

PARKING RESISTANCE AND RESISTING THE PARK:

‘WEAPONS OF THE WEAK’

CONFRONTING CONSERVATION

AT MOUNT ELGON, UGANDA

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Parking Resistance and Resisting the Park: ‘Weapons of the Weak’ Confronting Conservation at Mount Elgon, Uganda

Summary

National parks remain at the centre of conservation efforts in Africa. However, the long established strategy of conservation through law enforcement is now supplemented by participatory strategies such as community conservation. These new strategies have not changed the preservationist thrust of conservation policy and action. The relationships between parks and people are best understood as struggles in which ‘park neighbours’ use covert and overt ‘weapons of the weak’ to challenge the hegemony of conservation. This study of a national park in Uganda describes and analyses these forms of resistance.

Key words: conservation, institutions, participation, parks, wildlife, Uganda, Africa

Parking Resistance and Resisting the Park: ‘Weapons of the Weak’ and Conservation at Mount Elgon, Uganda

INTRODUCTION

National parks and protected areas have been central to conservation policy and practice for more than a century and this remains the case today.¹ Almost everywhere the management of national parks is seen as a state responsibility with the maintenance of natural processes and biodiversity as the main goals. Law enforcement strategies have been the main mechanism for ensuring that natural processes are not disturbed by human activity. Such strategies are based on Western preservationist philosophy and have led to the coining of terms such as ‘fences and fines’, ‘coercive conservation’ and ‘fortress conservation’ (Brockington, 2001; Li, 2002; Neumann, 1997; Peluso, 1993). Alongside these strategies, that punish local people and society for using protected resources, run strategies of education and sensitisation. For decades park rangers have struggled, usually unsuccessfully, to encourage park neighbours² to subscribe to the conservation ideology.

Despite the recent shift to community-based conservation and participatory park management (see below) law enforcement remains the core strategy for conservation (Brockington, 2001). It is argued that national parks ‘are on the front line in the battle to protect biodiversity...’ (McNeely, 1995: vii), as ‘protection of habitats is the single most effective means of conserving biodiversity’ (Ryan, 1992: 4; also see Brandon *et al.* 1998: 4-5; IUCN, 1999: 7). The effectiveness of the law enforcement strategies, as compared to other management strategies, has been emphasized by Bruner *et al.* (2001) (also see Beck, 2000; de Merode, 1998;

Jachmann, 1998), and numerous individuals and organizations continue to support this management strategy today (e.g. Terborgh, 1999; Terborgh, 2004).

State management of national parks through law enforcement strategies is often characterized by conflict due to the incompatibility of the development aspirations of local populations and the preservationist objectives of park authorities (e.g. Barrett and Arcese, 1995; Brockington, 2001; James et al. 1999; Langholz, 1996; Matenga, 1999; McNeely, 1995; Neumann, 1998; Wilkie et al. 2001). As a result, a supportive constituency for conservation at the local level has frequently been lacking. In an attempt to ensure broader support for conservation, arguments have been made for participatory park management strategies (e.g. Abbot and Thomas, 2001; Anderson and Grove, 1987; Kiss, 1990; West and Brechin, 1991; Western et al. 1994). These seek to give local communities³ a role in park management and to create a linkage between conservation and development (Adams and Hulme, 2001). Participatory park management strategies include environmental education and sensitisation, revenue sharing, out-of-park sustainable development activities, collaborative management and resource access agreements, ecotourism ventures, sustainable extraction for commercial purposes, small-scale businesses and processing operations, and hunting concessions. Each lies at a different point along a participation continuum that ranges from passive to active community participation (e.g. Barrow and Murphree, 2001: 28).

Participatory park management entails national park managers, park neighbours, and other organisations working towards mutually acceptable forms of conservation. Because conservation becomes a collaborative venture, it is argued the

resistance that often characterises the relationship between park management and park neighbours under the ‘fortress conservation’ strategy can be permanently ‘parked’ (i.e. resistance and opposition will cease).

In the practice of national park management, however, moves towards the participatory ideal are frequently impeded by the vastly differing land and resource use values held by park managers and local people. On the one hand, park managers prioritize conservation strategies that retain landscapes in their ‘natural’ state and are basically preservationist. On the other, the development-related aspirations of park neighbours frequently involve the transformation of ‘natural’ landscapes through agriculture and human settlement. Neumann (1997: 565) argues that in terms of political relations, new forms of conservation tend to represent continuity with, rather than cleavage from, past experiences. First World conservationists continue to determine whether locally preferred land uses are compatible with conservation or not. The goals of park managers (conservation) are not fundamentally reworked, rather the manner by which conservation goals are pursued is changed. Where policies of ‘inclusion’ do not result in a re-negotiation of the conservation agenda, they may represent an attempt by park management to impose conservation ideology on local communities. As a result, participatory park management strategies are unable to change the relationship that exists between managers and neighbours from conflict, to one characterised by acceptance, negotiation and compromise.

In this paper we analyze a Ugandan case in which a number of policies were introduced to shift a national park management strategy from one based primarily on law enforcement to one including a variety of participatory management strategies.

However, as the pre-existing value conflicts between park managers and park neighbours were not negotiated or resolved, conflict remained at the heart of the park-people relationship. Park managers sought to use both old (law enforcement) and new (participatory) strategies to engineer coercion and consent and obstruct the efforts of local people to pursue their development initiatives. Park neighbours responded by continuing to practise both overt and covert resistance to the park.⁴

PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES TO DEVELOPMENT: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Arguments about the role of participation in conservation, and of the ways in which this is manipulated by different social actors, are a component of a much wider set of theoretical debates. An extensive literature has developed around common property – based natural resource management much of it claiming that communal arrangements may be more effective than state or private control in terms of equity, efficiency and sustainability (Agrawal 2001: 1650). More generally, during the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s, a powerful normative case evolved within development studies that both narrow development goals (economic growth and income poverty reduction) and broader goals (human development and human rights) could be more rapidly achieved through participatory approaches (Chambers 1997; Uphoff 1992), community-based management (Gibson et al. 2000), people-centred development (Cernea 1991; Korten and Klaus 1984) and mobilising producer groups (Heyer et al. 2002). These ideas have impacted on policy and, for example, most developing countries now have to conduct participatory poverty

assessments (PPAs), as part of their national poverty reduction strategy (PRS), in order to access foreign aid.

