ocean to connect with the next set of cays. To theorize the distinct geomorphology and social

patterns of an archipelago nation, I turn to Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) outline of rhizoid properties:

[U]nlike trees or their roots, the rhizome connects any point to any other point, and its trait are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature...Unlike the tree, the rhizome is not the object of reproduction...the rhizome operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots...the rhizome pertains to a map that must be produced, constructed, a map that is always detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable, and has multiple entryways and exist and its own line of flight.

(Deleuze and Guattari 1988: 21)

Flying over The Bahamas, I am first struck by their tremendous beauty from above, mere smudges of sand colored paint amidst a glorious indigo sea. In contrast to the sheering cliffs of Jamaica, St Lucia, or Martinique—soaring island-scapes which surprise the mind's eye after so many miles of sea—The Bahamas appears as gentle dustings of sand breaking the shallow sea's surface and rising from a vast submarine plateau. The islands themselves appear connected through river-ways of sand just beneath the water surface, formed by sea currents and emerging just enough to support tenuous, perhaps overly optimistic development. These images underscore the nation's rhizoid qualities, those of “an acentered nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system without a General and without an organizing memory or central automaton, defined solely by a circulation of states” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 21).



FIGURE 2: AREAL VIEW OF BAHAMIAN ISLANDS

PHOTO: SARAH WISE

The rhizoid metaphor contradicts the notion of islands as discrete and isolated entities. Although the image of the deserted or remote island may be prominent in our imaginations, islands are in fact inextricably connected: to the sea, to the mainland, and to other lands through trade routes, ritual, and even geology. Anthropologists, archaeologists and ecologists have pointed to the research opportunities posed by islands for the understanding of biological and cultural adaptation and evolution, given their isolation and distinctiveness (Kirch 1980; MacArthur and Wilson 1963; MacArthur and Wilson 1967; Vayda and Rappaport 1963). Schneider's response to Vayda and Rappaport's claims questions the assumption of isolation, arguing for a more rigorous analysis before claiming particular characteristics of islands (Vayda and Rappaport 1963). Rather than emphasizing the sea as an isolating medium for islands, D'Arcy (2006) argues that the sea has historically been a connecting pathway for islanders in the Pacific. "Most of the inhabitants of Remote Oceania were not bound by the sea, but rather embraced it as both habitat and pathway to resources and opportunities beyond their home islands. A web of social, economic, and political ties linked them with other

communities and localities” (D'Arcy 2006: 50). Describing the Caribbean as “a highly divided, insular, and small-scale region, as compared with much of the rest of the world,” (Mintz 1974: 23). Mintz goes on to examine just how the region was and continues to be connected to the world historically and symbolically through trade, language, food, and imagination.

ARRIVING IN ANDROS

There are two main ways to travel to Andros Island. Only a few years ago, the only option would have been to take the mail boat which still operates out of Nassau, taking packages, food stuffs and goods, and the occasional passenger short on funds to the family islands. The supply ships were slow and accommodations notoriously rough although I did hear many stories about clandestine trysts on the upper storage decks. Now, you can take a three hour “fast ferry” that rolls over the shallow seas and deep water trenches from Nassau twice weekly. The boats are often full to capacity with the older people and women planted inside near the café, feeding seasick children Vienna sausages, cheese puffs, and tuna salad sandwiches. The young men opt for less confined space and fresh air, perching themselves in truck beds on the car deck, blasting music from car radios and drinking beer. The faster, but far more terrifying option is taking one of the small private planes operated by young men with freshly obtained pilot licenses. The plane rides are short but often harrowing, especially during mid-summer storm seasons when the winds toss the small planes around the lightening blazed skies and the rain falls so hard it inevitably seeps through the cracked sheet metal. On my many trips to and from Andros, transportation was always a difficult choice.

My plane follows Fresh Creek's broad path into the interior of the island in order to bank for the correct angle for the run way. The creek's water is shallow—too shallow at low tide for an unseasoned captain to pass his boat. Tourists must hire guides to navigate the complex waterways, sometimes paying as much as \$10,000 USD for a week of guiding and fishing. I watch for “blue holes” as we fly over the landscape, counting the circular bodies of water – darker blue and invariably eerie—embedded in the land. Some look like small puddles recently formed after the latest summer storm passed through. Others appear timeless, formed after millennia of erosion, steep walls encircling, catching unwary creatures passing by, isolating species. At this altitude, there is no indication that many of these blue holes are tidal, connected through intricate cave systems to the sea. At last count, there were hundreds blue holes in Andros, but new ones are being “discovered,” named, and mapped all the time.

*The coast of Andros is mostly low lying scrub with patches of the invasive *Casuarina* pine and the occasional coconut palm⁶. There used to be far more coconut trees, but the few remaining are a sickly yellow color and produce few if any coconuts. There are far more palm trees to the south of the island—away from Kamaleme resort, where the Jamaican owner is said to have imported several discounted but diseased palms which have killed off the existing populations. As my plane crosses the Tongue of the Ocean, a 6,000 foot oceanic trench stretching between New Providence and Andros Islands, the water changes color from dark midnight blue to aquamarine as it sheers upward from 6,000 feet to 15. Each patch reef is clear and some of the larger fish – sharks mostly – are visible even from this great height. As we*

⁶ *Casuarina* pine or Australian pine (in the family [Casuarinaceae](#)) is an invasive tree that dominates the Bahamas' coast lines. There are ongoing disputes about the *Casuarina* as it provides much needed shade along the beaches, but is overwhelmingly prolific and has edged out many endemic species.

pass over coastline, the line of vegetation ends a few 100 yards in and becomes muddy flats with dense mangrove stands. Fresh Creek, the tidal creek for which the settlement is named, widens and opens up the center of the island. Andros could be described as more water than land. The land sits barely above sea level, seeming to melt into the water. The island is strewn with tidal estuaries that connect as a labyrinth of waterways across the island, sharing their names with nearby settlements—Fresh Creek, Cargill Creek, Stafford Creek, Staniard Creek—each one dividing the land, connecting the freshwater interior with the saline sea, ushering juveniles of sea species to and fro, from oceanic depths to mangrove nursery grounds. Andros is only partially land with its houses perched on stilts along the coastline or tucked tightly together on the few gentle hills that rise a few feet above the water. Finally, we align with the runway and descend rapidly. Within seconds, we taxi on the runway toward a small yellow airport slightly larger than a standard Bahamian house. A man stands outside ready to help passengers deplane. The pilot barely stops the plane, before he unclips his belt and slips through the open window. His belly slows him for a second causing the ground man to roar with laughter and taunt him about, “getting rich and fat.”

The Androsian archipelago is divided into two large sections, separated by the expansive Middle Bight, a stretch of water and mangroves dotted with small uninhabited cays that divides the northern and southern sections of the island. North Andros is the slightly more developed of the two and is home to an industry for exporting fresh drinking water (otherwise scarce in the Bahamas), and the central government offices. South Andros offers small high-end sport fishing lodges as well as a luxury eco-resort, *Tiamo*. Due to the sheer size of Andros—Andros is often touted as the largest island in The Bahamas and the fifth largest island in the Caribbean (The Bahamas Online 2006)—as well as time and financial restrictions, my research focused exclusively on North Andros, where the original Westside National Park was first established in 2002. Furthermore, transportation between North and South Andros was limited to expensive charter flights or direct commercial flights from Nassau, prohibiting any cost effective travel between the two areas. Before 1960, few roads existed and most transportation between settlements, as well as other islands, relied on the sea. Each settlement remained isolated from the rest of the island, let alone the rest of the world. Residents traveled by flat bottom boat, polling over the shallow bays to see family, celebrate deaths, obtain medical treatment, and transport goods. Residents fished and farmed their food, collected

and carried water from nearby sources, built schools and churches, and depended on neighbors during lean times and crises. The settlements of North Andros, numbering no more than 30-80 households during the time of this research, maintain strong community ties based on family and faith.

Today, a thin strip of road—the Queen’s Highway⁷— runs the length of north Andros connecting each settlement from the southern tip of Behring Point to the far north of Lowe Sound, and west 20 miles to Red Bays like knots on a string. The last settlement to gain road access in 1997 was Red Bays, a tiny and somewhat bedraggled community, on the edge of the west side “mud,” distinct in its position as the only settlement on the west side of the island. Despite the difficulties in travel, Androsians were and continue to be also intricately connected to the broader world, whether through centuries of trade, migration, or music. While geographically isolated in some ways, Androsians have developed complex and extensive networks, often based on the sea. The sea became each settlement’s life source for food, for transport, and for any connection to the rest of the island and the wider world. The sponge market alone tied the people of Andros and the Great Bahamas banks to southern Florida and the Europe through trade routes. Fishermen fished along the coasts and transported their catch to Nassau and Florida. People looked to other settlements, other islands, for social partners. The young traveled to Nassau or to Florida to find employment. Social connections are made fluid by their marine conduit.

CONNECTING THE DOTS, LINKING THE CHAIN

Let’s be realistic: the Atlantic is the Atlantic (with all its port cities) because it was once engendered by the copulation of Europe—that insatiable solar bull—with the Caribbean archipelago; the Atlantic is today

⁷ Every main road on every island in The Bahamas is named the Queen’s Highway.

the Atlantic (the navel of capitalism) because Europe, in its mercantilist laboratory, conceived the project of inseminating the Caribbean womb with the blood of Africa...

(Benítez Rojo 1996: 5)

The Bahamas is a microcosm of the larger Caribbean and shares in the larger Caribbean identity, as well as connectivity. In *The Repeating Island*, Antonio Benítez-Rojos argues that the Caribbean is not simply a series of islands, each an individualized product of its history and political turmoil, but instead an interconnected string of repeating islands, linked together by a shared rhythm of experience. Employing chaos theory, Benítez-Rojo focuses on patterns among the Caribbean experience, identifying “processes, dynamics, and rhythms that show themselves within the marginal, the regional, the incoherent, the heterogeneous, or, if you like, the unpredictable that coexists in our everyday world” (Benítez-Rojo’s 1996: 3). Within this framework, Benítez-Rojo argues that each Caribbean island may represent different socio-cultural and historical experiences, while still participating in a shared and uniquely organized Caribbean identity. In this way, the Caribbean must be viewed not simply as a product of its historical roots, but as a constantly repeating, interrelated-through-performance, a “feedback machine” (Benítez-Rojo’s 1996: 11). Specific rituals are produced, consumed, and (re)produced anew, not so much in a circular design, but more accurately described as a spiral which never quite lines up perfectly. Thus, according to Benítez-Rojo, there are no “new” cultural performances because each is refashioned from bits of memories and experience. No person or place can be considered “the origin” of the Caribbean. Instead the Atlantic region only exists in relation to the capitalist greed of Europe and the blood of Africa. The Caribbean and its islands are not only *connected* through shared

histories, political events, or oceanographic currents, their very existence depends on their association with each other, their connectivity.

Benítez-Rojo's theory of connectivity is particularly relevant to The Bahamas. As an archipelago, The Bahamas replicates—in national and geomorphological form—the grinding movement of socio-political and historical repetition. Each island has been informed by a shared government, enduring family ties, geological events, cultural meanings, and histories. Concurrently, the different island settlements have developed in highly specific and localized ways. The Bahamas archipelago spans 100,000 square miles of ocean. While each settlement remains inextricably connected to the greater conceptualized Bahamas, each must also engage with and respond to specific social and environmental conditions which, in turn, inform the cultural dynamics of a place.

The Bahamas, as an archipelago nation—a string of islands unified by language, cultural meanings, laws and history, but distinct in each island's interpretation—requires contemplating the individual as well the collective. The very place, by its representation of *islandness*, becomes relational in its existence. The sea defines the island, materially as well as symbolically. In much the same way, the sea shapes island life.

MANY ENCOUNTERS, MULTIPLE DISCOURSES

ENCOUNTERING ANDROS

The plane held six passengers: the two tourists, me with my daughter wedged on my lap, and a young Androsian woman returning from a trip to Nassau to visit family. I had seen her in Fresh Creek often, but I guessed the nature of her trip because of her clothes. She wore new clothes, a bright blue shirt with matching blue sandals and earrings and tight jeans embroidered across the pockets. Her hair was freshly styled, slick with grease in the front, dyed blue and yellow, straightened, and twisted into tightly curled rings across the top. She told me she had just been to see her baby's daddy for Independence Day. Bahamian

Independence had just passed and Nassau continued to clean up after the Junkanoo⁸ rushes and street celebrations. The final passenger was perched in front of me in the co-pilot seat. She turned around and I recognized her as the director of The Nature Conservancy, a light skinned smiling woman with a Caribbean lilt to her voice. We greeted one another, asking about our reasons for flying. As we scrambled out the side hatch, she said, "Andros is amazing. There isn't any other place like it in the Bahamas, in the Caribbean. It has everything, reefs, mangroves, blue holes. It needs to be protected while there is still something to protect."

I got off the plane and walked straight out to pick up my bag. The waiting area was filled with passengers, friends and family and a seemingly countless number of airport staff who cleaned chairs, moved bags, and served Gatorade and warm cups of tea in Styrofoam. One man rhythmically swept the encroaching puddle of rain water off the tarmac, away from the entry. As he pushed, the water would return, circling around his broom and rushing back toward the entryway—a steady flow down the gradual slope. Undaunted, he rounded back and began again to push the water out, away from people entering.

There were 30 or so Americans with military badges sitting on chairs, waiting for the naval flight to Miami. Even with facial hair, thongs and Hawaiian shirts, the military personnel were easily distinct from the tourists. They lacked the nervous smiles of the tourist. Tourists smelled of vacation – coconut oil sun screen and rum. Tourist women wore large hats and the men sported painful sunburns around their eyes and nose, outlining their sport sunglasses. Instead, these military Americans carried a familiarity with the place and people, while remaining entirely distant. They sat reading novels and eating imported apples – a rare luxury on the island. They greeted each other with slaps on the back and long strings of acronyms. "I worked a full 20 on the DBR last night. Jackson was INA, so we had to SIPS it." Most ignored the Bahamians in the area and they certainly ignored me. Everyone ignored me. I stood among these groups, distinct from each. Neither Bahamian nor tourist, I was a white American but not military, I had been coming to the Bahamas, and Andros specifically, as a researcher off and on for six years. To complicate things further I was married to a black Bahamian man and we had a three year old child who spoke like an Androsian. I had come to Andros to study—broadly—how people experience and talk about change: change of the land and sea itself through climatic events, conservation practices, and adjustments in governance; change in the ways people use and claim access to resources; and changes in how people are thinking about these claims. In that moment, as I got off the plane, I stood in the little airport, a slow buzz of activity around me, and I felt change as the ground itself shifted to accommodate me. I felt the earth as I touched the ground, wet and soft after the morning's torrential rainfall.

Encounters with Andros have shaped and been shaped by images, metaphors, and ideas that constitute the discourses used by different groups. Many Bahamians, even those living in Andros, consider Andros to be the least developed, most rural and least appealing of all the Bahamian islands—often calling it *the back-of-the-bush*—meaning the remote, wild, and uncivilized.

⁸ Junkanoo is a carnival-type parade with ties to African traditions dating back to the early days of slavery in The Bahamas. The event traditionally occurs on Boxing Day and New Year's day although there are additional performance for tourists during other times of the year. Participants make intricate costumes of vibrant colored paper, feathers, beads and sequins to parade through the main streets of town throughout The Bahamas.

The phrase, *the-back-of-the-bush* illustrates the wide range of meanings that people in The Bahamas associate with nature and wilderness. Conservationists in the Bahamas conceptualize the bush, or Coppice Forest, as something to preserve, protect, and cherish as valuable wilderness and habitat for endangered species:

By far the most diverse and interesting group of native trees and plants can be found in our Bahamian forest known as Coppice...The Coppice forest is an important habitat for Bahamian wildlife. Birdlife abounds in the coppice forest. Smooth Billed Anis forage for insects and lizards. The Great Lizard Cuckoo hides in the low branches of trees looking for lizards and large insects, the White-crowned Pigeon feeds on Pigeon plum, Seagrape, Blolly and Poisonwood, and the shy Key West Quail Dove rustles through the leaf litter on the forest floor. As one journeys through the forest it is also possible to see our Bahamian Boa Constrictor stretched out along the branch of tree in a shaft of sunlight.

BNT information sheet on Blackland Coppice forests, 2012,

Rather than a threat, the bush protects what is valuable. On the other hand, many Androsians fear the bush as a place where people get lost and exposed to the elements. The bush is dark, impenetrable, and riddled with biting insects. Children and the elderly lose their way, fall into hidden caves and die. On Andros, the “bush” epitomizes the dangers of alienation and isolation, of being cut off from family and one’s life support. To the Androsians I spoke with, a wild rawness pervaded the bush and anyone daring to enter it. Home owners were careful to cut back all trees and shrubs on their home plots, leaving only torn and bare chalky earth devoid of any greenery.

The association between land “improvement” and razing all vegetation is so strong that it remains the most effective way to claim property in Andros. The first and most enduring claim to land is simply to “cut” the space desired. If the money is available, the person will rent a bulldozer and tear up all live growth, right down to the hard bare limestone. Years may pass before a house is built, if at all, but in the meantime

people understand that land has been claimed and rarely challenge it. Eventually, the land holder may plant a few stunted trees or shrubs—the very same varieties that had been torn violently from the ground, only those had been healthy and mature specimens. Typically, conventional Bahamian houses stand isolated from the surrounding vegetation, highlighting the desire for a distinct divide between humans and nature, tamed and wild, civilization and wilderness. One man explained the process.

The bush is dangerous. Those big trees can fall on your house. Snakes live in them. Biting flies like that shade. You people always keeping the trees, planting more trees! I put in a few things I like. Keep ‘em small. I don’t need no big trees to remind me that the bush is there, close. It’s the garden of Eden, not the bush...where’d Eve find that snake? In the tree!

The man’s biblical reference was familiar. Comparing islands with an Edenic paradise has a long history within the colonial Caribbean narrative. Rodríguez (2004) writes that the comparisons between islands and paradise appeared in early descriptions from adventurers in search of new lands, and continues today in tourist and conservation literature. Building on the idea that nature is culturally constructed, Rodríguez focuses on the disparity between discourse and geography: language and meaning are not in harmony, allowing for a space, such as an island, to be described and possessed through colonial rhetoric. In counterbalance to paradise, Rodríguez offers up a second chapter on the Caribbean islands, entitled, “*Inferno*.” Here, the author moves from the adventure/discover discourse to one of production and enslavement. The empty “natural” landscape becomes an industrial working island, plagued with difficulties including soil erosion and labor disputes. The island narratives of utopian opportunity and hope shift toward rigorous hardship, slavery—what the author calls, *Inferno*. The Caribbean islands are no longer empty and fertile Edens without the experience of human touch. Instead,

they are populated and legislated lands in a state of conflict. The landscape has been transformed to accommodate new ideologies: the island has been fashioned and refashioned to represent ongoing national debates and political—namely colonial and postcolonial—agendas (ibid).

ISLANDS REPRESENTATIONS

Rodríguez's focus on islands as places of adventure and discovery as well as that of production and enslavement are relevant to representations of The Bahamas given the nation's history of colonialism, slavery, and its more recent reliance on tourism. In the next section, I will compare and contrast the various discourses regarding surrounding the environment and islandness in The Bahamas. While some discourses reproduce a colonial imaginary in which the landscape is romanticized in nostalgic reverie, others are deeply rooted in the practical realities of living and working in an island environment.

SCIENTIFIC EXPLORATION AND PARADISE LOST

Remote places like islands offer opportunities for discovery, represented in the discourses of explorers, adventurers, scientists, and social scientists. Island inhabitants, the flora and fauna, and *the spectacle* (Beeman 1993; Thompson 2006) of Andros island culture have been extracted and analyzed by social scientists, cultural critics, and tourists for centuries see (Goggin 1937; Goggin 1939; Goggin 1946; Macleod 1999; Otterbein 1964a). In the 1930s, scientists from the American Museum of Natural History dynamited a large section of the Andros Barrier Reef in order to mount it in their coral reef diorama. Biologists, herpetologists, botanists, and anthropologists travel year round

to Andros to study the biota and social and ecological processes. Today research vessels roam the coasts of Andros examining oceanographic currents, population recruitment, evidence for climate change, algae formations, and reef health, and research continues on rock iguanas, aquatic caves, and other features of the land.

Islands attract researchers because of the opportunities provided for controlled comparisons, living laboratories. Kuklick (1996) traces the role of island research by such scientists as Charles Darwin and Alfred Haddon in the development of biogeography and anthropology. The assumed isolation and fragility of islands provided the ideal conditions for research of biological and cultural phenomena. Kuklick argues that Darwin assumed islands to be highly transitory systems compared to the permanence of continents and oceans. In order to explore his theories of natural selection, Darwin was drawn to, “the precarious conditions of islands” (Kuklick 1996: 616), believing that the specificity of the island environment led to homogenous genetic traits that could be more easily identifiable. Island peoples, imagined to be isolated from contact with other peoples, were also thought to be more homogeneous. Islands became laboratories for biological and cultural research (Kirch 1980). Through the process of scientifically documenting the environment and inhabitants, researchers were able to develop knowledge of a place considered exotic, geographically and culturally separate from mainland ideologies.

In his collection of essays, *Caribbean Transformations*, Mintz (1974) characterizes the Caribbean as both a product of a shared social history and as wildly heterogeneous in cultures and political experiences. Emphasizing the role of slavery and plantation agriculture in the formation of the Caribbean region and its people, Mintz attempts to position the Caribbean as a ‘cultural area’ worthy of further study. These

same arguments can be observed in early anthropological research (Goggin 1939, 1946) as well as more recent work examining Andros' history as a refuge for Seminole Indians during the 1800s (Howard 2006). Andros becomes a place worthy of study, and worthy of conservation. The past is rich with history and cultural meanings while the land itself is rich with natural wealth.

Andros has been depicted as a land lost in the past, untouched by humans, and rich with undiscovered and valuable resources that will somehow enrich humanity, whether through increased knowledge of long term climate change, or through added insight into human history, fresh water resources, or global fisheries. The discourses of tourism and conservation all draw heavily on nostalgic images of the rural undeveloped landscape of Andros. Much of the conservation discourse surrounding the rural landscapes of Andros employs nostalgic reverie to romanticize what once existed as the rural Bahamas, and to underscore the urgent need for action in order to preserve what remains. Islandscapes become softened in the haze of dim memories: the sun is less hot, the azure blue seas lap at the shore, and nature takes the shape of an undiscovered "natural" landscape. Humans are separated from the natural environment, disconnected from nature as the land becomes ripe for exploration. Ultimately, the state is tenuous and fleeting, and thus vulnerable. Modernization in the form of human-induced change threatens to overwhelm memory and obscure the past. Nature is threatened by human interaction, destroyed through wanton (unregulated, ungoverned) use.

I heard this discourse repeatedly while in The Bahamas, often when conservation agents talked about the need to protect a fleeting healthy environment. By juxtaposing the hazards of the urban environment of Nassau and Florida with the empty (of people) yet

bountiful wilds of Andros, conservation agencies put into play the familiar tension between the rural and urban, untouched wilderness and built environment, between a place untouched by humans and one transformed beyond return.

Former Bahamas National Trust (BNT) president, Demetrius Morris, who is a career lawyer and amateur historian, often used the imagery and language of a paradise lost or under imminent threat to promote conservation projects within The Bahamas. During his annual address at The Bahamas National Trust membership meeting, Morris talked about hunting in Andros as a boy with his father, when “there were so many pigeons you could just knock ‘em out of the tree.” Andros was “real wilderness” then. He camped in the bush and cooked his food on a fire. Andros represented a “natural wonder,” untouched by modernity, which he describes in the shape of mega resorts, mining operations, dredging and other destructive activities. By emphasizing of what has already been lost elsewhere and romanticizing Andros as an undeveloped island, tied to The Bahamas past, Morris suggests that Andros is valuable not only in its biodiversity and teeming wildlife, but in its symbolic meaning as an authentic and unspoiled Bahamian landscape. The people who live and work on the island—Androsians—do not enter his nostalgic narrative. He and his father survived the bush together. For Morris, modernity takes the shape of crowded roads, congestion, construction, loud machines burping fumes, air pollution, turbid oceans, and garbage strewn landscapes: in short, the island of New Providence. In contrast, Andros offers wide open space absent of human reminders: where one can “drive for miles without passing another car or settlement,” and “swim in crystal clear oceans,” or “get lost in the coppice it is so thick.” The Andros of

Morris' imagination—informed by centuries of colonial European imagery—is planted firmly in the past: a paradise that, if not lost, is certainly under threat.

TOURISM

As a visiting anthropologist, I watch for the subtle things and the not so subtle, like the dramatic changes in voice tone as the pilot turns to the pair of tourists—two men, white Americans with khaki shorts and Sperry topsiders, one with his Polo shirt advertising his last fishing trip – ‘Bonefish Charlie’s,’ and the other with an image of a fighting blue marlin raised high out of the water, its tail curled in defiance, the giant hook just visible in his jaw—and speaks with exaggerated clarity, “you all need a taxi at the airport?” The tourists still didn’t understand him even with his careful enunciation, and he shrugs and turns back to prepare to land.

Another type of encounter between visitor and resident that is profoundly relevant to the Bahamas more generally and Andros specifically is that of the tourist. For the Bahamas, tourism has become the dominant industry, obscuring other livelihoods and imposing radical changes on the landscape and its peoples. As Bahamian writer and playwright Strachan explains in his 2002 book, Paradise and Plantation, about The Bahamas’ history of slavery and the links to today’s reliance on tourism, “It is hard to ignore the hotels. They rise like mammoths of iron and concrete above the homes, the office buildings, the trees of New Providence, island of my birth” (Strachan 2002: ix).

Like many other places in the Caribbean and elsewhere, Bahamian environmental policies often allow for tourist recreational activities, while limiting use of natural resources by island residents. In this way, the WNP enclosure is an instance of the “leisuring” of the landscape: render the land and see a recreational space (Bunce 2008). This leads to conflict among visitors and people native to the island. Bunce (2008) argues that rural landscapes around the world are being sought out and acquired by foreign elites in order to satisfy leisure-oriented goals such as tourism. Bunce writes that Caribbean islands exemplify the ideal global countryside as is illustrated by the Small Island

Developing States, focus on tourism as a central development scheme, and that external control of space on islands through the “leisuring” of the landscape can be considered a form of neo-colonial governance that only works to further marginalize island communities (Block and Klausner 1987; Bunce 2008). Development and conservation agendas overlap. Conservation efforts in Andros are usually framed in terms of economic opportunities through tourism; however the overall loss of access to resources and fragmentation of space causes significant socio-economic constraints for the people living on the island.

CULTURAL BACKBONE

Another perspective common among Bahamians and tourists alike, also building on Andros’ social isolation and lack of development, is that Andros is the center of Bahamian music, dancing, language, and food, where people are connected to the sea, men really know how to fish, women cook, and the land crabs and fish are the largest found in the islands. Accordingly, tourist literature describes Andros as “the heartland” or “the backbone” of the Bahamas, representing the true or authentic Bahamas islands. Androsians also promote this view, proud of their resistance to large mega resorts and other development projects.

Andros’ inclusion in the tourist literature is not new. In the mid-20th century, Andros was popular among an extremely wealthy international crowd including former British prime minister Neville Chamberlain and Swedish entrepreneur and philanthropist, Axel Wenner-gren. More recently, there has been a resurgence of interest in Andros as a potential eco-tourist destination, building upon the conservationist discourse, of natural

wilderness in combination with the language of leisure to yield “natural experiences” in as in the following:

Andros is Bahamas’ most extraordinary natural wonder. All of The Bahamas Out Islands boast abundant natural attractions, but Andros Island—the largest yet most sparsely developed of all The Bahamas—is the king when it comes to superlative natural experiences. It’s a great place for a laid-back beach getaway, wedding or honeymoon, but for ecotourists, kayakers, bird watchers, hikers, snorkelers, divers and fishermen, the big island of The Bahamas is the ideal vacation destination.

Bahamas Islands Information (The Ministry of Tourism website 2012)

In other parts of the Bahamas, tourism agendas have frequently conflicted with those of local residents. A similar conflict has begun to emerge in Andros, particularly in relation to access to coastal waters. Carrier’s (2003) research on similar conflicts in Jamaica illustrates how the tourist industry has tangibly altered the island land- and seascapes through the building of roads, resorts, and airports, as well as the way people relate to their ocean environment. Conservation work in The Bahamas follows similar trajectories: fishers argue that tourism harms the marine environment, while conservationists promote tourism as a sustainable non-extractive activity. The surrounding ocean becomes contested space for control over the island’s marine resources.

The tourism encounter has shaped the Bahamas profoundly, from the built environment to Bahamian identity, as elsewhere in the Caribbean (e.g., Carrier 2003). Tourism has become the dominant industry, obscuring other livelihoods and imposing radical changes on the landscape and its peoples. Tourism builds upon the discourses of European colonialism, casting tropical islands as Eden-like landscapes (Grove 1995). These earthly Edens continue to beckon visitors—to the tune of five million tourists per

year—to the Bahamas. Visitors seek paradise in the form of sun, sand, and sea. The tourist campaigns emphasize the links between islands and early descriptions of adventurers in search of paradise (Rodríguez 2004). Williams (1973) describes the mythical Eden as, “This country in which all things come naturally to man, for his use and enjoyment, and without his effort, is that Paradise” (Williams 1973: 31). Abundance exists effortlessly, any labor invisible and inconsequential, nature is what Williams describes as “magically self-yielding” (Williams 1973: 42).

Native Bahamian playwright and professor, Ian Strachan (2004) suggests that the absence of labor in these tropical paradises (such as The Bahamas) goes beyond invisibility: rather, any sort of industry has been relegated to a particular segment of society and “integrated into the natural order” (Strachan 2004: 40). Laborers—those people mixing drinks, offering towels at the poolside, cleaning beds—have become part of the natural world, only to be seen through the context of service and servitude. Not only do people travel to islands to sightsee and enjoy the beaches and warm waters but also to experience what they imagine as what Bunce calls an “authentic island life,” which has been packaged and reconstituted as a tropical paradise (Bunce 2008).

NOT QUITE PICTURESQUE NATURE

A 2,300-square-mile island paradise, Andros is regarded as the bonefishing capital of the world, and a perfect destination for ecotourists, adventurers, and just plain vacationers alike. The idyllic Bahamian island also features the second-longest reef in the Northern Hemisphere. The average 80°F temperature of the crystal clear, blue waters makes diving or snorkelling to enjoy the abundant marine wildlife surrounding Andros Island a magical treat you can indulge in year-round. The diverse island which rises from these tropical waters is full of wildlife, much of it unique to Andros. Rare tropical birds, 4-foot long iguanas, wild boars and more than 40 kinds of wild orchids, and a recently discovered tribal group all

thrive in this island paradise. With miles of deserted beaches, freshwater mud flats, pine forests and inland waterways that make up this Atlantic oasis the island is rumored to be home two mythical creatures -- the chickcharnies and Lusca. Legend also has it that somewhere on Andros Henry Morgan's buried treasure lies buried.

Advertisement for guest house in North Andros (Hammond 2012)

Andros is not what one might consider traditionally "picturesque." Instead, visitors are drawn to Andros for its lack of development, its healthy and abundant fisheries, and broad tracts of seeming "wilderness." Conservations must use discourse beyond picturesque beauty to claim that the lands and seas are valuable to tourism and science.

Tourism is central to the island's economy primarily through high-end sport fishing. Andros is world renowned for bonefishing, and anglers can spend as much as \$10,000 for a week of fishing and rugged accommodations. Andros is different than parts of The Bahamian landscape dominated by mega resorts. Upon arrival at the tiny airport in Fresh Creek, I was not greeted by brightly clad and smiling musicians playing traditional rake-and-scrap music. Although the airport is painted the standard government pink, there are no souvenir huts painted flamboyantly or women calling out to braid my hair. At first glance, Andros appears to be a quiet island, somber if not unfriendly. Tourists arrive to experience something other than jovial Bahamians, rum punch, and the picturesque Bahamian clapboard settlement.

The concept of picturesque is complicated, particularly in relation to the harsh muddy flat lands of Andros. Picturesque can mean cute or quaint; the idea embraces feelings of charm and security, and puts words to that moment when the visible reality before you matches, at least to some recognizable degree, how you imagined a place

should be. Over time and familiarity, places tend to become less picturesque. The details that become visible in knowing a place break the spell of picturesque. To echo Kristin Thompson (2006), what is considered *picturesque* relates to the politics of space, colonial governance, and the state control over land and society. Creating spaces that looked like a picture in the imagination became, “not only a way of seeing and a program of landscaping, but of governing” (Thompson 2006: 94). The label, *picturesque* comes to signify the landscape’s ability to conform to the exoticized and fantastic ideals of being *tropical*. The visual landscape of Andros then becomes jarring as the viewer struggles to match it to the imagined tropical island.

Cosgrove (2005) makes the important distinction between the *tropics* as geographical spaces and *tropicality*, “as a set of imagined, pictorial, and textual spaces,” which he argues are mutually constitutive as they work to describe and reify boundary lines (Cosgrove 2005: 198). Rarely can the Androsian landscape be defined as picturesque or tropical. Wild, desolate and at times, starkly beautiful, Andros defies the quaint colonial picturesque (see Figure 3).



FIGURE 3: THE WEST SIDE OF ANDROS ISLAND

PHOTO: SARAH WISE

Instead, tourists and conservationists have turned instead to images of untouched and uninhabited space with abundant (yet precarious) resources and a long lost “pristine Bahamian wilderness” (TNC 2005: website). The message is clear: the work performed by conservation, such as scientific exploration and description, measuring and representing through a particular conservation lens is required in making the space valuable. The arguments are persuasive and presented matter-of-factly as if the perspectives are uniform, the perceptions in agreement. An example of this language is evident in the 2008 park expansion proposal for the Westside National Park:

The west side of Andros is known for its pristine land and sea ecosystems. It is composed of an extensive carbonate mud complex with small islands and characterized by estuaries, tidal creeks, and wetlands. Local fishermen confirm that these estuaries are key nursery and foraging habitats for commercially valuable species such as Nassau grouper, snapper, spiny lobster, tarpon, and bonefish. The area also contributes to fish stocks throughout the Caribbean.

On the west side, there is a small human population and extensive uninhabitable areas which mean that threats to this environment are relatively low. However, there has been a noticeable decline in the number

and size of adult Nassau grouper, conch and spiny lobster; all of which are exploited commercially.

Proposal for the Westside National Park
Bahamas National Trust 2008: 4

The text suggests that there is consensus among scientists and fishers in this representation of the west side of Andros as a space with “valuable species” under threat. Kristin Thompson’s (2006) work in the Bahamas and Jamaica shows how the colonial imagination manages to shape both the social and physical island environments through media representations and tourist advertisements; and, I would argue, through protected area conservation projects that require extensive outreach efforts and media coverage. Among international conservation agencies, Andros Island has become valuable for its globally significant biodiversity, but also because of its apparent insular tropicality.

A WORKING ISLAND: ANDROSIAN ENCOUNTERS AND NARRATIVES OF BELONGING

Andros is a highly productive environment; and yet despite that, conservation organizations continue to declare Andros a pristine wilderness—the value of which lies in its consummate enclosure. As the director of TNC’s Caribbean Marine Program said in the wake of the 2006 REA:

To find large populations of so many rare and threatened species reinforces our belief that the west side of Andros is one of the most ecologically intact and pristine areas remaining in the western tropical Atlantic.

Phillip Kramer, Marine Director as quoted in ANCAT newsletter, 2010

Andros has undergone several transformations in the past two hundred years. At one time, Andros was a refuge for people escaping slavery in the Bahamas, central to the international sponge trade, and remains an active sponging center. Throughout the late

1700 and 1800s, U.S. British colonialists tried their hand at plantations-style agriculture with slave labor across Andros. The combination of inadequate soil and a difficult climate led to repeated failures. Plantation owners moved on, abandoning their land and slaves as failed investments. The former slaves continued to work the land making homes and building communities. In the early 20th century, Andros was twice logged bare by United States timber companies. The thick coppice and pine stands were razed down to dusty limestone for timber.

The seas surrounding Andros have long been active sites of industry whether harvesting sponge, aragonite, or lobster. The Andros barrier reef runs the length of the east side providing ample fishing grounds for reef fish and some migratory deep sea species. The shallow sandy banks on the west harbors several commercial species, including spiny lobster (*Panulirus argus*), stonecrab (*Menippe mercenaria*), various sponge species, Queen conch (*Strombus gigas*), and scalefish, including bonefish (*Albula Vulpes*), a popular fish for the small but highly lucrative sports fishing industry on the island as well as for subsistence. International interests include enormous commercial trawlers and long liners that fish illegally, absorbing the minimal costs when the rare vessel is caught poaching.

Recently, the petroleum industry has re-instated exploratory drilling off the shores of Andros, looking for the first hint of oil to drill further. American and Canadian zoos and aquariums schedule regular collecting trips to the barrier reef to “freshen” their exhibit fish and breeding stocks. Bahamian fishers are quick to travel to Andros when they hear the call for live turtle or shark to replenish Atlantis resort’s live displays. The

seas surrounding Andros are dotted daily with fishing vessels harvesting marine species to eat, to catch for recreation, to study, and to sell internationally.



FIGURE 4: AGRICULTURAL LAND IN ANDROS ISLAND

PHOTO: SARAH WISE

From the air the island is hatched with old logging roads and farm land (see Figure 4). Andros Island is one of the very few viable farming areas available in The Bahamas. In addition to small household farm plots, Andros has recently agreed to lease land to the Chinese government for experimental rice production and other agricultural efforts (The Bahamas Local.com 2009). While conservationists strive to erase signs of habitation, calling the west side “pristine,” “uninhabited,” or “untouched,” Andros has been shaped by human interventions for centuries.

A HOMELAND

We call these island flats home
 peaks of an underwater mountain chain
 colouring books of emerald infancy
 dot-to-dot moss desires of slaves and loyalists
 unbalanced on slippery turtle-back humps

From poem, “Rocks of Refuge” by Marion Bethel: 35

The poem above was written by the native Bahamian Marion Bethel, an attorney who lives in Nassau and received her education in Cambridge. For Bethel, the islands are both home and a reminder of a dark past. Far from a utopian paradise, Bethel's islands echo with the "desires of slaves and loyalists." Her image of the homeland is a place hard to grasp, "unbalanced," and "slippery," only momentarily visible before submerging under the waves. Bethel's poem represents an alternate discourse to the conservation imaginary of the untouched pristine paradisaal landscape in need of protection. For many Bahamians who walk miles through the hard wood coppice to crab or bake in the hot sun to fish along the islands' shores, the concept of "untouched nature or a tropical paradise" take on very different and even malignant meanings.

