

IN THE AFTERMATH OF DISPLACEMENT:
A POLITICAL ECOLOGY OF DISPOSSESSION, TRANSFORMATION, AND CONFLICT ON
MT. ELGON, UGANDA

by

DAVID KARL HIMMELFARB

(Under the Direction of J. Peter Brosius)

ABSTRACT

Through the lens of political ecology, this dissertation examines the long-term legacy of displacement and resettlement on the edge of Mt. Elgon National Park. In 1983, the Ugandan Forest Department resettled 30,000 people in a forested area they called the Benet Resettlement Area. In the three decades since, the area has become home to some of the most severe poverty, highest levels of illiteracy and food insecurity, and most intense soil and water degradation in the region. At the same time, some residents have banded together in novel ways and experimented with new technologies to cope with periodic crises and take advantage of new opportunities. The resettlement area has also become the site of intense conflict that has pitted resident against national park manager and resident against resident. Over the past decade, leaders have used claims of indigeneity to secure government recognition of individualized land rights for the residents of the resettlement area. Nevertheless, conflict and insecurity have persisted as national park managers have

redoubled their efforts to stamp out encroachment and claim what they perceive as their territory.

The political ecological perspective adopted here shows how these particular opportunities and constraints came to be as dynamic conjunctures of ecological, cultural, social, political, and economic processes at local, regional, national, and international scales. The Benet case demonstrates how displacement and resettlement are transformative processes that create new relations of production, which then shape how affected individuals negotiate future political economic change and crisis. In the moving of people, allocation of land, and enclosure of common pool resources, forced migration made tenure security a new and vitally important component of livelihoods, expressed both in people's decisions and how they think about place. Yet, since the 1990s, protected area managers and their government supporters have enacted formal policies and informal practices that have promoted tenure insecurity, imperiling livelihoods throughout the resettlement area. This research demonstrates that within the economic system enacted by resettlement, tenure security has become an essential precondition for residents to move forward out of the shadow of forced migration and toward more viable and sustainable livelihoods.

INDEX WORDS: Forced migration, livelihoods, environmental conservation, political ecology, indigenous movements, Sabiny, Mt. Elgon, Uganda

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DAVID KARL HIMMELFARB
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Major Professor: J. Peter Brosius
Committee: Lisa C. Cliggett
Ted L Gragson
Bram Tucker

Electronic Version Approved:

Maureen Grasso
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
August 2012

DEDICATION

For my grandfather, David Himmelfarb, whose own dissertation research was snatched from him on the IRT.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Introduction: Getting up on Mt. Elgon¹

On my first morning on Mt. Elgon, I awoke to the sounds of dogs fighting. It was just before dawn and the sky was just starting to turn from cobalt to grey with the light of the new day. A cold wind carried the smells of wood smoke and wet earth in through the gaps in the louvered window. I had arrived at the half-built, cinder block hotel on the outskirts of Kapchorwa town late the night before from Kampala. Darkness had already fallen by the time that Vincent, a genial driver for the World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF), and I reached the base of the mountain. The steep incline of the tarmac switchbacks and the fleeting glimpses of plantain groves, closed-up shop fronts, and tethered cattle illuminated in the dim halo of the truck's headlights provided only hints at the terrain. As the truck engine strained against a particularly steep stretch, Vincent pointed out an ominous break in the guardrail where a bus full of soldiers had recently plunged, killing more than 30 people. When we finally reached the hotel, Vincent helped me unload my bag, yawned, and got right back in the truck to drive the six hours back to Kampala, leaving me alone in the glare of a single fluorescent light. With a vague feeling of unease, I remember asking myself what I thought I was doing there. What did I know about Mt. Elgon anyway?

¹ The title and structure of this section allude to "Chapter 2: Getting Down in the Valley" of Cliggett's (2005) *Grains from Grass*.