Proponents of participatory and community-based approaches have drawn on many ideas but ‘social capital’ and ‘pluralism’ have been especially important. While Bourdieu (1985) is commonly seen as the originator of the term social capital, it is Putnam’s (1993) conceptualisation that has been most powerful in development theory. His logic – that where civic engagement is high and there is a dense associational life then political and economic institutions function effectively and economies grow – has encouraged development agencies to favour approaches that involve group formation and collective decision-making. Pluralism has deeper historical roots, going back to de Tocqueville’s (1966) *Democracy in America* published in the mid 19th Century. Theorists of pluralism argue that stable and effective governance is dependent on the functioning of a plurality of associations in civil society that are not controlled by the state. In more recent times the work of Dahl (1956; 1989) has been highly influential and has percolated through to development theory and practice.

Such normative theory has not gone unchallenged and criticisms of participatory approaches have been made, often drawing explicitly or implicitly on Foucault’s (1991) concerns with ‘governmentality’. Cooke and Kothari (2001) have argued that participation has become the ‘new tyranny’ and that ‘... an emphasis on micro-level intervention can obscure and indeed sustain, broader macro-level inequalities and injustice’ (ibid: 14). Similarly, Cornwall (2004) uses Foucauldian notions to analyse the contradictory effects of participation. ‘The art and activity of

government... need to be seen as consisting of attempts to constitute governable subjects' (ibid: 80) and discourses and practices of participation are one of the mechanisms that can be used to achieve this end.

Like Foucault, Scott (1985; 1990) argues for a focus on the dynamics of power relations and through the notions of the 'weapons of the weak' and 'hidden transcripts' explores the complex (and again contradictory) ways in which rural people respond to state initiatives. These ideas are particularly useful for exploring the processes and contestations that occur around the proclaimed shift of conservation policies from coercion to participation. Scott's (1985) analysis of the 'weapons of the weak', and his critique of hegemony, provides an analytical tool to deepen understanding of evolving relationships between park managers and park neighbours, and between conservation with development.

HEGEMONIC AND COUNTER-HEGEMONIC STRUGGLES OVER CONSERVATION

Social scientists and historians have used the term 'hegemony' in a variety of social contexts, and cultural and historical settings (e.g. Akram Lodhi, 1992; Gramsci, 1971; McLean 1996; Barry Jones, 2001). In particular, this paper will draw upon Scott's (1985) conceptualization of 'hegemony', as imposed from outside, to facilitate an analysis of the use of various park management strategies by both park managers and park neighbours. It enables the identification of counter-hegemonic resistance and provides a useful framework for examining the struggles

park neighbours employ to obstruct the conservation agenda of national park managers.

Scott critiques the Gramscian concept of hegemony for a number of reasons (Scott, 1985: 317, 318, 322, 340). Firstly, he argues that if a dominant, hegemonic conservation ideology was successfully imposed by national park managers onto park neighbours it would mean that conservation beliefs and values (as defined by park management) would penetrate and dominate the views of park neighbours. They would consent to a situation that does not necessarily serve their best interests. But, conservation hegemony does not characterize the practice of park management: park neighbours frequently do not accept official conservation strategies. A move behind normative theory and official policy, through a detailed investigation of the relationship between park managers and park neighbours, reveals a situation of complexity characterized by a mix of acceptance, selective appropriation, and outright rebuttal of conservation policies by both park managers and park neighbours (e.g. Oates, 1995 and 1999; Murombedzi, 1999).

Second, Scott argues that even if the concept of hegemony to which preservation inclined national park managers aspire is taken to define what is and is not realistic, this situation must not be confused with justice or legitimacy. Although it may drive certain goals and aspirations into the realm of the impossible, it should not exclude from analysis 'just how the realm of the possible might, in new circumstances, be expanded [...and how...] what is nothing more than speculation today may become a realistic goal tomorrow' (Ibid: 326).

Thirdly, park neighbours challenge conservation both from within and outside the conservation agenda. For example, as Murombezi (1999) argues, rural people may use the conservation agenda in their pursuit of non-conservation ends (challenging the conservation agenda from within). The question is raised, to what extent are counter-hegemonic struggles, acting both within and outside the prevailing ideological order, used to facilitate the achievement of livelihood goals.

In summary, whether national park managers pursue official conservation objectives through ‘fortress’ conservation or through participatory park management strategies or combinations of these two, it is argued that conservation will not be accepted and we will not see the formation of environmental subjects (Agrawal 2005) if conservation is not perceived as being in the best interests of park neighbours. Park managers frequently respond to this lack of acceptance by attempting to impose the conservation agenda on local communities. The response of park neighbours, particularly in those areas where the differences between land and resource use values is high, is one of resistance or ‘counter-hegemonic struggles’. A variety of overt and covert ‘weapons’ can be used in such struggles (see later). This resistance and related ‘weapons’ observed are manifested in the implementation of strategies according to the Park neighbours’ practical mastery of the situation (Bourdieu 1977). Mount Elgon National Park in Uganda provides an excellent case for exploring these dynamics of conflict and social resistance.

MOUNT ELGON NATIONAL PARK (MENP)⁵

The Park

Mount Elgon is located in eastern Uganda, spanning the Kenya – Uganda border. It extends 80 km north to south and 50 km east to west, with a 20 km long Nkokonjeru Arm (or Wanale Ridge) branching off to the south-west. Mount Elgon is a designated National Park in both Uganda and Kenya and, in total, covers approximately 2,021 km², with around 1,145 km² comprising Mount Elgon National Park (MENP) in Uganda.