Bahamian author and College of the Bahamas professor Nicolle Bethel (2008) is quick to point out that the notion and experience of an island paradise is not the same for everyone. People who work daily in the elements, in nature, to survive have a vastly different experience than those people who engage with the environment for recreation, whether visiting tourists or wealthy conservationist. She writes:

The idea of paradise wasn't invented by us. How could it be? Our experience doesn't really lead us to regard these islands as earthy Edens. Those of us who toil in the fields or out on the sea have a healthy respect for the constant sunshine and those turquoise waters; the one can burn up all our crops...and the other can turn on us, drown us any time it gets ready. Most of us don't see paradise, anyway, when we look around us; we see the heat off the road, the mosquitoes, the prickles, the sand in our shoes chafing our toes, the salt itching our skins. No; paradise is the invention of someone who lives far far away.

Bethel 2008: 152

Bethel suggests that only visitors, those that live "far far away" view the island as a tropical paradise. However geographical distance is only one means of abstraction.

Recreational users and short term visitors of tropical island space are able to filter out the

harsh realities of daily life whether through distance, air conditioned transportation, groomed landscapes, insect repellant, or simply having the luxury to choose *when* to experience the sun, sand, and sea (winter versus summer, evening versus high noon, dry versus monsoon season). True, much of Andros Island is uninhabitable brackish marshland, only seasonally dry, at times impassable by all but seagoing vessels. The lack of industrial and tourism infrastructure or networks contributes to its characterization as a harsh place, sparsely populated with wild and lawless people.

A REFUGE

During the colonial era, Andros was known as a remote refuge for individuals escaping slavery. Those seeking freedom traveled to the vast and undeveloped lands of Andros to resettle and build a life. Although only 25 nautical miles from New Providence, Andros offered hundreds of miles of uncharted-and-difficult to penetrate coppice and marshland. Marronage—the act of escaping and fleeing enslavement—in Andros is well documented. The best-known case involved groups of Black Seminole Indians who traveled (some say by dugout canoe) from Florida to the west side of Andros beginning in 1821. The groups built a small settlement called Red Bays and survived as fishers and spongers. Today the tiny settlement of Red Bays sits perched on the northwest tip of Andros, the only settlement on the entire west side of the island. Although the settlement has had to rebuild several times in the last century due to devastating hurricanes, many of the inhabitants are able to trace their lineage to the original maroons who resisted slavery in the United States and found refuge in the wetlands of western Andros. I interviewed one man who grew up on the east coast of Andros, but once a year

traveled to Red Bays with his grandmother. As a very young boy, they traveled by boat, but once the road was built in the mid-1990s, they had the “luxury” of traveling by car.

I used to go out there with my grandmother every so often. Once they built the road, she pack all us children in Uncle Otis truck and he drive us out there. Only one time a year. Took all day to drive there. Man, I felt like I was going to the moon. We all sat in back and bumped the whole ride there. Hot baking sun. Sick as anything. Man I hated that ride. We drive and drive and then my grandmother would visit all the family. Aunts and uncles and cousins. Sometimes us children catch iguana, swim at the beach. But that beach different. I couldn't believe people actually lived there. I mean, wasn't even a beach like we had – water all brown. All muddy. Ha! that's why they call it the Mud. It would stick on you. My grandmother would tear up our hip when she see us getting all muddy like that.

Interview with Androsian man, 39, March 2009

To a young boy from a small settlement in central Andros, Red Bays represented a far flung hinterland, inaccessible and foreign. Later in my research the same informant agreed to take me to Red Bays and visit some of his family who remain there. As we got into the car he said, “I got to stop and get some snacks, man, get ready for the longest ride of your life.” In all the drive took roughly an hour. To be fair, the road was pitted with vicious potholes, but I marveled at the fact that he still regarded Red Bays as a remote outpost, only tenuously tied to the rest of Andros by a washed out logging road. The area had been marked for centuries as distinct from the surrounding area. After the construction of the road, the settlement retained much of its image as uncivilized and wild as well as lawless. When I asked another informant from central Andros if he ever fished on the west side, he responded:

Nah, I don't go out there [to the West Side]. Ain't nothing there but trouble. You get lost so easy. No nice houses like you see here. Just bush. And the people who go looking for trouble. I don't mess with that.

Interview with Androsian man, 67, Andros October 2009

The informant's mention of "trouble" was in reference to the drug trafficking industry. The coastal waters of western Andros were well known for drug trafficking in the 1980s and early 1990s. Although the drug industry had slowed in recent years, the west side still has a reputation for being a lawless battleground for warring drug cartels. For many residents of Andros, Red Bays remains a marginal settlement, deep in the bush, and only visited by bonefish guides and the occasional tourist interested in marronage history.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Islands are both isolated and connected to the rest of the world through extensive and historical trade networks, oceanographic currents, and climate systems (D'Arcy 2006; Steinberg 2001). Although seemingly remote and estranged from the wider world, island residents have been engaged in international trade for centuries, most infamously through slavery, later for resource extraction and tourism, and more recently, as central points of convergence for international players in development, drug trafficking, and conservation. Historically, islands have been positioned as sites of abundance and opportunity for consumption, whether of enslaved bodies, scientific knowledge and specimens, tourism, or, more recently, space through protected area conservation. Through encounters with early exploration and science, tourism, and industry, Andros has been recreated as a bounded and exceptional space, an islandscape in which enclosure conservation is both urgently necessary and utterly manageable, a space representing the possibility of paradise and the fear of its imminent loss. Islands, with bounded shorelines allows for the illusion of control. Sustainable management of complex ecosystems

becomes not only feasible, but essential to safeguard fragile island environments for future use.

At the center of conservationism lies the seemingly contradictory duality of abundance and loss, fecundity and scarcity, the bounty of nature with its inherent fragility. Andros, with its broad muddy banks and scrubby plains obscures this dichotomy. Conservationists work hard to produce biodiversity and exceptionalism of an otherwise stark and uninhabitable place. Implicit within the conservation message is that conservation work—that of scientific research, measurement, documentation, and ultimately enclosure—is necessary for detecting and preserving the importance of the environment, for redefining the value in the islandscape. The enclosure process becomes that of island making—in that space must be delineated physically and symbolically. Protected area conservation requires the demarcation of a region for additional restrictive policies. The space undergoes a transformation that differentiates the area from its surroundings. Enclosure cuts a path of difference and re-aligns the relationship between restricted and open space, between end points and beginning points, allowing for regulative intervention. Enclosure also changes the area's relationship with the people who live and work there, making the enclosed space distinct in its regulatory framework, in how it is perceived, used and valued by the local communities and beyond.

To create a land is a divine act as well as a conceptual feat. While the early explorers traveled in search of new land—the land of their dreams—their modern day counterparts, the adventuring conservation biologists and park planners construct their dreamlands by building a place in which they may act as true masters of their own domain. Islands are exceptional spaces in that they are removed from, distinct from, the

mainland and the mainstream. These bodies of land surrounded by sea manage to concurrently fulfill our desires for the idyllic and the extraordinary, as well as our fear of the treacherous. They are dreamscapes upon which we are able to create fantastical images of exotic animals, lawless people, and vulnerability. As Redfield writes, islands represent “the pure realm of open possibility” (Redfield 2000): 47). Islands become places for consumption and transience, boundless opportunities for recreation (play) as well as re-creation (to make anew) – of the self, society, and space.

CHAPTER 4

OWNING AN ARCHIPELAGO AND “RIGHTFUL” ACCESS IN THE BAHAMAS

INTRODUCTION

My land go way back there, way back. 666 acres. I've to deal with all that. It go back that way...Some of the family don't want it, some of the family build on it. I don't know, eh? Because you can't carry it. The only thing you can do is build on it. Farm it. When I might say I clear a piece, a place, I farm it. When God ready for me, he take me, that [land] still there. I ain't carry it.

Interview with Bahamian woman, 82, Andros Island October 2009

“The sea den God's place. No one man call dat his own”

Interview with Bahamian man, 66, Abaco Island July 2003

This chapter address the questions: *How do people negotiate and legitimize ownership of contested spaces within the context of protected area conservation? How do tenure systems shift to accommodate radical changes in both scale and governance as the west side of Andros Island transitions from a coastal commons to a National Park?*

The west coast of Andros is liminal, a space in between dry land and fluid sea. This middle ground stretches across miles of mangroves and sandy beaches far out into the shallow sea of the Great Bahamas Banks. Tenure laws on the island are also liminal, embracing both customary and formal systems that govern access and right to the low lying tidal shallows known as “the mud.” A duality of property laws has long existed in The Bahamas, which is entangled with history, family, race, and the need to survive in a harsh natural environment. For black Bahamians, this included the need to survive within a racist and classist socio-political system. This research suggests that many Androsians—black Bahamians who can trace family lines back to the declaration of their

bodies as legal property—eschew formal written permanent tenure codes in favor of customary laws that emphasize labor, daily practice, and kinship. Claims to the landscape and ocean are made through narratives of personal and familial belonging and experience. In comparison, wealthy and privileged whites have long known the benefits of official titled property and tend to associate formal tenure with moral superiority and modernity. What have emerged most clearly in this research are the narratives of rightful ownership and belonging during a period of governance change.

As a social institution, property is socially contingent and relational (Jentoft, et al. 1998; Macpherson 1962; Macpherson 1978b; McCay 2000; McCay and Jentoft 1998a; McCay and Jentoft 1998b; Rose 1994). "[P]roperty rights do not refer to relations between men and things, but, rather, *to the sanctioned behavioral relations among men that arise from the existence of things and pertain to their use*" (Furubotn and Pejovich 1972:1139, as quoted in McCay 2000: 68, emphasis in original). This research employs Macpherson's (1978) definition of property as "an enforceable claim," while emphasizing Ribot and Peluso's (2003) additional focus on access rather than ownership in order to underscore the importance of *the capacity* to derive benefits from places or things. Property in the Bahamas hinges on issues of access. While state law may allow or disallow legal access to a particular space (e.g., a national park, the parliament building, beaches, or a botanical garden), the *entitlement* (Sen 1981) of one's claim differs according to an individual's membership in particular social groups. Focusing on the *capacity* for access allows for the consideration of power differentials among groups and individuals and thus underscores the "intensely social nature of property" (Rose 1994, see also Bohannon 1963; Malinowski 2001 [1935]).

The ability to access property depends not only on perceptions and rights of access but also on having the economic (and social) resources required. Therefore, at the core of property claims lies tension between the perceived entitlement to property versus actual capacity to access and benefit from that property. I argue that what constitutes a rightful claim of access and ownership is not a fixed phenomenon, but shifts in meaning to reflect fluid social contingencies. In order for residents, conservationists, and scientists to make property claims, they must establish legitimacy through particular social processes tied to a shared conceptualization of natural space and belonging—that is, who rightfully belongs in a particular space. In Andros, complex social networks contribute to and reflect the ways in which people claim the land and sea. People make claims to contested space through experiential narratives, family linkages, racial identity, and scientific knowledge.

THE SIGNS

Sometime in 2008, signs began to arrive along the eastern roads of Andros Island announcing the “Crab replenishment National Park.” Although established in 2002, The Bahamas National Trust (BNT) decided to promote the roadside park in order to “make conservation more visible.” Most were small, green rectangles, declaring in white lettering, that the space was a *Bahamas National Park*. Each sign, no matter how small, held BNT’s crest: blue sea in the foreground, a small island mound in the background, two flying pink flamingos, a pink conch nestled at the bottom, and, above it all, a crown. The signs signaled BNT’s claim to the land under formal mandate of the national government. Spaces that had formerly been regarded and used for centuries as an open

access commons by Androsians for crabbing, farming, hunting, or gathering straw were threatened with change (Albury 1975). With the appearance of these sign, BNT and the national government declared the space important to the country as a whole, and even to the wider world, and, so the argument went, the space must be protected and regulated by enclosure or limited access.

One could argue, however, that very little changed. The arrival of the signs seemed to pass unnoticed for the most part and then they quietly disappeared, pilfered by nearby residents. BNT staff replaced the signs quickly, but they never lasted very long. When I talked to people about the signs, I heard, *“Yeah I see those little bitty signs. What they for? I crab here. My grammy crab here. No little sign gonna do nothing ‘bout that.”* And so the dance continued throughout my time in the field. While the signage seemed a futile exercise, I wondered if there were subtle shifts in how people regarded the space. Did people think about it or use the area any differently? Did the meanings associated with place and place-making change? Was it seen as a property claim, and if so, by whom exactly? BNT’s attempt to claim the land failed according to many Androsians. The claims were deemed illegitimate and thus regarded by the people living in and using the space as insufficient and thus ignored for the most part. Notwithstanding, with the move to enclose areas of land and sea that were long used as a commons, governance shifted in scale and structure from locally meaningful negotiations to management agendas with transnational significance.

The Crab Replenishment Park was one of the segments along the eastern roads that were part of the Central Andros National Park System, a series of five parks scattered across central Andros. In 2009, despite the lack of local support for the Central Andros

National Park System, BNT and partners proposed enlarging the original west side segment of this system calling the project the Westside National Park Expansion plan. The transition from a public and localized good to an enclosed area with restricted access occurred quietly. On the west side, no additional infrastructure was built, and no one even bothered to put up signs on the west side, an area that was thought to be too remote for it to matter. However, Bahamians continued to use the west coast daily for fishing and sponging, picnicking on the weekends, and cutting straw for baskets. Within the course of one evening in October 2009, however, the west side of the nation's largest island underwent a significant change: enclosure reduced access for Bahamians and re-defined the coastline from crown land—once considered central to communal wealth and wellbeing—to a privately-held albeit technically public space with central top-down governing authority. The tidal shoreline of western Andros is marshland, falling under both land and sea tenure institutions such as family land, crown land, and government land. Fishermen frequent the area for commercial and subsistence fishing and in their work as tourist guides. The argument for enclosure on such a vast scale was based on the area being unsettled and “un-owned,” and thus available for the taking.

No one own that land. It's open. No one lives there. And we've got to protect it while we still can.

BNT staff member 2009

BNT's property claim (performed through enclosure) was justified by citing reports of threatened marine species, declining fisheries, one world discourse, and the global need for conservation.

MAKING A PROPERTY CLAIM

Spatial and social boundaries reflect differences in people's social configurations, as well as how they make property claims and use the land and seascapes. Although land and sea tenure varies across the Bahamas archipelago, what has remained consistent is a lack of top-down enforcement, allowing for the variations and re-interpretations of resource governance in the local context.

The very geography of The Bahamas, a disperse set of over 700 separate islands of varying populations, adds to the inconsistency among local and national development practices. The Family Islands experience different growth patterns, and residents there may have vastly different opinions on development issues than residents in more populous islands, such as Abaco or New Providence. In addition, the Family Islands are physically located further from the seat of national government, and therefore may be more out of the line of vision of the national government. Without a physically closer connection to the national government, enforcement of laws often falls by default to the local government, despite the intentions of the law. This presents support for more localized planning and enforcement power.

Minister Earl Deveaux, Minister of Labor and Immigration
Report on Integrated Coastal Zone Management 2001: 11

Further complicating tenure is that Bahamian waters are governed by the English public trust principle, that is, the seas are held by the national government in trust for the Bahamian people. Having last been updated in the 1920s, government maps of Andros are woefully out of date. All property claims go through one individual based in the capital of New Providence who is said to keep accurate records in his head. Making a property claim in this context is complicated at best and hopelessly frustrating at worst. Claims that appear to be legal and sanctioned by custom do not always succeed in formal venues. To illustrate, I offer the example of an experience my family and I had

attempting to claim generation property—land held in common by family members—during our time in Andros.

FINDING A SMALL BIT OF DIRT

My husband is from Andros. He grew up in a small settlement, raised by his grandmother who had 15 children of her own. They grew up eating what they could catch in the sea or grow on a plot of generation land three miles down the road. His father was a Curry and his mother a Pinder, two founding families whose early members escaped slavery by boat, traveling along the rocky shoreline by night to settle in a calm, well protected, and very remote bay, which they named Jack's Bay for Derek's great great-grandfather. However, by the time of my visit, the name had changed to Cross Sound although no one could tell me why. Jack's Bay was ideal for the needs of the families who lived there, abundant with fish and conch, and protected by shallows and sharp reefs that kept larger ships away. The settlement grew, and at the time of our arrival, it was still dominated by the Pinder and Curry families. As children were born and grew up, they began to build along the settlement's edge, and after the road was built in the 1960s, people traveled a bit more widely to find a favorable piece of property. Over time, Derek's families were said to have land holdings across the island and even into South Andros where the original plantation was located. When we moved to Andros in 2009, it was Derek's dream to build a small house on generation property to call his own and eventually pass on to our daughter. Over the past eight years, Derek has submitted three crown land applications and received one rejection. He has never heard about the other two. If the government would not grant him crown land, he felt he could claim generation land since he knew his family claimed extensive tracks of land in Cross Sound and felt entitled to a portion. He began the process by speaking to his mother and aunt who grew up in the family home in Andros, which sat empty. They instructed him more deeply about family lines. His grandparents were long dead, but he had great aunts and uncles, so he spoke with them. What began as a process that we imagined would take a few weeks took well into the year to decipher. Aunts turned to uncles, who bowed to the older cousins. We kept hearing the familiar refrain, "ya just cut and build. They ain't gonna throw you off." Perhaps not, but they might burn your house to the ground, as happened to a young man in a neighboring settlement who dared to build on his father's property when his half siblings did not recognize his claims. We wanted to secure the land as our own and not have to worry about counter claims and conflicts with neighboring family members. I had heard so many stories about house burnings and feuding families that I urged Derek to go through what I saw as "official channels," given my western notions of property. This, I believed, took the form of obtaining an official deed to the land from the Bureau of Land and Surveys.

After several visits to the Bureau of Land and Surveys, the staff finally agreed to show us the map of officially claimed parcels in Andros. We were relieved, thinking we could finally see where family lands began and ended so that we would be better informed to make a claim. A middle-aged woman guarded the front door asked our purpose for coming, which island we were inquiring about, and pushed a long application form into Derek's hands. She explained the process:

You looking in Andros? You got family there? You know where you want? First, you find a piece that hasn't been claimed, then you fill out the application—make sure you answer ALL the questions. Mr. Fergusson will help you find the map of the area you're looking. You looking for family land?...Then you go to the cashier and pay for any copies you need. I's from Andros too, you got to talk to Mr. Fergusson. He know that area.

We waited in hard-backed chairs as people cycled through. There was very little evidence of computer age technology. There were giant ledger books with names hand-printed on the covers—Cat Island, Andros, Long Island, Eleuthera. When someone requested a map, one of many staff members

disappeared into the back for several minutes, re-emerging with large rolled paper maps secured with rubber bands. They would then swipe aside the counter clutter and unfurl one map at a time. From my seat, I could see that each parcel of land was outlined in pen with small names scrawled within the squares. Depending on the map's year, the handwriting changed as did the size and uniformity of the parcels. While we sat there, most of the inquiries had to do with Eleuthera and Abaco, two islands that were undergoing a boom of development brought about by foreign buyers of second-homes. Finally, Mr. Fergusson appeared with a tight scroll and cleared our bit of counter to unfurl it. Our map was brittle and much smaller than the others were. It cracked as he tried to unfurl it. Instead of the paper Xerox-style maps I had been watching come from the back, this one appeared to be much older. The material was a shellacked coarse canvas like sail cloth. On it were several thin lines in various sizes and shapes that vaguely outlined the few parcels that had been claimed when the map was made. I read some familiar names in the ink scrawls—Smith, Riley, Miller, Obal. In the bottom left corner in tiny ink print was the year, 1921. I remembered that Andros Island had been logged bare by an US timber company around that time. Clearly, the timber company had surveyed the island for established property claims. The map had been created nearly 100 years ago, and by the looks of the hard protective layer of varnish, it had not been updated since. In 2009, this map continued to represent, and in some ways determine, ownership and access claims in Andros. We were not allowed to photograph or copy the map, but we could request a photocopy for \$5 a page. We made the request and paid the money in advance and were then told that they would call us when it was ready to pick up. We never received a call or the actual copy. A few months later, the Prime Minister released a statement in a report on the disposition of crown land and government owned-land.

Clearly, there remains an urgent outstanding need for The Bahamas to develop a modern, orderly Land Registry that will accurately record all transfer of land title for both public and private properties in The Bahamas. Our current archaic system is unbecoming of a country at our level of development at the beginning of the 21st century; indeed, our system is reminiscent of systems employed more than a century ago.

Prime Minister Hubert Ingraham (2009), website
Report on the Disposition of Crown Land and Government Owned Land

According to the 1921 claims, Derek's great grandfather had considerable property in central Andros, but much of that land we knew to be taken and built on long ago. I was disappointed after seeing the outdated document, but Derek felt optimistic: he thought all it would take would be to talk again to the elders and claim his piece.

UNDERSTANDING TENURE IN THE BAHAMIAN CONTEXT



FIGURE 5: (CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT TO RIGHT) (A) GATED COMMUNITY IN NEW PROVIDENCE; (B) NATIONAL PARK FOR THE CONSERVATION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE WITH BEACH ACCESS SIGN; (C) EXAMPLE OF EXPANDING A LAND CLAIM THROUGH DREDGING IN ANDROS

Bahamians, according to Eris Moncur,⁹ ‘are millionaires;’ they are land-rich. It is the rare Bahamian citizen who cannot go somewhere in the archipelago and find himself or herself at home on the land. In fact, many Bahamians suffer from the opposite problem, a physical overabundance of common property combined with the inability of individual family members to make use of it.

Dr. Nicolette Bethel 2000, website
Writer, Professor, and Head of Social Sciences Department
College of The Bahamas

In The Bahamas, land-based resources fall under three systems of governance: 1) conventional ownership or formal deed-of-sale property; 2) Generation Land—land held in common by a family group; and 3) crown land—land held in public trust by the Bahamian government for the benefit of the Bahamian people. Each type of land operates under a separate framework. Formal deed-of-sale ownership is most familiar in Western notions of property in which a title establishing the rights of ownership is awarded to an

⁹ Nicolette Bethel refers to a well-known Bahamian historian who talks publically about Bahamian heritage issues.

individual. The property is then considered “private” and transferable through sale or inheritance. More frequent in The Bahamas is commonage property which can be defined as property in which the rights of ownership are shared or held in common by a group. Each type of land tenure operates within both customary and official frameworks that vary greatly depending on the geographical location, historical events, and social networks of the area.

Land in the archipelago is more precious than gold. Ownership of Bahamian land to most people living on planet earth is twofold: to the foreigner who has heard of The Bahamas from the barrage of blockbuster films, the claim to an ocean view/ beachfront property is like a good children’s story. To the average Bahamian ownership of the same, or a normal lot of land is a lifetime milestone. This is the reason why any legal matters involving Bahamian property goes beyond the normal professional limits and into the personal element, leading to more emotional strain than a heated divorce proceeding.

McCartney July 15, 2009, website

The people of Andros have built houses, raised families in them, farmed tracks of land, transferred parcels to relatives, excluded others from using certain resources, all without subscribing to individual property ownership. In The Bahamas, and particularly in Andros, much property is held collectively among families, settlements, or groups of users. Soon after I arrived in Andros, I conducted a survey of land holdings and ideas about property. I quickly realized that I would gain little information asking directly about ownership of certain space. I also realized that my own ideas were firmly embedded in Western notions of delineated private property rights and official tenure systems. At first, my questions were often met with uncomprehending stares and deflective answers. I learned to ask questions more discreetly, moving away from *who owns this land*, or *boat*, or *house*, toward a wider spectrum of questions, such as *can you*

tell me about the history of this place? How do you choose where to farm or fish? Do you need permission? Why or why not? While not in the formal structure of the survey, the narratives that emerged from the responses to these questions helped me to understand on a more profound level the nuances of negotiating access to certain spaces.

In order to have some sense about how people make claims to resources and property in relation to their own perceived positions within the community, I asked about residential property. Several of the survey questions addressed place of birth, residency histories, and property ownership. The survey's greatest contribution was to highlight the extreme sensitivity of the topic. Even those people who could be considered my family and who had invited me into their homes to celebrate birthdays and share food or childcare were hesitant to talk directly about property. The same individuals who had asked me to be their children's godmother, with whom I attended wakes and weddings, planted gardens, and gossiped, responded with a chilly silence when I wanted to discuss property details. One young woman explained it to me: *"Nah, you can't take anything by it. We just don't...we just don't talk like that. There so many rows and things, man. It's all supposed to be private, you know? You can't go talkin' about family like that. Not to you, nah, not to nobody."*

Some trends did emerge from the survey. The vast majority (82.8%) lived in houses rather than other types of residences (e.g., apartments or "other"). Although many people apparently shared houses with several members of immediate and extended family, I was able to untangle the nature of these housing agreements (e.g., who consistently lived within the house, who paid rent, how much, etc.) in only very few cases. While 32.8 percent reported living in some form of shared housing, I suggest the number was in fact

far greater as people's ideas of shared housing differed depending on the type of housemates. For example, a person living with and caring for her elderly grandmother would not consider the arrangement "shared housing," although two brothers living together and dividing house expense might. Over half of respondents (58.2%) reported owning the house in which they lived, but nearly 10 percent refused to answer the questions altogether. In response to questions about types of property people owned, 49.2 percent reported owning houses and 41.8 claimed to own land. Distinctions were made between generation land and crown land, with 45.1 percent claiming "ownership" of crown land, meaning they had at least applied for a grant even if they had not yet received documentation. More than half of the owners (57.4 %) claimed generation land (although only a few had formal documentation of these claims). The number of individuals who declined to answer was even larger regarding this topic, ranging from 24 to 30 percent. A large percentage of individuals I spoke with squatted on land in Andros and had various understandings about squatter's rights. Some reported that after 10 years of squatting, the government automatically granted the land. Others believed that any "improvement" to the land hastened the grant, while a few reported that only certain improvements were effective (e.g., cement housing structures were more persuasive in claiming squatter rights. Wood structures were considered "temporary."). Some Androsians, usually young and poor, saw little distinction between family land and crown land. These individuals cleared any piece at the first opportunity to "get a little something of my own." In general, people were clearly uncomfortable talking about property ownership, including property boundaries and direct lines of ownership.

The concept of property can be confusing even to those familiar with the intricacies of ownership systems, and my discussions with Androsians about ownership were no exception. Even fee-simple, titled private property turned out to be neither simple, clearly titled, nor private. After several years of conducting research in the Bahamas, I was still inexperienced in the complexity of how Androsians claimed the land, much less the sea.

EARLY HISTORY OF LAND CLAIMS

The Bahamas archipelago was first claimed by King Charles I of England, who then granted the island string to Sir Robert Heath in 1629 to be held in “free and common socage,” (Craton 1962: 51). A few years later, the islands were granted to six Lord Proprietors of the Carolinas who granted acreage to anyone willing to develop the land and pay rent. Settlers came from America and England because of the promise of free land, something not as readily available elsewhere in the colonies. Settlers continued to arrive until the early 1700s, when piracy took control of the colony and undermined attempts to standardize property law. In 1717, Royal government was instituted and land ownership reverted to the Crown. In 1764, the government moved to formalize property law through The Registry Act, requiring the registration of all property including, “lands, tenements or hereditaments, Negroes, vessels, goods or effects” (Craton and Saunders 1999: 165 – 66, citing Bahamas act for Geo III c. 4(1764) MSS laws, 1:16– 20). With the arrival of an estimated 8,000 British Loyalists in the late 1700s, property laws solidified further. After the American Revolution and signing of the Versailles Treaty in 1783, Britain encouraged its loyal British and American subjects to re-settle in the Bahamas with offers of large unencumbered land grants (Craton 1964: 159). Subsequent years saw

the passage of several Acts formalizing tenure law in order to benefit Loyalists with large property holdings. However, laws upholding commonage rights are documented as early as 1783 and again in 1842 (Craton and Saunders 2000:47). During this time, certain meanings associated with property, such as individualism, moral entitlement, and the importance of registered title, were cemented with new legislation (Craton and Saunders 2000: 48).

Loyalists arrived from the rich fertile grounds of Florida and the Carolinas, carrying their families, livestock, and slaves with aspirations to develop a strong agricultural economy supported by slave labor. Although several attempts were made at large-scale commercial farming along the same lines as other British colonial islands, the lack of space and arable soil led to the frequent failure of plantations. Bankrupt land owners fled to Nassau, leaving their property—both material and human—behind (Craton 1964: 180).

In many ways, the failure of The Bahamas as a plantation state allowed for greater independence of the enslaved and later of the peasant class (Johnson 1991: 17). After emancipation in 1834, The Bahamas underwent a series of land laws privileging existing landholders while attempting to formalize commonage property in order to provide newly freed slaves with some access to land. These laws released the white merchant class from any financial responsibility for their prior enslaved property and formally recognized customary tenure laws, which had a long history among enslaved Africans and their descendants in The Bahamas. According to Craton and Saunders (2000), “The process of emancipation, when the black majority in the Bahamian population instantly changed from being property to owning it, though, was a crucial watershed in Bahamian

landholding for the imperial government as well as for the former masters and slaves” (Craton and Saunders 2000: 48). After emancipation, the demand for land grew. The slaves were freed and continued successfully to farm small plots of land for subsistence, building on shared notions of common property that remain relevant today (Craton and Saunders 2000: 45). White Bahamian colonists protected their land holdings through legislation, whereas black Bahamians took full advantage of customary tenure to establish commonage and squatter rights. In this way, tenure processes were, and continue to be, tied to value-laden ideas about Bahamian identity, belonging, class, and race.

DEFINITIONS AND DISTINCTIONS

From the beginning, the Bahamian [tenure] system was not so simple.
Craton and Saunders 2000: 47

Land is always more than a parcel of dirt. In The Bahamas, a nation with a painful colonial history that involved slavery and racial oppression, access to land came to represent economic dominance for white settlers while signifying freedom, independence, and survival for black settlers. From the beginning, the institution of property in The Bahamas was characterized by a duality: wealthy white land barons received formal titles; commonage land was held by the poor, usually black, underclass that could not afford title lands. Common property is an institutional framework describing property held collectively by a group. That group is able to share some aspects of property rights and or obligations, although not necessarily equally (Ciriacy-Wantrup and Bishop 1975; McCay 2000; Schlager and Ostrom 1992). In the Bahamas, generation or “family” land is an example of common property in which a family or settlement

shares a sense of belonging or enduring claim to the property through complex kin networks, long standing ties to the landscape, and labor.

During my time in the field, I found that the label “common property” did not mutually exclude overlapping designations, but could be concurrently considered “crown land,” “generation land,” or even private estate property. Common property claims are multiplicitous, and they can overlap and change over time (McCay 2000: 68-70). For example, what was officially considered crown land could also be claimed as common property by residents who lived and worked on that land for generations. While the property remained in the government’s registry of crown land, residents farmed and built on the land, transferred parcels to family members through oral authority, and built churches and buried their dead, strongly identifying the land as their own through daily use if not through title. Other examples include plantation estates that transferred incrementally to resident former slaves through usufruct rights. Saunders and Craton identify this type of tenure as “quasi-proprietorial” (Craton and Saunders 2000: 50).

The marginality of The Bahamas on the global economic market and the geophysical environment of the islands—small isolated patches of land that were well suited for subsistence, but not for commercial use—benefitted the poor Bahamians, allowing them to escape the drudgery of economic subordination (Craton and Saunders 2000: 32). Because the white merchant class dominated the cash economy, trade, and resource production, less importance was placed on land tenure (Johnson 1991: 65). In a country divided along racial, ethnic, and class lines, access to and ownership of land provided opportunities for independence and even resistance among subjugated members of Bahamian society. As the largest island, Andros held historic importance as the island

offering the most free and accessible land to black Bahamians, thus signifying freedom for many. Compared to the Family Islands of The Bahamas, which are much smaller in size and dominated by white land holders, Andros became a place of opportunity and freedom for black Bahamians, and thus was associated with resistance to white subjugation. The vastness of Andros provided both the physical and psychological space for resistance. Through squatters' rights and commonage holdings, black Bahamians created and maintained independence.

GENERATION LAND

Generation land (less commonly called family land) is land communally held by a family and its descendants. The practice is best known among the descendants of the original families who lived as slaves on plantation property:

Even where former slave owners continued to hold legal title to the land—even still live on it—the former slave residents often developed a communal sense of attachment, belonging that was quasi-proprietary...once the former master's family left, or through generations of miscegenation, folded into the majority (as seems to have happened in parts of mainland Eleuthera and Long Island), the land was regarded as belonging to the former community and its descendants, in custom if not in law.

Saunders and Craton 2000: 50

This sense of belonging and the importance of kinship ties were strengthened by the rigors of surviving in physical isolation under harsh environmental conditions. In many cases, plantation properties were eventually awarded to the surviving families in an attempt at compensation for some of the injustices of slavery. As a form of land-based reparation, the government granted land to people considered *generational residents*, which underscored the notion of “rightful” belonging and hence ownership for many

black Bahamians. Commonage in the Bahamas is less restrictive of group membership than on other Caribbean islands. Otterbein's (1964) comparison of land tenure in Jamaica, The Bahamas, and Barbados, described The Bahamas' generation Land systems as "bilateral with unrestricted land holding descent groups" (Otterbein 1964: 31). In Andros, many black Bahamians had settled on the island as free men and women, and claimed crown land through squatting and government grants. These claims then became Generation Land in practice is not in law, in that any family member was able to build on or use the land over generations. Family members were able to build on the land through both matrilineal and patrilineal lines. Otterbein suggested that the abundance of land in Andros promotes inclusive tenure rights that are not evident in more crowded island countries, such as Jamaica or Barbados. Thus, the author predicted that as population increases, tenure will become less inclusive, and the nature of ownership will shift towards a more exclusive model (Otterbein 1964: 33). Although my research did not directly address this question, there is some indication that tenure is becoming more exclusive and access to property more difficult as Derek's attempt to gain family land illustrated.

According to Besson (1987), "[F]amily land is a dynamic Afro-Caribbean cultural creation by the peasantries themselves in response and resistance to the plantation system" (Besson 1987: 105). Besson argues that the land provides not only basic security and rootedness that has deep meanings in the context of enslavement, but also symbolizes, "personhood, freedom and prestige. Family land also symbolizes the identity of family lines, the significance of which can only be fully understood in the context of the history of former, kinless, slaves" (ibid). The institution of generation property and its

symbolic meaning as social capital exists throughout the Caribbean. Bethel (2000) suggests that in The Bahamas, generation land is uniquely valuable because of its size and thus potential for profit. Bahamians may claim multiple generation properties even on several islands as long as they have a family tie to the area. Even the people I spoke with in New Providence who had never visited a Family Island had a sense of distant available wealth through Generation Land. One woman with five children talked about her generation Land in Andros: *“Mama gave it to me and it’s my children’s now. They can go and cut and build and it’s theirs. They can raise a family on that land. It’s good to have that. I know my children have something.”* Believing that there was property somewhere in the country tied to her family offered a sense of economic security.

According to The Bahamas government archives:

Land is an essential criteria in indicating status in a community. Not only is it important because of its monetary value, but it is also important as a source of food through farming. In earlier years not many black Bahamians owned property. In the post-emancipation period the Crown only granted or leased land to those who could afford to develop it. Many people squatted land and built houses on small portions of it without legal tenure. Others farmed on "commonages", that is, land held by inhabitants in common, or "generation" lands - land handed down through the family. Many Bahamians claimed legal rights to land believing that it belonged to them because their family had lived on it for a long time.

The Bahamas Government Archive 2012

For many Bahamians, the land translates as wealth and perhaps a resource not yet tapped, but one that sits distant, expectant, and hopeful, waiting for the right opportunity or perhaps the most desperate circumstances.

Land in general and generation Land in particular represents a contingency for those whom the economy and the government have failed to support. However, the realities of generation land and the complexities of claiming it bely any enduring sense of security. The convoluted and lengthy claiming process frustrated many of the people I

interviewed. As one interviewee put it, *"It's just easier to get crown land from the government. Too much trouble bothering with family and dealing with them biggity selves!"* This sentiment was repeated frequently during my time in the field. People rarely knew the boundaries of generation land or who was responsible for each parcel. People seemed to have a vague sense that large tracks of generation land existed, but it was not prized land because of the social complications and distance from other houses. One older couple I interviewed had recently discovered that the woman was the oldest living descendent for a large parcel of land in Andros, and as such was responsible for allocating rights of access to the land. She and her husband lived in a small stone house across the road from a large bay. The generation land was *"out there some,"* the woman said gesturing behind her, *"it's a nice big piece, couple 100 acres."* She was not sure exactly where the land was located, but she remembered crabbing and farming there as a girl. She had spent most of her adult life in Nassau, but the couple returned to Andros to retire, moving into her childhood home. *"Andros nice and quiet and people don't kill you in your beds."* I asked if they planned to do anything with the land, but the idea seemed overwhelming. Until very recently she had never known about it, certainly not that it was hers to administer and she waved the idea away. *"I let my children deal with all that. My son keep telling me to put in for the papers, but no use now. What I gonna do with all that land?"* She figured her children could build on it if they wanted to. She and her husband lived in the same house her parents had lived in, just feet away from her sister's and cousins' houses. Beyond the few square feet she inhabited, the generation land was a distant notion, never visited and remembered only very recently.

BOUNDARY FLUIDITY

Exactly where generation land begins and ends is open to speculation and is constantly negotiated and re-negotiated through various means and across personal, regional, and state wide boundaries. These claims of access and ownership often go unrecognized by the national government (let alone transient and goal-oriented conservation managers). Although the law states that there should be a designated executor of the property, the role often falls by default to the eldest member of the family, sometimes allocating authority to someone unable or unwilling to manage it. Family conflicts, feuds, broken marriages, and extra-marital children complicate the system even further. Bethel (2006) recognizes the complications inherent in generation property but emphasizes its symbolic value and links to Bahamian identity.

Many people regard generation property as a trouble and a nuisance rather than a source of wealth...How, people asked, could they get around the difficulties posed by generation property? Let's look at the problems. First of all, it's impossible to generate cash quickly from generation property. You may own half of Exuma, for instance, but you can't use that ownership as collateral to get a bank loan. Part of the problem is that individuals are not outright owners of generation property, and another part of the problem is that the custom is extra-legal — it may be recognized by the courts, but is not covered in law, and so cannot be used to generate cash. So how, exactly, does generation property make you rich?

Well, the short answer is that cash is not the only form of wealth, or even the most important form of wealth that exists. The long answer is that generation property, for many of us, represents something even more basic than cash; it represents power. And it represents, for those of us who are lucky enough to be connected with it, the foundation of our identity, the core of what makes us Bahamian.

Bethel, The Bahamas Pundit, May 17, 2006

During my interviews, people often mentioned generation property as a common pooled resource; however, the availability of that resource proved debatable. Watching

Derek struggle to claim a bit of property and experience the complications of multiple and sometimes conflicting family claims, I began to wonder about the notion of generation land as a form of security. The Androsians I spoke with had a sense that, within their reach, there were accessible tracts of land that could be rightfully claimed. They may never need to claim the land, but it was available, accessible, and rightfully theirs based on their common family heritage. People considered generation land an untapped resource that rooted them to their family and to the island; however, for some, the resource was virtual, ethereal, and elusive. For most Androsians, property claims remained unfulfilled sources of frustration rather than security; nonetheless, virtual security is a form of security. The promise of property is also a symbolic and emotional resource. Extensive tracts of property held as commonage, which may not necessarily be usable, still contribute to Bahamian ideas about wealth and opportunity and the possibility of future benefit and production for the individual and the family. Bahamian notions about wealthy nationhood can be traced to generation property, although most individual Bahamians may never actually benefit from generation holdings.