At that point, the answer was not much at all. For some, the choice of a research location is clear; they enter graduate school with a clear vision of where they want to work and whom they want to work with. For others, like myself, the waters can be a bit murkier. I began with a general topical interest—conflict between local people and national park managers—applicable to just about any region of the world and selected equatorial Africa for no better reason than there were plenty of national parks and, at least by popular news accounts, plenty of conflict. Earlier that year (2005), Diane Russell, then a Senior Scientist at ICRAF, suggested that I use the small grant the organization had given me to document a land conflict between “the indigenous Benet people” and the managers of Mt. Elgon National Park that had gone on for over a decade and claimed the lives of several villagers. When I began my work in 2005, community leaders were just beginning to connect to networks of NGOs and activists beyond Uganda and were looking for a student researcher to help communicate their story to a wider audience. My preliminary library and Internet searches yielded frustratingly little on the Benet. I found no mention of them in print and only a brief mention of their struggle for land rights in an obscure online indigenous rights newsletter.

That first morning, once I could be reasonably sure that the dogfight had moved on, I stepped out of my room to an astounding panorama. The derelict hotel sat on the edge of a cliff, facing west. The morning sun lent a gold patina to the small, neatly arranged patches of maize, *matooke* (a type of plantain), coffee, and cabbages that extended out to the margins of the mountain’s lowest escarpments. On the horizon, the flat expanse of Lake Kyoga seemed to hover like an optical illusion atop the plains. The peace of the morning seemed at odds with the violence of the conflict I had come to study. My first meeting was

with Francis Alinyo, a broad-faced man from the resettlement area, who had been working on the local land rights campaign for the international NGO, ActionAid. He spent several hours with me tracing out the complexities of the conflict as he understood it, describing a bewildering array of community actors, NGOs, government organizations, internal rivalries and conflicts, victories and setbacks. Francis, and the other NGO workers and community activists, I spoke with in those first few days, framed the community land claims as a struggle for indigenous rights. Yet, the situation they described and the demands sought, diverged from the well-publicized indigenous struggles of the Americas, where the separation between original inhabitants and colonial migrants is more straightforward (though often contested). In the Benet Resettlement Area, leaders were not seeking collective control over a specific territory they had historically occupied for the continuation of a historic way of life in the manner of many other indigenous movements (see Niezen 2003). While increased access to protected resources may have been welcome, the activists I spoke with focused on gaining secure individualized tenure rights on behalf of a resettled population for the pursuit of intensive, semi-subsistence agricultural production. As I began to talk with residents of the resettlement area about their lives and the challenges of getting by, it became increasingly clear to me that the nature of the park-people conflict—the ways local farmers and activists articulated their claims and counter-claims—could not be understood outside of the social, economic, ecological, and political transformations wrought by displacement and resettlement. What follows in this dissertation is less a study of a social movement than an ethnography of profound change—of how people have made new lives, however precarious, in the aftermath of displacement.

An Overview of the Benet Resettlement Area Case

Comprised of approximately 7500 hectares on the edge of Mt. Elgon National Park, the Benet Resettlement Area is home to more than 30,000 displaced and resettled ethnically Sabinu agro-pastoralists. The population includes people from the upper regions of the mountain displaced by the managers of the protected area, people from the northern plains displaced by violent cattle raiding, and others from the mountain's central escarpment who fled land shortage and limited economic opportunities.² In 1983, during a brief period of political stability between civil wars, the Ugandan Forest Department, then in charge of the protected area encircling the upper third of the mountain, undertook a permanent resettlement initiative in which they allocated parcels of forest land to nearly 3000 household heads for intensive agricultural cultivation. Even by accounts of the Forest Department staff responsible for the exercise and later national park managers, the resettlement was hasty, poorly planned, underfunded, and corrupt (UWA 2000; UWA and GoU 2010). When considered against the "best practices" for involuntary resettlement suggested by the World Bank (2004), the resettlement exercise in Benet appears like a list of what not to do. Extensive planning and forewarning, a detailed understanding of pre-displacement livelihoods and social organization, sufficient compensation for resources lost, the creation of new economic opportunities, meaningful local participation—practices seen as the minimum needed to stave off at least some of the impoverishment risks created by forced relocation (see Cernea 1997; Cernea and McDowell 2000; de Wet 2006)—were all conspicuously absent from the Benet resettlement exercise. The Forest Department resettled households regardless of historical social ties, scattering extended families and

² This final group also includes a small group of well-connected individuals, who were able to leverage their positions to acquire land from the government.

historically tight-knit communities across the landscape. While the population from the central escarpment was accustomed to intensive montane agriculture, the new system of production brought about by displacement and resettlement represented a major change for the populations from the plains and uplands, both of which had depended on semi-mobile pastoralism as the core of their livelihoods portfolios. With no assistance beyond the allocated land, men and women had to negotiate new strategies for survival amidst a new set of natural resources with little recourse to previous lands or social ties.