The MENP has its roots in the colonial policies of the early 20th Century seeking to reserve the land for ‘the general interests of the country’ (Anon, 1912-1922) and prevent local people from extending cultivation up the slopes. The area was gazetted as a Crown Forest in 1938 and technical changes to its status occurred in the 1940s and 1950s (see Norgrove, 2003 for a history of MENP). At one time the Forestry Department adopted a populist strategy that permitted access for subsistence purposes to local residents. During the ‘chaos’ of the Amin and Obote II years, governance across Uganda broke down and people in the Mount Elgon area took advantage of this. Reserve neighbours expanded their agriculture and grazing into the forest and up the slopes while senior forestry officers issued licenses for residence, grazing and cultivation within the reserve in return for bribes. By the time ‘peace’ returned to the country in the late 1980s some 24,000 hectares of protected area had been degraded (van Heist 1994: 60) and many people believed they had acquired ‘rights’ to the reserve by use and/or licensing arrangements.

The government responded by raising the protected status of Mount Elgon to forest park (1991) and national park (1993). This meant use rights within the Park were restricted to ‘...biodiversity conservation; recreation, scenic viewing, scientific research; and any other [approved] economic activity...’ (GoU, 1996: 24). Uganda National Parks (UNP) adopted a preservationist approach to conservation and sought to evict cultivators and grazers from the Park and stop local residents from entering. UNP merged with the Game Department to become the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) in the mid 1990s and around that time changes in its approach began to occur with the introduction of ‘community conservation’ (Hulme and Infield, 2001).

Today, the primary management objective for MENP is, ‘To conserve and manage the physical, ecological and cultural resources of Mount Elgon National Park for the benefit of present and future generations’ (UWA, 1999b). Park management employs two principal management strategies: law enforcement and community conservation. Law enforcement involves park rangers in military style operations – patrols, raids, arrests, imprisonments, seizures and the use of state sanctioned violence. Rangers have rifles and, at times, shoot ‘poachers’. If needed, UWA staff can call in military support from the Uganda People’s Defence Force (UPDF). Education and sensitization, out-of-park sustainable development activities, revenue sharing⁶, and collaborative management agreements are all included under the rubric of ‘community conservation’. A major component of the community conservation initiative in Uganda has involved the negotiation of ‘collaborative management’ agreements between parks and neighbours. These agreements signify a major move away from the traditional legal framework (e.g.

decrees) that have not provided for use-rights. These permit park neighbours to enter parks to collect natural resources at a sustainable level. Usually they cover water, traditional medicines, bamboo, salt, reeds and grass; grazing and timber extraction are typically excluded, as their extraction is considered unsustainable by UWA.

Park neighbours: the Bagisu and Sabiny people

Two culturally distinct groups dominate the population around MENP, the Bagisu (in Mbale and Sironko Districts) and the Sabiny (in Kapchorwa District). Population densities are amongst the highest in Uganda (up to 400 people per square kilometre in Mbale and Sironko Districts). Livelihoods in those parishes neighbouring MENP are based on intensive agricultural production from small plots supplemented by small-scale enterprises and market trade. Average land-holding sizes in the study sites ranged from one acre in Kapkwai parish to two and a half acres per household in Mutushet parish. The predominant staple crop grown in Mbale and Sironko Districts is matooke (*Musa* sp), while in Kapchorwa District it is maize (*Zea mays* L). Both crops are of crucial importance as staple foods and cash income (together with coffee and passion fruits in Mbale and Sironko Districts and Irish potatoes in Kapchorwa District). Livestock is kept primarily for subsistence use, ploughing land (in Sabiny areas), and frequently serves as a ‘savings bank’.

The people of Mbale District are poor in terms of both income and human development indicators. The District has an average of one doctor per 20,734 persons, the infant mortality rate per thousand is 92 while maternal mortality rate is as high as 5,000/per 100,000 births (GoU, 2004) Income levels average only US\$1

per day (Mosely and Verschoor, 2005: 65). Although coffee production, demand for household items, and aspirations of development have integrated the region into the national economy, the area immediately neighbouring the Park is currently characterized by high population densities, land scarcity, deep poverty and physical isolation.

The low socio-economic status of the people translates into relatively limited levels of participation in governance, with Park neighbours rarely having any significant ‘voice’ in local or national politics. Little political pressure is placed on the government to construct roads, health clinics and schools or provide services in these isolated areas.⁷ The Park and its resources are an important component of local livelihood portfolios as a source of both high- and low-value resources (Table 1). There is intense pressure to convert its lower slopes for cultivation, and to ‘reclaim’ rights that were created in the 1970s and 1980s. Although collecting resources from the Park (e.g. bamboo shoots, bamboo and poles) is only legal in a small number of parishes that have signed collaborative management agreements with MENP (see later) most villages near the boundary make significant illegal use of the Park. Securing access to Park resources involves engagement both within and outside of the conservation agenda. As discussed below, a variety of covert and overt ‘weapons of the weak’ (Scott, 1985) are employed to gain and maintain access to Park resources.

TABLE 1

'PARKING' RESISTANCE AND RESISTING THE PARK

Weapons of the weak at MENP

Park neighbours have developed an impressive armoury to pursue their livelihood goals and resist the conservation agenda promoted by UWA and the staff of the National Park (Table 2). The majority of these are covert weapons. These do not publicly challenge the Park but they involve ingenuousness and /or 'hidden' activities and deals. These range from the relatively passive (feigning ignorance, not turning up for meetings, letting roads get overgrown) to much more active (bribing Park staff and moving Park boundary markers under cover of darkness). These strategies make it more difficult for Park staff to pursue Park goals and create incentives (both carrots and sticks) for them to 'turn a blind eye' when Park laws are broken.

In their daily behaviours, Park neighbours are less interested in 'changing the large structures of the state and the law', than in what Hobsbawm has appropriately termed "working the system... to their minimum disadvantage" (cited in Scott, 1985: xv). Such everyday forms of resistance stop short of outright defiance and include '...foot dragging, dissimulation, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage, and so forth' (Scott, 1985: 29; Scott, 1986: 6). These 'weapons of the weak' typically require little co-ordination or planning, make use of implicit understandings and informal social networks, and avoid any direct confrontation with authority. They represent a resistance to the conservation agenda associated with official Park management objectives, and they are able to gain Park neighbours access to Park resources on a daily basis.