In Andros, there has been little incentive to move away from common tenures toward individual ownership claims. The relative abundance of land and general lack of state oversight has allowed Androsians to settle according to informal customary patterns regardless of formal property laws. Some scholars (see Otterbein 1964) suggest that the preference of informal claims in Andros (and other Family Islands) is a result of land abundance. There is so much land in Andros that there is no need to privatize it. However, it cannot be ignored that the strength of family ties, great sense of solidarity,

and resistance to racial oppression contribute to fierce protection of communal land holdings.

CROWN LAND

Of the 3.45 million acres of land that make up The Bahamas, 2.5 million are designated as crown land (73%), of which an estimated 1.6 million acres (64%) are dry land. An unknown amount of crown land has been alienated through squatting processes and illegal building leading to the uncertainty of the government's estimations. The rest is comprised of tidal coastlines, mangroves, and "mud" (Ingraham 2009). Historically, crown land is land held in trust by the British monarch on behalf of the Bahamian people. After Bahamian independence in 1973, the Law of Property Act gave the responsibility for the disposition of crown land to the Bahamian Cabinet as opposed to the Queen, signaling the political transfer of The Bahamas from British colonial status to an independent commonwealth nations (The Bahamas Local 2009, website).

Crown land is distinct from commonage land (such as generation property) in that it is held by the government rather than held in common by a group. However, it is significant that the land is still regarded by Bahamians as accessible and available for use because it is held in public trust. For Bahamians, the land remains an available resource and symbolizes the possibility of individual and communal survival and even wealth. Crown land can be privatized by Bahamian citizens through the Bureau of Land and Survey in a convoluted and lengthy granting process. Non-Bahamians can also claim Crown land, but must follow additional guidelines and fulfill certain requirements regarding the proposed use of the land.

"Yunna just cut the land and build"

Nearly everyone I spoke with in the Andros had made a crown land claim in his or her lifetime, but the claims had rarely progressed beyond submission of the application. Many people had never received a response to their applications; others were rejected, while even more had waited from 20 to 25 years to obtain the paperwork once the claim had been “approved.” In the years that elapsed between application and response, governments (and thus crown land policies) had changed, family networks had shifted, and people had died, leaving heirs with no reliable information about the status of their family’s claims. For these reasons, there was considerable confusion and frustration regarding property in Andros.

For the most part, Androsians did not wait for official permits to claim territory, clearing land parcels as soon as they had saved enough money for the bulldozer. Land cleared of bush was “improved land,” and thus claimed. The claimant painted his initials on an upturned rock or portion of road to mark his or her claim of ownership (see Figure 6). These markings were recognized by the community as effective property claims although occasionally there were still disputes. Across North and Central Andros, immense tracks of cleared land had sat for years before anyone had saved enough money to build, if they ever would. According to Bureau of Land and Survey records, these lands are still listed as undeveloped crown land, and thus are measured as an untapped and available resource. However, Androsian residents recognize the cleared land as claimed and therefore unavailable. Once the land is claimed, it transitions into a pseudo-private phase that can be accompanied by extensive negotiation among residents and family members. This transitional phase allows (some) family members a voice in the transfer of property while it excludes others. Meanwhile, landholders are caught in an

unstable and uncertain state of possession. By their own reckoning, people had spent small fortunes building homes on unsecured land in which they raised families and invested life savings to increase well-being and achieve a sense of security for the future. According to government records and the prevailing system of conventional ownership, these landholders were not owners, could not obtain government loans for building, and certainly could not sell the land or leverage it in any way. Any counter claims to the land were particularly dangerous and could result in wider family disputes.



Photo: Sarah Wise

FIGURE 6: SPRAY-PAINTED INITIALS MARKING PROPERTY CLAIMS ALONG QUEEN'S HIGHWAY

The legitimacy of property claims is based on the individual's standing in the community: the higher status the person holds within the community, the more legitimate his or her claim. On a very basic level, at the very least the claimant's name must be recognized as a member of the community. This qualifier reduced legitimacy for those who had not grown up in Andros, those who traveled to New Providence or the U.S. for employment, and others living on the margins of Andros society. For example, a lifelong resident who was well known in the church community, had had few personal scandals, and who had maintained family ties in the settlement would have a strong claim to nearby

land. In contrast, Derek had grown up in Andros but had moved to New Providence as a young man. Alienating him even further was the fact that he had married a white American woman and had since moved to the U.S. His grandmother had been well regarded, but his claim was compromised by his visible “otherness.” Furthermore, the proximity of the claimed land to existing family was important. A resident of Love Hill would have much better luck claiming land close to settlement boundaries and established family where his or her name was better known than in an area farther away. Some brave souls claimed property far from family lines; however those individuals were regarded as “reaching too high for the basket,” that is, they thought too highly of themselves and were greedy.

COMMONAGE CLAIMS

Macpherson (1962, 1978) focuses on the acquisition of property as a social process as well as a reflection and enactment of social class (and thus power).

The concept of property is, historically and logically, a concept of rights in the sense of enforceable claims...That property is a political relation between persons is equally evident. For any given system of property is a system of rights of each person in relation to other persons. This is clearest in the case of modern property, which is my right to exclude you from something, but it is equally true of any form of common property, which is the right of each individual not to be excluded from something.

Macpherson 1978: 4

Macpherson’s understanding of property expands beyond material holdings and underlines the focus on property as a social process both emerging from and determined by social relationships. The notion of an “enforceable claim” hinges on the location and movement of power within social relationships—the power to hold a property claim and the power to withhold support for the claim, rendering it “unenforceable.” Having

established the highly social nature of property, Macpherson continues to explain that common property is held in common as the right of an individual:

Society or the state may declare that some things – for example, common lands, public parks, city streets, highways – are for common use. The right to use them is then a property of individuals, in that each member of the society has an enforceable claim to use them. It may not be an unlimited claim...but the right to use the common things, however limited, is a right of individuals.

Macpherson 1978: 4

According to Macpherson, common property is property shared among members of a society or a particular group. The rights of ownership are then based on whether the individual can (is allowed to) claim group membership. This becomes particular relevant when the ability to claim or exclude societal membership is based on race or class, which is the case in The Bahamas. Focusing strictly on a conventional Western notion of property rights, such as deeded property and rights of sale, oversimplifies the realities of working tenure and excludes the varied and important ways many people value and claim property (McCay 2000: 69). In the broader sense, “property rights” can include a multitude of rights, such as rights of access to a geographic region, labor, knowledge, the market, capital. These rights can also include restriction of access to the foregoing, in addition to rights to use, transfer and sell; and the rights to make and enforce rules (Schlager and Ostrom 1992). How we choose to conceptualize property is embedded in particular social frameworks, which may change given different cultural value systems and historical circumstances (McCay 2000: 78). The dominance of Western ideals valorizes private property over long standing customary law, which would ultimately lead to the dispossession of material wealth, agency, and identity among black Bahamians.

THE WEST SIDE OF ANDROS AS A COASTAL COMMONS

This our land. I's Androsian. What? The government come and tell me not? No!

Androsian woman, 26, interview August 2009

The west side of Andros is officially designated crown land except for a tiny settlement (population 80) on the northern tip and a privately owned hunting and fishing lodge. Protected areas retain the official designation of crown land although they have been claimed through the exclusionary process of enclosure and restricted access. Also significant is that the management authority of the area shifts from the hands of central government to the quasi-governmental organization, the BNT.

Enclosure conservation shifts the scale and structure of governance, creating new social frameworks as it reallocates resources and redistributes power. Previous research on the socio-cultural aspects of protected areas has shown that as the systems of governance change, so do people's notions of property rights and belonging. Consequently, social networks and economic conditions shift in scale and content (Bene and Tewfik 2001; Carrier 2003; Sen and Nielsen 1996). The 2009 proposal to enlarge the Westside National Park by 300,000 acres transformed the western coastline of Andros from crown land to nationally owned and internationally managed conservation space. The moves of the BNT and the Nature Conservancy to enclose the area enacted a claim of ownership by restricting access, thus transforming the area from a locally available and used space to an internationally valued "global asset" for conservation and biodiversity (Convention on biologicaldiversity 2012: website). Knowledge production—and the

power of those producing the knowledge—shapes the capacity to access and use resources (Foucault 1978; Ribot and Peluso 2003).

Land and seascapes that were long held as commonage or owned individually fall into a state of ambiguity during the transition to enclosed areas for conservation under the authority of national and international conservation agencies. Such universalizing conservation narratives identify the area as unused “pristine” and “natural” space of international significance for biodiversity and fisheries, thereby reinventing how the area is imagined and utilized. However, the transformation may not have immediately changed the way Androsians use the area. In fact, it runs a high risk of becoming yet another “paper park” (i.e., a park on paper only, without a feasible monitoring or enforcement plan). Even as a “paper park,” however, the shift in designation holds consequences for the people who have depended on the area for centuries for daily survival as well as for security, a “fallback” in the case of hard times. Reassignment from a Bahamian commonage to an international protected area changes the ways in which human and west side ecosystems interact.

At stake is not only a mismatch in marine resource management and ultimately failed policy initiatives, but also a loss, both material and cultural, for the people of Andros. The material consequences consist in the substantial loss of commonage territory used for generations and valuable in daily subsistence. The cultural consequences consist of the loss of Bahamian’s sense of agency, security, and well-being, that is, what Anne Stoler (2002) describes as “the intimate injuries of empire” (Stoler 2002: 213).

In 1992, the smaller Westside National Park, a component of 2009 proposal, was implemented as one of a network of five small parks in the northern half of Andros. The

area encircled the property of James Strathorne III who inherited the land from his great grandfather and converted it to a luxury fishing and hunting lodge. Although the property has been in his family for most of the past century, many residents do not consider him Bahamian, much less Androsian, and deny his claims of ownership. Although many residents use the west side for fishing, sponging, conching, picnicking, hunting, and foraging, for others the west side of Andros is only a dim reality. Over half the people I surveyed had never visited and knew nothing about a national park, but everyone knew about the Strathorne land. Most associated the west side with fishing and the occasional violent conflict between James Strathorne and other Androsian fishermen.

No fences surround the Strathorne property, and the boundary lines shift dramatically depending on to whom you talk. Many Androsians argued that James Strathorne is not from Andros, that he claims far too much land (i.e., more than he could possibly use), that he is “too white,” “too rich” and “too foreign” to own that much land in Andros. To make matters worse, Strathorne hires Haitians (the ultimately undesirable foreigner according to Bahamian subjectivities) to patrol what he considers his property, and he has commanded them to shoot trespassers on sight. Strathorne was a supporter of the initial West Side National Park, which in many ways solidified and increased his land holdings. Because much of the west side of Andros consists of brackish muddy wetlands, Strathorne’s claim was less about the actual land than about access to the vast and resource rich seascape that extended westward. In the next section I will examine how “rightful claims” are intertwined with individual notions of identity and relationship with the environment.

CLAIMING ACCESS, CLAIMING OWNERSHIP: NARRATIVES OF “RIGHTFUL CLAIMS”

We are more of an ocean nation than we are a land nation.

Interview with environmental consultant, Nassau 2006

The term “coastal zone” is not formally accepted nor clarified within the legal code of The Bahamas (Anderson, 1999). It is clear from discussion during the December 2001 trip that a general understanding of this term exists, and that the term is accepted to include the entirety of the country since the country itself is comprised of islands.

Deveaux 2001: 11

Because The Bahamas is an island nation, it is not surprising that the struggle for access and the discourses of resource ownership and belonging regularly play themselves out on the seas. As The Bahamas’ third largest industry, fishing is a highly competitive and frequently discussed occupation. In conversation with me, several people explained the close relationship between being Bahamian and making a living from the sea. As one fisherman exclaimed, “*I’s a fisherman! I’s from Andros!! That’s what we does.*” The line drawn between doing and being also speaks to the idea of owning and belonging.

In practice, access to the sea provided economic security for Bahamians to a much greater degree than terrestrial property did. Regulation of marine resources and property in the Bahamas is significantly less structured but no less complex or socially contingent than terrestrial resources, and arguably more so. Kinesis, or movement, of resources, habitat, heat, nutrients, and of the transport medium itself (water) adds complexity to the sea, which requires multi-dimensional and multi-scaled understanding of interconnectivity. Fluidity complicates any attempt at marine management or resource use. The coast has transient and often difficult to define boundaries. The sea is dynamic and subject to intense natural and socio-economic pressures. These factors pose challenges to societies that seek to control and benefit from the coast (McCay 2009:8).

By Bahamian national law, the sea and littoral are held in trust and thus are accessible to any Bahamian citizen. In an unusual twist of English public trust law, the seabed is also considered crown land, supporting the claim that any and all fishing gear deployed on the sea floor is crown property (not private), regardless of who incurs the costs of deployment. All material, including fishing gear, placed in the ocean is considered to have been abandoned to the commons, and can be legally used opportunistically.

According to Ingraham, “The seabed is reserved in perpetuity to the Crown Estate” (Ingraham 2009). The public trust doctrine is difficult to pin down, even more so given the fluid materiality of the sea. McCay describes the material challenges of public trust doctrine: “Its original form, and its more precise rendering at law, concerns patently slippery, muddy, and intangible subjects: waterways and the shores lapped by them, usually tidal and navigable” (McCay 1998: xx). Although the law sanctions opportunistic use, people still attempt to mark their own “condos” as private and exclude access. Commonly made of corrugated tin and 2 x 4 planks, these condos are also called lobster “traps” or “habitat.” These traps are laid flat along the great sand banks on the ocean floor in the tens of thousands by fishers all over the Bahamas. The lobsters crawl under the traps for protection and the fishers simply have to flip the tin over and collect the slow moving creatures. This is the primary method of harvesting lobsters. Bahamian law states there can be no legal ownership of condos due to the public trust principle. Fishers often build their own condos from construction scraps and toss them overboard. Many are lost in storms. They are not marked by identification buoys for fear that another fisherman would find and pillage them. Some fishers use GPS to track their locations, but

many small-scale fishers without the financial capability to invest in either condos or state-of-the-art technology harvest opportunistically from any traps. It is commonly understood that “discovered” condos are justifiably free for the taking. One fisher explained the process to me:

I'm just starting man. I don't have the money to be making traps. I just know the spots. There's so many out there. Spanish Wells guys throwing 'em out every year. I know where they are and I go and check the traps. I's try and get there first cause otherwise ain't nothing there. Lobster all gone. That's the trick man, you got to be the first one there [laughs].

Interview with Eleuthera fisherman, Nassau March 2009

When I asked if the other fishermen got mad when he arrived first, he laughed again, “*Yeah!! They's mad! But I don't stay too long!*” Although the seas are recognized as commons, fishers are aware of individualized claims. Harvesting from these locations is branded as poaching and stealing. Newspapers commonly report foreign fishing vessels poaching in Bahamian waters, and these stories are hot topics of discussion among Bahamian fishers (for examples of articles see Bonimy 2006; Lightbourne 2006).

Although Bahamian law states that no one person can own portions of the sea or coastline, there are numerous examples of privatization of coastlines, mainly by the restriction of access to the sea. According to one report, “All Bahamians have the common law right to use the foreshore and beach for swimming, fishing, and navigation. However, there is no legislation guaranteeing the right to access the foreshore” (ICF Consulting 2000: 26). All Bahamians should have equal access to the sea (a sentiment shared by most of the Bahamians I spoke with, even those with tall breakwaters and gates surrounding their compounds). In practice, claims of ownership and access to the sea are complicated by local and national legislation interwoven with regionally specific

customary law. Nevertheless, laws that are relatively well articulated and that hold firm within the capital of New Providence may not be recognized or endure in the far flung reaches of smaller and less populated Family Islands. There are, however, intricate *de jure* rules and norms governing the use of the ocean based on kinship ties, social positioning, and historical conditions. Just who travels to sea by boat verses walking the shoals close to land is stratified by age and gender: men tend to own the boats and fish in small family groups while women wade into the shallows to fish and conch (see Stoffle and Stoffle 2007 for a close look at women's practice of fishing the littoral in Exuma). Certain areas are known to be frequented by specific members of the community and are often avoided out of respect for seniority or simply to avoid conflict. When asking fishermen how they choose where to fish, I would often hear responses like: "*Nah, I don't go down there. That's were Sean dem fishes. I got my own hole.*" Complex customary tenure regimes, communicated through oral negotiations, regulate access to both terrestrial and marine species. Reliance on oral documentation of ownership and access can lead to rapidly shifting boundary lines that reflect social, economic, and political contexts that change over time. In the next section I offer an example of the complexity inherent in shared common pool resources and fluid boundaries.

AUNTIE CLAUDINE'S "BUNDLE OF STICKS"

I met Auntie Claudine one hot summer morning by Cross Sound as I took shelter under a seagrape tree. I had walked out along the curry road while the sun was still cool and the tide far out, draining the mangroves that lined the road. I passed a small creek that looked dry and muddy, the wet pathway unconvincing except for the boats tied to the trees, proving that fishermen did indeed skull their vessels up during high tide to protect them from storms. Suddenly, without noticing how she got there, I was suddenly aware that an old woman was standing by me watching me write up field notes. She was short and thin, but solid, dressed in a bright yellow housedress, wearing a narrow-brimmed straw hat with a plastic daisy. I said hello and she nodded, watching me for a long time, eyes squinted. In her hand, she held a long strand of small black sponges. These sponges are cut from the seafloor and threaded on fishing line or twine. The

strings are then left in the water to soak and die, and then hung in the sun to dry for several days. Afterwards, they are washed in salt water and "beaten" with a paddle to clean them. What is left is a soft golden sponge that people buy in department stores for a lot of money. I knew people had been sponging in Andros for centuries, but I was only familiar with the active sponging in Red Bay on the west side of Andros where an old Greek man collects the daily catch and sells it directly to Florida. I wasn't aware that people sponged on the rougher eastside.

Finally, after what seemed like an hour, Auntie Claudine spoke to me. "Wha' ya writin' in that little book?" I introduced myself and explained what I was doing. She knew me instantly. "You Melvern boy's wife?" I answered that yes I was. It turned out (after much figuring) I was married to this woman's great grandnephew. And that was all it took. She visibly relaxed, her shoulders lowered, a broad smile (the Pinder smile that I recognized in my own child) spread across her face and she said, "Yunna have that mulatto baby? She pretty! She sometin' special, that chil'" I agreed. We spent the next hour talking about Cross Sound and the bay, about raising babies (she had 15 children, 10 living) to sponging "That man's work, they go out for days and days." She said she only sponged in the shallow bay close to home, walking way out during low tide most mornings to collect sponge and then hang them. One tree was strung heavily with chains of sponges. I asked if they were all hers, "Nah, everybody use dis tree." I asked how she knew which strings were hers and which were her neighbors and she looked at me like I was a simpleton. "Now, how I not know that? I string 'em, right?" To me, each chain looked the same, of course there were slight differences: some were fresher and some were black with algae, some were golden already, some were bigger and some were tiny and irregular in shape, but there were hundreds to decipher. Does anyone ever make a mistake and take the wrong one? I asked. "We knows, we knows." She laughed softly and the conversation drifted elsewhere.

Later I asked a friend (and Claudine's great-great-grandniece) about the sponges, incredulous that Claudine could remember which sponge were hers. Did they use different twine or label them in some way? She howled with laughter at my ignorance. She explained that most people do really try to take only the strings they gather. There aren't very many people who do the sponging, and generally people remember which is theirs. Then she told me stories about the rows she remembered as a girl when someone "tiefed sometin' that wasn't theirs." Family members were called in to arbitrate and there loud spats in the road.



FIGURE 7: SPONGE CRAWL, ANDROS

PHOTO: SARAH WISE

When discussing “rightful claims” to property, how do we make sense of an old woman’s claim to a set of small sponges hanging from a seagrape tree or a young man scouring an island to write his initials on a patch of ground? Of Claudine’s “bundle of sticks,” a legal metaphor for the complex of rights that make up property claims? In the previous year, Claudine had made close to \$300 by collecting sponges, which she gave to her daughter to pay for her children’s school uniforms. In the small bay bordering the tiny settlement of Cross Sound (population of 80), people made daily claims on the sea. Old people sponged and conched by walking in the shallows and gathering up what lay at their feet. Fishers launched their boats and hand lined for snapper and grunts in the shallows. Children swam in the creeks and picked dilly fruit and custard apple. Women gathered plants for “bush medicine” along the shoreline. Naval cadets trained while on duty and spear fished while off duty. Scientists harvested the flora and fauna, the water, the air, and the dusty limestone for their research. Each group and each individual conceptualized their own *rightful* access in very specific ways that had been informed by historical and cultural legacies as well as personal experience.

Within the tiny hamlet of Cross Sound, Auntie Claudine with her 10 living children, 27 grandchildren, and uncounted great grandchildren, her position in the church and standing as an elder had tremendous capacity to act as a community leader and decision maker. Taken out of this immediate context (even in the national context, Nassau, for example), Auntie Claudine’s legitimacy as a community leader, and thus her authority, would not hold. A woman in her late 80s, Claudine was functionally illiterate with little experience of the world outside her home settlement. She had fished and sponged daily most of her life but saw her knowledge of the sea as inferior to men’s

knowledge. She had never gone to a formal school, but she had learned midwifery from her mother and still treated many people in the settlement for basic ailments. She grew up, married, and raised her children and grandchildren in a one room stone house that still stood, its yellow paint faded, on the small hill overlooking the bay. Recently, she had moved to a new cinderblock house her son built her in town along with three grandkids and a set of cousins who stay with her when “*dey get in too much trouble in da city.*” She still liked to climb the hill to her old house for the view. As she made resource claims, her notion of what was *rightful* was steeped in her individualized experience as a poor Bahamian woman who heard her mother tell stories about slavery and who faced the many inequities associated with living as a black British subject—not yet citizen—until 1973. Claudine remembers telling her children to run anytime they saw a “*white man. Yunna don’t want da mess with dem.*” In the 1960s when a road was finally built connecting the few settlements of central Andros, Claudine hid her children in the bush anytime foreign vehicles rumbled down the road, afraid that these men would harm her family and steal “*wha’ was mine!*” What was hers amounted to very little materially, but in terms of daily security and agency—her own understanding of her capacity to act—she had much to lose from the loud foreigners pushing through her settlement.

Claudine knew little of private property rights afforded to her by the Bahamian government. Her property, which was her wealth, was communal. Access to it was granted through the pulse of active membership in a social network and its commonly held property. Far from open access, the land and seas surrounding Cross Sound—which by legal definition is considered crown land—were occupied, overseen, and well used by the people living there. In what McCay (2009) calls the “Many faces of ‘Common

Property,’” the author emphasizes the important distinction between common property and open access, arguing that common property is “difficult to define, to bound, and to tame...Its outer boundaries are that it involves some kind and level of shared use rights rather than exclusive ones and that there is some sense of a *community of users and owners*” (McCay 2009: 14). Claudine shared her property, her “bundle of sticks,” with generations of family and community members. More than a bundle of sticks that could be individualized or made distinct through measurement and categorization, Auntie Claudine’s property resembled a blanket that was interwoven with multiple threads intersecting time and space, making it difficult to see where one thread began and one ended, and continuing to take shape. Much like in a weaving, patterns begin to form as we perceive its production.

CLAIMING THE SEA: FISHING NARRATIVES



FIGURE 8: A) COMMERCIAL SPONGE FISHING OFF ANDROS; B) CONCH FISHING IN THE FAMILY ISLANDS; C) COMMERCIAL FISHING FLEET IN NEW PROVIDENCE
PHOTOS: SARAH WISE

Perhaps even more than the land, the sea offers Bahamians access to its seemingly boundless resources, particularly in light of the growing foreign development along the islands’ coastlines. Claims at sea exemplify the changing climate of tenureship in the country away from locally meaningful common property toward greater value placed on

modern approaches to capital accumulation and privatization. People are passionate about their claims for rightful access and ownership, believing emphatically in their right to claim the land and sea, but their claims differ depending on their social positioning. Much of the focus on Bahamian marine resource users focuses on commercial and subsistence fishermen and the three primary commercial species: grouper, conch, and crawfish. Bahamian fishers are not a homogenous group and should not be considered as such. The commercial sector alone spans gender, race, and socio-economic categories. Although the industry is dominated by men, women have central positions as fishers, processors, sellers, and buyers of fish. Entire families fish together. In Sandy Point, Abaco, old men tend to fish with homemade wire traps while the young men go to sea on large commercial vessels for weeks at a time. Crawfish is the target of choice and the settlement appears to sleep until the first of the crawfish season comes when the town explodes in activity. Fishing in Andros can mean dropping a hook off the bridge for dinner, making \$500 per night fishing for mutton snapper, guiding tourists on the bonefish flats for \$10,000 per week, or cutting sponge from the sea's floor. The art and practice of fishing shifts, depending on both social and environment conditions—the direction of the wind, currents, and proximity to the market, alternative occupations, employment histories, and opportunism. Each form of fishing differs in habitat, season, gear, and expertise. Each fisher's rightful claim to the sea's resources is articulated through a lifetime of experience and engagement with the sea.

THE AUTHENTIC BAHAMIAN

I fished those creeks all my life.

Interview with Androsian fisherman, Andros, 70, November 2009

In my small settlement of 60 households in Spaniard Creek, central Andros, one commercial fisherman went fishing every day except Sunday. His crew changed. On the weekends, when there was no school, he took his younger brother. During the week, his cousin or uncle went along. Ringo owned the boat and therefore was in charge. They left early in the morning at low tide and motored out in their 17-foot Boston Whaler with a 90 HP outboard engine. The night before, Ringo filled his two 10 gallon tanks and kept them indoors so that no one would be tempted to siphon a little bit off. Their fishing spots changed depending on the weather, the wind, and tide. As soon as they made a small patch of reef or John's rock, they anchored their boat, and the two divers, dressed in wet suits, stepped off the rails into the water. Floating for a minute, spitting in their masks, they would complain, "The water cold man!" Most days, the men were out from dawn until two or three in the afternoon. Some days, they barely got enough fish to pay for gas, while others they returned grinning broadly, calling for nephews and cousins to help clean the catch. Family and friends arrived at the dock and someone started a fire. It was up to the young children to put "sweet bush" on the fire in order to make smoke and keep the biting flies and mosquitoes at bay. Often there was talk about missed groupers "dis big!" and a close call with a barracuda they've come to name the "Admiral." Lately, talk had turned to the muddy channel and dying coral off the settlement. The owner of a nearby luxury resort just north of the settlement wanted to extend his landholdings and deepen his marina by dredging sand and debris in the channel. The dredging was clouding the water, and the reclaimed sand covered the reef.

He dredging it all up. Muddying the waters all up. Tractors there all day man, only stop when dark. I call Michael—nothing! Nobody do nothing. That resort killed all our coconuts and now he killin' our fish. It's not his to do, man. All da conch dead. And I can't find no lobster no more.

Dogs scurried out from under houses to grab the entrails and tails as one of the men cleaned the fish. Ringo never cleaned unless it was for an elder in the community. Then he would painstakingly pick through the pile of fish, asking, "Mother, what you cooking tonight? Got a nice snapper right here. Ya want me da' cut up dis snapper for ya?" The old woman had seen the boat returning and had walked slowly across the settlement to the dock. As Ringo scaled and hatched each side of the fish (so that she can easily rub in the seasoning), the old woman slowly eased herself against the breakwater to wait, sometimes yelling at the children for playing too close to the creek. I rarely saw money change hands. I often bought fish for cash as did one or two of the small restaurants in the area, but usually people negotiated bits and pieces, promising to "give ya a couple dollar" or simply, "I needs me a fish dinner tonight!" Ringo considers himself a commercial fisherman, and he did sell fish, but the bulk of his business was in trade. Later in the week, Ringo might need some more gas or a few cinderblocks for the bedroom addition he was building. He calculated the trades in his head and was quick to say no when he felt it was deserved. The cash he did receive, he divided among his crew, each getting an equal share and leaving a share for the boat. Ringo was said to be fair, much better than the Fresh Creek fishermen who "work ya ta death and don't give ya' nothing." Thus, Ringo fed the settlement and kept at least two young men working. He taught the younger generation a trade and provided a meeting place for the community to gather, talk, swap stories, laugh, and share. His monetary transactions were slight in comparison to the larger commercial fishing fleet fishing in these same waters, but his contribution to the community's livelihood and welfare was incomparable.

For Ringo, fishing was not a way to make money, but how he identified himself and sustained his "rightful" place within the community. Drastic changes in the marine environment, whether they were caused by dredging or enclosure conservation,

threatened his livelihood and even his “way of life” as a fisherman. These changes threatened his place in the world, as fisherman, provider, family, mentor, caregiver, instructor, and expert. Although not necessarily recognized by lawmakers or conservationists, by losing the *capacity* to access the sea, Ringo would lose everything around which he had built his life.

The Bahamas Bank off Andros hosts productive fishing grounds for commercial and subsistence fishers. As might be expected, many Bahamians draw strong distinctions between local and foreign when designating “rightful access” to Bahamian fishing grounds. The concept of “foreign” is not restricted to non-native Bahamians, but also to those fishermen who do not represent the desired, but ever-changing Bahamian ideal, which is tied to ideas about modernity and capitalism, of what it means to be Bahamian. Androsians fall under the label of foreign poachers because they do not adhere to the imagined Bahamas the minister desired.

The largest commercial fishers hail from Spanish Wells, a historically all white settlement in North Eleuthera. Spanish Wells is known for its isolationist tendencies, well-developed commercial fishing fleet, and substantial wealth¹⁰ in comparison to the rest of the Bahamas. There are several other small white Bahamian communities throughout the islands, but Spanish Wells is the largest and best known. Originally founded by British loyalists from the US when America gained independence in the late 18th century, the settlement attempted (unsuccessfully) to establish independence from the greater Bahamas on several occasions.

¹⁰ There is a great deal of discussion on whether this wealth comes primarily from the fishing fleet or the well-organized and large-scale drug running industry active in the settlement.

Much distinguishes Spanish Wells from the rest of the Bahamas, the most visible of which is their fishing fleet. Although most Bahamian commercial fishing uses smaller motorized vessels, many of which are no bigger than skiffs and few exceed 40 feet, Spanish Wells fishers operate as a well-organized cooperative with highly mechanized large (60 to 80 feet) vessels and fishing gear. The settlement also controls the buying and processing sectors allowing for greater overall profit. In comparison, most Bahamian fishers work as independent vessels with a relatively new crew each season, selling their catch to intermediary buyers and reaping a modest profit.

Some Spanish Wells fishers have reported deploying over 50,000 lobster condos in one season. Other fishers often get to the traps first, and stories frequently tell of guns and the threat of bloodshed in order to “protect our property.” There is an ongoing lobby by Spanish Wells fishermen to get the government to establish legal ownership of condos in order to persecute “poachers.” The individuals deemed “poachers” may be native born Bahamians with the legal right to access the lobster traps, yet when the terminology is deployed, little distinction is drawn between foreign fishers crossing transnational boundaries to harvest Bahamian marine resources and local fishers following established law.

There is a long-standing and often talked about feud between Spanish Wells and Androsian fishers. Depending on who tells the story, the narrative often falls into one of two categories that I call David and Goliath and Pirate Tales.

DAVID AND GOLIATH

Them Spanish Wells folk, they scrape the sea clean. They got so many traps out there you can't even see the sand. They make more every year, throwing them out, making more. They just take and take and take filling up them big boats they got...And those

motherships, they got 10, 12 whalers attached to them. And they start way before season you know? Oh yeah, they comming, sometimes just waiting for the first day to start. But you know, sometimes they don't even wait. I go out there in my little boat, just taking enough to feed my family and maybe a little to make a couple dollars. Man's got to feed his family. But times are so tough now.

Interview with Androsian fisherman, Andros, October 2009

PIRATE TALES

Androsians don't know nothing about the laws. They just go out and take another man's livelihood. They lazy. I buy the material, build the traps and throw them out. I mark my spots with the GPS. Then they come and just take what they want. It's unbelievable! One time I come up on my traps and I see this boat, nobody there, just a boat tied to my buoy. Must be diving so I get my flare gun and I wait. Boy, I'm gonna scare him when he comes up with my lobster¹¹.

Interview with Spanish Wells fisherman, Nassau June 2007

Both groups feel they have a rightful claim to the sea's resources but for very different reasons. Spanish Wells fishers emphasize their labor, the size and scale of their production (large), and their success in a modern capitalist economy. Alternatively, Androsians (like Ringo) make claims based on need and community ties, as well as the small size and scale of production. Spanish Wells fishermen argue in favor of their right to harvest as many lobsters as possible because they are *business owners*, and not simply fishermen or consumers, but producers of a desired good. Spanish Wells fishers present themselves as satisfying a market and providing goods for sale through personal investment in large commercial vessels and crawfish traps. Androsian fishers, on the other hand, underplay their role as business owners, focusing instead on the small scale, humanistic needs of the family and community. Most Androsian fishers do not have the resources to invest in large vessels and numerous traps, but in relative terms, they are

¹¹ The term lobster is used interchangeably with crawfish. Both refer to the same species, Caribbean spiny lobster (*Panulirus argus*).

deeply invested (through the expenditure of money for fishing gear, vessels, fuel, and labor) in making their livelihood from the sea.

In an interview in 2006 with Minister Philips of The Bahamas' Ministry of Agriculture and Marine Resources (MAMR), we discussed the topic of resource ownership. MAMR is responsible for initiating and developing all regulations concerning agriculture and marine resources in The Bahamas. The minister at that time was formerly the Minister of Trade and Industry, but had recently been appointed to MAMR. Minister Philips was quick to inform me that he had attended high school in Miami and went on to study business at the University of Texas at El Paso, emphasizing his position as a modern and well educated Bahamian national. Just prior to the interview, the Minister had traveled to several Family Islands to meet with agriculturists and fishers in order to "get a better sense of the industry." He continued to be involved in industrial projects, such as the highly controversial liquid natural gas (LNG) line along The Bahamas, which is proposed to supply Florida with fuel, and the gas refinery in the Grand Bahamas. Both projects are proposed for foreign rather than local consumption of resources.

As Minister, Phillips was ultimately in charge of setting the legal parameters regarding access to resources and allocating rights of use. During his interview, Minister Phillips spoke at length about a conflict between the Spanish Wells fishers and other Bahamian fishers regarding property rights over fishing gear. The fishers' dispute began over ownership of spiny lobster condos.

FISHERMAN AS MODERN BUSINESSMAN

During his interview, the Minister discussed his recent meeting with Spanish Wells fishers, describing them as “*probably the most independent set of fishermen, I guess I could say in the whole world. They don't need the government for one single thing. They have their own cooperative among themselves. And they are probably the wealthiest fishermen that this country has ever seen. It's a beautiful place.*” The Minister holds up the Spanish Wells fishers as an icon of good business, independence, and a strong moral code:

I mean they take pride in whatever they do...And they're very conscientious fishermen too, you know? They've been pacesetters in, not only in regulating, but in trying to harvest and to see the need for regulations to be put in place, to protect their future. And they've done a wonderful job.

For the Minister, these fishers illustrate the ideal values he would like to believe his country represents: modernity, wealth, organization, and independence. Rather than recognizing that the Spanish Wells fishers stand apart from most Bahamian fishers by their history, wealth, racial affiliation, and in the very way they fish, the Minister positions the Spanish Wells fishers as the desired Bahamian prototype of fishers with legitimate resource claims. Hence, these men deserve privileged access to Bahamian resources and have earned the label “pacesetters” in the decision making process. Minister Phillips indicates the Spanish Wells fishers’ rightful resource ownership through his use of the phrase, “to protect their future.” He associates ownership with market capital. Later in the interview, he spoke more emphatically about their ownership rights, particularly in comparison to foreigners and other Bahamians. “*A guy would go spend \$50,000, \$60,000, put his habitats down, and he goes there to harvest what he put. And the foreign fishermen, as well as the guy from Andros, he is all on his boat, in his little*

area, and they just uproot his habitat.” In his narrative, the minister positioned Spanish Wells fishers as the rightful owners of the habitat as well as the resources. By definition, the undesirable interloper—whether foreigner or Androsian—is a disruptive force, “uprooting” that which has been carefully placed and maintained. The uprooting seemed to speak to the displacement of rightful claims and desirable Bahamian values. Also interesting is the Minister’s alignment of the Androsian fisher with the foreigner, thereby “othering” the Androsian in order to align himself and his country with what he sees as superior, modern, and more efficient ideas that are closely tied to ideas about race and wealth accumulation. Many Bahamians view Spanish Wells as the home of wealthy and white Bahamians. Other primarily white enclaves are either dominated by foreign residents (for example the gated communities in New Providence and Lyford Cay) or are associated with poverty and lack of education as well as other social ills.

During his interview, the Minister associated modernity with rightful ownership, whereas he relegated Androsians to foreign status. As the Minister spoke, he mentioned that Bahamian law clearly states there can be no owner of the seabed, *“Now, one of the rules you got is that the seabed belongs to everyone,”* but he said he was determined to change the law to allow Spanish Wells fishers to own their condos legally. *“They told me in Spanish Wells, that if we don't stop them [the other fishers], they're prepared to do what is necessary to protect their welfare. They're gonna kill a couple people.”* The Minister aligned himself politically and personally with the moral community of Spanish Wells’ fishers, even in light of morally ambiguous threats, such as violence and murder. The Minister continued to hold onto his image of rightful ownership, by emphasizing

their welfare, despite the fact that the Bahamian government governs the seabed as commonage.

CLAIMING IN THE NAME OF SCIENCE

In order to justify the proposal to enclose the length of the west side of Andros, BNT and the national government looked to science and international conservation organizations with global visibility. BNT partnered with the Nature Conservancy and two Androsian conservation organizations, the Andros Conservancy and Trust and the Bahamas Sport Fishing and Conservation Association to form a conservation alliance. From 2005 to 2009, the alliance was involved in a flurry of research documenting the global importance of the west side of Andros. The conservation alliance promoted the proposal through scientific measurement and narratives of comparative abundance, vulnerability, and urgency:

We in The Bahamas are fortunate to have some of the healthiest reefs and highest marine biodiversity in the wider Caribbean. We also have some of the last remaining fish stocks in the region. Many of the fish that we take for granted in The Bahamas are commercially extinct elsewhere. We have the opportunity to protect our reefs, and have a sustainable supply of fish for the future... but we must act now.

Bahamas Reef Educational Environment Foundation 2009, website

In 2005, The Nature Conservancy (TNC) led a rapid ecological assessment (REA) in documenting notable species in the area, including threatened and commercial species. An interdisciplinary team of international researchers gathered evidence on the area's environmental worth, such as biological diversity, ecological habitats, and freshwater reserves. Subsequent reports suggested unprecedented abundance and undisturbed ecosystems in need of protection. The scientific narratives emphasized the healthy

populations and valuable habitat on the west side, laying claim to the area for the purpose of conservation. In one of TNC's glossy promotional brochures, the lead primary investigator stated, "The west side of Andros Island is teeming with large numbers of rare species from bull sharks to small organisms." Other scientists chimed in to lend support to the enclosure project, observing that "The number of sea turtles observed is significant in The Bahamas Archipelago and may be of regional significance in the Greater Caribbean" (TNC 2007: 12). Environmental value was calculated based on vague notions of threatened pristine wilderness and value-through-scarcity. The REA and subsequent reports and promotional literatures reshaped and claimed the space for the specific purpose of conservation.