However, there are also overt weapons within the armoury. These are used when Park neighbours act against the conservation agenda and operate outside of the conservation agenda (Table 2). This happened only twice during the twenty-two months of fieldwork, but earlier examples were also reported. Such weapons are used in public (open threats of violence, actual violence and taking MENP to court) and commonly involve the mobilisation of large groups, local political leaders⁸ and financial resources. These strategies seek to stop Park staff from carrying out their duties. They are high risk, as ‘neighbours’ may, for example, be beaten or punished for such actions, but they are also potentially high reward in terms of the resources that may be accessed.

Different individuals and groups use combinations of weapons that are sequenced over time: Park neighbours prefer to utilise covert weapons to achieve their goals and move to using overt weapons only as a ‘last resort’. In the sections that follow we explore the day-to-day low profile struggles that characterize most Park-people relationships; the less frequent ‘hybrid’ forms of resistance that involve a mixture of covert and overt weapons; and the rare, high profile, direct confrontations that erupt when neighbours employ overt weapons in a dramatic fashion.

TABLE 2

Day-to-day resistance: low profile, covert struggles

Covert resistance to the conservation agenda and Park authorities is the norm around Mount Elgon. At all eight of our field sites numerous examples of such resistance were recorded and these were seen as socially legitimate by villagers.

Neighbours in Ulukusi Parish, for example, passively sign agreements that legalise low-value resource access (co-operation), but do little or nothing to monitor or enforce these agreements (non-compliance with its terms and conditions). The pretence of a pragmatic resignation to the goals of the management authorities is very rational in a situation where the alternatives to such ‘nominal participation’ – often law enforcement or UPDF raids – are not attractive. Park neighbours pay small bribes to rangers in an attempt to maintain relationships that are mutually beneficial in monetary terms. In Buraba, a village located within or outside the Park (depending upon the source of information), our research could not be carried out because of a strategy of non-co-operation. For example, the local chairmen would always arrive for meetings so late that the proposed research could not be discussed as it was time for the 16 kilometres walk back down the mountainside. This strategy of non-co-operation was to maintain a low profile for outside agencies. Research might lead to the village being noticed by UWA, NGO’s or others.

Park management has responded to low-profile resistance with a two-pronged strategy that combines education and sensitisation with law enforcement. This strategy aims to increase knowledge about the benefits of conservation and reorientate value systems, whilst simultaneously asserting Park property rights and restricting all use of forest resources. Following this restriction, Park neighbours are presented with the opportunity to legally secure use rights if they actively participate in the ‘negotiation’ of collaborative management agreements, monitor implementation and report illegal activities. Park management views this strategy as one of ‘legitimised exclusion’. The process of signing agreements is therefore

induced rather than negotiated: if Park neighbours do not ‘negotiate’, all use rights will be classed as illegal by rangers. It is built on a relationship of unequal power and is not an example of partnership, co-operation, negotiation or ‘win-win’ participation built on mutual trust and respect, as is often conceptualised in normative theory and portrayed in policy documents.

Collaborative management agreements on Elgon allow for the consumptive use of wildlife⁹ if harvested at a sustainable level (GoU, 1996: 28). While MENP staff see these as a fundamental change in their management strategy, villagers have a quite different perspective as these agreements do not result in the re-negotiation of the overarching policy goal, conservation of the Park. The fundamental conflict with the preferred high income generation land use strategies (i.e. timber extraction, agriculture and grazing) of Park neighbours remains. For this reason, ‘support’ given to local institutions to handle their own affairs through collaborative management agreements is structured around institutional arrangements that severely restrict local participation.

Park management, for example, believes that the primary reason for the sub-optimal performance of collaborative management agreements is the pre/existing *de facto* open-access nature of low value Park resources. In response, MENP’s Department of Security and Law Enforcement reasserted government ownership over Park resources, thereby inducing resource scarcity and increasing perceived values of all Park resources (Interview no. 241, CPW, MENP)¹⁰. Following a period of access restriction, the Department of Community Conservation visits the parish to educate villagers on the importance of conservation and negotiate resource access

agreements; agreements that allow controlled access to a number of Park resources. Breach of agreement is responded to with a warning and/or temporary cancellation of the agreement. This was justified in the following dialogue at a parish meeting:

A Park neighbour complained:

‘Bamboo for the Bagisu is compared to fish for the Baganda – we cannot do minus them’

The Warden responded:

‘At one time people were using poison to fish, so the government banned fishing until it was rectified. So we are likewise banning bamboo collection until the situation is rectified. When people stop carrying out illegal activities in the Park we can sign an Agreement that will allow for restricted resource access.’

Warden Community Conservation, addressing Park neighbours in

Zesui, Dec. 5th 2000

The success of this strategy rests on the assumption that the activities of the Department of Security and Law Enforcement can be intensified on a sustained basis and Park neighbours coerced into the Park strategy. If successful, the *expected long-term* outcome is a significant contribution to two of UWA’s Strategic plan’s priorities ‘To optimise protected areas contribution to the welfare of neighbouring communities’, and ‘To improve relations with local communities’ (UWA 2000a: 45). The approach being taken by management is supported by research elsewhere in

Uganda. Infield and Namara (2001:58) report supportive evidence in Lake Mburo, concluding that 'community programmes require a solid platform of conventional management to be effective'. In Bwindi, Beck (2000: 225) reports that '...fear of capture at Bwindi has been a more effective deterrent than giving people a stake by allowing use as at Mt. Elgon' (also see Abbot and Mace 1999). But the assertion of law enforcement in order to generate 'successful' agreements negatively affects the relationship between Park management and neighbours because it means that at the outset of negotiations the main feeling of neighbours is resentment.

Worryingly, six per cent of all respondents to semi-structured questionnaires in Parishes that had signed collaborative management agreements believed that they would have to re-sign agreements, whether they wanted to or not. For example:

'We would like access to grazing within the forest and land for ploughing maize. However, since the government is more powerful than us even if they do not agree we must still accept the agreement.'

Interview no. 175, Park neighbour, Kortek Parish

This is indicative of the powerlessness felt by Park neighbours and their perceived (and often real) inability to challenge government policy. Participation in Park management is restricted, and room for organisation, negotiation and participation is actively tailored within the political economy of conservation.

In such situations, Park neighbours frequently appear to accept conservation whilst concurrently employing an array of covert weapons to resist any idea of

conservation hegemony and ensure participation within the conservation agenda against the conservation agenda. Apparent conformity with Park management strategies is a cover for a range of counter-hegemonic struggles that operate around the Park on a daily basis. Despite the argument that ‘Working as uncoordinated individuals, poor people simply cannot do much in the political sphere’ (Moore, 2001: 324), these actions have secured access to both low-value and high-value resources (Norgrove, 2003) that provide considerable benefits and that have undermined the conservation ideology and objectives Park managers try to impose.

Hybrid forms of resistance: combining covert and overt ‘weapons of the weak’

While the day to day struggles against the hegemony of the conservation agenda involve low profile covert resistance, more significant contestations use a hybrid armoury of covert weapons supplemented by overt weapons. The case of the Bamasobo people, seeking to maintain a right to cultivate within the Park, provides an example of such a hybrid strategy.

The boundary in Bumasobo has been under dispute since the early 1990s when the Forest Department, working in conjunction with Mount Elgon Community Development Programme (MECDP)¹¹, first attempted to retrace the Park boundary. In the mid to late 1990s, a number of further retracing attempts were made, but these were marred by widespread bribery. In addition, Bamasobo cultivators moved boundary cairns and eucalyptus trees to extend arable land further into the Park (Etengu, 2002). In the absence of global positioning system (GPS) equipment, it was difficult for MENP to assess the extent of the encroachment.

Moves to resurvey the boundary in 1999 saw the Bamasobo fabricating information. They (a Bantu people) claimed common ancestry with the Ndorobos (a Nilo-Hamitic people who live on the MENP moorlands) because the Ndorobo people had succeeded in gaining a 6,000 hectare excision of land from the park for resettlement in 1983 (Benet Resettlement Implementation Committee, 1998). They argued that this common ancestry merited the excision of the Park land that they (the Bamasobo) were cultivating (Memorandum from the residents of Bumasobo / Zanzasi of Buluganya Sub-County – Bulambuli, Mbale District to the RDC Mbale District, 8 May 1999). This strategy was unsuccessful and, in 2001, Bamasobo people began a strategy of non-co-operation to stall their eviction. They agreed to a boundary retracing exercise in formal meetings with Park officials. On the day of the exercise, however, the ten people's representatives who were to accompany the surveyors, 'rejected the idea of tracing the 1993 boundary saying it is the very boundary which they had disputed about and that it had been put in place using armed rangers and that they had never accepted it' (letter from surveyors to CPW, MP, LCV, RDC and DISO, dated 24 April 2001). As a Park ranger reported (items in brackets have been added to indicate the weapons used):

'The ten man committee said:

1. the 1993 line had been rejected [...]; (non-cooperation)
2. the 10 (ten) man committee is not ready to retrace the 1993 boundary;
(non-cooperation)
3. the surveyor should not risk crossing through people's land that they are retracing the boundary; (threat of violence)

4. and finally if Park management has failed to handle the issue of the boundary, then they (Bamasobo) should be informed to go ahead in higher offices until their problem is handled'; (support from politicians).

Source: letter from Park ranger to Warden Security and Law Enforcement,
dated 24 April 2001

Additional strategies have included token negotiations and signing of agreements, non-co-operation, poor accessibility (perhaps purposefully maintained, Interview no. 230, Park neighbour, Bumasifwa Parish), threat of violence against Park staff (pers. com. CCR North Mbale District), and use of social and political relationships. Using covert (and slightly overt) weapons, the Bamasobo have successfully expanded the realm of the possible and cultivated annual food and income-generating crops on Park land in 1999, 2000 and 2001. They have derived a significant income through this mechanism.

In 2000 the Park acquired a GPS and, after a number of discussions with local leaders, it was decided that a 'neutral' party should retrace the boundary, following which it would be checked by Park staff using GPS. The surveyors, under pressure from both Park staff and Park neighbours, marked a 'mutually acceptable' boundary located between the 'Park' and the 'community' boundaries. The Park's senior management, dissatisfied with this compromise, deployed its 'strength' to cancel the contract with the surveyors. The Bamasobo responded by further fabricating histories, challenging Park records and throwing water on the road as Park vehicles

approached (the nature of soil in this area renders passage of vehicles impossible if the road is wet). But the threat of eviction intensified. The Bamasobo mobilised social and political relationships (and perhaps used bribes) to get powerful individuals to take up their case in Kampala. A visit from UWA's top management in February 2001 led to a temporary success for Park neighbours with the prolongation of cultivation within the Park. Later in 2001, with determined Park management, a force of armed rangers were sent in to resurvey using GPS and introduce a system of phased withdrawal from Park land (a final harvesting crops followed by reforestation with native tree species).

The Bamasobo have accepted a temporary setback. However, this is the compliance of coercion (remembered and anticipated) rather than the compliance of consent and agreement. The Bamasobo are currently refraining from using overt weapons and focusing on covert weapons of ideological resistance, as the Park is slandered and its legitimacy denied on a daily basis in local conversations and meetings. They await any window of opportunity (e.g. a weakening of law and order, regime change at national level, a new Director for MENP) that will enable them to return to their 'farms' in the Park.

Open resistance and confrontation

Open, high profile confrontation between Park neighbours and staff is relatively rare. When it does occur, Park neighbours and their political leaders seek to 'induce' the Park's participation in their agenda using overt weapons that include open confrontation (including intimidation and violence), financial resources, and political and economic relationships (Table 1).