FIGURE 9: PRACTICING SCIENCE IN ANDROS

PHOTO: SARAH WISE

Later ecological assessments funded by The Nature Conservancy and other conservation organizations made similar claims about knowledge scarcity, undisturbed nature, and vulnerability:

The avifauna of Andros is poorly known; the collecting trip reported on by (Northrop 1891) and White's (White 1998) birding guide remain the only extensive surveys of the island's birds. However, Andros, with its low

density of human inhabitants and extensive areas of undisturbed natural vegetation, is almost certainly an important source of habitat for wintering birds.

Rapid Ecological Assessment Report, TNC 2010:16

This report, as well as others, suggests protected areas as solutions to threatened wildlife species of which very little is known. The scarcity of information and scientific data operates as a proxy for vulnerability. In response, enclosure becomes a viable, indeed a necessary, option. Within the conservation arena and beyond, enclosure is viewed as a rational response to vulnerability, particularly in the context of developing island nations. The dualism of enclosure both assumes and defines specific threats to human security while concurrently presenting the solution to these perceived threats. Thus, enclosure becomes an obligatory resolution for trans-scalar threats to security—to the body, the landscape, and to capital investment.

THE SCIENTIFIC NARRATIVE

Scientists are rife in Andros. They come from across the globe. Biologists, oceanographers, archeologists, climate scientists, and anthropologists arrive with plane loads and boat loads of gear, research protocols, and hopefully, some form of permits. They study the land, sea, air, reefs, plants, and people. Scientific knowledge becomes paramount, and enclosure the obvious answer to vulnerability. As a result, the multitude of other tenure claims is obscured by the sheer importance of maintaining ecosystem health or scientific objectives. As in any group, some individuals are more conscientious than others; some are committed to sharing their knowledge with Androsians in schools and community events; and others are more dedicated to the idea of “good science” than to the effects on the people living in Andros. During the course of my own research, I

shadowed several scientists who were visiting Andros for the same purpose. What struck me was the shared belief that Andros was an unusual and special island, filled with scientific wonders (primed for their study) and uncooperative people (who hindered their work). Perhaps because of the perceived local resistance, researchers often talked as if Andros was their domain alone. The island existed in order to be studied, measured, and catalogued; only through measurement and scientific knowledge did it exist. The island's value lay in the scientific potential of what could be discovered and its significance for the broader scientific world.

I try to come a few times every year depending on the funding situation. Andros is the perfect environment to do my research. In the middle of nowhere, no one is ever here. I have it to myself...I found these spots with old water survey maps, long before Google Earth! I used to have to hike around for miles looking for blue holes. I'd guess just based on the water table. No one's ever back here unless they're doing something you don't want to know about.

Interview with U.S. Researcher, Andros, October 2009

For this researcher, Andros Island was an empty scientific canvas, depopulated and ready for exploration. As he discussed his research, the scientist emphasized his own labor and skill at newly discovering parts of the island. Through his hard work, he “found” Andros, measured its pine forests, sampled its fauna, and claimed its space as his own.

ROOM FOR SLIPPAGE: AMBIGUITY AND MORALITY OF “RIGHTFUL” CLAIMS

The Bahamas is a nation of 700 islands and 375,000 people. Bahamians are a diverse group, spanning a vast color line, an urban-rural divide, and strong class distinctions. Bahamian subjectivities identify Andros as the most rural and least developed island in the country. Tenure laws are thought to reflect the island's isolation

and strong ties to African heritage, ideas that have been assigned racial characteristics and measured against Westernized notions of modernity and moral progress. In the capital of New Providence, an island whose area is only seven by eleven miles but has over two thirds of the nation's population, tenure claims tend to be more formal although it is no less uncertain. Despite the drive for more systemized property laws, ambiguity and overlap remain in tenure claims stemming from a colonial history and relating directly to class and racial identity.

The meaning of a *rightful claim* is certainly socially determined and only vaguely understood. According to the Merriam Webster Dictionary, rightful is defined as: a) just or equitable; b) having a just or legally established claim; c) held by right or just claim; d) proper or fitting. Firmly planted within each of these definitions (yet still frustratingly elusive) is the notion of *justice*, suggesting ties to legal institutions and social norms. Indeed, what is considered *just* follows a winding path towards mutually established legitimacy, perhaps stopping on the way to gather collective support or at least the support of a powerful few. To be just suggests an institution of commonage in that the idea of ownership and the claim of access to a resource must be held in common in order to maintain legitimacy. Socially constructed and thus deeply influenced by the mechanisms of power, rightful claims are unstable, fluctuating with time, over space, and with respect to the individual. In order for something to be considered just and thus rightful, there must be a ground swelling of patronage from people who hold sway within the community. Above all, rightful claims reflect the diversity and individuation of people living and working on the land and the sea.

In the context of The Bahamas, property claims differ greatly depending on who makes the claim. Claims are enforceable through legitimizing processes that included social networks, racial and gendered identity, and embodied experiences. While Andros embodies the traditional black Bahamian who is still said to “live in the bush,” the moral character of Spanish Wells fishers—despite their history of racial separatism—stands in the forefront of a Bahamian Minister’s depiction of rightful ownership. C.B. Macpherson (1978) refers to the importance of moral standing when considering access to property, stating “What distinguishes property from mere momentary possession is that property is a claim that will be enforced by society or the state, by custom or convention or law” (Macpherson 1978a: 3). Therefore, how property is defined and allocated is directly shaped by social constructs and the very people engaged in these frameworks.

Ribot’s (1998) emphasis on *the ability* to access, as distinct from *the right* to access, takes into account the capacity to use and benefit from an area. Such an approach recognizes the presence of power within social relationships and with the environment in interactions that are always changing (Ribot & Peluso 2003: 158). Ribot and Peluso explore the relationship and implications of power more directly through individual social positioning. The authors define an “enforceable claim” as one that is “acknowledged and supported by society through law, custom, or convention” (Ribot and Peluso 2003: 154). Different types of property rights result in various consequences for resource users and decision-making (Agrawal and Ostrom 2001). Just who has access to particular areas at what times, and who performs which activities is closely tied to the social power of individuals or groups (Blaikie 1985; Ribot and Peluso 2003). The authors further distinguish among those attempting to control or maintain access to particular

rights, arguing that “Various types of power relations around a given set of benefits and beneficiaries must be analyzed to understand these webs of access” (Ribot and Peluso 2003: 159). Enclosure conservation is based on restricting access in some form, whether it is specific to individuals or activities. Enclosing a commons restricts access to space once considered commonly held. The act of enclosure changes what Ribot and Peluso call the “mechanisms of access” (ibid) governing the land and sea, and re-allocating rights of access.

Derek’s story, begun on page 97 and continued below, illustrates the nuanced differences between the rights of ownership—whether customary or formal—verses the rights of access. Derek’s standing as a family member entitled him to a piece of generation property, and his right of ownership was supported by custom as well as formalized by law. However, his efforts to obtain “his piece of dirt” were hindered to the point where he decided against making a claim. After several months, Derek grew tired of negotiating with family and forfeited his tenure claims.

CLAIMING THAT SMALL BIT OF DIRT

Over the course of three months, Derek began the claiming process of three individual pieces of land. First, he asked his eldest aunt if he could fix up his grandmother’s abandoned stone house (property no one wanted because it was “too old and poor”). She agreed, but was quick to remind him it would never be his, that it would forever belong to “all her children.” Derek explained to me that we could live there for as long as we liked, but once we added electricity and indoor plumbing, the house would become desirable and there might be some conflict with the rest of the family. We ruled out that option.

While I spent my days roaming the island talking with people about marine conservation and tenure, Derek roamed the island talking with people about claiming a piece of land to call his own. He operated well outside the conventional and legislated property laws, instead negotiating the orally transmitted customary laws at play in Andros. In some ways, his position was a familiar one—a young Bahamian male with a wife and baby who wanted to build a house on his family island. In other ways, his position was complicated by the fact that he was mostly raised by his grandmother in Andros, but spent some years in Nassau with his mother, which marked him as an outsider from the city. Furthermore, his status as grandson (rather than son) lessened his claim. But his role as committed father and husband increased it. The hardest for some to fathom was that he married a white American educated woman, an

object that held tremendous meaning as a foreign invasive body with authority, but who was still recognized as his baby's mother. Derek's claim to property in Andros represented a loyal homecoming as well as an invasion. He embodied the prodigal son who left the island as a youth (as so many do) to return home as a financially and reproductively successful grown man. But in his own transformation, he became less familiar, perhaps even less Bahamian. His story offered a hiccup in the usual coming home narrative and so his claims to property were further complicated by people's ambivalence. He was a boundary crosser, and because of his ability to straddle multiple economic, social, and racial worlds, he didn't seem to belong fully in either one. He straddled the instable middle ground. At best, Derek was able to decipher and participate in the slight cultural nuances that were lost on me. He had access to the knowledge, memories, and historical contingencies shared by family members. He understood the threads of meaning interlaced throughout the land- and cultural-scape. At worst, Derek was alienated by his association with the other and prevented from full participation. His role as boundary crosser was exemplified by his own search for property on the island, for a tie to the island and his homeland.

In the end, Derek grew frustrated with the complications of family claims and counter claims, just like the other Androsians I had spoken with during interviews, and he abandoned the idea of family land. One day our friend, the BNT conservation agent, Rawlins, brought over topographic maps of the island. He had gotten the maps from a visiting scientist researching blue holes. Rawlins had asked him for copies because he had experienced the futility of depending on the Bureau for Land and Survey's maps. The scientist had given him all of the maps when his research ended. "I got more back in my lab in the states." Rawlins had sought out a prime property—close to the beach with some elevation and a source of fresh water,, and most importantly, not yet claimed. He submitted the paperwork, but also cut a few trees and painted his initials on the road. He suggested we take the patch bordering his since he knew it remained uncontested. He drove us by the property singing out the names of claimed property every few miles, sometimes feet. "That's Tom Hinsey, then his sister...that's the Hinsey's too. That's Bogger's place. And Ranson's." On we drove, most of the land physically untouched, undeveloped, but claimed nonetheless through small initials streaking the road from one corner to the next. He finally came to his own (initials RR in white). His land was black and singed from the fire he started last year to burn the brush. The whole island laughed about it: that a Bahamas National Trust conservation officer and park warden had "burned down the whole forest trying to get his property!" His folly seemed to suggest his own complicity with the foreigner (as an employee of BNT and also friend of a man whose wife is a white American woman) as well as the inevitable mess BNT created when it became involved with island affairs. This was the land that Derek claimed. It was far away from his family land, even far away from his home settlement, but this land proved available in ways that his family's generation land had not.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I attempted to respond to the question of *how people negotiate and legitimize ownership of contested space within the context of protected area conservation*. Legitimate property claims to the land and sea are dynamic, involving, and contingent on social networks and linkages to the environment through blood ties and bodily experience, and they are performed and interpreted through experiential and scientific knowledge. This research suggests that Androsians use the oral documentation

of their historical ties—and thus claims—to the landscape and ocean through narratives of personal and familiar belonging and experience. This type of attachment to the land and sea contrasts those of researchers and conservationists who produce their own claims of legitimate authority through access to privileged forms of knowledge and greater global networks.

Historically, Bahamians have had a rich sense of ownership and rootedness in the form of shared property within a community or familial group. Enclosure conservation has threatened to usurp this wealth and security in the name of global environmental health and sustainability. Much of the land and seas of the Bahamas are held in some form of common property, whether as Crown Land or Generation Property. Restricting access through enclosure conservation lends the illusion of maintaining commonage property for the public good, while drastically restricting access for many Bahamians. Enclosure of property appropriates rather than bestows rights of access. The Bahamas government and conservation agencies enclose large tracts of land and sea in the name of vague notions about scarcity and protection against vulnerability, thus restricting access to fishing grounds, blue holes, and stretches of land that were once considered accessible to all Bahamians. Adding insult to injury, these losses—of property, rights and access to resources—are labeled as global benefits by the conservation agencies proposing the enclosure.

The concept of property is complex and extends far beyond that of simple ownership. Instead of the “bundle of sticks” metaphor used in property law, which conveys nothing of the connections and interdependency of rights within a rightful property claim, imagine an intricate, nested latticework of governance that indicates

multi-dimensionality as well as an uncertain hierarchical order. There is no clear starting point, no nucleus of authority, no real command center. Rules and practice that affect access to resources and space shift to accommodate national priorities, daily needs, and family obligations. In the Bahamas, clear distinctions can be made among properties, whether terrestrial and marine, and common and private property that is permanently or temporarily held. Some property systems are coded by law, but the majority are communicated through oral pathways and influenced by fluctuating social contingencies. When large-scale governance change occurs, such as the creation of a protected area, the complex lattice work of property systems can be flattened, masking much of the finer detailed filigree beneath. A certain conceptualization of property, one that withstands international scrutiny and requires little context in order to be understood, dominates and elides the finer distinctions of ownership and access to resources that underpin social welfare and survival of entire communities. Both property and the meanings surrounding that property are lost, obscured, and reallocated covertly. For the most part, they remain unnoticed or compressed as “resistance” in the justification of global conservation efforts.

CHAPTER 5

THE ARCHITECTS OF CONSERVATION

INTRODUCTION

Enclosure conservation is a social process in that is shaped by dynamic human interactions. These processes are fluid, continually shifting to accommodate new information and changing social and environmental contingencies. Furthermore, enclosure conservation is shaped by the diverse and sometimes conflicting ideologies held by the individuals, organizations, and alliances involved in the creation of protected areas in Andros Island. By examining each of the key organizations and actors involved in efforts to establish and expand protected areas in Andros, I will locate the Westside National Park expansion project in the context of conservation trends and existing social relationships.

In this chapter, I examine the key organizations involved in enclosure conservation in the Bahamas archipelago, paying special attention to the dynamic social interactions and collaboration among conservation agents. I will begin with a brief historical overview of protected area conservation in the Bahamas as it has evolved from a fortress approach to multi-zoning. I will then look at the creation (and eventual dissolution) of the Conservation Alliance, a partnership of conservation organizations which organized around the West Side National Park expansion project. The emerging Alliance was an institution united in purpose yet fractured by elitism, power differentials, and interpersonal conflicts.

HISTORY OF ENCLOSURE CONSERVATION IN THE BAHAMAS

Managing marine resources through a regulatory framework is not new in the Bahamas; however protection-through-enclosure has grown in popularity as a reasonable and effective way to protect commercial marine species and habitat (Agardy 1997; Chiappone, et al. 2000; Chiappone and Sealey 2000; Harborne, et al. 2008). Historically, multiple regulatory mechanisms were used to manage marine resources in The Bahamas including, size limits, seasonal closures, regional closures, and gear restrictions. Subsistence resource users were usually provided with greater use rights than commercial appropriators (Mascia 2000: 118). Laws controlling resource use in Bahamian waters date back to a 1670 regulation limiting fishing in Nassau Harbor (Mascia, 2000: 121). In 1904, a marine resource governing board was appointed and given the authority to establish marine protected areas in 1937. Shortly after, the first fish reserve (one square mile in size) was designated in Nassau Harbor (ibid).

In response to international interest in the marine biodiversity of the Bahamas and concern over growing environmental stressors, a group of foreign scientists and naturalists proposed the Exuma Cays Land and Sea Park (ECLSP) in 1958 (Ray 2004). The proposal represented a new movement to link land and seascapes under one umbrella of protection and was labeled the first “island (land and sea) National Park in the world” (Ray 1998: 7). At first, the park was open to multiple uses and continued to be fished heavily. In 1986, the ECLSP became a “No-Take zone” forbidding all forms of resource extraction while continuing to allow recreational swimming and boating. Today, ECLSP remains a “No-Take” National Park and is considered a conservation success story. The

Bahamas National Trust (BNT) manages all national parks in The Bahamas including the ESLSP. BNT is a non-governmental body responsible for:

promoting the permanent preservation for the benefit and enjoyment of The Bahamas of lands and tenements (including buildings) and submarine areas of beauty or natural or historic interest and as regards lands and submarine areas for the preservation (so far as practicable) of their natural aspect, features, and animal, plant and marine life.

The Bahamas Government 2001: 3-4

In 2000, a network of five Marine Reserves was proposed by the then-named Department of Fisheries (since renamed The Department of Marine Resources [DMR] to further emphasize the value of marine life as resources and broaden the scope beyond simply fish). Each of the five marine reserves was touted as important to the protection of commercial fisheries and local livelihood of Bahamians. To assist in the proposed reserve site selection, the Bahamas government appointed a scientific panel to develop biological and socioeconomic criteria needed to evaluate potential sites. The team also assessed the estimated level of support for a protected area within the surrounding community. A total of 38 sites were evaluated and ranked (Dalgren 2002). The first five sites proposed by the Department of Fisheries were in North Bimini, Berry Islands, South Eleuthera, Exuma Cays, and North Abaco Cays, totaling 800 square kilometers of sea which would be “No-Take” areas. The “No-Take” designation limits any extractive use of the area while still allowing for recreational or other non-extractive uses, including tourist activities. These final five areas were expected to serve as prototypes for developing larger nation-wide and ultimately Caribbean-wide networks. As “No-Take” areas, the reserves were distinct from National Parks because their main stated purpose was management of marine resources, putting the emphasis on prohibiting extraction rather than promoting multiple use areas with certain (often generalized) restrictions.

In an effort to centralize the management of natural resources, these protected areas were supposed to be supervised by the DMR not by The Bahamas National Trust. Centralizing authority was seen by many conservation officials (both in and outside of BNT) as a political move to gain credibility and counter the perception of elitism surrounding BNT. The DMR is a branch of the national government and as such, subject to certain challenges such as underfunding and ineffective management. The proposal to create the network of marine reserves was delayed due to the political elections at the time: each political party used the reserves as a party platform, either embracing or obstructing the proposal. In the meantime, the ground swelling of support for the network waned and funding was re-allocated elsewhere and diminished (Bullard 2006, pers comm.). In 2006, six years after the original proposal, one Bahamian journalist wrote “what has happened to the much-publicized, five-year-old decision to set up a network of marine reserves throughout the country to protect our fishery resources?” (Smith 2006: website). For many Bahamians, marine reserves were associated with restrictive “No-Take” policies managed by the ineffective national government while National Parks—promoted as, “conserving our National Treasures”—continued to gain support among conservationists. It wasn’t until 2009 that two of the initial five reserves in the network were officially declared. Even so, management plans have not been finalized and regulation details are unclear.

What is clear is the general progression of enclosure throughout Bahamian waters, what Murray et al. (Murray, et al. 2010) refer to as “creeping enclosure” of the commons—that is enclosure of the sea as a cumulative restriction rather than as a result of a singular event (Murray et al. 2010: 369). Protected areas as a form of conservation

and resource management in the Bahamas began in 1958 with the single ECLSP proposal. Since then, enclosure has become the primary means of “protection,” of the sea, marine resources, biodiversity, Bahamian livelihoods, and the Bahamian way of life. The pressure to increase protected areas in the country was strong after signing—along with several other Caribbean nations—onto to *2000 Caribbean Challenge*, an initiative executed by TNC to protect 20 percent of the country’s marine and coastal environments and 10 percent of land by 2020. The Central Andros parks were part of The Bahamas move to double the country’s National Parks, and talks began almost immediately to increase the size of West Side National Park. Furthermore, the enclosed areas are progressively getting larger in scale. MPA proposals have expanded in scope and complexity from small regional MPAs to larger networks of linked protected areas. This context helps account for the move to expand the Westside National Park to encompass the entire western length of Andros Island. BNT and The Nature Conservancy (TNC), a major international conservation group very active in the Bahamas, frequently touted the original network of five protected areas in Andros as an successful act of environmental protection, announcing in 2004 that the network, “paves the way for additional protection in the North and the South” (BNT 2004: website).

BNT has continued to take the lead in conservation projects in The Bahamas. More recently, BNT partnered with other environmental organization to form a Conservation Alliance in an organized effort to promote the Westside National Park expansion plan. Four groups in particular are members of the alliance: The Nature Conservancy - Bahamas branch (TNC-B), The Bahamas National Trust (BNT), The Bahamas Sportsfishing Conservation Association (BSCA), and Andros Nature

Conservancy and Trust (ANCAT). In the next section I will give a detailed overview of each organization as well as explore the conditions surrounding the formation and disbanding of the alliance.

MAKING THE ALLIANCE

Just as enclosure conservation began to gain momentum within the national arena in the early 2000s, local environmental organizations in Andros began a campaign to establish a series of five protected areas in central Andros, later called the Central Andros National Park System (CANPS). Driven by the two local conservation organizations (The Bahamas Sprotfishing Conservation Association and Andros Conservancy and Trust) and supported by the Bahamas National Trust, the park system was successfully implemented in 2002. Three of the five protected areas were located on the east coast of Andros, close to human settlements: two marine protected areas that ran like thin bands along the eastern shoreline; the Blue Hole National Park, an oddly angled area encompassing a tract of inland blue holes; and the Crab Replenishment Park, a vaguely defined space just south of the airport that was prized habitat for land crab. The fifth protected area was designed to protect at least some of the shifting liminal of the west coast of Andros. This early Westside National Park (WNP) encompassed a small bit of both land and sea and encircled the only private property along the coast, James Strathorne's hunting and fishing lodge. In 2006, BNT and partners turned to The Nature Conservancy for support in proposing and promoting a substantial expansion of the park, exponentially increasing its original size.

By 2009, the expanded WNP was officially declared although boundary lines had not yet been drawn. Between 2006 and 2009, a relatively small group of people representing conservation organizations reconfigured the entire western coast of Andros as a place of tremendous value to the wider world, and one under threat from human impacts. Much of the outreach literature surrounding the parks and people later interviewed mentioned a “Conservation Alliance,” which referred to the partnership of the four conservation agencies. It was this Alliance that was credited with building capacity for a park system on Andros. The Alliance was also promoted as an example of TNC’s ability to effectively integrate international resources (e.g. money and international influence) with regional resources (labor and territorially-based influence). Each group in the Alliance is distinct in its membership and mission, funding strategies, and conservation goals. In the following section I will give an overview of the four organizations involved in the Conservation Alliance and their work to promote enclosure in Andros.

ARCHITECTS OF CONSERVATION: THE KEY ACTORS

The Bahamas is a small country. With a population of just over 350,000, people with specialized interests, such as the environment or marine science tend to know each other. During the course of interviewing conservation agents and government officials, I managed to interview many individuals who had worked for nearly all the environmental agencies in the country involved with conservation and marine management. There was a great deal of mobility among agencies and the difference in pay and prestige led to general patterns in how people tended “move up the ranks:” Several people had begun at the government level and moved into the international NGO sector. What remained

consistent for any conservation project in The Bahamas was that there was a great deal of overlap in the labor pool and collaboration among staff. Outreach projects were co-organized by multiple agencies. Brochures that had been printed by the TNC headquarters were distributed by all the environmental organizations. Teacher workshops were co-hosted by two or more groups and perhaps funded by others. Although there was tremendous collaboration among agencies, there was also significant tension surrounding issues of rightful belonging and authority, power hierarchies, and elitism.

THE BAHAMAS NATIONAL TRUST (BNT)

The Bahamas National Trust played a leading role in establishing enclosure conservation on Andros. In 1959, the British Commonwealth government of the Bahamas established through an act of parliament the nation's first conservation organization, The Bahamas National Trust (BNT). The National Audubon Society conceptualized, spearheaded and funded the Trust, in response to international pressure to protect the West Indian Flamingo, and it has since grown to be the largest conservation organization in the country. By government mandate, BNT is in charge of managing all national parks including marine protected areas, placing the organization in an internationally influential and highly visible role within the conservation arena. As of 2011, the organization manages 27 National Parks (covering one million acres) including the well-known Exuma Cays Land Sea Park (BNT 2012: website). Funding for the Trust is provided through the Heritage Fund Endowment, memberships, donations, sales and fees, and a government grant. Although BNT is responsible for conserving the Bahamas' biodiversity through area management, education, policy, and advocacy, the Trust's

efficacy is limited by its inability to actively enforce existing regulations. Controversy surrounding the parks, the questionable justice of limited access for Bahamians and private ownership within park territory is ongoing. New park proposals such as expanding the Westside National Park only seem to re-ignite the debates over property ownership within the archipelago.

BNT's central offices in Nassau are housed in a tiny wooden bungalow that was the former private estate of Arthur and Margaret Langlois, world renowned exotic palm collectors. Situated on the crowded and dusty Village Road, *the Retreat* as it was called, with its long winding driveway and tall aged and well-tended palms, did indeed resemble its name. The estate, its manicured lawns, and the collection of exotic palms, all illustrate in landscape form a particular relationship between humans and the environment: one steeped in a colonial history of extraction, collection and ownership. Whether collecting palms or people, social elites, display these assemblages as symbols of power and control, Hughes (2010) calls, making "a fetish of scenery" (Hughes 2010: xv). The land and seascapes fall under the dominion of wealthy white land holders who are morally sanctioned (by the divine or a certain set of ideals) to govern.

During the course of my research I visited *The Retreat* frequently to interview staff and scientists, attend events and workshops, and present my research. The *Retreat's* front office stands in what might have been the small entryway with office wings on each side. The porch creaks every time I entered and the air conditioning unit in the window whirled so loudly, it was difficult to hear guest speakers who came from around the world to speak with authority to the Trust's interested benefactors about conservation. On hot days, I relished the cool breeze and overgrown vegetation, something difficult to find in

New Providence's overcrowded city. I could sit undisturbed for many hours among books in their archives, the wireless easy to access and reliable. I had to remember to bring a sweater as the air conditioning was always cranked up very high chilling me to the bone after hours of work.

My skin color, social class, and profession allowed me access to the *Retreat* to use as a comfortable and productive working space. This is certainly not true for all Bahamians. I could blithely enter the front gate and hail the security guard, the very same guard who asked my brother-in-law (a young black Bahamian with dreadlocked hair and janitorial clothes) about his business when he arrived to pick me up one day. When I asked that same brother-in-law to come for a walk with me around the grounds, he shrugged shyly, "This place isn't for me." I was struck by his statement, uncertain whether he meant he was not interested in rare and exotic palms or whether he felt the *Retreat* was truly not a place he belonged. When I did persuade him to enter, to cross over the gate and walk through the dark shaded pathways, he became excited by all the plants, explaining to me the medicinal uses of several of them and how to grow them best. He lived only a few miles down the road and had never visited, hadn't really known what lay behind the stone wall and metal gates. Yet, it was at the *Retreat* that conservation and resource management in The Bahamas is shaped and launched.

On the walls of the Trust's office hang photographs of former directors and "important supporters." The faces are arranged chronologically from oldest to newest; each dressed in appropriate styles of the day with dated haircuts. The majority are men, looking authoritatively into the camera conveying a mixture of beneficence and expert knowledge. Slowly, over the decades, women's faces begin to populate the line-up,

stylishly groomed, often smiling. There are a few individuals whom I recognized as British royalty. British Dukes who contributed to “the conservation of natural and historic resources of The Bahamas” (BNT 2006a: website).

At first, without knowing individual faces, it was impossible for me to tell unerringly who could be called a “native Bahamian,” and who was foreign born. In looking over the faces, one fact is overwhelmingly evident: in a country where 85 percent of the population claimed African descent, the majority of the faces on the wall are of white European descent. Later, as I interviewed people about conservation in the country, many people condemned BNT for being for “whites only;” a group only interested in “white foreign concerns;” and “an elite social club.” A prime example of this perspective was evident on an online blog, *Bahamian Issues*, which provides a forum for people to discuss some of the contemporary problems faced by the nation and its residents. Topics addressed in the blog include morality, Bahamian youth, the economy, and the environment. In regard to the environment, several comments were directed at The Bahamas National Trust and its exclusivity:

I don't know if it's just me, but years ago when I wanted to be a part the BNT I joined and started attending meetings and functions etc. That only lasted a few months because I always felt like an outsider at their events. It seemed like an elite social club and if you weren't cut from the same cloth then you weren't very welcomed. This is not to say that they don't do good work, but just that they didn't seem to embrace the 'common man'.

“Khatty” on Bahamas Issues Blog site (BahamasIssues.com 2012)

BNT was described as a private club, an exclusive group requiring certain characteristics to get in: wealth, class, and whiteness, or at least the privilege whiteness held. This social club generates the discourse on environmentalism in The Bahamas, defines the parameters of conservation, of nature and wilderness, and of “rightful” access.

This group of individuals continues to be responsible for designing the regulations, monitoring and enforcing those laws, and developing a conservation ethic for the over 700 islands and 100,000 miles of ocean that make up The Bahamian archipelago. Through legislation, outreach campaigns, school curriculums, and enclosure projects, BNT continues to shape the land- and seascapes as well as the mental-scape of conservation among Bahamians. The faces on the wall configured conservation ideologies throughout the Bahamian archipelago and wider Caribbean; they did not represent the majority of the Bahamian public or the governing political party.

THE BAHAMAS SPORTSFISHING CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION (BSCA)

The Bahamas Sportsfishing Conservation Association (BSCA) is a national non-profit organization dedicated to conserving, “the unique and important marine ecosystem of The Bahamas, which function as the major nursery system for fisheries across the Caribbean” (BSCA 2008: website). Members were primarily sport fishermen from around the world, interested in maintaining healthy fish populations for recreational fishing. Among BSCA’s central goals was the development of marine protected areas in The Bahamas, and establishing ethical and professional standards among marine resource stakeholders and, “the economic and recreational needs of the Bahamian people” (ibid).

BSCA, with Lawrence Green as its director, was among the original partners to support the West Side National Park (WSNP) in Andros. Lawrence was a native Androsian, son to “Crazy Tommy Green,” said to be the father of bonefishing worldwide. Tommy Green had once owned one of the first bonefish lodges (and certainly the first lodge to be owned by a black Bahamian). Located on a small cay in the middle bight of

central Andros, Tommy's Bang Bang Club was famous among wealthy Americans who traveled to Andros during prohibition years and beyond to indulge in forbidden goods. During my last visit the lodge still stood, a set of rambling stone buildings with traces of once-vibrant paint on doorways and archways. Bougainvillea had grown over the walls. Tommy continued to live there alone, tying flies and feeding sea turtles off his docks. Several of his sons grew to work as bonefish guides, but Lawrence and his older brother David both own their own lodges and were central actors to conservation effort in Andros. Both spent years working toward greater marine protection and are founding members of BSCA.

When I first met David, I was struck by his sharp questions and keen interest in marine conservation. David was a strikingly tall man with an easy warm smile. His size somehow emphasized his calm and he easily took charge of a room during community meetings. In contrast, Lawrence was blunt with his words and managed to irritate even the people who agreed with him. Lawrence was a well-known thorn in the side of local and central government, scientists, and conservation organizations alike, feared by some and disliked by many. I always found him a gracious host when he welcomed me to his bonefish lodge or invited me to various conservation meetings; however his remarks were cutting and critical and he had been threatened with law suits for slander more than once. David described Lawrence to me one day when I stopped by his hardware store, *"sometimes Lawrence just talk too much, say too much. He so angry that's all people ever hear. He shouting so loud, people don't hear the truth in his words."* Lawrence was angry. He raged over the social and economic inequities and racial injustices of the post-colonial political regime in The Bahamas. He fumed about being excluded from top

administrative meetings with conservation and government officials, arguing that it was his radical point of view promoting equal opportunity and racial equality that rankled rather than his demeanor.

They all want to be your friend, want to collaborate with you, ride on your back is what it is. They wouldn't have nothing if I hadn't been fighting to save this island, save the waters around it. Then when the money come in, down comes the hand to snatch it away. It's slavery is what it is, all over again. The white man still cracking the whip, they just working for BNT and The Nature Conservancy now.

Interview with Lawrence Green, Andros, June 2009

He lamented the fact that Androsian youth had no hope for the future beyond a life of service in the tourist industry in Nassau or poverty in Andros. He worried that commercial fishing was no longer a viable option because of diminishing fisheries and foreign exploitation of both land and sea in The Bahamas. He believed Andros to be “the jewel of the Caribbean,” holding tremendous beauty and potential as an untapped natural resource that should only be sustainably used rather than “*dug up, torn out, and sold off.*” I found myself agreeing with his sentiments although uncomfortable with his rage. I too had watched the abuse of power among government officials and conservation agents. I wondered at his ability to run a highly lucrative and successful bonefish lodge, catering to wealthy tourists, providing them a memorable and pleasant experience while annoying Bahamian administrators and environmental managers throughout the islands. Lawrence grew up working in his family’s bonefishing lodge and so had been exposed to a wealthy international clientele his whole life. He described himself as “an Androsian but a world citizen.” He was educated in Canada and had a white Canadian ex-wife. He had two children who lived in Canada with their mother. In an odd twist reflecting the complexities of property claims in the Bahamas, his Canadian in-laws legally held title to

the property on which he had built his lodge. During the time of my research they were in dispute over ownership of the property and the battle had grown contentious, involving lawyers and threats of vandalism. All parties involved (Lawrence, his ex-wife and his in-laws) had long ceased talking to each other, a difficult task on an island where social networks are inextricably overlapped. Perhaps because of his personal problems with Canadian land-holders, or perhaps because he had watched his own family struggle to acquire and hold on to a piece of their home island, Lawrence felt and acted as a man under siege.

ANDROS NATURE CONSERVANCY AND TRUST (ANCAT)

Michael Miller founded ANCAT with his sister and several other Androsians in 1995, and formally organized it in 1997. Since then, the group was involved with conservation projects on the island including the West Side National Park expansion. In addition to providing on-the-ground support for conservation research, ANCAT is able to fulfill the role of local participation and regional representation for international conservation groups. Many Androsians I interviewed viewed ANCAT as a local institution, founded and operated by residents, even though prone to sticky power-laden political processes. This perspective is in contrast to Androsian views of other NGOs such as The Natural Conservancy and Bahamas National Trust as international groups imposing foreign interests on local processes.

ANCAT's positioning within Andros was particularly interesting regarding the organization's ties to "the local." ANCAT was founded by Michael Miller. As a proponent of protected areas in Andros, Michael frequently flagged his ties to Andros

describing himself as native Androsian, “an Andros boy.” His actual genealogy is vague, however. His identity as an Andros boy was complicated by the fact that he originated from Long Island, but was “adopted” by an expatriate family who emigrated from Canada to open a dive resort in the 1960s. Michael grew up as Doug Miller’s adopted son although the nature of the adoption was unclear. Further setting him apart was his marriage to a visiting Scottish white woman who had traveled to Andros to teach in the early 1970s looking for “fun and a bit of adventure.” The two married and had children who were raised and educated on Andros. Michael was complicated. Sometimes kind and warm toward people, sometimes obsessed with his rise within the social elite. Energetic and gregarious, Michael filled any room, wearing his iconic batik shirt from the Androsian textile company the Miller family opened in the 1960s. Likened to a bull shark by some, Michael was constantly moving, circling the group, angling for an advantageous entry to the elite; but entryway was blocked. Michael longed for access to the social elite who governed the land and seascapes of Andros and the Bahamas at large, yet was unable to gain full membership. His striving attitude, racial identity and connections to “the foreign other” blocked his full assimilation either as a native Androsian or a wealthy Bahamian elite.

While I was in Andros, ANCAT had diminished in size and capacity. Founder Michael Miller had become well known among the conservation world as an active and sometimes combative spokesperson for the Andros environment. Michael had recently become the island’s Ministry of Tourism representative and was not able to spend much time on ANCAT business. The task of keeping the organization alive fell to his wife, Gabrielle, a retired school teacher with a soft Scottish lilt and freckles. She worked half

day, “that’s all ANCAT can afford now” in a tiny office next to the ferry dock. Her former high school students visited often, calling her “Miss Miller” and asking for spare change to buy sweets. Gabrielle asked students and other unemployed residents to help with beach clean-up and church picnics and wrote the monthly newsletter. Only on scorching hot days would she turn the air conditioner on low; otherwise she relied on the ceiling fan and narrow windows.

ANCAT worked closely with other conservation organizations regarding outreach projects, research and management of the protected area plan. ANCAT was once poised to become the regional administration for the Andros park system, but staff at The Nature Conservancy-Bahamas voiced some concern about ANCAT’s capacity to manage the island’s entire park system. In response Michael voiced his outrage at not being chosen for a leadership role, being “hobbled” as he called it. *“Working with TNC is a double-edged sword. You can’t live with the bitch and you can’t live without her. They got the money, but they can’t do anything without local support and that’s what we offer—the idea that Androsians are doing this.”*

THE NATURE CONSERVANCY – BAHAMAS

The Nature Conservancy’s strategy in The Bahamas, as in other cases worldwide, was to facilitate the formation of national conservation projects, ultimately transferring management authority to regional governing organizations. In this way, TNC could work as a central authority during planning and implementation stages, but could then shift its ample resources onto another project, leaving monitoring and enforcement to nationally-based groups. During an interview with the director of TNC-Bahamas, I asked about

TNC's role in the WNP expansion proposal. She stressed the point that TNC acted as a "*facilitator only*," the real actors, "*the meaningful agents*" in the protection of the Bahamas environment were the Bahamians themselves, and thus it was the local organizations that would take the lead in managing the parks. "*We are simply helping with the logistics*" said the Director. These logistics included handling the money and coordinating large research projects involving international scientists and experts. Other staff members within TNC suggested that funding agencies would not trust large sums of money to the smaller regional conservation groups within the Alliance such as ANCAT; therefore TNC was called in to manage and oversee the finances while still satisfying the call for local participation.

POWER AND CONFLICT WITHIN THE ALLIANCE

The Conservation Alliance gave the impression of a unified front, in favor of enclosure and against the threats of human destruction. Each of the four organizations within the Conservation Alliance worked together, sometimes begrudgingly, toward the goal of environmental sustainability and environmental protection. However, embedded within the Alliance was a profound power hierarchy. At the top was the large internationally-based TNC, followed by BNT, and dwindling in membership size, global networks, and influence, BSCA and ANCAT. The two small conservation organizations on Andros Island survive on small grants, beach clean-up fundraisers, and private donations.

Conservation staff and government officials spoke critically about each of the organizations. ANCAT was "*too unorganized*" (perhaps too regional), to handle the

funds. BSCA was described as “*too political*.” Neither could be trusted to take leadership roles on the project. BNT had the capacity to lead the park project, but did not have the legitimacy within Andros. Residents and regional agents did not consider BNT local enough (i.e. their “local” ties not strong enough to gain legitimacy among Androsian residents). BNT was thought to have stronger ties to the international and expatriate communities than to Bahamians, especially those living *in da back of da bush of Andros*. The resulting tension among members produced an uneasy and fragile coalition. Although somewhat unified under the threat of environmental degradation and threatened fisheries, the Alliance faltered when faced with differing notions about the issues of “local” and “foreign” leadership, social elitism, and racism. The Alliance was weakened further by the perception of an unequal burden of labor and accountability.

THE CONSERVATION ALLIANCE AND THE WEST SIDE NATIONAL PARK EXPANSION

The Alliance was contentious, each group led by highly visible and vocal individuals with a long history of conflict. Informally, Alliance members voiced frustration about the inefficacy of the Alliance and interpersonal conflicts. I interviewed members of each organization and a few people who had worked for several of the Alliance organizations. Within each group were people with strong personalities who had fundamental disagreements about the allocation of money, how to proceed with the protected areas project, and the meaning of conservation. The Directors of each agency had some fatal flaw: the director of TNC (a Caribbean woman who had married a Bahamian) was not local enough, she was too political and power hungry. She was said to be untrustworthy and her light skin and gender called into question. The president of

BSCA (a native Androsian who owned a fishing lodge) was too radical and racially biased. He was said to have a personal grudge against white people due to a failed marriage. He could not be trusted to control his emotions. He wanted to argue more than he wanted to find a workable solution. The Director of ANCAT was also from Andros. He was considered power hungry as well, and had a reputation for creating obstacles among management staff.

Despite the conflict among Alliance members, the Westside National Park expansion proposal was arguably successful: ultimately, the government adopted the proposal in late 2009, designating 286,080 acres of land and sea as protected areas. The management plan with defined boundaries was made public in early 2012. Androsian residents continued to fume against the chosen locations of the park and the move appeared to have increased distrust in BNT and conservation efforts in general.

In 2006 The Nature Conservancy received \$300,000 from a private foundation, the Kerzner Marine Foundation to conduct a rapid ecological assessment (REA) of the west side of Andros with the goal of enlarging the park. Kerzner Marine Foundation is a philanthropic offshoot of Kerzner International Limited owned by Sal Kerzner, the developer of such luxury properties as Atlantis Resort in Paradise Island, The Bahamas and Sun City Resort in South Africa. Kerzner granted additional money to build Bahamas National Trust staff management capacity for a total investment of \$675,000 (Kerzner Marine Foundation 2012: website). The Nature Conservancy coordinated the REA inviting international scientists including biologists, botanists, herpetologists, and other to travel to the west side of Andros and assess its scientific value. Their results supported the enlargement proposal on the grounds that:

The west side of Andros Island is teeming with large numbers of rare species from bull sharks to small organisms. To find such a large population of so many rare and threatened species reinforces our belief that the west side of ANDROS IS ONE OF THE MOST ECOLOGICALLY INTACT AND PRISTINE AREAS remaining in the western tropical Atlantic.

Dr. Philip Kramer, Marine Program Director, TNC, Expedition leader
TNC 2006: 4, emphasis in original

The REA helped to build a strong argument in favor of protection. The scientists and conservation agents were in awe of what they found. Hyperbole regarding the flora and fauna of Andros infused public statements and outreach documents. The area was said to harbor important nursery grounds for valuable commercial and threatened species. BNT produced small video documentaries and TNC paid to carry boat loads of major donors to the west side, “to see for themselves what we are trying to protect, the value of Andros to our nation, to the world.” The REA became the foundational document for the west side expansion: it also was the cause for the dissolution of the Conservation Alliance.

BREAKING THE ALLIANCE

The 2006 REA involved over 10 lead scientists and several conservation agents, students and support staff. The west side of Andros can only be accessed by sea plane or hours of travel on a shallow bottomed boat. The TNC Director thought travel to be both prohibitively expensive and time consuming, and so when James Strathorne, the owner of West Side Lodge offered the research team rooms at his luxury fishing lodge on the west coast of Andros, the director accepted. For 10 days the entire research team stayed at the

lodge, paying Strathorne an undisclosed amount for room and board, internet facilities, and access to his sea plane and an assortment of vessels.

West Side Lodge is a high-end fishing and hunting lodge that began as a duck hunting lodge in the early 1900s for the Strathorne Family and their guests including British royalty. The Strathorne family is one of the original Loyalist merchant families who made their wealth in the shipping industry in New Providence. The Strathornes continue to be prominent in government and industry in The Bahamas. The walls are lined with pictures of hunters holding guns, hanging dead wild boar, and smiling tourists holding impressively large sport fish. The recent owner, descendant James Strathorne III, still fishes and hunts, has loudly and forcefully embraced conservation—particularly marine conservation in the area surrounding his lands—and even went so far as to change the name of the lodge from Rod and Gun club to West Side Lodge.

BSCA's president and lodge owner Lawrence Green and others in the Conservation Alliance objected to TNC's decision to house the team at Strathorne's lodge arguing the REA project monies should have been more fairly distributed among a range of fishing guides and small businesses in Andros rather than solely given to Strathorne. Lawrence was loudest in his protests and suggested TNC unfairly privileged Strathorne by using his facilities for the 10-day research excursion, calling TNC's director racist and the whole research project another act of nepotism and racism. As the president of BSCA, Lawrence pulled out of the alliance and began to mount opposition to the expansion project. Lawrence continued to support protected areas in Andros, but often questioned the alliance's motives for site selection. The Alliance broke apart with little fanfare and TNC continued to partner with BNT, and to a smaller degree with

ANCAT to go forward with the park expansion. What did shift was the image of one unified conservation force that spanned local and global scales to join under common interests. Partnerships among actors such as the Conservation Alliance are made fragile by interpersonal clashes and tensions among conceptions of ‘local’ and ‘foreign,’ social elitism, and racism. In the process, the organizational conflict may have led to decreased support and a loss of credibility among Androsians, particularly among those affiliated with Lawrence Green and BSCA.

CONCLUSION

The term Alliance indicates a state of being allied, a bond or connection among parties; an association to further the common interests of the members (Merriam-Webster Online 2012: website). Alliances form in order to benefit each in the group in the face of a commonly held threat. Members of the Conservation Alliance were bound to one another through their shared goals of marine conservation and protection of Andros’ natural environment. While the main directive remained marine conservation, each group radically differed in their missions as well as membership and approach to conservation in Andros, and place within the complex social system of The Bahamas. The term Conservation Alliance suggested cohesion among parties—a meeting of minds and sharing of resources—and support across scales, from the back-of-the-bush across international borders and beyond. It was hoped the Alliance would mutually benefit members through sharing the financial resources and expertise of the developed nations, and the labor, regional knowledge and personal investment of the local (a term widely used in this context to mean staunchly native Androsian). The term however obscures

much. In Andros, differing agendas, race and class affiliations, individual personalities and power dynamics within and among the groups confused any shared goal as well as the identified threat. Once allies, members of the group felt betrayed by others along age-old lines of colonial hierarchies and racism. The threat became internalized and the Conservation Alliance disintegrated just after the REA in 2006.

TNC, BNT and other Bahamian conservation organizations, as institutions, wield government-supported authority as well as a long history of conservation management, which is buttressed by a colonial legacy, political segregation, and socio-economic inequality. Each of the institutions in the Alliance is firmly positioned to produce and reproduce powerful conservation ideologies. It is not simply that certain conservation organizations in the Bahamas hold government-sanctioned authority over how the environment is used and imagined; as important is the access to resources (political, environmental, social) that these organizations provide certain groups within specific, and often racially, geographically, and socio-economically delineated categories. In this case, the threat shifted from the more distant, abstract and external hazard of threats to wilderness and biodiversity, to the more immediate threat of systemic racist and social injustice. For Lawrence Green and his followers, the enclosure project became an unrightful claim by foreign elites to an area that belonged to “true Androsians.”

Natural resource managers operate within multifaceted social, political, and historical contexts, which are ultimately reflected in decision-making processes. This chapter attempts to examine the ways in which Bahamian natural resource managers engage with and (re)produce power structures within conservation projects given the primacy assigned to the largely white, elite, and often-foreign conservation experts.

Meanings lie in what is illuminated as well as what is obscured through social engagement—the in *between* the presenting and receiving of that claim: the historical and social positioning of that claim. The way in which an individual positions his or her legitimate claim of access is performative and falls within the frontiers of social exchange where new meanings may develop. This frontier is a dynamic and mobile arena in which multiple meanings may emerge, withdraw, collide, and reflect one another. And it is here where we may glimpse for a moment, multiple and sometimes conflicting ideologies.

CHAPTER 6

MAKING SPACE, MARKING BOUNDARIES: ENCLOSURE CONSERVATION AND THE SOCIAL ELITE

INTRODUCTION

How you think those boundaries drawn? That park made? Conservation in Andros Island been hijacked by the powerful and elite. [BNT] goal isn't to protect Andros, it's to control resources. Strathorne told the Prime Minister what the boundaries going to be, nothing to do with locals.

Interview with Androsian bonefish guide and activist, August 2009

If BNT go forward with the park expansion without talking with the people first, it's going to backfire. They haven't met Andros yet.

Interview with Androsian conservation official, November 2009

In response to the question, *Who has the power to create enclosures in the Bahamas?*, this chapter focuses on social elites and boundary-making processes as people work to claim territory and establish what Hughes (2010) describes as “a credible sense of entitlement” (Hughes 2010: 1). In the Bahamas, as is true of many places around the world, the conservation field is dominated by those with the time and money to devote to environmental causes, the so-called *social elite*. Among this group, designating marine protected areas is considered a reasonable method of resource management and protection: creating boundary lines becomes a way to secure space and negotiate power hierarchies. For many Bahamians who make their living by the sea, these same boundaries fragment and disrupt longstanding and familiar institutional practices, beliefs, understandings, and rules, reallocating access and use rights in specific areas. Land and seas once commonly held are redefined as areas with restricted access. In this way, boundary-making processes that are essential to enclosure conservation become social

processes informed and fueled by existing power structures. In order to examine the role of power in boundary making, this paper analyzes the interaction between two individuals with radically different social positioning within Bahamian society, as they work to claim space and belonging in Andros Island. Drawing on this example, the possibility for transgression and resistance to hierarchical social frameworks within Bahamian society is explored. Finally, a moment of exceptional beauty is detailed, when boundaries appear to blur, perhaps even vanish, during a moment of shared admiration for “the natural.”

SOCIAL ELITES

The Bahamas social system is hierarchical and multi-tiered. The class structure is organized around race, wealth, education, and historical social networks. Those active in ‘enclosure conservation’ on Andros tend to belong to the social elite. In defining social elites, (Woods 1998) focused on the relationships between people and their capacity to act, rather than on individual attributes (Woods 1998: 2,106; see also Jessop 1997).

Woods outlined three characteristics of social elites:

- (1) An elite has privileged access to, or control over, particular resources which may be mobilised in the exercise of power or influence.
- (2) Members of an elite are linked by a network of social or professional relations, performed in exclusive back-region spaces, which may be used for recruitment, or the transmission of influence or patronage.
- (3) Elites are socially and discursively constructed as an elite, either by themselves or by others.

Woods 1998: 2,108

In this way, social elites fluctuate, depending on social, political, and historical assemblage and are connected through various networks. Particularly significant to this

research is Woods' statement that social elites have access and control over resources and are linked to other members through social networks (Woods 1998: 1,206). Elite status is "fluid" (Woods 1998: 2,105), waxing and waning as the individual's social positioning shifts over time and across scale.

Throughout the colonial and post-colonial world, social elites have historically used conservation as a way to connect themselves with and justify their rightful belonging to a landscape (Hughes 2006b; Hughes 2010). In this way, those people associated with settlement and colonization are able to legitimize their ties to the land- and seascapes. In the Bahamas, the lack of indigeneity has complicated the familiar (however limited) scenario in the colonial narrative: that of native inhabitant, connected to and knowledgeable about the natural world through centuries of engagement, versus the alien interloper, who must justify ties to the environment through some means of moral argument.

MARKING BOUNDARIES AND ENCLOSURE CONSERVATION

Establishing a protected area delineates space for specific purposes. Boundaries mark the area as specialized space with restricted access, and as such are perceived very differently according to different ideas about community membership, the role and value of nature, historical experiences within a given environment and cultural paradigms (Bradshaw and Bekoff 2000; Capitini, et al. 2004; Curry 2007). In the case of protected areas, boundaries mark physical space while concurrently defining the parameters of membership.

Protected areas demonstrate and reify the conceptual divide between “nature” and “culture,” between “the modernist nature/culture dichotomy: the spatial dichotomy between Insiders needing protection and Outsiders posing a threat; and the ontological distinction between biophysical and societal conceptions of boundaries” (Fall 2002: 249).

Boundaries mark space and in some ways restrict membership of certain groups while constructing social threats (Tsoukala 2008). Boundary-making processes, such as those involved in the creation of a protected area, often serve to emphasize the identification and construction of social threats. Circulating select narratives depicts certain groups (for example, uneducated, poor, and black Androsians) as not holding dominant ideologies (for example, global environmental concerns and conservation ideals), and therefore posing a social threat to those very ideals (Tsoukala 2008: 147). A line has been drawn enclosing the valuable and excluding the threat.

MEANINGS OF PROTECTION

In Andros and elsewhere in the Bahamas, protected areas take on different values and meanings. Bahamian conservationists argue in favor of protected areas for the benefit of the native species and natural environment, as well as for the good of the nation as a whole. The current BNT president Neil McKinney makes a clear statement of protected areas as important to the well-being of Bahamians and the country:

These three parks are so important in our being able to maintain and preserve and enhance the marine life here in the Bahamas...It's very easy to lose something and it's much, much harder to get it back. It is so helpful that we have these areas now as our parks to maintain and keep, both for current generations [of Bahamians] and future generations, so that when we look back and see what we have, we know these parks contribute all over the nation because of the diverse marine life that they have.

(Smith 2012, *The Tribune*, March 13, 2012)

Protected areas are described as “legacies” for future generations, or ecological “bank accounts.” This language evokes financial stability and potential wealth: it creates a vision of the moral and practical advantages of restricted access to resources for the sake of the greater social good (Larson 2011: 149-151). The space is held precious in its “natural” form, symbolizing pristine natural beauty and future opportunity. The looming threat of loss—of diversity, marine life, of a sense of security, and capital—serves to signify the urgency of a place under threat. McKinney’s narrative warns, “It’s very easy to lose something and it’s much, much harder to get it back,” suggesting that, without protection, unbounded space will be lost.

In the Bahamas, protected-area boundaries are created through a convoluted process that publicly highlights ecological value, while hinging on individual interests and sheer practicality. The literature promoting the expansion of Westside National Park uses the findings of scientific research to legitimize enclosure. In one brochure published by The Nature Conservancy, entitled *Exploring the Westside of Andros Island the Bahamas*, specific ecological attributes of the west side are stressed with headings such as “*Protecting This Pristine Region for the Future:*”

Recently, The Nature Conservancy led a team of scientists and volunteers on an expedition to explore the west side of Andros Island. The team found that the area is an important feeding area for young green and loggerhead sea turtles, as well as a rarely seen nursery for bull sharks...

They discovered that the largest freshwater estuarine system in the Bahamas is in the Lake Forsyth/Turner Sound/Wide Opening area and that it provides breeding and nursery areas for many unique species...

The west side of Andros is an important habitat for green turtles, loggerheads, and hawksbill which are identified as endangered species...

They found that North Andros is currently home to a resident nonbreeding

flock of flamingos that have 100 to over 1,000 [sic] individuals from year to year...South Andros is ideal for iguana conservation simply because the isolated small and large cays of the south/south-western area (south of Mangrove Cay) supports the largest pines remaining in the Bahamas, have no wild hogs and are far from human settlements, roads and areas where commercial logging is practiced.

TNC 2007: 4-16

Exploring the Westside of Andros Island the Bahamas

Conservation agents are quick to quote research on unique species or habitat under threat from human contact. While certain areas were identified for their sea-turtle populations and nursery grounds, logistical concerns were also influential. One conservation staff member explained why the west side of Andros was considered so important to national conservation planning:

The best thing about the west side is that it isn't damaged yet! It's so hard to get to, there really isn't anyone there doing major damage—yet. We have to get in there and protect it, protect what's left before it's gone too.

Interview with BNT staff member, Nassau, October 2009

The move to protect the west side of Andros was not in response to existing threats, but to the *potential* threat of environmental degradation.

Boundaries then become a means to mark and produce space in the way Lefebvre (1991) discussed space as a social production. “[S]pace is neither a ‘subject’ nor an ‘object,’ but rather a social reality—that is to say, a set of relations and forms” (Lefebvre 1991: 116). Protected areas then become a project at the convergence of shifting histories, social engagements and physical space. Molotch (1993) commented on Lefebvre’s theoretical perspective of space:

A space is thus neither merely a medium nor a list of ingredients, but an interlinkage of geographic form, built environment, symbolic meanings, and routines of life. Ways of being and physical landscapes are of a piece, albeit one filled with tensions and competing versions of what a space

should be. People fight not only over a piece of turf, but about the sort of reality that it constitutes.

Molotch 1993: 888

Through the production of enclosure conservation, social elites are able to constitute a particular reality that provides them a place within the social and spatial landscape of the Bahamas as stewards of endangered species and threatened habitats.

PRODUCING SPACE, CLAIMING PLACE

In March of 2009, I had the opportunity to attend the annual meeting of the Bahamas National Trust. The meeting took place at the Governor's House, home to the Governor General (the Queen's royal appointee in the Bahamas) and open to the public for certain performances and events. The Governor's House sits atop a hill overlooking downtown Nassau and the harbor. The grounds are expansive and dotted with overgrown Royal Poinciana, massive sea grape trees with gnarled trunks indicating their age, and bougainvillea climbing the walls. The gates surrounding the house are high and sport the odd cannon. In the distance, I counted four enormous cruise ships in the tiny harbor, great behemoths nudging each other at dock, dwarfing all but the super resort and Bahamian landmark, Atlantis. I got a ride from a friend in her treasured new car, a 1987 convertible BMW with tin foil lining the dashboard and duct-taped seats. The guard seemed reluctant to let us in, but Monique rolled her eyes and explained they were just dropping me off, they would not be *staying*, she emphasized. I asked Monique, who had grown up in Nassau, an island 7 by 21 miles, if she had ever visited the Governor's House. "You see that guard? They keep these places nice for you people." I asked her to stay for the talk, but she laughed and drove off, not stopping for the guard who gestured to slow down.

The meeting was large, nearly 100 people, with a noticeably white majority. I recognized a number of ministers and residents of Lyford Cay, an exclusive, walled, gated community in New Providence, known for its predominance of white, often foreign residents. People were dressed up, men in suits and women in dresses and high heels. One man stood out in a bright red Androsian batik shirt. I recognized him as Michael Miller, a member of the Miller family of Small Hope Bay in Andros and founder of the Andros Conservancy and Trust (ANCAT). He sat toward the back and left soon after the voting results for BNT officers was read. He did not win. He later explained to me that he'd nominated himself for several years running and never won:

It's a club and if you ain't in it, that's it. They want you to do the work, they wouldn't have these parks if it weren't for ANCAT, if it weren't for me, but still they don't think I'm qualified to be on the board. They put ANCAT on everything, acting like we're partners, but once they get the money—that's it!

In general, wealthy Bahamians, holdovers from the original white merchant class in New Providence, continue to dominate the highest social tier. This group of individuals is predominantly white (no small feat given the historically tiny population size of the islands). Usually, they receive their education in Canada or the US, and return to New Providence to work in government or the financial industry. They form a tight social group that exists behind high walls—those of private schools, art galleries, and gated residences—protecting them from the glare of the sun, as well as that of the “other” Bahamian: the poor and disenfranchised citizen who is perceived as a threat to personal security as well as to the calm, white and well-ordered daily lives of the wealthy elite.



FIGURE 10: ENTRY GATES TO LYFORD CAY PHOTO CREDIT: WWW.BAHAMASPRESS.COM

College of the Bahamas professor, Patricia Glinton-Meicholas, wrote about the aspiring upper class in The Bahamas in her satirical book, The 99¢ Breakfast:

Before you begin to think about climbing the economic and social ladder in the Islands of the Bahamas, you must first take a simple test. If you can't pass it, then get therapy to accept your current low estate. Do you speak often of “growing the economy,” like a head of cabbage? Do you refer frequently and impatiently to caring only for your bottom line? Can you say Armani? Or Mizrahi? Lexis? BMW? If you are white, do you travel annually to some chic mountain resort for ski parties or take your boat, Oakleys and drink to the “Cays” each weekend? If you are black, you must be able to throw the name “Sydney” frequently into the conversation, saying you have dined with Mandela, and listen with suitable insouciance while your audience repeats with mouth open all “Sir Sidney Poitier, Nelson Mandela?”

Glinton-Meicholas 1998: 40

While sardonic, Glinton-Meicholas does capture the differences of representation as they relate to class and race in The Bahamas. For Bahamians who identify as white and who can pass behind the secured gates of enclosed communities, signifying privilege occurs with material possession and performed knowledge (e.g. about the global economy). For those who identify as black Bahamians and who, once traveling behind the security gates,

may still be mistaken for the staff, mere material possession does not represent being elite. Rather, broader connections to famed leaders of international importance are necessary to claim elite status.

The elite ranks are fickle, swelling a bit to embrace new wealth or fleeting celebrity, shrinking to exclude those no longer in favor. Miller's social positioning is ambiguous. He is neither white aristocrat nor black provincial. His skin is tan, his accent strongly Bahamian, but not mired in the flat wetlands of Andros. He was raised in Andros by an expatriate Canadian family, which afforded him a comparably rich education and opportunities. He holds world records in scuba diving and is a well-respected expert in cave diving, which has gained him access to the global networks the upper class hold in such high esteem. The fact remains, however, that Miller is not rich enough or white enough, he is neither a lawyer, nor educated abroad. Finally, Miller does not live in New Providence, but has embraced Andros as his homeland. His loud voice and booming laugh celebrated a specific part of the islands. His brightly colored shirts advertised his place (Andros) and his position (proprietor of a family business) in a family island. While his energy and ambitions were appreciated, he was regarded as too rough and loud—too peripheral—for the subdued tones of upper-class Bahamas society.

The meeting ended with an address by BNT's former president, Demetrius Morris, a wealthy Bahamian from an old sponge-merchant family that had very large real-estate holdings in New Providence. In many ways, Morris embodies upper-class New Providence: he is a wealthy white lawyer who has been educated abroad. Morris' father claimed a large amount of land in New Providence and the family still owned much of the south side of the island. Morris represents the highest echelon of the

Bahamian social elite. His own status was cemented through generations of family wealth and political influence. His social networks span old merchant families, lawmakers, wealthy white foreign residents and international scientists who travel to the Bahamas to conduct research. Morris has become a powerful figure in conservation by orchestrating high-profile political campaigns, handling environmental lawsuits and court cases and leading influential fundraising events. As a former president of BNT, Morris holds court among conservationists and scientists as the spokesman for conservation projects, becoming the face and voice of conservation in the nation.

Morris has been in the news a lot over the years because of his loud support of marine protected areas. Recently, his role as an environmentalist had been called into question and his affiliation with BNT criticized because he had brokered a highly lucrative deal with a foreign developer to build a massive gated resort community on undeveloped land in New Providence, called the Albany Gated Community. The resort, which spans 565 ocean-front acres, required the clearing of hundreds of acres of crown land, a complete rerouting of the public road, as well as major dredging for a marina. Officially, the Trust urged careful “sustainable development,” and “careful management and planning (BNT 2008: 4) rather than radical restrictions, and the environmental impacts of the Albany project threatened the island’s freshwater table and important fisheries. Even with claim to environmentalist identity, ties to the BNT and the obvious environmental impact of the project, Morris was a staunch supporter of the project. He sold several acres of his own property to the developer and negotiated to have his own personal marina built with project funds. While the Albany project was in dispute, BNT

and Morris were actively pushing a new marine protected area that would border the resort waterway and limit resource use (but not recreational use) in the area.

During the annual meeting, Morris stood up to take the microphone. He was bald at the crown, with a large paunch and the signature sunburned face of the white Bahamian. He talked at length about the importance of conservation, “for our children and children’s children.” He spoke about his boyhood, about the joys of growing up Bahamian. He reminisced about hunting for hog and pigeon in the bush of Andros, fishing for mutton snapper at night, building the Morris estate alongside his father and now continuing to build it with his own children. He called himself and other members of BNT, “architects of the conservation world” in the Bahamas.

I thought back to my first meeting with Demetrius Morris. I had just returned to the Bahamas to do some preliminary research on conservation in 2006. I stayed with my mother-in-law, who on Saturdays worked as a maid for an elderly expatriate British woman. The expatriate heard about me and insisted on calling on me early one morning to set up a meeting with “my friend, Demetrius. He’s very committed to conservation and an expert on birds.” My mother-in-law was excited that she had facilitated this connection for me and that I was important enough to warrant the phone call. When Morris did call me, she shushed the entire house, glaring at the children to be quiet so I could take “this very important phone call.” He is recognized across the Bahamas as “the father of conservation.” He has choreographed the dance among industry, conservation, and science that plays out in the string of islands by influencing how people conceptualize “wilderness” and “sustainable” harvest. During his time as BNT president, he had crafted natural-resource legislation and educational programs, and drawn the

boundary lines of protected areas. His actions and words had helped to sculpt the Bahamian land- and seascapes by shaping the rules and ideas surrounding the natural environment in the Bahamas.

THE ANDROSIAN CONTEXT AND PARK PLACEMENT

In 2009 the BNT, in partnership with TNC and Andros Conservancy and Trust, put forth the plan to enclose the entire western length of Andros Island. The proposal took many resource managers and Bahamians by surprise. There had been considerable discussion about enlarging the existing National Park. The plan to enlarge the park northward was well established (although controversial), and efforts had been made to attract resident and resource-user support for the larger park. It was not until the eve of the Trust's 50th anniversary gala that the Trust's Director of Parks and Science decided to extend the expansion plan even further—ultimately enclosing the land and sea from the northernmost to the southernmost tips of the island (see figure 11).



FIGURE 11: SUGGESTED BOUNDARIES FOR THE WEST SIDE PARK EXPANSION SOURCE: ANCAT

The plan was to claim the length of Andros and establish boundaries later. When I interviewed her, she explained her reasoning for introducing the changed expansion plan so suddenly:

We need to strike while the iron is hot. You can't please everyone. You know Androsians, they're going to complain no matter what. We don't need more town meetings to know that.

Interview with Senior Conservation Manager October 2009

Although the plan to expand the Westside National Park was in progress well before the 2006 REA, it was not until 2009 that tentative boundaries were suggested. The push was simply to expand the original park northward and southward to include as much

ecologically valuable habitat as possible. “The protected area planning should take the approach of protecting representative habitat types from throughout western Andros” (TNC 2010: xiii). Following this vague directive, the conservation partners organized community meetings to promote the park expansion and discuss possible boundaries. The response was mixed. While there was support for protecting important fisheries from overharvesting and foreign development, there was suspicion and unease over the idea of enclosing the west coast of Andros for the sake of conservation. The general consensus was that the conservation effort was led by a small group from the social elite, well known in the Bahamas—and in Andros Island specifically—for their aggressive attempts to claim areas of land and sea for their own benefit.

The move toward enclosing the west coast of Andros was viewed by many Androsians as a government-facilitated and racist taking of common property for the benefit of the special-interest elite. These tensions were tied to a long history of colonial rule, racial oppression over access to resources and tenure. Most recently, the resentments were tied to the 2002 implementation of a network of protected areas in central Andros, called the Central Andros National Park System (CANPS). The 2002 park system was touted as necessary for the health of the environment; however, many Androsians saw the park placement and boundary lines as simply extending the private property lines of the elite group. As a result, the 2002 national parks were not well supported and regulations were not respected.

During interviews about the WNP expansion project, Androsians would invariably ask me about the 2002 park system. Did I know about it? Who was promoting the WNP, was it the very same people who had benefited so greatly from the 2002 CANP

system? Many Androsians I interviewed or talked with were ambivalent about the established protected areas and argued that the people benefiting most from the parks were tightly bound within an elite social network; indeed, they were often from the same family. The initial Westside Park encircles a series of creeks and inland waterways on the west side of Andros. Most notably, the park encircles James Strathorne's fishing and hunting lodge, West Side Lodge. When looking at the placement of these five parks, it is impossible to miss—and indeed many people took great care to point out to me—the relationship each of these parks had with adjacent properties (Figure xx).

I mean, just look at those five parks. Where they at? I mean, I ain't saying nothing, but I'd advise you just to look. You wonder how the science matches up so nice with the property lines, right?

Interview with conservation agent, Andros, November 2009

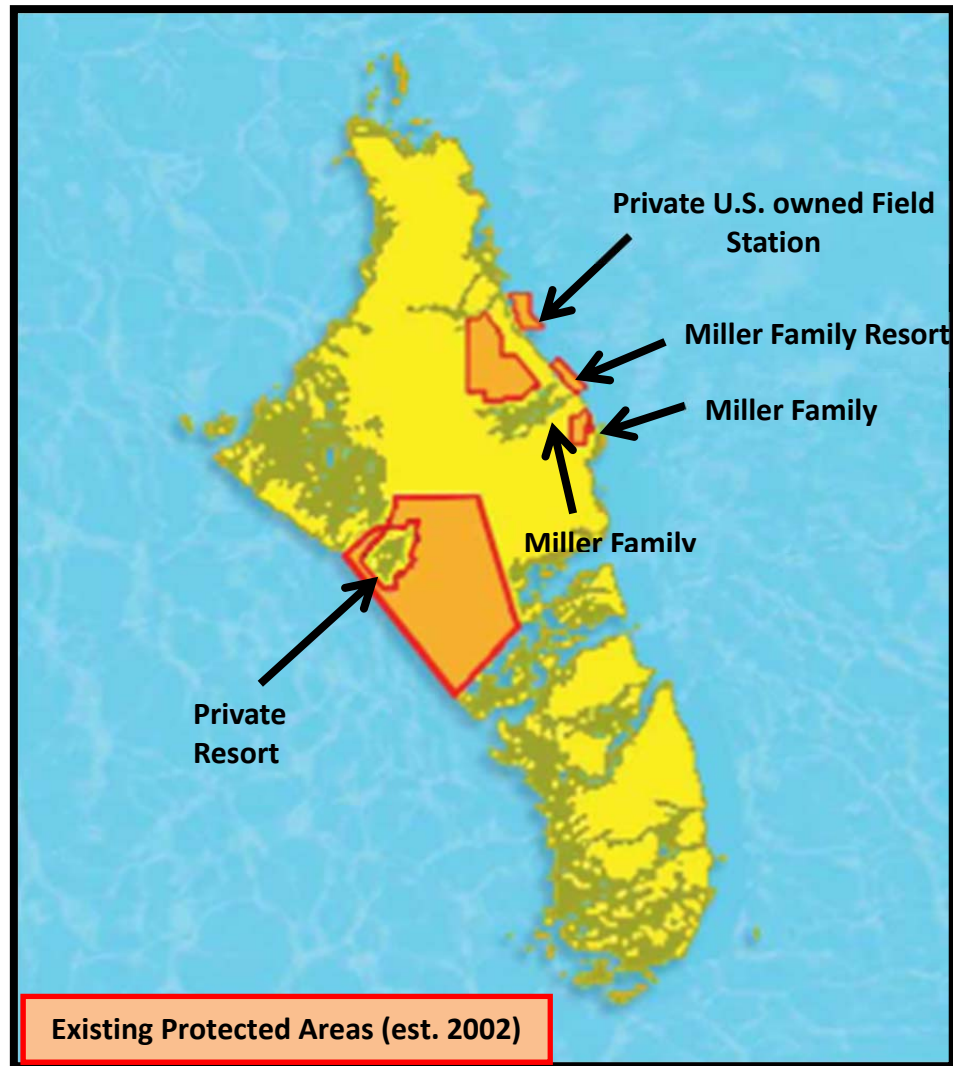


FIGURE 12: LOCATION OF FIVE PROTECTED AREAS ESTABLISHED IN 2002 AND ADJACENT PRIVATE PROPERTY.
*ADAPTED FROM ANCAT MAP

Indeed, the local participants most vocally in favor of the parks were the private property owners who would benefit directly from the protection of adjoining territories through increased land value and more exclusive access to the space. On Andros, members of the Miller family are major landholders, hold positions of authority among local government, work within the school system, own the major businesses on the island, and hold leadership roles in the local conservation organization. The push to establish the network

of protected areas was led by these same members of the Miller family; and James Strathorne was among the strong supporters of the parks.

One government official in the Ministry of the Environment articulated his feelings of distrust and injustice surrounding the idea of protected areas in Andros when I interviewed him in 2006. First, acknowledging the influence of special interests, he also emphasized the importance of protected areas for environment and society:

There are a number of people who have desires to make this area, that area, the other area protected areas. We are always interested to see and to know why, and to test the sites to see if, in fact, it should be. But we are also concerned that there are people with selfish interests. It is sometimes in their interest for an area to be protected, just because it inures a financial benefit to them by it so being, so we are also careful of that. But I think it sometimes can be encouraged, should be encouraged, because it is beneficial I think, ultimately, to, you know, to people and to the future sustenance of our marine life and our general environment...

But then, he questioned the motives of siting decisions for marine protected areas in the Bahamas, including Andros:

The problem sometimes that you have with marine protected areas in the sense of what you are talking about...The Exuma Sea Park has been very good for the Bahamas. Because it is good to know you can't do certain things in a particular region. But it was the wrong place for it to be...What is being protected? To me, Andros ought to have been what Exuma and some of the Cays currently are. Because the kind of species and the kind of marine life Andros has, it's more important to say you can't have, you can't take...And so I have some concern about how these protected areas have been decided and why. I want to know, scientifically, that this is of some benefit, really benefit, to sustainable development or to sustaining us in the years to come.

The government official then questioned the specific choices made for Andros and linked the notion of a protected area to special interests and elitism:

If someone were to tell me they want to put a protected ring around

Andros, I have to welcome it, because most of the fish we have is coming from there. If someone say, look, let's go to Aklins, Crooked Island and put one around there, I can understand it. Because of what I know is there and what is important to our fisheries and our lifestyle here. But when someone say, oh, we gonna go to Andros, we gonna just take this small piece. And I say, well why? And then I look and see who owns the property over there, just on the side of the coast. Oh, that belongs to Mr. Tom, Dick and Harry. Let's see, who is Tom, Dick and Harry? He's connected to the lobby for getting the protected area, you follow? And so it is racism that's built into it. Because it means if you have it protected, it means that the average person in the Bahamas is not going to come to fish in the waters around your property, because they can't take anything.

Interview with Ministry of Environment official
July, 2006 New Providence

The ministry official's comments underline several of the issues surrounding protected areas in Andros Island and elsewhere. Protected areas are often considered little more than tools of the wealthy to increase land holdings and restrict access of the "average person in the Bahamas." Because of the ways protected areas have been introduced in Andros, there remains tremendous suspicion that the act of enclosure is little more than a land or resource grab. In this way, protected areas are associated with injustice and exclusion (the antithesis of "rightful"), whether having to do with race, class, or simply wealth.

POINTS OF CONTACT: THROUGH ARTIFICE AND MORAL STANDING

In the following section, I provide an example of one interaction between two individuals with very different social positioning, as they work to claim space by asserting their own belonging within the Bahamian landscape. While James Strathorne leverages his membership to the wealthy and powerful elite in order to claim "rightful" possession of the west side of Andros, Ravine Riley maintains his authority through his

expert knowledge and enduring physical presence. By highlighting the differences in each person's approach to assert belonging, I explore the possibility for transgression and resistance to hierarchical social frameworks within Bahamian society.

JAMES STRATHORNE AND HIS FORTRESS OF SOLITUDE

Every now and then Superman feels a need to be alone with his memories, and he flies off to an inaccessible mountain range where, in the heart of the rock, protected by a huge steel door, is the Fortress of Solitude. Here, Superman keeps his robots, completely faithful copies of himself, miracles of electronic technology, which from time to time he sends out into the world to fulfill a pardonable desire for ubiquity. And the robots are incredible, because their resemblance to reality is absolute; they are not mechanical men, all cogs and beeps, but perfect "copies" of human beings, with skin, voice, movements, and the ability to make decisions. For Superman, the fortress is a museum of memories: Everything that has happened in his adventurous life is recorded here in perfect copies or preserved in a miniaturized form of the original.

Eco 1986 : 1-2

Umberto Eco's *Fortresses of Solitude* speaks to the desire to surround oneself with miniaturized representations of notable events in life as a means to secure power through the controlled production of space. Social elites utilize similar strategies to maintain and reinforce their own social positioning. As the only landholder on the western shoreline of Andros, James Strathorne has had the opportunity to create his own Fortress of Solitude in building the West Side Lodge. Accessible only by boat and seaplane, Strathorne's lodge sits among the broad stand of mangroves and mud, an anomaly in its rugged luxury. The lodge could be described as a "museum of memories," as the walls are lined with images of family, celebrities, and British royalty hunting and fishing in the bush. During our conversation, Strathorne was quick to describe his labor in building the lodge, his enduring presence on the land, first as a boy and later as

landholder, and his cunning and moral certitude for being the only individual to “use the west side,” to “see what it was truly worth,” and to improve on its natural beauty.

Strathorne is a controversial figure. Many Androsians contested Strathorne’s rightful ownership of the west-side land as a white Bahamian, arguing that only black Bahamians should be eligible for such land claims and that he and his family were nothing but glorified squatters benefitting from an archaic colonial system steeped in social inequity. Strathorne’s grandfather was granted the land in the early 1900s, when land was regularly given to wealthy subjects. The land is surrounded by crown land and, since 2002, it stands as an island among protected lands. Strathorne was a strong supporter of expanding the marine protected area “for the benefit of the greater Bahamas.” Although Strathorne denies that he supported the park only for his own interests, it was hard to see beyond the obvious and immediate financial benefit he gained from being the only land holder and lodge on the entire western length of Andros Island.

I first met Julie Strathorne, James Strathorne’s wife, at a bonefish-guide certification workshop in Nassau. I had immediately noticed the pair sitting alone at a table. In a sea of rugged Bahamian bonefish guides with dark tan-lines around their wrists marking their wrists and eyes where the sun managed to reach despite their protective sun shirts and glasses, the two caught my eye. Julie wore white summer linen pants with a shirt of eyelet lace and her hair was upswept in a French twist. Her husband sat back with his stocky legs spread wide, looking authoritative and curiously angry. His arms were crossed tightly on his chest, and, while short, he looked powerful. He was tanned, with deep lines around his face and a baseball cap on his head. He wore running shoes and a polo shirt. When he smiled, he looked like a Floridian tourist, an entitled American, in

The Bahamas for a weekend to drink and fish before returning to an office. At first, in part because of his scowl and because of the distance he kept from the other guides, I could not place him. Perhaps a white Bahamian from Abaco, where racial tensions run high and which can be seen in the clear color lines drawn in the room—white Bahamians sitting apart in a phalanx, black Bahamians spread across the room, in the physical majority, albeit less politically powerful. Perhaps he was an American fishing-industry representative, here to introduce new fishing gear to the guides. Neither he nor his wife fit easily into any category. I puzzled over who they were until I heard a murmur from beside me: “James Strathorne” was here, and I immediately knew that this was he. Strathorne was a man to whom people referred by his full name—“James Strathorne,” rather than simply “James” or “Jim,” or even “Mr. Strathorne.” The Strathorne nomenclature classified him squarely as the very individual who reigned supreme on the west side of Andros.