Park neighbours have frequently threatened and occasionally carried out ‘mob justice’¹² on rangers. In February 2000, for example, Park staff confiscated cows found grazing inside MENP in the Kapkwai area. Whilst the rangers were transporting 11 of these cows to Mbale town as court evidence, a group of people from Kapkwai blocked the parish access road. Stones were thrown, the vehicle ‘sabotaged’¹³, cows reclaimed, a gun ‘stolen’ and, despite firing in the air, 12 rangers and two drivers were forced to flee. In the 1990s, such actions typically saw victory for Park neighbours, inducing the Park to turn a blind-eye on illegal activities. A second documented example of violence against Park staff involved the injuring of one ranger during a frontal shooting match between Park rangers and ‘illegal’ cattle grazers (Anon, 2000a). At that time collaboration between Park management and other security forces was minimal and the Park had neither the man-power nor arms-power to retaliate. By 2000, this situation had changed through active collaboration between Park staff and the Ugandan People’s Defense Force (UPDF).

The Park management responded to the Kapkwai confrontation with the statement: 'I am quite happy that the community still have the gun because it allows us to pressure them' (pers. com. Warden Security and Law Enforcement). Newly cultivated relationships with the UPDF were drawn upon and soldiers were deployed to ‘find’ the stolen gun, terrorizing the people of Kapkwai and Upper Tegeres parishes in the process. In the face of such repressive force the Kapkwai and Tegeres people temporarily shelved their most powerful overt weapon – ‘mob justice’. However, redeployment in the future can be anticipated if the competency of management decreases and/or UPDF withdraw from the region.

A further example of open confrontation to the conservation agenda occurred in 2000. When Park management withdrew an agreement that franchise revenue from softwood timber plantations would be shared with the District authorities, District leaders took action. Kapchorwa Local Government saw the potential loss of considerable revenue. It banned all movement of softwood timber through the District and 'local political groups'¹⁴ destroyed a portion of the plantation. UWA was immediately threatened with court cases from timber concessionaires, and local leaders with stakes in the softwood plantation placed intense personal pressure on the Local Government as well as UWA, threatening to sue for lost revenue. These threats were effective and within days a statement was made to the effect that 16.7 million UgSh (US\$ 11,100) would be released by MENP (UWA, 2000), and moves were made to establish a joint bank account dedicated for revenue sharing funds in Kapchorwa District.

While open confrontation is only employed occasionally in response to particularly heated issues, almost all those involved in the illegal use of Mount Elgon acknowledge the regular use of bribes to influence Park management.¹⁵ Covert corruption and rule-breaking behaviour characterizes micro-level dynamics, whilst increasingly overt corruption (i.e. with widespread public knowledge of the bribe) is used to secure access to high value activities, such as cultivation, within the Park. This is particularly common when Park managers, rangers, and related personnel prioritize self-interest over official management goals. Surveyors and Park staff, for example, have received millions of shillings over the years from Park neighbours for marking the boundary in a 'favourable' manner (Betlem and Kahembwe, 1992;

Muhangi, 1998). When these local level pay-offs fail and stakes are high, Park neighbours will mobilize considerable funds to facilitate the development of relationships between local leaders and politically powerful people (e.g. at the Ministerial level) to aid their struggle. In 1999, for example, the Chairman LCII from Bumasobo is reported to have solicited 9.6 million UgSh (US\$ 6,400) to fight the Park over rights to land (MENP, 2000: 8). With this money he was able to successfully extend the 'grace' period during which the people could cultivate the disputed land.

Elections are periods of turmoil throughout Uganda. Around MENP, prospective candidates are used by Park neighbours as a low cost means to move from covert to overt resistance of the Park. In their search for votes, potential candidates draw upon all possible issues. For example, the Member of Parliament (MP) for North Mbale based his 2001 election campaign almost entirely on the promise of maintaining cultivation on Park land. Political candidates are therefore a relatively low cost and powerful (comparatively rich and well-connected) 'weapon'. The success of this strategy is greatest during terms of incompetent or corrupt Park management and when high-value illegal activities are threatened. When candidates who are pursuing the demands of Park neighbours meet with Park managers who are committed to conservation objectives, severe conflict often results, as there is little opportunity for compromise.

Prior to elections, candidates on the campaign run are seeking votes and can be relatively cheaply exploited to the ends of counter-hegemonic struggles. On the other hand, the use of elected political leaders as brokers is financially costly for

Park neighbours. Local communities, through a process of rough cost-benefit analysis that involves weighing up potential social, political and economic factors, generally limit large bribes to high value activities (e.g. cultivation within Park boundaries) that warrant the significant investments.

Traversing the dichotomy: park staff and self-interest

The situation around Elgon is more complicated than a clear-cut, two-sided, hegemonic – counter-hegemonic struggle between Park staff (fighting for the prevailing conservation ideology) and Park neighbours (fighting for agricultural expansion / reclamation of lost land and better livelihoods). Park neighbours and Park managers do not always concern themselves with these struggles but instead traverse the dichotomy, actively using the struggles of ‘the enemy’ to pursue self-interest (i.e. they prioritize personal financial, social, and political goals over official Park objectives or community interests).¹⁶

Around MENP, numerous examples of managerial behaviour indicate that Park staff have collaborated with the counter-hegemonic struggles of Park neighbours, breaking rules and deviating from official management objectives in order to benefit themselves. On Elgon, self-interested (and also incompetent) management has historically been extremely important to Park neighbours. The breakdown of governance that characterised the years of the Amin and Obote regimes, saw an absence of law enforcement on Mount Elgon. Neighbours moved in for cultivation, grazing and timber cutting. Both during and after this period, they harnessed the self-interest of a series of Park managers to continue illegal activities such as cultivation through bribery. The associated institutional arrangements that

prevailed under this management involved unofficial ‘fees’, negotiation, collaboration, co-operation, and occasional reprimand. The meaning of ‘conservation’ was (unofficially) renegotiated, and the relationship was ‘win-win’ for both Park neighbours and Park managers. Conservation, in both its preservationist and sustainable utilisation forms, was the loser. Corruption, reward for malpractice, reprimands for honest behaviour, and low levels of commitment to official conservation objectives, substituted for the bargaining, transparency, accountability, honesty, and commitment assumed in normative models of ‘how’ institutions should operate.