The Strathornes evidently felt entitled to be at the meeting, to spread out at their own table while the rest of the participants scooted chairs up to already overfilled tables. Strathorne spoke loudly and I could hear him talking from across the room. During breaks, while everyone stood to stretch, walk and mingle with other tables, Strathorne stayed rooted at his own, talking with people who approached him. Strathorne and his wife appeared powerful. Their social status was evident in their ease with the surroundings and air of entitlement, as he crossed one leg over the other and wrapped his arm over the back of his wife’s chair. Legitimacy refers to a mutually acknowledged state of legitimate or rightful being. Social interactions work within a communal arena, so it is important to recognize the function of all actors within the frame. An actor cannot be

considered legitimate without the inclusion of external validation, which highlights the importance of the collective in establishing this legitimacy. The room of bonefish guides, lodge owners and company representatives were all participants in Strathorne's establishment of legitimacy. This was not surprising with regards to the industry representatives sent to the workshop to sell their wares and gain another loyal client. Strathorne's lodge was known to be a very high-end, expensive resort, where only the wealthiest anglers are able to afford the seaplane transport and US\$8,900 for one week of fishing and hunting. I saw the salesmen (they were all men) stop at Strathorne's table several times, laugh loudly, and produce business cards. Lodge owners from other islands acknowledged Strathorne, stopping briefly at his table or nodding in greeting. Androsian guides and lodge owners ignored Strathorne altogether. The friendly David Green walked by without a glance and his controversial brother, Lawrence made pointed comments about his presence and the rumor that he hired non-Bahamians—*foreigners*—to guide his boats. The engagements were not warm. Strathorne did not appear to be well liked. These colleagues were not friends; however, they recognized, and in some ways cultivated, his status and power through their collusion.

The notion of collusion, as put forth by McDermott and Tylbor (1995), underscores the role of all participants in establishing legitimacy through speech, and in turn influencing what that legitimacy means. As the speaker works to develop legitimacy, the audience helps to shape and define it, creating something that is both collaborative and generative in its own right. Summarizing Bourdieu, Thompson (1991) wrote, "Dominated individuals are not passive bodies to which symbolic power is applied, as it were, like a scalpel to a corpse. Rather, symbolic power requires, as a condition of its

success, that those subjected to it believe in the legitimacy of power and the legitimacy of those who wield it” (Thompson 1991: 23). Here emerges the notion of authority, closely tied to the concept of legitimacy. Authority draws on recognizable power hierarchies. Authority can be understood as the power and right to control, administer, and determine circumstances. Authority must also be externally acknowledged in order to hold any sway within the social arena. The state of *belonging*, or the rightful possession of particular space within a social framework, also relates to the notion of legitimacy in that it must be mutually understood as appropriate (or socially recognized).

At the bonefish workshop, I introduced myself to Julie and described my research in Andros, explaining that I would appreciate the opportunity to visit their lodge and see the area. Julie was gracious, saying she would love to be in further contact. She laughingly told me they flew their private seaplane to the east side of Andros to visit Brian “all the time, you know, at Kamalame Cay,” when they needed, “a civilization fix.” Kamalame Cay is a privately owned luxury resort located just off the eastern coast of Andros. Brian, the owner, was a white Jamaican well known for illegal dredging, unpermitted building and neglecting to pay his already underpaid staff. She suggested they could give me a ride the next time they came through. Julie gave me the public contact information available on their generic website. In the following weeks, I emailed the lodge several times asking when it would be a good time to visit, but no one ever responded.

Finally, after months of receiving no invitation or response to my inquiries at the Strathorne Lodge, the local BNT staff member and friend, Rawlins, convinced me to plan

a trip to the west side. He said the Strathornes were “his friends,” that he stopped by to say hello any time he was in the area, that it would be fine and we would be welcome.

ALTERNATIVE NARRATIVES: AN INTERSECTION

It was December and a warm, clear, sunny day. The cathedral sky was brilliant blue with cumulus clouds billowing. We packed a cooler full of food and drinks and ice. An older man ambled out of the house—Edmond Bowlin, internationally known as one of the best bonefish guides in Andros (and hence the world). He was tall, and, while pushing 70, still muscular and broad in the shoulders. He stood erect and offered his hand with a wide smile. He slapped Rawlins on the back and then turned to the guide who would be taking us. I had hoped he would send his son, Kenneth. Kenneth was still young, but already well known in the bonefishing and conservation arenas as extremely knowledgeable about bonefish and Andros seascapes, but also about ongoing conservation debates. I had met Kenneth several times and had talked at length and was hoping to get an active tour of the west side from him. He was the guide who had taken the TNC-funded research staff to the Westside in 2005.

Instead, Bowlin gestured to a small man who squinted into the sun: “Bones.” Bones wore a Columbia-brand spf50 sun shirt that hung on his thin frame and was soiled from what I imagine to be previous meals. He seemed nervous, was missing his front teeth, and his bloodshot eyes and skin showed the signs of a lifetime of heavy drinking. He was also Bowlin’s son and had been guiding for 22 years. He shook my hand, smiled graciously, and then led us to the boat. The moment I stepped on the boat and sat on the aft cushion, Bones threw the engine into gear and we flew off the dock, around the thin wire stakes marking the channel and south toward the bight. The throttle was fully engaged and, I thought, surely he would slow to talk about the day’s trip and research goals. I was mistaken. For two hours, we screamed across the shallow bight, passing miles of ocean dotted with small uninhabited cays. Occasionally, we saw Androsian buzzards circling over carrion on land and the rare frigate bird flying overhead. The water was a pale, frothy blue dipping into crystal depths of 10-15 feet at a time. On the horizon, the sky met the sea in an indistinct line, only really visible when broken by a land mass or the occasional dot of a fishing vessel in the distance. Finally, the boat slowed as we banked wide, giving the finger of land a wide margin. Rocky edges of reef poked above the surface and I realized Bones knew exactly how far to stay offshore to avoid running aground.

Rawlins pointed to the coastline and I could see a dark mass pass under the waves. Bones slowed even more and said, “shark,” before he revved the engine once again to an aching intensity and darted past. Again, Rawlins raised his arm to point and shouted. I heard nothing but engine, but I could just make out his lips mouthing, “TURTLE!” I turned to see a dark saucer shape, nearly five feet across, beneath the surface as we flew past. Suddenly, Bones angled the boat sharply right, never slowing, and I realized we were out of the bight and heading north. This was officially the west side of Andros. The water color changed subtly to a milkier shade of blue. The sand beneath the hull was white and the water slightly rougher. We were in the unprotected shallow waters of the Great Bahamas Bank. The coastline was even starker, tan sandy mud with sparse vegetation. A stunted silvertop palm stood alone and I watched as Bones headed toward it, checked his watch, and then veered away.

Later, when we stopped for a lunch of sausage and cheese sandwiches and oranges, Bones explained his system of navigation, which involved engine pitch, time and certain landscape features. The result was a series of abrupt, but subtle directional changes. Rather than one continuous motor north, the boat seemed to zero in on a particular visible marker—palm tree, oddly shaped rock, distinct seagrape bush—and, once on a par with it, we then shifted slightly, toward a new target. After many miles of this, we

again banked right without slowing and slipped into a narrow creek that had been invisible moments before. Bones followed the curves of the channel closely as the steep walls narrowed. I had to duck the overhanging vegetation as we whipped by and I wondered how we would make each blind curve, wondered how he knew there were no other boats ahead, hoped he was right.

Bones was an expert on the west side of Andros. His knowledge and lifetime of experience was evident in his every move. Just by checking his watch, the wind, the tide, and the clusters of trees on the shore, he was able to navigate through the “marls”—a series of small cays and shallows that have been disorienting mariners for centuries. Bones oriented himself through the fine textures of the day: of the water level and the angle of the sun, the direction of the wind. He said of his own knowledge:

I take the scientists when they come. They can't go without a guide. I been going out there all my life. My father took me out as a boy... Sometimes I just go out to explore. There're places I know, no one else knows, not even my brothers!

The difficulties of navigation on the west side were made even clearer when Bones got lost.

Thankfully, eventually we began to slow, so Rawlins and Bones could talk about the passage ahead. They were in agreement that there was a shortcut to Wide Opening—the main arterial waterway, where flamingoes have been sighted and where the Strathornes have their lodge—but neither man was sure which turn to take. “I was here last week and it's just up ahead. It goes right through there,” Bones said, gesturing toward a very shallow mangrove stand. Every time he turned the boat in the direction he was pointing, we ran aground. The engine kicked up black mud, thickening the water and wedged us deeper into the morass of mangroves. Rawlins thought the cut was deeper in, over to the right, or maybe it had changed in the months since he'd been here. He remembered a particular patch of red mangroves, but the water was shallower than he thought. They both checked their watches and said it was high tide, it should have been passable then. We turned again and again, running aground, tearing into the muddy bank and mangroves at every attempt to cut through. Finally, Bones made the decision to turn back and take the long way before the tide stranded us on the inner banks. He said, if they waited any longer, they would miss the tide to get through Wide Opening and into the interior, where the flamingoes lived. He turned the boat and after several noisy groundings, we were back in clear water. Bones cranked the throttle high again. My neck started to ache.

From a distance, I thought I saw a series of fishing vessels on the horizon, but, as we neared, I realized the dark marks on the horizon were channel markers—each one stood three yards high, thin reeds of metal with reflective markers. They ran, equidistant, into the channel and disappeared around the point. Bones took a slow turn into the broad mouth of a large estuary. I began to see signs of human activity: an old steel ship container angled on the point. It looked as if it was used as a temporary shelter for spongers or hunters. There were a couple of chairs outside and the loading door thrown open, but otherwise no sign of life. The land was flat as far as the eye could see. Large anvil-shaped clouds began to form and tendrils

of heat rising off the land blurred the horizon. It would be a hot day, but it was only 10am—there was still time to see the flamingoes and stop by the Strathorne's place for lunch.

ARRIVING AT WEST SIDE LODGE

Bones tipped the boat sharply toward the mangrove bank and we pushed through a narrow winding channel toward Strathorne's lodge. The mangroves suddenly widened, exposing a small marina with several boats, one large house and smaller cottages, and a few other outbuildings. A pontoon plane sat under a semi-permanent hanger. Bones surveyed the area and asked Rawlins if the Strathornes knew we were coming. He opted to stay in the boat and wait for us. We docked and Rawlins began calling out his jovial hellos in the voice he always used when he was nervous. I stepped off the boat after Rawlins. Three quiet men barely noticed us as they went about their work on the grounds, bent over buckets pulling weeds, ushering wheelbarrows along the paved pathways. The place was immaculate, grassy patches and trimmed tropical-foliage-lined curved walkways from one cluster of buildings to the next. Some of the structures had thatched roofs and walls, some were built of plank wood—all painted a muted green with rust trim. There were artifacts of old, wooden plane propellers and lopsided, quaint signs indicating the "tackle box" or "boys room."

Before James Strathorne remodeled the lodge, this had been a rustic hunting camp where the Strathorne family and other Bahamian and British elite escaped to solitude to hunt and fish the abundant wildlife. In true colonial tradition, the men—because they were almost always men—stayed in ramshackle cabins or tents, fending off the infamous Androsian mosquitoes and recounting past hunting stories. The Duke of Windsor was a frequent visitor. In the main dining quarters, there was a picture of the Duke, one leg crossed tightly over the other, shoulders hunched, smoking a pipe with his shotgun leaning casually against his side.

As we walked around and Rawlins called, Julie emerged wearing blue lightweight running shorts, tank top, a baseball cap, and bare feet. She had two black Labradors in tow and looked startlingly like an LL Bean advertisement celebrating American wealth, health and the great outdoors. She walked up with a smile and welcomed us, explaining that they had just said goodbye to their guests and were preparing for the next group of six. She apologized for things being disorganized and out-of-place—she had just been washing the dogs while the Haitian gardeners manicured the grounds. She was gracious, if not friendly, and offered to give us a tour. She asked one of the gardeners to call Strathorne and said, "Come, come, let me show you the place. Sarah, I'm glad you could actually make it out here!" We started with the small thatched bar, "the duck down bar," so named because you actually had to duck your head to enter, and ended with the most recent development, the large, two-story residence designed to house a group of 6-8 people. The furniture was oversized and imposing, leather couches with floral cushions and a thick wooden banister leading to the second floor. The place spoke of wealth and rustic comfort, a mixture of safari and island topics. There were large, beautiful photographs of the island and seascapes on the walls. From every window, there were expansive views of the seemingly endless mangrove scrubland that surrounds Strathorne's oasis. In the distance, a clay-pigeon range and beyond that, another float plane and radio tower. The breeze blew through the obligatory porch screens and moved the heavy palm fan blades. I was tempted to help myself to the well-stocked bar on the porch and enjoy my afternoon "in the bush." As we toured, Julie and Rawlins chatted about various research projects going on in Andros and the state of the Westside Park. Rawlins asked about the population of flamingoes we had just seen, explaining he had been asked to do a bird count by plane yesterday and we had returned today to do some follow-up observations. Julie said the population has grown steadily over the years and seemed really to be taking hold in Andros. She said they always directed their guests to the bay for bird watching and called it "Flamingo Bay" now. Julie asked how long we planned to stay and suggested we eat our picnic lunch on the table by the dock. As

we headed back, Strathorne came to meet us. After the perfunctory greetings, Strathorne began to tell a story about his own position as protector of the environment. He talked about coming to the lodge as a small child for the first time. As his boat docked, his first vision was of a pile of dead flamingoes, taller than he stood as a boy, their rosy pink feathers bloody. "My father used to come here, he made this place...When I was a boy, I came here to fish, to hunt. I brought that flock of flamingoes back from nothing! The locals hunted their eggs, ate them. Now there's over 300...This is my land and no one comes here unless I say he can." Although he still remembered that day and had been an ardent conservationist ever since, although he certainly enjoyed fishing and hunting "within the law's confines."

Strathorne reinforces his claims of ownership and belonging—what Hughes terms, “the project of belonging” (Hughes 2010: 2)—through a triad of physical territory, historical connection, and moral supremacy. By erecting fences and posting signs, patrolling that fence line with hired security, and engineering the landscape according to his own vision of wilderness, Strathorne establishes his ownership claim. His sadness at witnessing dead flamingoes as a boy demonstrates his compassionate character and emotional connection to the natural world. In an aggressive attempt to establish legitimacy, he positions himself as protector and steward by way of his knowledge, family history with the land, and appreciation of its beauty.

Foucault used the phrase “conduct of conduct” to describe the process of governing, whether it be self-governing or governing of others. “A person who wishes to govern the state well must first learn to govern himself, his goods and his patrimony, after which he will be successful in governing the state” (Foucault 1994 [1978]). Embedded in this ability to govern is an insidious notion of morality. Capacity to rule implies moral superiority of the governing body and a moral assessment of its subjects. In order to be a good subject, one must uphold the correct morals as determined by the state. This adherence to mandated morality enables access to the collective (what could be termed, “participation”). Along with this access comes greater responsibility for the

increased costs of governing, as well as greater risk. Lemke further explores Foucault's theory of the "techniques of the self," writing:

The strategy of rendering individual subjects 'responsible' (and also collectives, such as families, associations, etc.) entails shifting the responsibility for social risks, such as illness, unemployment, poverty, etc., and for life in society, into the domain for which the individual is responsible and transforming it into a problem of 'self-care'.

Lemke 2001: 12

The implication is powerful: "moral individuals" possess the ability to govern successfully; therefore any failure of the individual to successfully manage their own environment is attributed to a lack of morality and strength of character. Burchell (1996) advanced this idea further, writing, "Civil society becomes at the same time both object and end of government." He suggested that public campaigns are aimed at, "the moralization and normalization of the population through practical systems situated at the interface of society and the State, private and public". Through involvement with these *public* campaigns, the public becomes more efficiently and fully governed. Rose referred to the process of developing the subject as, "a kind of despotism of the self" (Rose 1999). By acquiring knowledge about and pursuing what is morally acceptable and socially appropriate, people become model citizens, collective agents of civility.

Environmentalism hinges on subject creation, which is often describes as the "creation of an environmental ethic," or "empowering" communities to acquire stewardship roles. As Li (2007) succinctly stated, however, "Empowerment is still, in short, a relationship of power" (Li 2007: 275). The act of "governing" is relegated to the individual, often relying on the rhetoric of morality and good citizenship to accomplish the transformation from marginal and "under-modernized" groups to active participants in civil society. Strathorne made his own moral right to claim a large piece of the west

side of Andros, emphasizing his own role in scientific research and knowledge. His outrage at seeing the “slaughter” of flamingos as a boy proved his strong moral standing and potential for leadership. Furthermore, Strathorne claimed to abide by the law, thus underscoring his good citizenship. Strathorne illustrated his *ability*—and therefore his right—to control the environment by creating a hunting resort with a five star chef, hot tub, plane runway, and fully stocked bar on a floating stand of mangroves.

As soon as Strathorne finished the story of his origins, he began a second narrative. This one illustrated the hardships he had had to endure as steward of the land and sea on the west side. “Just yesterday, we had an incident. I’ll tell you what happened. Just yesterday, we had an issue come up. So you see what I mean. A plane came around. Out here, just over there.” He gestured south-east toward the bay we had left earlier in the day. “It flew around right in Flamingo Bay, did a bunch of fly-bys.” At this point in his story, Strathorne became visibly angry. His face clouded over and he threatened:

I mean, I was going to call somebody on that. I looked up the numbers and called down [to the airport headquarters] to find their point of origin. It’s just not acceptable! I have worked for years to get that population back up! It used to be just a few birds and now we have 300 or more in our group. We can’t have people coming over and disturbing them! I’ve been trying to get a no-fly zone established here. I keep telling the Trust we need that. People shouldn’t be able to fly their planes out here just anywhere! They shouldn’t be able to come so low. I mean I have my plane, but I always take the same flypath and just come straight down. You should have seen them! They kept circling and circling and the birds were circling—it made me furious!

Rawlins had been trying to break in and explain that, in fact, it had been him in the plane representing the Audubon Society, trying to get an accurate headcount, but Strathorne was not allowing interruption. Finally, Julie broke in with her light, casual voice, “Yeah, Rawlins was just saying that it was him in the plane. He was trying to get a headcount for Audubon, I guess.” Rawlins tried again to explain his actions—that he was not in fact wantonly flying around the birds, disturbing them, but, rather, carefully flying overhead “for science”—scientific research for the Audubon. Rawlins is a big man. He stands at least 6’2” and is thick in the shoulders and gut. Strathorne stood beside Rawlins, perhaps reaching his chin, angry brows and arms crossed. He raised his voice, “That was you! Oh, you are lucky! I almost shot you down! You nearly got shot down! No, no, no, that isn’t acceptable. I mean those birds are just now beginning to settle there and we can’t have people disturb them like that! Who were you working for? Audubon?” Rawlins gave the name of an eminent ornithologist. “Tell her to call me. You tell her to call me!” Rawlins was quiet, but not cowed. As he often did when faced with animosity, he played the clown. Rawlins had many years of experience dealing with Strathorne and others like him and, while never publically crossing him, Rawlins also did not recognize Strathorne’s claims of exclusivity. In fact, Rawlins returned to the Westside the following week with a herpetologist and promised to take him to see the flamingoes.

The scene between Strathorne and Rawlins highlights the importance of transition: of the land and seascapes, power relationships, as well as the species

populating the area. The ways people shift to accommodate and reflect minute changes. As the social elite, scientists and other residents travel across the watered landscape of Andros, their own interactive experiences with the island shift as their own positionality and purpose change.

During that trip to the Westside and the Strathorne Lodge, I witnessed a battle for rightful access to the commons play out between Rawlins and James, each demonstrating their case publicly for an audience—for me, the foreign researcher, but also for the support staff of guides, gardeners, spouse, and the marshy wetlands of the Westside. Rawlins was rendered silent, voiceless, as Strathorne's self-righteous tirade of entitlement boomed across the wet landscape. To him, the land and waterways were "rightfully" his to protect and use. Rightful access came to suggest a moral, rather than a just claim. Perhaps Rawlins's claim to the space was less in question by virtue of his roots in Andros, his historical ties to the iconic Bahamian (rural, black, poor). While effectively ignoring Strathorne's pomposity, Rawlins's silence was powerful. Strathorne, clearly felt the need to defend his territory vigorously, his right to inhabit the space, while Rawlins entered unasked, at will, and without hesitation. With his silence, Rawlins rejected Strathorne's claims on some level, while emphasizing his own legitimacy. While the powerful elite work to establish their own legitimacy and authority, the so-called "non-experts," such as Rawlins and Bones, or those with experiential knowledge, introduce similar contexts and counter-contexts that help to mold the ways in which people think and talk about the environment.

ERASING/TRANSCENDING BOUNDARIES: ENCOUNTERING FLAMINGOS

From Wide Opening, we turned off into a smaller bay. Beneath the boat, the sand had turned into a muddy brown and the water, only a few feet deep now, was rusty colored, but still clear. Bones quickly decelerated and we scanned the horizon for flamingoes. Rawlins had flown over the day before in order to do a bird count for the Audubon society. He spotted the flock and had done several fly-bys to get the footage requested by the researchers. Although the flock frequently moved, he thought it was likely they would still be in the same bay. As we got closer, what looked like muddy clumps at the bay's edge took on the pink tones and long necks of flamingoes. There were hundreds of birds. Last counted in the 1980s, the flock had numbered 30 birds, but we counted close to 300. Bones edged the boat closer and we watched as first the adult birds and then the gray juveniles began to move away, before Rawlins told Bones to back the boat off. Rawlins was careful not to disturb the birds, but was excited to see them so close. We shut off the engine altogether and floated closer. I could hear the distant and peculiar clucking of the birds while our cameras let off a steady flow of clicks as we documented their every move. Suddenly, the birds burst into flight and the sky became pink from water's edge skyward. Rawlins's camera batteries died and he shouted to me to "keep taking photos, just keep taking them!" I did as I was told and Rawlins hopped from one foot to the other as the birds circled around our heads, vocalizing. The adults, vibrant pink, necks elongated in flight, elegantly took the lead, while the smaller, gray juveniles flew behind, ungainly, but remarkably beautiful. I took over 600 images as the birds flew, dipped toward the ground and circled up again and again. We sat in awe at the spectacle for perhaps 20 minutes until the birds settled down, first one and then another alighting on the muddy shore again to feed. It took several minutes for them all to land and then they hardly seemed to notice us as Bones held us at bay with a sculling pole. All was calm again and I sighed, spent from the excitement. Rawlins asked Bones to turn the boat around and we headed back out the way we came, stunned by the experience of seeing hundreds of flamingoes fill the sky above our heads. As soon as we were far enough away, Bones revved the engine and we raced back into the main channel.

For a moment, we had all lost our heading and our own boundaries of expertise. Rawlins, a man who had been born and raised in Andros and who had spent years educating people about the island's natural wonders, stood slack-mouthed with wonder as the pink birds circled around our heads. I had forgotten my own social positioning as an American woman and scientific researcher as I frantically (and so inexpertly) snapped photo after photo, trying to capture the beauty of the moment. Even Bones, a fishing guide who had traveled to the Westside of Andros, perhaps to this very spot, countless times, chortled with enjoyment at seeing the birds as they flew in spirals above us. For a moment, we were united in our awe at being so small, so human, so dwarfed by the vast expanse of the "mud" and the pretty pink birds that dotted its shoreline.

CONCLUSION

Power discourses are not fixed, but change in response to specific interactions between people and institutions. The majority of social interactions reinforce power dynamics; however, there does exist the potential for slippage. “Power can be won and exercised only in and through social struggles in which it may also be lost.” (Fairclough 1989: 43). As Fairclough suggested, power is exercised through the interaction of people and their surroundings, which incorporates social, temporal, spatial and historical contingencies, and can sometimes result in uncertain ends. The ways in which knowledge is used to convey expertise informs power hierarchies; however, these hierarchies are dialectic and subject to existing and ever-shifting social structure(s) (Giddens 1979). Therefore, authority must be achieved through interaction with others (Bourdieu 1991, Duranti 1994). While James Strathorne works to establish his own legitimacy and authority through his moral visage, residents such as Rawlins and Bones, with generations of experiential knowledge, introduce similar contexts and counter-contexts through experiential and *belonging* narratives, as well as through a meaningful silence that helps to mold the ways in which people think about and use their environment.

CHAPTER 7

SYMBOLS AND SPECTACLE OF CONSERVATION SCIENCE: LOOKING DOWN THE BLUE HOLE

INTRODUCTION

When I was a kid, I remember this truck full of white people come to Colvin Creek and they stop by Auntie Ola bar to get some drinks. Somebody say they was going to go dive in the blue hole. So all of us run down by the blue hole to go wait for them. When they come, they set up all their special 'tings, you know, special white people tings' (laughs), and two of them jump in. There was about three or four. One had a camera and one had a big role of rope, chain, or something, rope. And we was little children, we didn't know no better, we was just looking. You been down to Gobbler hole 'fore. They must have been there for an hour or so and they was talking and having lunch and talking. One of the white woman take out some biscuit and give us some biscuit. And one of the white man come up, and the other one didn't come up. He, he come up panicking saying the rope break and say he can't find him and the rope break. Then the woman went down, the two of 'dem went down for a time. And they come back up and pack up all their stuff and ride away. That night everyone talking about them white people, saying, "white people believe they're fish, you know!" they go down inside that blue hole and ain't never come back.

Interview with Androsian male, 39, Andros, March 2009

In this chapter, I argue that the long history of scientific research in Andros, such as the recent blue hole expedition that was highly publicized by a 2010 National Geographic article and documentary videos, helped to transform the lands and sea of Andros Island from a daily experienced and practical space for the people who lived among them, to a highly prized commodity within the conservation and exploration world. This Spectacle of science has significant scientific value, for example, through grant funding and increased visibility for researchers. In his 1967 classic, *Society of the Spectacle*, Debord defines Spectacle as “a social relation between people that is

mediated by images" (Debord 2006 [1967]: 7), enabling select images and associations to reconstitute the tangible, while reorganizing the value of something through its commodification. In this way, Spectacle manages to obscure the minutia of localized value and meaning in favor of illuminating the grandiose and exceptional. At the root of this chapter is my experience leading a group of Bahamian college students to conduct a rapid ethnographic assessment of meaningful cultural engagements among Androsians and blue holes. Most recently, Bahamian blue holes have been brought into the popular imagination because of the well-documented National Geographic 2009 deep cave exploration. I will present some geological and cultural context to blue holes and then turn to the individual narratives of island residents and scientists to examine how people interact with blue holes in profoundly meaningful, yet very different, ways. This chapter is not meant to be an exhaustive account of all Androsians perceive and engage with scientific research in Andros, but what emerged most prominently from my own experiences as a researcher associated with the blue hole expedition.

BAHAMIAN BLUE HOLES

In August 2010, National Geographic Magazine published an eight page glossy print article on Bahamian Blue Holes, the tidal aquatic caves found on land and in the sea throughout the Bahamian archipelago. The article tells a story about an interdisciplinary team of scientists and expert divers highly trained for dangerous deep water diving and equipped with specialized gear—and their 2009 scientific exploration of several Bahamian submerged anchialine caves. The research team's stated purpose was to document ecological conditions, describe new species, and investigate what one

journalist described as “one of the final frontiers for human exploration on the planet” (Smith 2009, website). In conjunction with this project, I was asked by Dr. Kenny Broad, lead investigator for the blue hole expedition, and Dr. Keith Tinker, Director of the Bahamas Antiquities Monuments & Museums Corporation, to co-lead a group of College of the Bahamas undergraduates to perform a Rapid Ethnographic Assessment (REA) exploring how blue holes have been woven into personal, community, and national narratives in Andros Island. Dr. Keith Tinker was particularly interested in getting Bahamian perspectives on what it is like to live with and use blue holes. Not only was he interested in the geochemical and bacterial characteristics below the surface waters of blue holes, but also how Bahamians experienced these geological phenomena. I had worked for years with Dr. Broad, first as his field researcher with the US National Science Foundation’s Bahamas Biocomplexity Project in 2003. Under Dr. Broad’s supervision, I entered the social science research field and faced the complexities of conducting research in a post-colonial Anglo-Caribbean nation with a long and sometimes sordid history of scientific exploration. In contrast to earlier research dominated by foreign white scientists “discovering” the land, sea, and people of The Bahamas, Dr. Broad made attempts to include—often through direct action and funding—Bahamians scholars and students in his research. The blue hole project involved two young Bahamians on the team who had undergone extensive cave diving training: Michael Pateman, a trained archeologist who works for the Monuments and Museums Corporation of the Bahamas, and Nikita Sheil-Rolle, a University of Miami-RSMAS student and director of the Young Bahamian Marine Explorers program.

Interestingly, Nikita is from South Andros and her family claimed to own the land surrounding Stargate Blue hole, the cave of import in the National Geographic article.

I was excited to be part of such a project, not only because of my interest in blue holes in Andros, but also because of the rare opportunity to involve Bahamian students with research in their own country. Although there has been a recent push to involve Bahamian students in natural science research (e.g.: to study the reefs or sea turtle populations), few have had the opportunity to participate with social science research. An exception was the work of Richard Stoffle and his team on perceptions of marine protected areas in the Exumas, also part of the above mentioned Biocomplexity project.

I worked with a fellow anthropology graduate student from the United States who had also done fieldwork in the Bahamas. Our goal was to provide foundational knowledge in the theory and practice of social sciences while giving students the opportunity to perform social science field research. Our team consisted of four Bahamian students, a professor of social sciences from College of the Bahamas, and two Ph.D. candidates from the U.S. The students attended classes, conducted interviews, entered data, wrote a final report on their experiences, and presented their work to the public in Andros and to the scholarly community in New Providence. This chapter emerges from the stories we heard during this research as well as from my reflections on my gaze upon the blue holes of Andros.

WHAT IS A BLUE HOLE?

They are bottomless. No bottom down there. You go in, you don't come back. They connect to the sea. See that? See the water line? That's a breathing hole. It breaths like you and me. Who knows what down there? All kind of 'tings down there. People lost all the time.

Interview with Androsian male, 34, June 2009

Subsurface voids that develop in carbonate banks and islands; are open to the earth's surface; contain tidally-influenced waters of fresh, marine or mixed chemistry; extend below sea level for a majority of their depth; and may provide access to cave passages.

Mythroie and Carew 1995: 231



FIGURES 13: IMAGES OF BLUE HOLES IN ANDROS ISLAND

PHOTOS BY SARAH WISE

If arriving in Andros by plane, your first introduction to a blue hole is by air. The flat landscape unfolds beneath the plane, rolling rivers and creeks threading through low-lying scrub. Deep blue, circular patches of water of all sizes dot the ground below. Some

look like seasonal puddles that formed after the rain, some are as large as lakes. Many blue holes are neither blue nor circular, instead forming muddy crevices along a limestone fault line. With its large land mass, Andros is home to a great number of blue holes; at last count, nearly 200 had been documented, if not yet explored or named, but there are many more. They are so common, that even some backyards have small blue holes—tiny deep openings used to irrigate the garden. Others are deep in the coppice, well hidden and not yet discovered. There are areas where the rocky limestone ground is so dotted with small blue holes—some just inches or feet across, but connected through intricate corridors to larger underground caves—that the earth itself looks like a porous surface grate, a fragile dock of limestone barely floating over the sea. As I stepped across one of these, I was reminded of walking across a pier built just over the water. The wooden slats may give the appearance of walking safely on dry land, of separation from the sea below, but because I could still see the water between steps, I was intimately aware of how close I was to touching its dynamic and unstable surface. There is a sense, a hopeful illusion, that those thin bars of limestone will prevent you from falling down into the murky abyss, but clearly it is not solid ground, and to Androsians, many of whom possess intimate practical and cultural knowledge of the perils of blue holes, they can be fearsome and dangerous.

You can't see no bottom. The water looks like the water out there, blue, blue like the reef. One time I throw a rock into the hole, see bubbles coming. When I first see that, when I threw a rock, I think: it's time to get away from there!

Interview with Androsian male, 70, Andros June 2009

VISITING AN OCEAN HOLE

Some blue holes are far out to sea, visible by their deep blue color amidst the azure shades of the shallow sandy banks. These are called ocean holes or boiling holes because of the powerful tidal currents that “boil” the water as the tide waxes and wanes. While in Andros I visited scores of inland blue holes, even swimming in the clearest, but ocean holes were different. The danger and mystery that surrounded ocean holes in the form of large predators and fluctuating tides were very real to me.

I traveled out to see an ocean hole on the east side of Andros with a group of Bahamian students and Terrance, an American staff member from a U.S.-based research and education station. We planned to visit “Archie’s Hole” that day, a hole named after the founder of Forfar [field research station]. Archie was said to have “discovered” many of the blue holes in Andros, meaning he was among the first to dive with scuba gear to explore the aquatic cave systems. We anchored just off a small cay and Terrance pointed to a patch of water slightly rougher than the rest. “There you go, at about 10:00. Don’t get sucked in! Ha!! No, but seriously, be careful.” I scrambled over the side and treaded water for a bit to catch my breath. I was terrified. I had heard stories about the sucking currents that can trap you under a ledge until your breath runs out, about the lurking sharks which hover in the shadows of the entrance, waiting for smaller fish who feed on the biota circulating near the cave’s mouth. One Bahamian woman told us a story about a tourist who dove into an ocean hole only to find she had mistakenly entered the mouth of a goliath grouper. She only realized her mistake when the fish’s mouth began to close as she fought her way out. Impossible, I thought as I paddled toward the patch of darker rougher water. My neck began to ache as I swiveled my head back and forth watching for predators. One student had refused to get in the water all together. He had been raised in New Providence, far from the daily realities of blue holes, but was well acquainted with the stories of ungodly monsters and unpredictable natural forces.

I swam over the shallow sandy bottom estimating its depth – 8 feet? maybe 12 feet at its deepest. Small patches of reef popped up across the bottom, blue tangs and small brightly colored wrasses darted in the coral. I swam with focus, trying to concentrate only on the fish, the sunlight rippling over the sandy bottom. Before long I realized I was directly over the “hole” which looked very little like a hole and more like a broad crack in the ancient coral rock. The sand stopped and there was a thick coral ledge with seafans lining the edge. A large nurse shark lay at the bottom of the ledge just barely moving her tail against the sand, hopefully sleeping. The COB students had stopped swimming and floated at the surface, faces frozen by their masks and what I imagined to be the same wonder I felt. Barely visible, rising from the dark opening in the rock like a thin line of steam, swirled a vortex of tiny bubbles. Tide was waning and the cave acted as a drain. As I stared at the spiral of water and the small bits of ocean debris disappear down into the depths of the cave which reached 100’s of feet down, I forgot about the sharks and stories about goliath grouper. I watched the earth breathe.

Bahamian blue holes were first described by early explorers and are documented in British nautical charts dating from the mid1800s (Schwab 2006: 179). Sailors reported

distinct deep blue circular depressions with tidal fluctuations dotting the Bahamian seascape, notably different from the typical aquamarine blue of the shallow carbonate banks (Shaw 1993). Even earlier, there are documented references to terrestrial “pits,” described as deep circular holes in the landscape filled with water that fluctuated with the tide (ibid). Today the definition of blue holes remains frustratingly vague and entangled with disciplinary bias (Myroie, et al. 1995). Cave geologist Myroie and fellow authors define blue holes as: “subsurface voids that develop in carbonate banks and islands; are open to the earth’s surface; contain tidally-influenced waters of fresh, marine or mixed chemistry; extend below sea level for a majority of their depth; and may provide access to cave passages” (Myroie and Carew 1995: 231). There continue to be debates of course (for example see (Schwabe and Carew 2004) article *Blue Holes: An Inappropriate Moniker for Scientific Discussion of Water Filled Caves in the Bahamas*), particularly in relation to the distinction between marine and terrestrial caves. While there are similar cave formations in other parts of the world (e.g., Cenotes in the Yucatan peninsula and sink holes in Australia), Bahamian blue holes have received attention in recent years for their geo-chemical properties which lead to preservation of paleontological and archeological artifacts as well as unique microbial life. Bahamian blue holes also are the most biodiverse in terms of multi-cellular cave life compared to anywhere else in the world. Most recently, cave formations such as speleothems, are receiving increasing attention for their value for reconstructing climate change, including sea level rise, at high resolution. They exist as liminal space, located between sea and land, linked in a living, breathing web of cultural, scientific, and historical meanings.

Blue holes represent a meeting place or point-of-contact on spatial and temporal levels. Physically, the caves are both terrestrial and aquatic: they are holes in the ground and tunnels connecting the earth's surface with subterranean space, the land with the sea. Symbolically, blue holes are what Rudwick (1992) might call "keyholes into the past," representing the connecting point between the past and present, fantasy and reality, visibility (and known) and invisibility (mysterious). Blue holes are spaces around which distant and distinct human experiences swirl and collide: places where foreign journalists cross paths with native Androsians, climate scientists, and visiting tourists.

A MULTIPLICITY OF MEANINGS

Science remains a metonym for Euro-American modernity and
rationality...

Lowe 2004: 491

Our Rapid Ethnographic Assessment was meant to satisfy the Bahamas Government's interest in contemporary perceptions and uses of blue holes, specifically the relevance of these spaces to native Bahamians living near them. What became clear in conducting 80 interviews with Androsian residents was that blue holes were deeply meaningful in a range of ways that varied over time and among individuals. Blue holes held a multiplicity of meanings, whether for residents who grew up crabbing in the area, tourists in awe of their beauty, resource management agents believing in their conservation value, funding agents persuaded by their importance to the wider world, or scientists thrilled by their scientific value. The rest of this chapter first explores their meanings to science and then local perceptions of and experiences with Bahamian blue holes. The chapter considers the intersection of both as "alien spaces," as well as

conflicts and frustrations. The concluding sections use the trope of “spectacle” to examine how the local diversity and subtlety of daily experience with the blue holes has become transformed for Androsians, e.g., simplified as something of economic value through both scientific discovery and tourism.

SCIENTIFIC VALUE: EXPLORATION AND DISCOVERY

For scientists, blue holes have become a symbol of exploration and discovery internationally and have been linked to large-scale global phenomena such as climate change—generating significant research funding in the process. As a low lying island nation within the hurricane belt, The Bahamas archipelago experiences direct impacts of climate change such as severe storm events, sea level rise, acidification of marine waters and resultant reef damage and increased sea temperatures. The International Panel on Climate Change listed The Bahamas as, “especially vulnerable to climate change and associated sea-level rise,” due to the country’s low elevation and coastal settlement patterns (IUNC 2001: website).