The history of conservation on Elgon indicates that in recent times moves have been made away from a ‘messy’ situation *towards* a more clearly hegemonic – counter-hegemonic dichotomy characterised by Park managers highly committed to official conservation goals.¹⁷ This, in turn, emphasises the importance of the culture of Park management and, in particular, the personal characteristics of the Chief Park Warden. The competence of Park managers committed to official objectives and the commitment of politicians to government policy, are key determinants of the outcomes of the counter-hegemonic struggles that are initiated by Park neighbours.

CONCLUSION

The management of Mount Elgon National Park, and the responses of its neighbours, have moved through a number of stages since stability came to Uganda in 1986. Under the Forest Department, access to non-timber forest resources was open and management authorities were willing to negotiate on issues such as cultivation rights within the Park. Throughout much of the 1990s, management was

incompetent and/or prioritized self-interest over official conservation objectives. Local residents employed overt and covert weapons along with co-operation and bargaining to gain access to the Park. From 2000 to 2002, Park-people relations moved towards a hegemonic – counter-hegemonic situation, as honest and competent park managers sought to incorporate Park neighbours within the conservation agenda through a two pronged strategy of law enforcement and community conservation. Park neighbours struggled to participate both within and outside of the conservation agenda against the conservation agenda. This situation is complicated by the pursuit of personal goals and bribes, an activity that sees certain individuals ‘traversing’ the hegemonic – counter-hegemonic divide. For example, ‘exclusion’ by managers who prioritize self-interest (e.g. financial, social or political gain) over conservation goals, who are incompetent managers, or who empathize with the livelihood struggles of park neighbours and turn a ‘blind eye’ to illegal activities, may be more rhetorical than practical. At the same time, a number of Park neighbours employ strategies of ‘careful compliance and calculated conformity’ (Scott, 1985: 242) to pursue maximum benefits at minimum cost. We argue that, while official MENP management strategies aim to ‘straight-jacket’ people’s participation within a conservation agenda that emphasizes preservation and asserts a hegemonic ideology (including the use of the military), counter-hegemonic struggles, calculated conformity, prioritization of self-interest, and incompetent managers all challenge any idea of a conservation hegemony.

Li (2002: 278) emphasizes that, ‘...it is important to keep questioning the hegemonic claims of environmentalism, the ways in which it threatens to delimit

discursive frameworks, define the boundaries of what is possible, and make "simple common sense" out of some partial truths, thereby legitimizing continuing inequalities in power and well-being' (also see Brosius, 1999: 278). Only in this manner are researchers and practitioners able to delve behind hegemonic claims made by conservationists and Park managers, and explore counter-hegemonic struggles and the real practice of management. Around Elgon, it is evident that on a day to day basis Park neighbours continue to use low-profile strategies, harness the incompetence and self-interest of brokers and some park guards, and circumvent formal structures to expand the realm of the possible, and maintain their claims over Park resources. High value uses warrant the use of 'overt' weapons, active aggregation of interests and substantial co-ordinated action on behalf of Park neighbours. Other studies from Uganda (Infield and Namara, 2001) indicate that such processes may be a generalised response to the participatory management strategies that have been introduced.

Employing these 'weapons of the weak', Park neighbours utilize all available political spaces (often outside conservation policies) in the constant renegotiation of their relationship with the Ugandan government and MENP management authorities. These strategies have maintained access to Park resources and, in certain areas around the Park, legitimized the presence of Park neighbours in the Park and consolidated their hold over Park resources, even if on an irregular and temporary basis. Complex and informal social networks, rather than formal institutional arrangements, predominate.¹⁸ The argument made in this paper moves beyond the idealization and essentialization of civil society and simplistic statist notions that

have projected a myth of the state as a cohesive entity (Houtzager, 2004: 21) and recognizes that Park management is an active battle site between Park management authorities, who resist the preferred land use strategies of Park neighbours, and Park neighbours, who struggle against the preservationist thrust of the conservation agenda.

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ABBREVIATIONS

CPW	Chief Park Warden
FD	Forestry Department
GoU	Government of Uganda
GPS	Global positioning system
LCI	Local Council I (village)
LCII	Local Council II (parish)
MECDP	Mount Elgon Environmental Conservation Project
MENP	Mount Elgon National Park
NORAD	Norwegian Development Agency
PPA	Participatory poverty assessment
PRS	Poverty reduction strategy
UNP	Uganda National Parks (to 1996)
UPDF	Uganda People's Defence Force
UWA	Uganda Wildlife Authority (after 1996)

Table 1: Local livelihood portfolios and Park resources

Use	Resource type
Nutrition and income	Fungi
	Fruits
	Honey
	Flowers
	Bush meat
	Leafy greens
	Bamboo shoots
Health and income	Medicinal resources
Agriculture and income	Fodder
	Grazing*
	Crops stakes
	<i>Matooke</i> supports
	Land for cultivation*
Household use and income	Ropes
	Withers
	Firewood
	Bamboo
	(construction and basket making)
	Timber*
	(construction, carpentry, beehive construction)
Income	Tourism
Cultural and spiritual	Employment
	<i>Musambwa</i>
	Circumcision sites
Other	Resources for ceremonies
	Water
	Recreation and education

* Financially high-value resources

Table 2: The armoury: ‘weapons of the weak’ employed by MENP neighbours and their goals¹