BLUE HOLES AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Sea level rise associated with climate change can be related to the genesis of blue holes as well as concern about their future existence. Both marine and inland aquatic caves were created by rising sea levels from the last glacial period and subsequent erosion of the surrounding limestone. Water circulation in inland blue holes is limited, resulting in highly stratified water. Because lower levels are anoxic in some blue holes, conditions are ideal for preservation. Bahamian blue holes have yielded several

significant fossil specimens contributing tremendous scientific knowledge about the natural history of the area. Archeological evidence including human remains indicates Bahamian blue holes were used as burial sites for pre-Columbian indigenous peoples (Steadman et al. 2007). Research into cave biology has yielded new species and greater understanding of cave biodiversity (Iliffe 2010, Daenekas et al. 2009). Recently, researchers have used blue holes to reconstruct a detailed picture of climate variability and modern sea level rise—particularly rates of climate change for the Bahamas and Wider Caribbean region (Arienzo et al. 2009). However, current rates of sea level rise pose a direct threat to the scientific relevancy of blue holes: as the sea rises, the caves’ delicate water chemistry changes, disrupting what the 2010 National Geographic article referred to as a “living laboratory” (National Geographic 2010: 4) and potentially destroying what the author calls, a “window into the distant past” (ibid). These terms dramatically echo James Clifford’s critique of the problematic colonial and positivist perspectives of exploration and anthropological research, as the field becomes a laboratory and, “place of ‘discovery’ for privileged sojourners” (Clifford 1997: 194).

BLUE HOLES AS THE FINAL FRONTIER

The author of the 2010 National Geographic article begins with his own descent into Stargate, a well-known aquatic cave in South Andros. His descriptions are full of elegant language about the cave’s mystery and ethereal beauty, the awe he felt while descending, the nausea he experienced while attempting to follow “the world’s premier divers” deep underground. He writes about the interdisciplinary team of scientists who risk their lives to explore these aquatic caves as if they themselves are not just scientists

and cave divers but pioneering adventurers, veritable celebrities of exploration. Debord (1967) writes that Celebrity is the “*the spectacular representation of a living human being*” (Debord 2006 [1967], Thesis #60: 29). In the case of the National Geographic divers, the bodies of the divers themselves are obscured by their diving equipment, their faces rendered almost unrecognizable by huge masks and regulators. Examining the photographs of the divers we are able to see very little, to know anything about them on a personal level. The image of the person is flattened, his tiny details erased. It is an (eye catching) image, distorting the person in its representation of celebrity, the spectacular. The National Geographic author’s writing delights the readers while glorifying the scientists. He emphasizes the links between risk of injury or death and value of the scientific research. “I can think of no other environment on Earth that is so challenging to explore and gives us back so much scientifically” (Todhunter 2010: 8). Much of the article describes the inherent risks of cave diving more than the scientific findings in the caves themselves.

In cave diving, redundancy is critical. If one of my lights goes out, I have three in reserve. Our gas supplies—in this case oxygen-enriched nitrox, a combination of oxygen and nitrogen—are backed up with two independent tanks and regulator systems. As long as we follow the rule of thirds (one-third of your total gas going in, one-third coming out, and one-third in reserve for emergencies), we should always have enough to get home—even if one of our tanks or regulators fails. That's assuming we don't lose our guideline. In the labyrinth of passages, separation from the line can be fatal. In my training, Kakuk had spun me around with my eyes closed and towed me away from the line to simulate disorientation. Groping blindly and using my safety reel to search in a spoke pattern, it took me 12 interminable minutes to find the line. One of Kakuk's students was so traumatized by this drill that he bloodied his hands clawing for the line along a cavern roof. For his part, Kakuk has logged some 3,000 cave dives without serious injury. Given the risks, the lighthearted mood of Broad's team belied this fact: Combined, these divers have participated in dozens of body recoveries from submerged caves.

Todhunter 2010: 6

The result is strangely alienating and reinforces the divide between the lay public and the expert while completely ignoring any local contexts and meanings. Blue holes, for all we are able to gain from reading the article, could exist anywhere. They become strange and unearthly worlds that are invisible to average people. The holes tell tales about human history, but only of the very distant past, not about recent practices. Much like remote planets, these caves seemingly have no connection to contemporary life. In National Geographic's depiction of blue holes, the spectacle of the foreign and utterly alien world erases the contemporary human context: there is no echo of children voices, no swinging ropes tied to custard apple trees, no women picking herbs or crabbing in the surrounding shrubs, no stories of mermaids and romantic trysts, no spawning crabs in their shallows or mysterious drownings in their pasts. Rather, the author stresses the fact that the divers are the first humans to see the depths of the caves for centuries. The divers are gods of their newly discovered worlds, simultaneously encountering and re-conceptualizing the alien nature of life as we know it (see also Helmreich 2009: 256).

Kakuk hands me the skull. Silt and leaf fragments clog the eye sockets and nasal cavity. I try to imagine—from the brow, eye sockets, and cheekbones alone—how this individual appeared in life. In its breadth and solidity, the skull strikes me as distinctly male. Was he a warrior? A shaman? I return the precious object to Kakuk, who reburies it in the silt to await later study.

Todhunter 2010: 6

The extreme danger of diving in aquatic caves where divers must take off their breathing apparatus to wiggle through craves in the rocks hundreds of feet underground thrills divers.

Inland blue holes are the scientific equivalent of Tut's tomb. From a diver's perspective, they're on par with Everest or K2, requiring highly specialized training, equipment, and experience. Even more than high-altitude mountaineers, cave divers work under tremendous time pressure.

When something goes wrong, if they don't solve the problem and make it back to the cave entrance before their gas runs out, they're doomed.

Todhunter 2010: 2

The author writes that the research “promise[s] to deepen our understanding of everything from geology and water chemistry to biology, paleontology, archaeology, and even astrobiology—the study of life in the universe” (Todhunter 2010: 2). Certainly, science is the pursuit of lofty goals. Scientists reach for elusive and complex answers to ever evolving questions. Such a broad scale research project—particularly one occurring deep underground, under water and in total darkness, and one that poses tremendous danger to the researchers, is indeed thrilling. Catherine Lutz and Jane Collins (1993) write about National Geographic’s role in forming the public’s perception of scientific exploration and the exotic other. They argue that the editors of National Geographic must straddle the boundary between science and entertainment to always consider both communities (Lutz and Collins 1993:25). The story of blue holes is an example of such adventure science.

The National Geographic article clearly outlines the importance of blue holes to science by increasing our understanding of astrobiology and global climate change, and to the world by informing our knowledge of human and natural history. However, the only mention of local meanings or usage—how blue holes are used on a daily basis, by Bahamians—is a brief note on the threat of destructive dumping practices by locals.

PORTALS TO THE SEA: LOCAL PERCEPTIONS AND CONNECTIONS TO LIFE AND DEATH

Locals have a necessarily different perception of blue holes. For most people and certainly for most Bahamians, cave diving is an impossibility. The expertise, training, and

the expensive gear are simply not accessible. Even more relevant for Bahamians perhaps, is a vastly different cultural understanding of exploration and discovery. National Geographic Magazine hinges on western notions of exploration and discovering “the other.” Bahamians have vast experience with being viewed as “the other,” and hence discovered. The difference in orientation toward what may be considered dangerous and alien positions individuals differently in relation to what can be considered accessible.

This exemption/oversight on the part of the National Geographic writers renders invisible hundreds of years of practical, lived experience of blue holes. The Bahamian’s rich cultural history provides a different perspective from that of the outside scientific community.

I grew up in a mangrove creek speckled with deep blue holes and caverns and ever since about eight years old I would free-dive them with my best friends and either shoot fish or just swim through their connecting portals. I don’t want to think about these things changing. I am going to school to become a marine biologist and learn how to protect the environment—the country I love.

Interview with Bahamian college student, Andros 2010

As scientists dive hundreds of feet underground to harvest stalagmite formations to document rates of climate change and sea level rise, Androsian island residents utilize these same spaces as important cultural and natural resources, and have for hundreds of years. For Bahamians, and specifically Androsians, blue holes have represented sustenance through fresh water and other resources, as well as culturally meaningful sites through stories and shared events.

In some settlements, prior to roads and other infrastructure, inland holes were communal sites for washing clothes, swimming, crabbing, and socializing. At one time, inland blue holes provided reliable fresh water for farms and settlements. Residents

remembered hauling water from nearby by holes for household uses and in at least one instance, steps had been carved into the limestone for greater access.

I used ta' go fa' water down dere. Dat's walk too long, nah. Long walk, gal. I used ta go down with mama and I used to tote the pail. We all went there as children. There used to been steps cut out goin' straight to the water, I 'member da' . Da' steps still dere. I ain't know who cut 'em, must have been somebody from long time, cuz I 'member them from when I been small. Can't see 'em now after that woman clear the land and full it up. Das' a shame, nah.

Interview with Androsian woman, 70, June 2009

Historically, people located farms near inland blue holes for convenient access to fresh water. Logging roads often crisscrossed from inland hole to inland hole, perhaps for drinking water or to cool off after a hot day cutting pines. Today, people still walk for hours in the hot sun to catch landcrab during the summer months. They carry buckets, crocus sacks¹², and flashlights at night, but rarely did I see anyone carry water. This was particularly puzzling, especially when the temperature tipped into the high 90's. When I asked about water, I learned that the crab parties dipped into pools of water, "iguana holes" or "banana holes" along the way. Crabbing routes often worked toward or around blue holes, and crab numbers were thought to be higher around blue holes. The practice of crabbing at night made blue holes particularly dangerous to children who weren't as familiar with all the caves in the area and who might fall in with no chance of climbing back out the steep cliffs. Nearly everyone had a story about a child drowning in a hole and several suggested the government should built fences around the blue holes to, "protect the children."

Once we duck class to go swimming in the blue hole. Rainbow Hole, right by Love Hill by the school.. all the school kids go swim in that one. Well, we kids, so when it time to go, we just put our clothes on

¹² Canvas carrying sacks used to transport dozens of crab to New Providence and Grand Bahamas.

and Marco wasn't there. They say, 'he still back there' ... 'you know he always slow.' And then that night Marco family don't see him and then we realize last we saw him was at the blue hole. Two days later, they find him in the Berry Islands. So we know for sure that blue hole go out to the ocean. Some fishermen find him.

Interview with Androsian man, 36, 2006

This story reaffirms the concept that the caves are connected directly to the sea through a web of tunnels. In this way, the hazards of the sea make their way onto land. The sea was known to be deadly, and blue holes were thought of as portals of the sea.

Ocean holes were considered excellent fishing grounds, provided you watched the tide and paid close attention to the surging whirlpools that could drag your boat under. Many of the tales we heard were certainly spun to entertain the inquisitive tourist and anthropologist; however, there was little doubt that real experiences underlie the taller tales. My brother-in-law told me his own account of fishing too close to an ocean hole as a child. He had gone out with his uncle to the “boiling hole” to fish. The uncle threw the anchor out and settled in for the day with a bottle of rum. He drank too much rum and fell asleep in the sun, leaving my brother-in-law, a boy of seven or eight, to tend the fishing lines and “watch for the tide.” The tide turned and the anchor began to drag as the boat was forcefully pulled toward the boiling hole. His story had little of the sensational in it. Instead, the story resounded with a child’s real fear as he tried to rouse his uncle from a drunken sleep while the boat edged closer to the “big big whirlpool!” Eventually the uncle did wake and was able to toss the anchor farther out in order to haul them out of the vortex. This was not a story about man-eating monsters and magical forces, but the power and unpredictability of natural forces that proved to be equally frightening.

For many Androsians, blue holes do hold tales of mythical creatures, death, otherworldliness and connections to the divine—a place to be feared and avoided if at all

possible. In much of the conversation surrounding blue holes, death was a recurring theme,

My boy done dead in that hole. One white man kill him and trow him in the blue hole. They never find him. One man come from Fresh Creek to look for him. He dive that hole looking for him, but he ain't never find notin'. He musse' been down there all day looking for him and still ain;t find him. They say there all kinds of tings down there, all kinda car, iron and tings.

Interview with Androsian woman, 76, June 2009

Blue holes were mysterious and held the secrets of the dead. This woman had lost her boy and attributed his death to the inland blue hole. Looking into a blue hole is simply put, eerie. For inland blue holes in particular, it may be the lack of visibility. The light does not penetrate beyond the first few inches, leaving the rest to our imaginations. The water is far from blue: rather it is rusty with tannin from nearby vegetation. Peering down, one can easily conjure up images of twisted iron frames, trapped bodies and lurking devil fish.

During my time in Andros, I heard endless stories about dangerous sea monsters as well as subterranean passage ways that connect the land to the sea, destabilizing the very ground on which we walked or stood talking.

When I was 10 or 11 I remember going out there and running boxfish with Ruggie and Omar, cousins. They used to go down off that wall going down on the Tongue of the Ocean. There's 100s and 100s of holes there. You got to know what hole to go in. Some you go in and you come out with 2-3 big grouper, and then some of them got the moray [eel], the moray hole. Then one of the hole you go, the closer you get, you see, you see the red eye. Any time you go in that hole you turn back—that's the Lusca hole, man!

Interview with Androsian man, 36, August 2009

As a visitor I heard about mermaids and the Lusca, a creature said to be half octopus and half shark that lives in the caves and pulls swimmers under. Tourist literature, travel logs, and Palmer's 1989 book on blue holes are filled with references to Lusca. Palmer's description of the mythical creature evokes the tidal flux of cave waters: "A monster breathes. The 'Lusca' stretches, and exhales toward the dawn. His tremendous breath, drawn in over a quarter of the day, flows out in an equal spell of time" (Palmer 1989: 35). While Lusca is a compelling story, and certainly one we heard often from Androsians of all ages, the tale is relatively new. In the late 1950s a Canadian chemist, pioneering inventor of photographic equipment, and diver by the name of George Benjamin began visiting Andros regularly to explore the aquatic caves. "Ever since my first encounter with these strange holes, I have felt irresistibly drawn toward their dark mouths. Everyone talked about the blue holes, but no one, apparently, had mustered either the equipment or the curiosity to explore them" (National Geographic 1970: 16). Benjamin's early explorations of the blue holes of Andros informed and inspired Rob Palmer and others' interest in the caves. According to divers involved in cave diving tourism, it was Benjamin who created the story of Lusca in order to draw attention to Bahamian blue holes and develop diving tourism in the area.

Regardless of the origin of the story, the tale spread and continues to be told, along with legends of mermaids who dwell in blue holes and trick unwary humans with promises of wealth, wisdom, and beauty. According to these cautionary stories, blue holes are unpredictable and dangerous, their depths invisible and unknowable. People should exercise great care when near a blue hole and view them as potentially dangerous places.

ALIEN SPACES: INTERSECTIONS OF SCIENTIFIC AND LOCAL PERCEPTION

The photographs featured in the National Geographic article depict mysterious elongated underwater caverns, swirling clouds of colors and several close shots of the scientists themselves, faces distorted from their masks under pressure. The author's turn of the pen coupled with the vibrant and surreal photographs create an otherworldly experience of the underground—a space so inaccessible and remote that it is not perceived or presented as of this earth. Discussions about aquatic caves among cave scientists make parallels to “celestial bodies” and “distant planets and moons” (Todhunters 2010: 4). Blue holes are equated with the mysterious unknown and unknowable, distant, extraterrestrial (i.e.: outside of this earth) worlds. As Stefan Helmreich (2009) writes in Alien Ocean: Ethnography of Microbial Seas:

The extra- in "extraterrestrial" points to categories outside and beyond, contexts stretched from the earthly to as yet unknown limits... To draw on an obscure meaning of alien, life as a material and semiotic relation is being aliened—transferred across contexts, leaving whatever it is or was transmuted.

Helmreich 2009: 254

Interestingly, the same analogies to extraterrestrial forces are made by Androsians living and working next to these water bodies. When asked how people believed blue holes were formed, several people mentioned falling stars, meteors and bottomless caves connecting the earth's hot molten center with the island's surface. Some linked the caves to giant sea creatures with mouths open wide, poised to trap adventurous divers and unsuspecting swimmers. These spectacular creatures fill the empty space of our knowledge, embodying our fears of the unknown and extra-terrestrial. Blue holes are able to shift in form, from geological formation to a living breathing entity, a breathing hole, that “*breathes*” as the tide fluctuates. In our imaginations, these caves become

gaping mouths that consume bodies without any trace. Perhaps less compelling for some is the geological story surrounding blue holes—fresh water acts as acid against the lime stone, eventually etching the hole larger over geologic time.

FEAR AND FUNCTIONALITY: SCIENTIFIC EXPOSURE AND CHANGING LOCAL RELATIONSHIPS

Our research suggests that over time, as it became less necessary to use the blue holes for daily subsistence, functionality diminished and residents' perceptions of blue holes re-focused on the danger and threat of them. Over the past 20 years, use of blue holes has shifted to accommodate communities' growing reliance on a cash economy and tourism.

As the Bahamas struggles to find purchase in a competitive tourism market, blue holes have increasingly become important sites of tourism and recreation rather than practical sites of resource extraction. The recent wave of articles and television programs suggest growing international interest in these geological phenomena. Meanwhile, the spectacle of modern scientific exploration and television production may threaten to obscure the subtlety of daily Androsian experience. Androsians' perceptions and use of blue holes have shifted—moving away from an uneasy marriage of fear and functional reliance for daily life toward that of a tourist commodity and scientific discovery. What were once tangible sites for resource extraction and daily use have become symbols of modernity, economic potential and sites of knowledge gathering in a broader and often international context.

Over half of the residents interviewed stated that blue holes had begun to take on value as places of scientific discovery and potential tourist attractions. Several people reported that their own relationship to blue holes had changed after speaking with scientists about their research. Holding tightly to a copy of the National Geographic magazine while talking with me, one man exclaimed, *“this is like a wave coming to hit Andros. If you're not ready for it, then you get drowned in.”* And by “it,” he meant international exposure as a tourist destination.

In the spectacular retelling of the exploration and global importance of blue holes—spaces so remote and inaccessible, few mortal humans would ever see it—the tangible details of daily use remain obscured, as hidden from view at the dark caves themselves. Some Androsians have developed business ventures around the potential allure of blue holes. Some blue holes have been groomed for tourism with small built platforms, walking paths, and interpretive signs. One woman interviewed described how she began her touring business. After hearing about the National Geographic scientists researching the blue holes, she and another woman decided to borrow a church van to offer “Blue Hole tours” to tourists. They were not familiar with the nature of the research, only that scientists were interested in these places and tourists would probably pay money to see them. They were not familiar with the concept of climate change or the global relevance of Androsian blue holes. One local business man said, *“This is our bucket of gold. For Andros—these are our national treasures. Scientists come and find all kinds of things and tourists will want to come to see what they find.”*

CHANGES IN MEANING AND GROWING FRUSTRATIONS

Blue holes were once highly valued by residents as community resources, but also deeply feared as a public hazard; today—while still feared by many—there is growing interest in blue holes as national landmarks, cultural and historical symbols, tourism sites, and for recreation. Changes in meaning and uses of blue holes are coupled with widespread frustration among and disappointment by Androsians regarding scientific research in general and researchers in particular. This was due in large part to the lack of visible benefits of science to the island communities.

While doing research in Andros, scientists usually stay at one of two locations: the Miller Family dive resort and the ForFar Field Station. While the Forfar Field Station is undisputedly a U.S. institution, the dive resort is owned by the expatriate Canadian family and managed by Doug Miller's son, Ben. During the Andros section of the 2009 National Geographic blue hole expedition, the research team traveled and stayed primarily on their research vessel. Their stay in Central Andros was brief and dedicated to extracting fossil sand and other samples from several caves. Days before their expected arrival, local government officials and NGO staff kept me informed of the team's plan. Local government planned a meeting to discuss how the research would affect Andros tourism, hoping Andros would be put on the global radar for interesting tourist destinations. Bahamas National Trust staff member Rawlins had worked with members of the National Geographic team in the past and was excited to meet up with old colleagues. We arranged to ride the 20 miles down to the dock when the ship came in to greet the crew and learn about the project's progress. Rawlins assumed he would travel with the divers to the cave sites and help with the research. In the end, the ship visit was

delayed and cut to a mere few hours due to the usual complications of conducting field research. Add in the difficulties associated with working on the Bahamas such as unreliable phone lines, summer squalls, and a convoluted and highly charged bureaucracy, and any research trip is likely to incur delays. Finally, hearing nothing from Rawlins, I traveled south on my own to find him on the empty dock. He said they had come and gone without notifying anyone in the area. He was deeply disappointed and felt betrayed by people he had considered friends. Local government aborted their plan for a meeting and when I asked Michael what had happened, he said “*The same old thing. They come, they take, they leave. You didn’t think it was going to be different did you?*”

Rawlins was angry and hurt. During our ethnographic field work with the College of the Bahamas students he had told a story about fossils and other artifacts found in a blue hole near Mastic Point. In order to get there we drove the length of the road and back three times before Rawlins was certain of the path. It was well hidden, a barely visible trail through the bush. He told us to keep the location secret, particularly when talking with Androsian residents. The fear was that islanders would steal artifacts for personal gain rather than for the benefit of science. Rawlins—continually straddling the divide between local and foreign, islander and scientist, Androsian and conservationist—did not consider himself (nor indeed the cave divers) a threat to the artifacts. Rather, Rawlin’s thought of himself as a keeper of knowledge and secrets, contributing to his own social capital within the scientific community.

He told us that the man who had showed him the cave discovered Lucayan relics in the cave one sunny day while diving there alone. These relics were said to include an intact Lucayan canoe, many centuries old. The Lucayan were thought to bury their dead

in blue holes. Rawlins's friend, the man who had told him about the artifacts, was now a member of the elite diving team scheduled to collect the artifacts and document the expedition for National Geographic. Rawlins felt he had kept his word, telling no Androsian about the find. Later, I discovered that Rawlin's story combined several diving events, some of which occurred when he was only a boy. A Lucayan canoe and human remains thought to be hundreds of years old had been discovered in South Andros in 1995 by diver Rob Palmer. The dive was documented in Palmer's book, *Deep into Blue Holes*. Palmer was the first to find and document Luycayan artifacts and human remains in blue holes. According to Palmer, the diving team removed the canoe and presented it to the Bahamian government for preservation. Unfortunately no funds were made available for the preservation and in 2004, Palmer's widow and fellow cave diver, Dr. Stephanie Schwabe, reported that the canoe was badly damaged (Schwabe 2012: website). Rawlin's account of the canoe and his diver friend were similar to Palmer's published story: it remains unclear whether Rawlins was referring to another incident or confusing the two and including himself in the narrative to emphasize his own disappointment.

Regardless of the inconsistencies in Rawlin's story, his feelings of betrayal were strong. Whatever scientific and cultural treasures lay in the cave waters, Rawlins felt a legitimate claim to them as an Androsian and as someone who had assisted in the scientific exploration of the island for years. To be excluded from the National Geographic expedition weakened Rawlin's claim and identified him as "other." Fiercely proud of his island home, he believed any cave artifacts would reflect the wonder and value of Andros, not just to him, but to the world at large. When the research team left

only hours after arriving, neglecting to call him, he felt excluded: from their research, from their friendship, from the international scientific community he had respected, and from any rightful claim to the natural science and cultural heritage of Andros.

I first met Rawlins in 2007. I had heard about the local “Andros Boy” who had worked his way up the conservation ladder to become the only BNT staff member in Andros. Rawlins is tall and broad with a warm smile and a laugh that fills the room. At our first meeting he wore a white polo shirt with the BNT logo. He stood with his wife, a white Floridian woman who had been working as an intern at Forfar Field Station when she met and married Rawlins. She carried a tiny baby and we quickly gravitated toward one another. *How do you keep the mosquitoes off them, I asked?* You don’t, she answered. And indeed both her children were covered in red welts. Bahamian mothers keep their young babies inside, away from the heat and bugs, but we did not, and so our children suffered from the exposure. She planned to go to midwifery school the next year and return to Andros to provide needed healthcare to mothers and their babies. She was proud of Rawlins and boasted to me of his accomplishments.

For over a decade, Rawlins had been involved with conservation research in Andros and the wider Bahamas. Scientists who had worked with him described him as hard working, bright, dedicated, and great to have in the field. The director of the Forfar Field Station encouraged Rawlins to get his associates degree in sustainable tourism at Hocking College, paid his tuition and provided housing. He spent long hours educating kids, scientists, fishers, and tourists about the natural history of Andros. Soon after my field work ended and I left Andros, Rawlins moved to Fort Lauderdale, Florida, to be with his wife who had enrolled in the midwifery program. I asked him what his plans

were, whether he would follow his passion and continue his studies in conservation biology. “Are you kidding? That’s way too political for me. They some cutthroat folks! Nah, I’m thinking HVAC or something.”

REFLECTIONS: RECONSTITUTING THE TANGIBLE

An example of this frustration and anger reoccurred during the second follow up session of research in August 2010, the month National Geographic’s article was published and hit the newsstands. I had returned to Andros to again engage Bahamian undergraduates, this time under a United Nations Environmental Programme grant to explore people’s perceptions of the blue holes in relation to climate change. Again, we interviewed residents about their uses of the caves, stories and events surrounding specific blue holes, conservation practices, and perceptions of change. After the interviews, I passed several copies of the magazines around to share. The images of divers dwarfed by immense stalactites were striking and the participants expressed disbelief that this underground world lay in their own back yard. I asked if anyone had heard of the ongoing blue hole research, knew about the unprecedented fossil findings in these caves, seen the article, watched the recent television productions on National Geographic and NOVA, whether anyone had spoken with the scientists when they were here? For nearly everyone we spoke with, the answers were no.

Many were surprised and proud that Andros had been made visible and beautiful by the magazine. *“That’s what it look like down there? Man, only Andros have that, you know.”* Sometimes, that excitement turned quickly to bitterness and suspicion about motive: *“I was a boy here, I grew up right here all my life and I never seen this...It’s*

foreigners that want to go down there, go and see everything. They looking at the money in things.” Our project ended with the students presenting their findings. We showed several photographs of the underground caves given to me by one of the cave scientists. Many participants asked how I’d gotten the photographs. Who from Andros had been on the research team? Who had given permits to extract the artifacts? When would this information be available to local schools; would the researchers come to speak with community members, to the schools? Why did I have access to this information—as a foreigner—when their government officials, their teachers, their community leaders did not? An Androsian man involved in the tourist industry asked:

For years we Androsians sit and watch while scientists come in and take. They take everything – our time, our land, our resources, our history. And what do we see in return? These caves are ours! They’re Androsian! And what do we get, what do we see? How do we profit? They are blind to us, to our schools... Who does science work for?

During our final meeting, another man addressed the whole table as he spoke about the project. He was well known in the community for being a strong proponent of conservation in Andros.

You know there's a wall in the American Museum of Natural History. A whole wall that was taken [from here]. The coral reef exhibit that was taken, right from John's Rock. To me, these scientists shouldn't need to be told to put something back into these communities...they are coming here, taking advantage of the natural resources of a sovereign nation, and going away with a notch in their lapel... now you see a big shiny magazine ...that is a slap in the face. That is rape.

The language of exploitation and subjugation at the hand of visiting scientists is particularly interesting given the speaker’s position in the community as a white Bahamian with known ties to conservation science projects. This very same man had been involved with the efforts to declare the network of five protected areas in Andros in

2002, one of which abuts his property. He is not well integrated in the community and many dislike him because he fences his property and erected signs forbidding any conch harvesting in the area. On one hand, this man may be able to articulate feelings of mistreatment because of his social positioning, as a white outsider with ties to the U.S.; however it is possible that he feels particularly affronted because of his positioning. These feelings of exclusion and exploitation are not as familiar for a white well educated Bahamian with ties to local and central government. For this man, and indeed for many others we spoke with, it made no difference that the Nation Geographic archeological research included Bahamian team members—one from South Andros—and was partially overseen by a Bahamian institution (The National Museum of the Bahamas and the Antiquities Monuments & Museums Corporation). Rather, he viewed the research as yet another attempt—by individuals he marked as foreign and white regardless of their own identity claims as black and Bahamian—to take what he considered to be rightfully Androsian.

A black Bahamian man at the meeting argued that the fault lay at the feet of Androsians, quickly devaluing his own daily experiences, “*You can’t blame somebody for trying to make a dollar. We don’t use them, just fishing and things.*” While only a passing comment, this remark reflects a re-orientation in how blue holes have been historically valued. Suddenly the images our research team had presented of underground crystal formations and alien divers overshadowed—in meaning and in worth—the man’s own daily experience of fishing and survival in an island environment, of providing food for his family.

At the end of the meeting, several people asked me for a copy of the magazine. I had brought copies for the schools but had not brought enough for everyone. There was an argument among the men as they discussed why they should get the one remaining copy. The magazine became a prize, symbolizing their connection to global ideals of modern science. No matter if these individuals harvested crab or fished near these caves, the illustrated representation of blue holes of the magazine—the glossy images—were far more valuable than their own daily engagement with the space.

CONCLUSION: SPECTACULAR BLUE HOLES

In this chapter, I use the recent National Geographic blue hole expedition in Andros Island as an example of how a long history of scientific exploration has transformed how people experience and interact with a place. Debord's theory of Spectacle is helpful in thinking about how representations of tangible geological forms—in this case, Bahamian aquatic caves—reconstitute material space into immaterial and ultimately marketable imagery, eliding daily experience and practical uses. For many Androsians, blue holes have historically been and remain important. Residents actively use blue holes in their daily lives for a multitude of purposes including as a fresh water source. Other uses include fishing, waste disposal, and recreation. Women and children crab along their steep banks, and farmers grow their crops nearby. Both terrestrial and marine caves are used to mark boundaries of properties and to navigate passageways. For scientists, blue holes represent “the final frontier” of exploration akin to outer space. The depths of blue holes are only accessible to a few highly trained experts, marking the caves as exclusive and privileged space. In this way, blue holes offer an *intersectional*

space—a place of exchange and interaction (for ideas, information, cultural meanings) that is deeply meaningful to people across time, social context and space, but not necessarily in the same ways. Meanings and values placed on space, on geological—and in this case hydrological—features transform through engagement and interaction. Blue holes have multiple, simultaneous and sometimes conflicting value: for some they can be dangerous and threatening while still deeply relied upon for survival. For others, blue holes can fascinate, terrorize, intellectually excite, inspire awe in the divine, provide sustenance or recreation, or offer up all at one time. This complex instability emphasizes the blue hole's profound range of meaning, albeit transitory and elusive.

How blue holes are used and perceived, indeed even their material shape, shifts over time and according to individualized perspective. Intersectionality allows for transience as perspectives change over time, dependent upon who is engaged. The bloom of scientific interest in blue holes in recent years has been hastened through technological advances that provide access to the farthest reaches of the underground. For Androsians, their relationship with blue holes is enduring, spanning years, even centuries, and through generations. Their engagement with these caves has helped to shape the space as pathways that have been literally carved into the rock's face over daily use.

In contrast, scientist engagement is fleeting but flamboyant in scale. Scientists visit for short periods, documenting the barely visible with fantastic technologies. The transformation of blue holes into Spectacle, articulated through the intangible display of scientific exploration, is that making something a spectacle threatens to overshadow the minute and tangible details of daily practice and localized meaning. According to Debord, the Spectacle overshadows that which is real with that which is unreal. “*The real*

world is replaced by a selection of images which are projected above it, yet which at the same time succeed in making themselves regarded as the epitome of reality” (Debord 2006 [1967]: 17). Through this process, blue holes are replaced—in meaning and in value—by their digital representations. While aquatic caves have been regarded as divine, mythical, and life sustaining by some, the National Geographic images have taken root in our imaginations as “alien spaces” and “portholes to the past,” supplanting other, more nuanced meanings. What is at stake is not simply the insertion of particular commercial images into our mental conceptualizations of space, but the erasure of historical meanings, daily (tangible) context, and a host of values associated with blue holes for the people who live, play, and work among them. In their stead emerges the “fetishism of the commodity” (Debord 2006 [1967]: 17), images that lack the multidimensionality and richness of reality, but become more real, more tangible, in their representation. Human relationships as well as human bodies disappear within the array of images (with the exception of the exceptional and spectacular celebrity): they too are erased and depicted as alien and intrusive threats.

For Bahamians who have lived with blue holes, the Spectacle may threaten to displace once enduring and intricate understandings about and engagements with these spaces. By re-imagining these underground caverns through the lens of popular exploration and science, blue holes have become exceptional spaces fit mainly for elite scientific appreciation and tourist consumption—through such venues as glossy exploration magazines and television productions. It cannot be ignored, however, that the National Geographic expedition led to greater dialogue about rightful claims to Androsian heritage and cultural belonging. Controversy surrounding who benefitted from

the cave research brought together age-old convictions about ownership and access to land and waterways, to the artifacts found within the ancient holes, and just who can rightfully lay claim to the island's biodiversity, scientific value, and cultural history.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION: FINDING THE REAL BAHAMAS: NATURE, RACE, AND BELONGING

INTRODUCTION

I've found the real Bahamas. Not the over-developed, over-hyped Paradise Island version, but the Bahamas the British Loyalists found when they fled here in the 18th century. Descendants of those Loyalists—and the Indians before them—still live on the islands of the Abaco's archipelago. That is, cobalt blue water, white sand beaches and fishing to last a lifetime, each in the serene surroundings where time, while not quite standing still, isn't in any hurry to move forward.

Excerpt from an article in an online golfing magazine, PGA.com, "The Real Bahamas."
Pike 2006: website

In this concluding chapter, I return to the central question of the research: how do people claim rightful belonging and ownership? Located firmly within notions of belonging are assumptions about authenticity. What is meant by the "Real Bahamas"? What does the notion of a Real Bahamas suggest about who belongs in Bahamian space? How do we come to terms with the radically divergent images of a land and sea overrun by tourists, purchased and transformed by foreign land speculators and investors, consumed by the world as an exotic but contained and safe paradise, and worked by the Bahamians themselves through such resource extraction activities as fishing, farming, straw work, and crabbing? Social context shapes resource use, but it is also indelibly imprinted by these same users. McCay and Jentoft (1998) explicitly state, "Communities of resource users are not simply aggregates of individual acts. They often result from deliberate collective action or gain a sense of identity and shared purpose through patterned interactions over time" (McCay and Jentoft 1998a: 23). Given this mutuality,

who is able to gain access to the contested space and how does access to resources help to construct the Real Bahamas through ideas about nature, race, and belonging?

In this chapter, I look for my own “Real Bahamas” and authentic Bahamian among the murky backwaters of Andros, as well as in the capital’s mammoth resorts. I explore the linkages among belonging, citizenship, and authenticity, asking why the “authentic” holds so much value for people—whether tourist, conservationist, or native Androsian. The land and sea are venues for dispute, resolution, and negotiation of difference. Depending on who encounters the Bahamian archipelago and whether through labor, visitation, extraction, or measuring its geo-physical and social forms, the landscapes and seascapes are transformed by our own visions and boundary work: “Those who see the purpose differently, will see the thing differently” (Macpherson 1978b: 1). Constantly changing, the islands are reconfigured for particular interests and needs. This can happen materially, such as dredging sand in order to enlarge a property claim; or it can happen symbolically, as in the conservation agenda-driven transformation of Andros Island from backwater swamp to pristine and valuable wilderness, a hub of biodiversity. In the midst of this contest of belonging, sanctioned resource use and access, and property claims, conservation organizations and governments re-allocate resource use rights among various “stakeholders,” balancing the imagined “authentic” Bahamas—the Bahamas that exists through varied and shifting interpretations—with the material practice of being and living as a Bahamian.

FINDING THE REAL BAHAMAS: EATING CONCH SALAD

The Bahamas isn't owned by Bahamians – don't you know that?

Interview with Bahamian Male, 26, Nassau, July 2007

During an early visit to New Providence, I met Garrett, a young man who said he would show me the “Real Bahamas.” Not the tacky Atlantis-motif-pink-flamingo-made-in-China-plastic-craft-cheap-rum Bahamas, but the “*real place, the real island. Things you white people never see, man. Not that tourist shit.*” In essence, he offered to show me the authentic heartland of the Bahamas. I was curious about what he considered to be “real” and accepted his invitation. Other Bahamians had offered to show me the island, but the trip usually started with Atlantis Resort and ended with a cold drink at “Fish Fry,” a strip of bars and small restaurants constructed in the mid-1990s to look like a Caribbean fishing wharf. The goal had been to lure tourists away from downtown Bay Street by offering them a safe and clean “authentic Bahamian experience.” Fish Fry looked a bit like the Disney version of a Caribbean fishing wharf: the paint was too bright, the tables too clean, the buildings too new, and the patrons too white. People sat under umbrellas to order their conch fritters, fried fish, and peas and rice. Police cars sat at the periphery, under the palm trees by day and under the glare of streetlights by night. And every evening during the month of June, the Junkanoo performers gather in front and perform the traditional Junkanoo parade, a festival that once represented cultural ties to a shared African heritage and resistance to slavery. For Garrett, Fish Fry was a mere reproduction of “the Bahamian night spot,” a fake.

Garrett drove me through the streets of Nassau, pointing out landmarks: the barracks of the original Fort Charlotte; the Queen’s Staircase, a stairway that had been hand cut into the limestone by slaves in honor of Queen Victoria; and a tour of Cable

Beach lined with casinos and hotels. All way points were familiar and well documented in the tourist literature; however, Garrett told a different story at each stop. At the Fort, he told of runaway slaves held in the dark windowless cells before being executed. The staircase represented the countless slaves who had died of heat exhaustion and disease while, “building the city, building the Bahamas!” At Cable Beach, he talked about his mother, who had worked at one hotel or another since she was fourteen years old, starting out at Paradise Island, then called Hog Island, when you had to ride a ferry out to work. *“Now days with the bridge, you can drive, but she always walk anyway, to save the dollar.”* For Garrett, what and who could be categorized as authentically Bahamian were clearly marked along racial (black) and economic (poor) lines, with a shared history of hardship and enslavement.

Finally, he took me to Potter’s Cay, a series of small multicolored restaurants and bars lining the fishing docks underneath the Paradise Island Bridge. Unlike Fish Fry, Potter’s Cay was frequented mostly by Bahamians and was reputedly dangerous for tourists. Fishing boats tied stern to the dock and offloaded their catch directly into the bellies of the tiny kitchens, some of which held only a single cook standing upright at a hotplate. Conchs by the hundreds moved through the stalls via metal shopping carts operated expertly by young boys and old gin drinkers for a few dollars. Garrett chose a table saying, “This is where *we* go.”

As we sat with our conch salad, something he said he never ate— “this stuff is just for you tourists”—I asked about the new large high-rise hotel under construction on the horizon. He told me Sol Kerzner (of Kerzner International) was building another hotel next to his most famous Atlantis Resort. The mega developer also had plans for an

additional 18-hole golf course and marina on the island. *“He owns the whole island now.”* I asked if Garrett ever went over the bridge to Paradise Island to visit the famous beaches or eat at one of the hotels, and he shrugged. Finally he said, *“Don’t you know Sarah, Kerzner International owns the Bahamas. We just work for him.”*

Garrett was a government worker with a wife and five children at the age of 26. He and his wife both worked full time and wanted to save to buy a house, but first they needed another car, *“and some clothes to look good, you know.”* For him, ownership of the island was not a legal matter but an issue of access to the land and shoreline itself. Other, older Bahamians had told me stories about ferrying across the harbor long before the bridge was built to pick coconuts on the island and picnic on the beach. They declared, *“Cabbage beach is the prettiest beach in the Bahamas.”* Cabbage beach is now raked smooth of seaweed and debris every morning by the Atlantis staff. By noon, hair braiders, often mothers and grandmothers with their young children in tow, sit every few feet enticing customers to have their hair braided, each braid costing \$1–\$3. Men sell their wares made in china: neon wrist bands, alcoholic drinks in coconut shells, wobbly-headed characters, t-shirts, and painted bead necklaces. Cabbage beach is long gone, and in its place Paradise Beach has been created. In the process, the rights of access have been exclusively allocated to the mega resorts that line the shore.