Weapon	Goal
Defer to Park management	Develop or maintain a positive image with MENP staff, thereby reducing attention from the Department of Security and Law Enforcement
Feigned ignorance	Delay resolution of disputes with MENP so that they incur high transaction costs
Tell false oral histories	Future excision of Park land because of ancestral claims
Make up ‘bad’ stories about rangers (ideological resistance)	Create an image of rangers as inhuman so their actions are seen as illegitimate (e.g. ‘Rangers love animals more than people’ and inferences of bestiality).
Feigned compliance (e.g. sign an agreement but not comply with it)	Obscure the scale of illegal resource extraction
Passive co-operation	Legalize low value resource access through the signing of (without subscribing to) ‘collaborative management’ agreements
Avoidance or non-co-operation	Do not turn up at Community Conservation meetings, look displeased in meetings
Leave roads and paths in poor condition	Make it difficult for MENP staff to enforce Park Laws
Small bribes to MENP staff	Maintain mutually beneficial relationships that facilitate rule-breaking and illegal access to resources
Moving Park boundary markers	Extend cultivation into the Park through deception
Large bribes to MENP staff	Mobilize officials to draw on personal social and political capital in the fight to continue practicing illegal activities in the Park. Park management turns a ‘blind eye’ to economically significant illegal activities
Legal challenges	Get Park to back down to avoid costly process
Voting and Mobilising Support from Politicians	Mobilize officials, particularly election candidates, to draw on their personal social, political and financial capital in the fight to continue illegal activities in the Park
Control that District level Politicians have over District resources	Assert leverage associated political power to force the Park to concede to local demands
Threat of violence	Generate fear amongst Park staff so they do not enforce laws
Violence against people and property	Stop park staff from enforcing the law

¹ The Table starts with the most covert and runs down to the most overt. It should be noted that this categorization is not static and covert weapons can become overt weapons, for example, with increased guard knowledge of the actions of park neighbours.

Source: Adapted from Norgrove (2003)

NOTES

¹ Protected areas cover around 13.2 million km², or more than 8.8 per cent, of the earth's land surface.

² Part neighbours are defined as families or individuals who live in areas bordering the protected area and / or exercise direct use of the protected area and its resources. Specifically, the example in this paper, refers to people living in the parishes that border Mount Elgon National Park in Uganda.

³ Many writers have pointed out that communities are usually heterogeneous and may have varying ideas about conservation and resource use (Agrawal 1997; Agrawal and Gibson 1999; Adams and Hulme, 2001; Li 2002).

⁴ In this paper, 'overt' resistance refers to actions taken by park neighbours against the traditional conservation ideology that are directly evident to Park management; 'covert' resistance refers to actions taken against the traditional conservation ideology that are falsehoods (e.g. signing agreements not to extract resources and then secretly extracting resources) or that are hidden because they are conscious 'inactions' (e.g. not repairing roads so that rangers do not visit areas). It is possible that 'covert' resistance becomes 'overt' in nature, for example, when Park guards receive additional information relating to the secret extraction of Park resources following the signing of agreements not to extract resources with Park management.

⁵ This paper is based on research for a PhD (Norgrove, 2003). In the 22-month period spent in the field, the initial twelve months of research were carried out in a selection of four primary and four secondary study sites neighbouring MENP. A multi-round household survey, ethnographic techniques, and semi-structured interviewing were used to investigate the lives of Park neighbours, their use of Park resources, and all other issues relating to the management of the Park and its resources. Subsequently, ten months were spent with Park staff and local politicians where participant observation and numerous discussions were employed, alongside a series of structured and semi-structured interviews, to develop an understanding of managerial philosophy and the politics underpinning park management strategies. This combination of methodological techniques enabled an in-depth investigation of the multiple facets of park management, claims to Mount Elgon and Park resources and strategies used to assert these claims.

⁶ Revenue sharing refers to the park authority giving a fixed percentage of its income from entrance fees and charges on visitors to park neighbours.

⁷ For example, in the Bumualakani area in 2000 the only public services reaching villages were occasional visits from healthworkers to vaccinate children. When asked about this state of affairs villagers shrugged their shoulders and reported that decades ago agricultural extension workers and health clinics had visited regularly – but that was long ago!

⁸ And sometimes national level figures and members of Parliament.

⁹ There are great limitations on what can be harvested. Most agreements only permit the harvesting of bamboo shoots (this has cultural significance for the Bagisu) and the collection of traditional medicines. Taking animals and timber is not permitted.

¹⁰ For full details of interviews see Norgrove (2003).

¹¹ The Mount Elgon Conservation and Development Project (MECDP) is a NORAD-financed project that was active on Mount Elgon between 1990 and 2002, with technical assistance from the IUCN (Sjoholm *et al*: 1998). The goal of MECDP was to: 'Safeguard the Mt. Elgon ecosystem for the benefit of present and future generations' (Source: MECDP, briefing note 1998). MECDP used to be managed as an autonomous NGO but was latterly integrated into MENP. Whilst initially activities focussed on environmental education, law enforcement and out-of-park sustainable development activities, since 1996, the project refocused its activities to support the production of district environmental plans and the development of collaborative management agreements in two pilot parishes (1995/96) (Hoefsloot, 1996: 2-3). Collaborative management agreements would provide Park neighbours with limited access to selected Park resources. In return for access rights, Park neighbours would agree to harvest sustainably. A linkage would thus be established between the sustainability of use (and therefore conservation) and licit improvements in rural livelihoods (in the form of the selected Park resources). Pilot agreements were signed in 1996. At the same time, seminars, training workshops, and recruitment of community conservation rangers strengthened community conservation capacity within MENP.

¹² Terminology used by Park neighbours to describe a situation where a group of Park neighbours use threats of violence / violence to prevent Park staff from carrying out official management duties.

¹³ Terminology used by Park rangers.

¹⁴ We were unable to ascertain the forces driving the actions of the ‘local political groups’

¹⁵ The use of bribes in all spheres of activity in Uganda is common. Transparency International ranks Uganda as one of the most corrupt countries in the world.

¹⁶ Baviskar (2004) has similar findings for a participatory resource management programme in India. ‘Villagers and lower-level bureaucrats bring diverse agendas and perspectives to development projects, co-opting new institutions and assimilating them into ongoing individual and collective projects of social survival and gain’ (ibid: 26).

¹⁷ This is not to suggest that all Park staff have stopped taking bribes, nor that villagers no longer seek to do ‘deals’ with rangers.

¹⁸ See Mahanty (2002) for an analysis of the networks around an ecodevelopment project in India.