How property is defined is not fixed in time or space but flexible in its applications. C. B. Macpherson defines property as, *“not things, but rights”* (Macpherson 1978a: 2), specifying, *“to have a property is to have a right in the sense of an enforceable claim to some use or benefit of something”* (Macpherson 1978a: 3). Macpherson makes the important point that in order to have an enforceable claim, the claim must be

perceived as a morally right or just claim. Building on this notion of rights, Jesse Ribot untangles the central idea of access, distinguishing between property rights and rights of access through *de facto* and *de jure* legal mechanisms:

‘Access’ does not replace the term ‘property,’ but rather it encompasses property, putting property (and other forms of) rights in their place among the whole array of mechanisms, structures and relations at work. ‘Possession,’ may be, as the old adage goes, ‘nine tenths of the law’, but law may be only a fraction of the access.

Ribot 1998: 312

Thus, while the Bahamian government did not in fact endow ownership of Paradise Island to Sol Kerzner, it did give him access to the land and resources, leading Garrett to claim Kerzner’s “ownership” and his own lack of access. Garrett viewed Kerzner’s highly visible occupation of the landscape as an example of the new colonization of the Bahamas. Foreign investors enter the Bahamas as temporary visitors to claim access and therefore ownership of Bahamian resources. Garrett rejected Kerzner’s hotels and the entire Paradise Island as part of the Real Bahamas, perhaps in some part due to his lack of standing within that context. Potter’s Cay, literally sitting in the shadow of the Paradise Island Bridge, was Garrett’s territory, *his* “Real Bahamas.”

COUNTER CLAIMS AND GUAVA DUFF

An alternate claim of belonging is that of Kate Meadows, a Canadian expatriate who grew up in the Bahamas and emphatically calls herself Bahamian. By Garrett’s standards, Kate holds no legitimacy. Visibly white, Canadian by birth, and well educated, Kate showed none of the markers of the “native” Bahamian; however, she was quick to claim her own belonging, emphatically declaring herself Androsian and investing in all that that meant to her. The crux of her argument often hinged on her involvement with

and dedication to environmentalism and conservation science in Andros. While in many ways Kate represented “the foreign,” she created space for herself through the moral groundings of “environmental stewardship” and a conservation agenda.

ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP AND BELONGING

Kate Meadows was the former director of the Center for the Environment (CE), a partnership organization between a U.S. university and the College of the Bahamas (COB). CE’s headquarters was housed in a bright pink plastered building on a tiny sand bar settlement. Visiting researchers and students would stay in small cabins and bring in most of their supplies from the United States and Nassau, only relying on a tiny shop to satisfy cravings for Tostitos and cold soda. CE’s main focus was to facilitate research on the ecology of Andros, but the center had been caught in controversy over research funding priorities and leadership agendas within the COB. Kate led the center with draconian enthusiasm, requiring visiting scientists to adhere to permitting regulations and share their findings with the local communities through public forums. Some scientists were unaccustomed to sharing data and protested at having to devote additional time and effort to what one researcher called, “Kate’s personal agenda.” Others argued that Kate was an ideologue and as such, must be managed for any conservation or research project to succeed.

Many Androsians grew up with Kate, daughter of a famous expatriate Doug Miller, who brought his wife and four children to Andros from Canada in 1960 to open a diving lodge and begin a new life. Kate left the island briefly for college and then returned as a primary school teacher in one of the island’s small settlements. She

eventually gained a position with the COB in the Andros extended education program. Kate had grown up side by side with many residents, had taught in the schools, and had brought to light the chronic malnutrition of young children in some of the smaller settlements. She had long fought foreign development and the chronic exploitation of local people and resources by the naval base. She promoted environmental education in the classroom and offered night classes on reading and math for adults.

In 2008, unexpectedly, the COB decided to close CE. The college allowed Kate to keep her job only if she moved to Nassau to teach on the COB campus. The doors of CE were locked and most of the lab equipment shipped to other departments at COB. The closing of the center was a deep and personal loss for Kate, for the people of the small settlement, and for Andros as a whole. While Kate's fiery temperament and unyielding demeanor had brought endless critique and conflict among the researchers and conservationists, she had also argued for Androsian rights to land and resources and provided many with valuable opportunities to learn about their island's ecological processes and participate in scientific research. Regardless of whether you loved or hated Kate, she was unquestionably devoted to Andros as her home.

IMAGES OF NATIVE ANDROS

When I first talked with people about my research, everyone directed me to Kate as someone central in the dialogue and knowledgeable about the issues surrounding much of the scientific research and conservation projects happening on the island. The recommendation would go something like, "You really need to talk to Kate. Good luck with that." Every foreign scientist I spoke to warned me against Kate, her demeanor too

harsh, her voice too loud, her ideas too rigid, her opinions too forceful. “You have to deal with Kate. And there is no dealing with Kate,” said one scientist. “I don’t even touch Andros. If I did I’d have to work with Kate,” said another. Expatriate conservationists rolled their eyes and sighed heavily. Bahamian conservationists, polite and diplomatic as always, would suggest I “set up a meeting with Kate. She is very knowledgeable, but can be hard to reach.” By the time I made my first call, I was deeply intimidated and already in awe of the woman who so many feared, or at least avoided. True to her reputation, it took me a full two years of phone calls, emails, and canceled meetings to successfully meet with her.

In May 2007, Kate emailed me that she was organizing Crabfest that year.

Crabfest is the annual land crab harvest festival on Andros Island. In the ten years that the festival had been going, it had become the largest and most popular Out Island event in the country. People traveled from other islands and the United States to attend the raucous affair with live music from some of the Bahamas’ most famous musicians, a fashion show, and a “Catch the Crab” chase that usually ended with hundreds of maimed crabs and pinched fingers. Beside the music, the festival was best known for its food. For weeks in advance people collected land crabs, fattened in small pens, and then made into gallons of crab soup, pans of crab and dough, plates of stuffed crab, pounds of crab salad, and pots of crab and rice. Originally, Kate organized the festival with her brother Michael Miller, but the event had since grown, requiring a year-long committee, rented public buses shipped from Nassau, and, some years, imported crab.

Kate had said she might be available to meet briefly. I had just had a baby, but knew that I may not get another chance to meet with Kate for a very long time. That is how I found myself late one June night in the middle of Fresh Creek Andros with a three-week-old baby strapped to me, surrounded by huge crowds, heavy drinking, and very loud music. As I stood in the throng of laughing, dancing, singing Bahamians while

holding the ears of my sleeping infant, I wondered at the power of a woman who could make me go to such lengths to meet with her. Not surprisingly, it took several more days to get that promised interview.

When we did sit down, Kate seemed candid and vulnerable. She was just facing the prospect of losing her job and, thus, her home in Andros. She felt betrayed by COB and the administration she had worked with for over 15 years. She had four months of paid vacation time owed to her because she had not “*taken so much as a sick day in years.*” Her story was compelling, her passion about Andros and its people admirable and infectious.

Kate talked with fervor for hours. She talked about her dedication to the people of Andros, her own children's attachment to the island. “My daughter calling me all the time for real Bahamian food. How you make peas and rice, mumi? she asks. She got to have her guava duff! I supposed to call her now to tell her how to make it. She in school now, but she grow up here, she real Androsian.” I was struck by her continued insistence that she (and by extension, her children) were real Androsians, that she belonged in Andros, not her family's native Canada or the capital of Nassau, but the mudflats and scrub of Andros. She had built a home here, had even posted a street sign with Meadows Lane on it, had fought for the right to be Androsian—to improve the school system, to push out foreign interests, to expose underhanded and exploitative tactics of the island's U.S. naval base. However, I could not help but that had her daughter been real Androsian, in the sense that she was like the vast majority of other island residents, she would not be in college in North America dreaming of guava duff. Indeed, like the other young women I spoke with daily on the island, she would likely know well how to cook guava duff and would have spent the last few weeks making pans and pans of simmering syrup and fluffy dough to sell at Crabfest. More likely than attending college, a young Androsian woman would probably already have children, live with extended families in small homes, wait on the men of the household, and work long hard hours doing household labor. Kate sat across from me, white, educated, and well fed with children living in foreign countries attending school, fervently claiming her own belonging in Andros. I felt my own unease with the apparent inconsistencies in her claims. I wondered what people thought as she drove honking through the settlements in a white Land Rover, talking about “dem some damn good peas and rice” she made the night before, and “lawd, help me, I tired.” But I wondered if it was my own social biases that a sunburned woman with Canadian roots—whose family moved to Andros by choice, whose family could (and in many cases had) moved away from the island by choice—could hardly claim the same shared spatial memories and history as those Androsians who were direct descendants of the European slave trade and centuries of colonial injustice.

My own ideologies as they relate to defining “the Authentic Bahamian” with rightful access to property were uncomfortably clear to me. While Kate felt entitled to own land, access resources, and establish laws governing the environment in the Bahamas, I found myself questioning her rights based on what she looked like and because she was foreign born. Regardless of the fact that she had lived in Andros longer than I had been alive,

Kate still represented the foreign in many ways. I discovered that most Androsians felt the same way. While Kate had “*done a lot for the island,*” and “*fought hard for this place,*” she was, to quote an Androsian official, in the end, “*not from Andros, nah, she not Androsian.*”

EMBODYING THE FOREIGN, OCCUPYING THROUGH SCIENCE

My research site was the entire area of Central Andros, which ran 50 miles in length and 40 miles in depth. As there was no public transportation, in order to talk with residents, tag along with science research, attend meetings, buy cooking gas, or shop for groceries, I had to drive. To prepare for this, I bought a tiny 1986 Honda Civic—for an exorbitant amount of money—that was simply no match for the roads. Some days, I was able to drive from settlement to settlement, ricocheting from pothole to washout, parting flooded creeks like the red sea and grinding gears through dusty sections of curry¹³road. Most days, I spent many long hours standing next to my little broken-down car, waiting in the hot sun for a ride to town to search the island for the ultimate scarcity, a spare tire. I conducted several informal interviews while riding in the cars of passersby and learned a great deal about daily life in Andros, as well as basic automotive care. As I became better known on the island, the rides were faster in coming, especially when I held my two-year-old daughter on my hip. After six flats, two dead batteries, and a mysterious leaking carburetor, I took to getting a ride with Rawlins, the local Bahamas National Trust field agent, as often as possible. Rawlins drove the company car, a large white extended-bed Land Rover truck, a glorious four-wheel-drive, with the iconic spare tire on the hood. The truck roared with power as Rawlins careened down the roads, bounding over the potholes without so much as a second glance. I sat in the passenger seat, with my arm out the open window. The engine was too loud to shout over, so we mostly drove across the island, crisscrossing from north to south and back, without talking, feeling the heated wind on our faces and watching the landscape shift from dense green coppice to muddy mangrove flats, to dazzling blue water peeking through the breaks in the trees. Upon entering the settlements, we were often hailed by passersby: short blasts of the horn, hands raised in greeting, smiles for Rawlins, and uncertain looks for me. Then, inevitably, a look of recognition, and someone would shout, “Hey, Kate! When you get back?”

Kate cut a broad and blazing path at the wheel, blond hair pushed under a wide brimmed safari hat with an oversized foundling mutt in the cab by her side. Close to 50, Kate had spent most of her life in Andros, “*Fighting for Andros, for us—Androsians! For my home!*” She was heavy set with a quick smile and tanned skin showing the lines and freckles of a lifetime of heavy sun. Driving into town, she called from the wheel to everyone she knew—which was in fact everybody. When I first started visiting Andros in

¹³ Curry roads are dirt roads that have been cleared by a bulldozer, scraping off the top level of soil and rock, leaving the chalky limestone bare beneath

2005, I saw Kate everywhere. She was a common sight at the ferry dock watching the loading and unloading of goods. She was loud and brash, asking men about their grandmothers and women about their children. She chastised boys for drinking or keeping the music too loud. She openly confronted people about building permits, fishing practices, and leaky outboard engines. In a land where people have little regard for dogs and mutts are called “potcakes” because they eat nothing but the burned bottom of the rice pan for survival, Kate always had her well-fed dog by her side. For this reason and many others, people were scared of Kate. I was scared of Kate. I marveled at her unpredictable anger and scathing attacks on scientists as exploitative foreigners, while perpetuating the image of white colonial governmentality in her safari hat and enormous white Land Rover jeep. I was faced with the fact that, for many living in Andros, I fell into the same category. I too rode in the Land Rover, vainly attempting to protect my white skin with any available hat. I too conducted research, taking people’s time and stories, rather than fish and soil samples, but gathering data nonetheless. My own body and actions had melded with the iconic imagery of conservation in Andros and beyond: white, well fed, weak and vulnerable to the elements, exploitative. At first, Kate seemed to me an imposter, however admirable. Despite her emphatic claims, her physical form and social positioning contradicted her declarations of being Androsian.

SYMBOLS OF SCIENCE: WHITE ELEPHANTS AND CONSERVATION

The Land Rover was used by visiting scientists and conservation managers. The truck became of a symbol of conservation, foreign research, and scientific occupation on the island. Although specifics of the ownership of the truck were unclear, there was some vague acknowledgement that it was co-owned by the conservation agencies—ANCAT, BNT, and Center for the Environment—and driven, most often, by Kate Meadows. In 2005, the three agencies collaborated on a proposal for a large grant from the UNEP-funded Caribbean Regional Environmental Program (CREP) to perform a number of research projects geared toward conservation research on the island and greater Bahamas geared toward marine biodiversity and

participatory management processes. They got the grant and immediately bought the Land Rover. As one official involved with the grant told me, "that truck is the only thing that ever came from that grant. Certainly no research or conservation happened." It remains unclear what happened to the initiative or the funding. The money was taken back and the alliance of the three organizations dissolved. There were rumors of lost funds and bad accounting. The alliance's failure undercut confidence in the small locally based conservation agencies. It seemed the Land Rover not only stood for foreign interests in conservation science, but also for failed attempts at local organization and leadership. If Kate was aware of the irony, she did not let on.

So when people hailed me in that same white Land Rover, my own sun hat pulled low to protect me from sunburn, I felt quiet discomfort at my own place within the historical trajectories on this island space. The jeep, my skin, my hat, and certainly my notebooks, GIS, pens, and voice recorder (all the trappings of an anthropologist) were symbols not only of scientific research and western knowledge-gathering, but also the quiet—and at times not so quiet—exploitation that had taken place here for decades, indeed for centuries.

Kate herself talked at length about the exploitative nature of science. Her narratives about the scientific research occurring in Andros were at times both hilarious and horrifying:

The scientists come and do their research, write their papers, get their tenure, and we never see them again. They take everything from here—our flora, our fauna—they roam the coppice or the reefs, collecting samples for their jars, and when I ask them to talk to the schools or present on their research, they tell me I'm being unreasonable...It's exploitive and I'm not going for it. They don't follow protocol, they get permits to do research—when they even get the permits!—and don't follow them. And no one is looking, except me. And no one cares, except me. So I make sure they stick to their permitted research. If they ask to collect a certain species of fish, they can't go collecting shells, too. I had one guy come out here to collect plants. He writes the proposal and gets his permit for plants. But while he's here, he starts collecting lizard tails because his colleague is doing research on lizard tails! There is no oversight! No enforcement!

Interview with Kate, Andros, 2007

Although committed to "good science" that improves "our knowledge about Andros and the amazing things that live here," Kate went to great lengths to differentiate herself from the foreign scientists. Scientists were transient, "coming for only a short time" to gather up specimens and "head back to their labs." Researchers who gathered wantonly, whether lizard tails, plants, or fish, disgusted Kate. In contrast to these scientists who visited from Canada and the United States, Kate reminded me, Kate had made her home in Andros,

had raised a family here. She argued that the only science she supported was that which sustained conservation in Andros, not the science that “*just makes some guy’s career back in the States.*” She saw environmentalism as a binding agent, linking herself to the island as well as its people:

People need to understand and see the worth of Andros. There’s no place like it anywhere else! We need to build environmental citizenship here. That’s the only way, the only way. We got to invest in our home!

For Kate, and many others I met like her, her conservation work represented her investment in the Bahamas and thus her moral standing as someone who deserved to belong. Kate’s labor within the conservation arena tied her to the land and seascapes of the islands. Historically, the western environmental movement (of which the Bahamas is certainly part) was based on the appreciation for wilderness and recreational activities such as hunting, fishing, and outdoor recreation. To some extent, this remains true today. Far from being depicted as a playground or public space, the environment is abstracted into a private and sacred space, available to the worthy few enlightened enough to experience a spiritual transformation through environmental engagement. This level of enlightenment is reserved for a self-selected group embracing the characteristics of ideal “environmental citizenship”: rugged, virtuous, spiritual, financially sound, and physically powerful. In the Bahamas, portraits of members of this group hang proudly on the BNT office walls. Access to wilderness space is highly restricted, safeguarded to protect the “pristine” land from flagrant abuse, overuse, and casual indifference. This perspective limits sanctioned users of the environment to only those able to partake and interested in recreational leisure activities, sometimes extractive but always focused on “pristine” wilderness as hallowed ground, gazetted away from the world of the common

man and available to an elite few. “Working together, race and nature legitimate particular forms of political representation, reproduce social hierarchies, and authorize violent exclusions—often transforming contingent relationships into eternal necessities” (Moore, et al. 2003: 3). This exclusive group is socially determined and, in the case of the Bahamas, often white.

Laura Pulido (2000) aptly connects the social construction and discursive formation of nature with that of race. Following Omi and Winant’s characterization of race as a “social formation,” Pulido writes, “Since landscapes are artifacts of past and present racisms, they embody generations of sociospatial relations” (Pulido 2000: 16). These socio-spatial relations determine who belongs in a particular landscape, while shaping the landscape for a very specific purpose. Who has (is provided) the right to access or govern certain landscapes corresponds to socially established ideas of racial affiliation and produced nature—the external shaping and internal self-fashioning of the imagined subject.

MORAL COMMUNITIES AND BELONGING

In 2006, the Bahamas National Trust hired a new director. Touted as having, “twenty years of experience in non-profit management, natural resource conservation and economic development,” the new director, “looks forward to working together with all Bahamians to protect the environment and the country’s unique historic and natural character” (BNT 2006b: website). This specific reference to working with Bahamians is significant because the newly appointed director is not Bahamian, but American. A photograph accompanies the article, showing the director to be a white middle-aged man

wedged between two other staff members significantly labeled “Bahamian.” Both are listed as, “from Nassau.” Interestingly, while interviewing these two Trust employees, I discovered that neither were in fact from Nassau. The male staff member was born and raised in Eleuthera, a family island known for its fishing and pineapple farming. The woman was originally from Canada but moved to Nassau over 20 years prior and firmly identified herself as Bahamian. She argued that permanent residency status was equivalent to native status. In each of these cases, the question of belonging, citizenship, and rightful ownership of the nation’s resources clearly emerges. These three individuals are positioned within a conservation organization mandated to delineate, manage, and at times appropriate the Bahamas’ natural resources for the rest of Bahamians. The Bahamas National Trust wields government-supported authority and a long history of conservation management buttressed by a colonial legacy, political segregation, and socio-economic inequality, but whether Trust managers are considered authentic Bahamians and legitimately in control of the country’s resources plays an important role in compliance with conservation regulations.

Building on Marx’s treatment of nature as a differentiated unity, Neil Smith (1984) notes that nature is popularly seen as that which cannot be produced, as the antithesis of human productive activity. But as society moves toward greater economic development and capital accumulation, nature becomes more of a social production, fusing together value, space, and society (Smith 1984: 32). The physical and symbolic divide between nature and culture is seen by many to represent the newly sprung conservation values of what Roderick Neumann (2004) terms a “moral community.” He defines this community as, “the assemblage of individuals, things and collectives that are

awarded moral standing within specific historical and geographical contexts” (Neumann 2004: 818). In the Bahamas, conservationists clearly position themselves as a moral community and validate their standing through scientific research and socio-economic power. In this way, morality overrides authenticity in the claim for rightful belonging.

AUTHENTICITY AND THE TRUE TRUE BAHAMIAN

What counts, however, is not the authenticity of a piece, but the amazing information it conveys.

Eco 1990: 8

From both Garrett’s and Kate’s stories we can discern that what constitutes a Real Bahamian varies, depending on the individual and personal investment in their socio-cultural heritage. The question of who constitutes a “true” Bahamian citizen was a pressing one during my stay. During a joint conference organized by the COB and University of West Indies, there was a great debate among speakers and audience members over the issue of immigration, citizenship, and the existing Bahamian population. The question was raised repeatedly, “Who can be counted as a Bahamian?” Can or should a second- or third-generation Haitian be considered Bahamian, particularly if he or she is born in the Bahamas? Are white loyalist Bahamians “Real Bahamians” or simply transplants, loyal to the Queen of England, the prime minister of the Bahamas, or most alarming of all, perhaps, the almighty American dollar.

There are no “indigenous peoples” in the Bahamas, the pre-Columbia population having died out with the arrival of Columbus, slavery, and exposure to new diseases. All contemporary Bahamians are migrants through colonization, slavery, economically motivated migration, and, more recently, financial investment. As the law now stands, for

\$10,000 and a relatively clean police record, anyone can legally purchase permanent residency in the Bahamas. This law came under heightened scrutiny during the 2009 permanent residency scandal involving the U.S. celebrity and former playmate of the year, Anna Nichol Smith. Opposing government party members accused a public official of accepting money to ensure Smith's legal residency after he approved her permanent residency status. Members of government legally challenged Smith's attempt to claim permanent residency, and many Bahamians questioned publicly her moral standing as a "desirable resident." While permanent residency may legally grant the right to live and work in the Bahamas, for many Bahamians, it does not constitute genuine belonging. Belonging, to the land, to the islands, and as a Bahamian, requires a shared social recognition.

NATURE AND IDENTITY

The issue of residency and citizenship looms large in public discourse and is most fiercely debated around immigration laws concerning Cubans and Haitians, as well as second-home owners from the United States and Canada. Although the scope of this topic is worthy of a dissertation in its own right, I will highlight some aspects of the discussion as it relates to resource use and rightful claims of belonging.

There are different notions of what it means to be a "true true Bahamian." During an interview with the minister of agriculture and marine resources, he was quick to identify Bahamians as those who rightfully deserve to own Bahamian resources, those who "belong in the landscape."

In some of our islands now, I was in one of the family islands on Friday. Off Andros—the Berry Islands and 97% of the land on Berry Islands is

owned by foreigners, who has been speculating on that land now for over 30 years—barren land. And the Bahamians are congregated on one little acre that is less than a half-mile long. So you've got about 2,100 inhabitants on just this little small spot. And the rest of the island is just there, almost deserted. And the people are just hoarding the land—speculators. The government has an obligation to take the land back and to give it to Bahamians.

Interview with Minister of Agriculture and Marine Resources, Nassau, 2007

According to the minister, these individuals living in the Berry Islands (foreigners, speculators), who owned 97 percent of the land, were not legitimate Bahamians or land holders. Instead they were “foreigners”—outside the realm of belonging—both the cause and result of their illegitimacy. Their status as foreigner led to his rejection of their land claims. Although the Minister did not have the authority to officially rescind their claims, his remarks reflect a popular belief that true Bahamians look and act a certain way regardless of legal standing. Also embedded in his thinking is familiar settler logic that productive land is worked land, improved through labor. The minister objected to portions of the Berry Islands lying “barren,” unworked. He argued that the title holders were simply land speculators, suggesting they had no experiential connection to the land or sea, simply “hoarding” it for future profits and not “improving” it. These speculators were not truly rooted to the landscape nor were they making it productive, and as such they could not rightfully claim exclusionary ownership. The minister made a clear distinction between those who belong on Bahamian ground, The Real Bahamians, and those who don’t belong—visitors, speculators, tourists, and those labeled as foreign.

The control of nature has long been associated with proprietorship. Braun suggests the concepts of nature and race go together as ideological discourses, born from colonialism and slavery, and bled into the land itself. “Cultivated crops and human

harvests provide ample means of illuminating what the seeds of racism have sown”

(Braun 2003: 9). There emerges an association between nature and our own inner landscape, emphasizing the varied interactions and formations we experience through the environment.

Nature as contested terrain both grounds material struggles over environmental resources and refracts racial essences through the discursive prisms of nation, population, and gene. Race and nature reach far beyond biology and ecology, science, and state, also crafting interior landscapes of sentiment and selfhood.

Braun 2003: 11

We are able to view selfhood through the lens of conquest ideology—of nature, the self, and the Other, and through that of race. “Man’s” attempts to tame nature paired with catastrophic, uncontrollable, and fatal events manifest images of human fear, vulnerability, and insignificance when compared with the “indomitable” natural world. Richard White (White 1995) describes nature as a working machine, forcing humans to expend energy to transform natural processes to suit their needs. The relationship between “man” and nature is based on oppositional goals, conflicting needs, and strenuous coercion. It is a relationship based on power—a relationship designed to transform rather than to collaborate, as is evident in the existence of river dams, seawalls, strip mining, desert irrigation practices, wildlife relocation projects, wetland reclamation, and so on. “Man” wrestles with the land just as he battles over the landscape itself: it is a space of conflict and warring ambitions. “Nature will always be contested terrain. We will never stop arguing about its meanings, because it is the very ground on which our debates must occur” (Cronon 1996: 52).

Hughes’s (2006) exploration of the linkages between place making and belonging in Zimbabwe highlights the significance of race and other social markers in the contest to

claim legitimacy. Hughes asks the basic question, “how, under these conditions, could so few ex-Europeans feel entitled to own so much African land? (Hughes 2006: xiv). In answer, the author paints a picture of determined white Zimbabwe settlers reconfiguring the landscape in order to claim space, “belonging awkwardly” (Hughes 2006: 129). He writes, “Engineering, then, fostered an unstable, ephemeral feeling of entitlement and belonging” (Hughes 2006a: 269). In the context of an African country with a black majority populace, white settlers struggle to make space for themselves, turning to land acquisition and manipulation and finally to conservation discourse. A similar phenomenon is evident in the Bahamas. While dams are not popular, there is a great deal of tension regarding who can claim legitimate belonging as it relates to racial ideologies.

THE RACIAL LANDSCAPE

[I]n the popular imagination, to be Bahamian is to be black. People who are not obviously black tend to spend a lot of time explaining why they are Bahamian even though their skin isn't. One's race is usually the very first thing that is considered when assessing whether one is a “true true” Bahamian or not.

The ironic thing about this idea that the “true true” Bahamian is black is that if we measure one's “Bahamianness” by the depths of one's roots, it is white Bahamians who have the deepest ones. The Eleutherian Adventurers, the people who settled the issue once and for all of who lived on these islands and what language they spoke, were predominantly white; and they arrived 135 years before the Loyalists brought the slaves who changed Bahamian demographics forever.

Bethel 2003: website, *On Being Bahamian*

Bethel's observation throws much of popular perception—both in and outside the Bahamas—about the nation and the nation's identity into disarray. As Bethel's quote suggests, the Bahamas is understood to be a former British colony and a Caribbean island

nation with a majority black population and government. The flag's gold and blue are meant to represent the sun and sea of the Bahamian coastline, while the flag's black symbolizes a black political majority. The 1973 independence movement was led by the Progressive Liberal Party (PLP) who based their rallying cries on racial equality and political rule for the black Bahamian majority.

The same Dr. Nicolette Bethel, an anthropologist now serving as the director of culture for the Bahamas, wrote about the racialized nature of politics and the independence movement in her 2001 doctoral thesis, "Navigations: The Fluidity of National Identity in the Postcolonial Bahamas."

The rhetoric of nationalism that accompanies Bahamian independence in July 1973 was overwhelmingly a racist one...most of the nationalist rhetoric took much the same path as the Black Power movement in the USA began to take; the darker one's skin, the purer one's status as a 'true' Bahamian.

Bethel 2001: 131

The racialization of citizenship and belonging remains strong in the Bahamas and is evident in the political process as well as daily public activities.

RACE, POLITICS, AND CONSERVATION

Political affiliation and loyalty have tremendous significance for conservation efforts and natural resource management. Many Bahamians view conservation projects as political (and hence racial) projects. When interviewing one government official involved with environmental management, he categorized marine conservation projects as simply protecting white and often foreign elites and their private property. While the previous party (FNM) worked toward furthering elite interests, the informant said the PLP had different priorities—specifically, "*furthering Bahamian interests*," emphasizing the word

Bahamian to suggest not all voters, or all people residing in The Bahamas could hold such a title. He said the people in favor of conservation were mostly “foreigners with selfish interests” who want to protect the environment in order to benefit their own interests and land holdings.

There are practical implications to how racial ideologies affect identity, place making, and links to conservation. Paul Gilroy (1993: 2) unties the idea of identity from nationality, race, ethnicity, language, and belonging, and instead positions identity in the space between these regions, a fluid association that shifts and transforms, depending on context. Bruce Braun (2003) addresses the complexities of race, identity, and representation specific to the environment and nature through the examination of adventure travel and representations of the rugged outdoor adventurer. Braun argues that given the strict historical and media-driven formation of what it means to be an adventurer, there is simply no place for people of color within the imagery and therefore within the imaginary. He writes:

The absence of [the “non-white adventurer”] is not only, or even primarily, an economic or sociological matter but an ideological matter: within the discursive terrain of “adventure” in the United States today, the figure of the black or Latina adventurer *has no proper place*.

Braun 2003: 178, emphasis in original

Although written of the U.S. context, this representation of environmental discourse aligns closely with Bahamian environmental discourse. The imagined environmental belonging relates directly to questions of access and legitimacy. Who has the right to occupy certain landscapes corresponds to ideas of racial affiliation and the duality of nature (the external shaping and internal self-fashioning of the imagined subject).

To further complicate the explicit white rule of nature space, conservation agencies have sought to incorporate broader participation in environmentalism while still

strictly guarding “legitimate” or authentic membership. Participation or coalition rhetoric has gained momentum, particularly in the past 15 years. As globalization increased visibility and connectivity around the world (Appadurai 2002 [1996]; Held and McGrew 2000; Rouse 1995), environmental movements broadened their scope to integrate larger global concerns, often under the auspices of “partnership” programs (Fairhead and Leach 2003).

Increasing public participation has long been a goal of the environmental movement, but the ideal environmental subject is strictly defined and is powerfully shaped through ideological processes and social discourse. Mainstream conservation relies on a contradiction between wide involvement and elite membership. There is an effort toward instilling a strong environmental ethic, eliciting stewardship practices, and increasing large-scale participation while simultaneously maintaining limited access to the sacred. Power hierarchies remain strong. Western white conservationists venture out to aid the less fortunate, voiceless, “under-modernized,” and usually non-white, only serving to further invest in the discourse of difference, contribute to what constitutes the racial Other, and strengthen power hierarchies.

Paul Silverstein (2005) reiterates the significance of accepted systems of knowledge production as both perpetrating and resulting from “racial formations” or the existing racial paradigm (Omi and Winant 1994, Ong 1999, Silverstein 2005). In the Bahamas, the process of enclosure conservation constructs the ideal environmental citizen through restricted access and education, with the goal of transforming people into stewards of the environment. Environmental citizenship denotes a rightful “belonging” to a landscape while also suggesting an active engagement with citizenship responsibilities.

There is an inherent duality in the process of subject-making: people, as agents, interpreters, and performers simultaneously create social, political, and even environmental structures and in turn are formed by the constructed framework (Ong 1999).

Markers of group membership, “guidelines for proper and improper behavior, for legitimate and illegitimate group membership,” are enforced through formal and informal mechanisms that reinforce racial landscapes linking racial performance with the legitimate occupation of space (Jackson 2005: 13). Just how people across the racial spectrum are persuaded to follow this exclusionary and restrictive ideology becomes an interesting question, one that requires some exploration into subject-making, image and knowledge production, affect, and, ultimately, desire. Racialized spatial delineation certainly exists within the conservation agenda in the Bahamas. Certain areas are clearly cordoned off for specific racial activities. These spaces offer greater opportunity for racial solidarity, increased connectivity, and consensus building, but they are “also locations which can reproduce existing inequalities” (Brennan 2001, 651).

How do we understand the concept of race as a social formation, fluid and ever shifting in meaning, an “unstable and ‘decentralized’ complex of social meanings constantly being transformed by political struggle” (Omi and Winant 1994: 54-55) yet firmly positioned in experience and intensively structured? Omi and Winant argue the term and the concept is anything but static or fixed to one crystallized experience that remains historically and socially constant. Race must be viewed as it is experienced—situated in an ever-changing and multidimensional world. The authors write, “It is not possible to represent race discursively without simultaneously locating it, explicitly or

implicitly, in a social, structural (and historical) context” (Omi and Winant 1994: 60): a context that changes temporally and, most importantly, is transformed as the agent engages with the process, shaping and being shaped by an individual and collective identity.

In using such highly emotive and complex terms as race, ethnicity, and class, it is important to stress the significance of heterogeneity and individualized experience. Race and ethnicity are “not terms that have fixed referents” (Wade 1997: 5, but often reflect the central location of the colonizing west as the key determiner of these terms. In the end, by employing the concept of race, ethnicity, or class, we are reifying a social construction put forth by the elite and thereby reinforcing the power of difference and the hierarchy of social, economic, and racial location. “We have to see each term in the context of a history of ideas, of Western institutionalized knowledge (whether social or natural science) and of practices” (ibid). Stuart Hall reminds us that race is inextricable to identity and to historicity. “Identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past” (Hall 1990: 225). Identity not only forms who we are but also who we imagine ourselves to be. The role of imagination in subject-making is central to environmental governing. How do we imagine ourselves? Which qualities do we embrace and which do we reject or attribute to Others?

FORMING THE OTHER

Just as property claims are relational, in that they are executed through an exclusionary process—those with access and those without—identity claims also involve

delineating difference. Goldberg (2000) addresses how the category of race is used to classify, examine, and determine difference, thereby enabling greater ability to govern. “Power is exercised epistemologically in the dual practices of naming and evaluating” (Goldberg 2000: 155). He emphasizes the central role of categorization and the establishment of “Otherness,” which in turn provides legitimacy and underscores the significance of these lines of difference as a way to create and maintain order. “Once defined, order has to be maintained, serviced, extended, operationalized” (ibid), essentially developing and sustaining an arbitrary but firmly positioned system of order and, ultimately, rule. Once categorized as Other, a conceptual binary is developed: first world/third world, modern/primitive, white/black, Bahamian/foreign. This works to reify the distinction between those who are fit to govern and those who must be governed. For example, Emma Crewe and Elizabeth Harrison’s article “Seeing Culture as a Barrier” (2005) examines how the “explanation of culture” can be used to further development goals while it is simultaneously flagged as an obstacle to cultural “enlightenment” (Crewe and Harrison 2005: 232), fitting nicely into the western (white) binary perception of the Other in need of aid. These projects, seen as “foreign and remote, almost magical, the target of prejudices” (Fox 2005: 311) engage the western audience profoundly with the concept of obscure (geographically, socially, economically) “local” communities, under-developed, and under-modernized—“true modern myths” (ibid).

CONCLUSION

There is a two-volume CD of Bahamian folk music titled *The Real Bahamas*. Compiled in 1965 by two college students and musicians who were later to become well-

known ethnomusicologists, the album became widely acclaimed as one of the earliest examples of the world music genre. On the album, Androsians Joseph Spence and the Pindar family sing old spirituals in Jesus's name, with one guitar and an audible foot-tapping back beat. The music is rough, expressive, and entirely engaging. Listening closely to the songs that are simultaneously familiar and eerily haunting, I can gain a glimpse into the "back bush" of the Bahamas—to imagine a country that is at once intimate, enticing, and unfathomable. Within each composition, I experience the liminality of Andros, in the tension among black African voices and white missionary stories, among the nuanced meanings and ragged, sun-drenched voices, the lapping beauty of the sea and the craggy shoreline of the low-lying carbonate islands.

This, I think to myself, must be the *Real Bahamas*, not the glitzy, tourist, and high-rise-laden consumer paradise we see in the travel magazines. Not the Kerzner International Atlantis Hotel Bahamas built to look like a Disney cartoon that caters to the masses of sunburned tourists sporting temporary hair braids and free drink coupons. One review of the album writes,

Lyrical, graceful and welcoming, THE REAL BAHAMAS is the best possible introduction to world music, to the ways in which the universal and the local converge, offering the thrill of the exotic alongside the comfort and security of the known, presenting songs that are almost familiar---American spirituals and blues, English hymns and folk songs---refracted through a strange and personal sensibility...There is a sense of comfort and reassurance in the familiarity of the melodies, in the Biblical cadences or the sing-song patterns of the rhymes.

"There's a B for the beast at the ending of the wood
 Goodnight Goodnight
 He eat all the children that would not be good
 Goodnight Goodnight"

Still, the closer you listen, the less familiar things get. In the best possible sense.

Cullman 1998, website

The Bahamas has come to represent this odd but marketable coupling of, “the exotic alongside the comfort and security of the known.” Touted as a friendly safe place, the Bahamas is where one’s desire for the exotic (carefully packaged and contained) can be obtained. The nation has redefined and reconstructed much of its landscape to ensure this image holds—even through hurricanes, poverty, racism, and a history fraught with colonial rule and slavery.

In the end, the Real Bahamas remains distinct and frustratingly elusive. Shimmering on the horizon through a heat haze, the tall towers of Atlantis appear like a hologram in the distance: blink and the surreal images of a long-forgotten undersea city disappear. In their place, the plastic facade of mermaids and beach umbrellas line the walkways, each store front selling “Bahamas Mamas” for \$10 per cupful and pizza by the slice. Fly seven minutes west and land in the muddy flatlands of Andros, once described as a wasteland and now promoted as an

Endemic paradise, Andros is teaming with lush green foliage, spunky land crabs, and wild orchids of every possible color. If you like to get your feet wet, Andros has more than a few beaches to do it. The island has some of the best diving sites in the world, filled with deep coral canyons and home to more magnificent blue holes than anywhere in the world.

BNT 2012: website

Umberto Eco’s notion of hyper-reality explains how great effort is made to achieve a believable fake representation of something “real.” In the process of replicating the original, it is impossible to tell the real from the fake, and eventually “the copy is authentic” (Eco 1990: 30). The Real Bahamas is no more or less the crystalline blue waters than the plastic Disney facades, cannot be represented in its entirety by Garrett or Kate. What constitutes the Real Bahamas or a rightful claim to its land and seascapes are

socially and historically contingent, fluid in meaning and practice. Dialectic markers of belonging reinforce notions of property ownership or “enforceable claims” of access to resources, determining what is truly Bahamian. Through this process, acting (or doing) and being overlap with the physical land/seascape, breaking down the great intellectual divide between human and nature.

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