For the first years following resettlement, resettled households made the best of their changed situation. They worked hard to clear the lands they were allotted for cultivation and made some use of forest and grassland resources, which were officially under protection but ineffectually policed due to political upheaval. Continued access to grazing lands, building materials, wild foods, and medicines softened the transition to intensive agriculture, but did not last for long. The rise of President Yoweri Museveni and the National Resistance Movement in 1986 ushered in a new era in conservation policy, thanks in large measure to the involvement of international institutions such as United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the World Bank, and others. Flush with donor funds, the new government dramatically increased the area under strict protection. Forest reserves such as Semliki and Mt. Elgon were regazetted as national parks, a legal status that precluded human settlement and effectively cut off local access to protected resources. To reestablish control over the new parks, the parastatal management organization responsible, Uganda National Parks (UNP, later to become the Uganda Wildlife Authority—UWA), adopted a militaristic approach

common to many such institutions around the world. On Mt. Elgon, use of in-park resources, however central to local livelihoods, became a highly risky endeavor. Rangers began impounding cattle, confiscating tools, imposing fines, and caning villagers found within the boundaries of the park. Several cases of rape and murder were also reported. As a corollary to the increased protectionism, the new managers turned their attention to boundary marking. When they re-measured the boundary between the park and the Benet Resettlement Area in 1993, they found that the Forest Department had allocated more than 7500 ha instead of the intended 6000 ha. Park managers drew a new boundary directly through the resettlement area (known locally as the 1993 line), reclaiming the upper 1500 ha for the national park and branding the people who lived there, “illegal encroachers.” Over night, roughly 6000 men, women, and children, who had invested great effort and resources clearing and planting the 1500 ha were told the land no longer belonged to them and they would have to relocate once more—this time without an allocation of land. The drawing of the new boundary affected the distribution of social services in the 1500 ha of contested land. Because they were considered illegal occupants of national park land, residents there were considered ineligible for government education, road construction, health services, and agricultural extension. Schools and clinics were closed and roads left to disintegrate.

Both villagers and local governmental officials vehemently protested the new boundary, eventually securing a Parliamentary order calling on park managers not to forcibly evict any residents until the dispute could be resolved. In response to continued threats and surveillance, community leaders, with support of national and international NGOs, sued the Uganda Wildlife Authority and the central government for recognition of

their land rights. The lawsuit, which dragged on for several years, culminated in a 2005 consent judgment or settlement. The judgment, recognized as a historical precedent by national and international human rights groups, recognized the “Benet Community” as “indigenous and historical residents” with legitimate claim to the contested 1500 ha of land. Despite the judgment and public fanfare that followed, there has been no progress officially degazetting the contested area from the national park by the time of this writing (June 2012). Park managers continue to insist that the land is national park and the pervasive sense of insecurity that has defined the lives of people above the 1993 boundary has continued unabated.

The Complexities of Identity Categories in the Benet Resettlement Area

Anthropologists have long observed the fluid and political nature of identity (see Barth 1969), the complexity of which has often proved a challenge to researchers seeking to make sense of social behavior and organization. In the Benet Resettlement Area, the negotiation of identity categories has been a central point of contention in the conflict between residents of the Benet Resettlement Area and national park managers. Community leaders, residents, researchers, NGO staff, and government officials have employed a confusing array of overlapping identity categories to describe the people living on the northern side of Mt. Elgon and, more specifically, those who have relocated to the resettlement area. As explored in more depth in Chapter 5, there have been political advantages and disadvantages to identifying with or being identified as a member of certain categories. Those benefits and costs have fluctuated over time as the political terrain has shifted. For the sake of clarity, I will provide an overview of the major identity

categories that have been used in recent decades. It is important to note that the meanings of many of these categories are constantly challenged and in flux.

The range of labels fall into two broad categories: those of exogenous origin (coming from the outside) and those of endogenous origin (coming from the communities themselves). Exogenous terms include *Kalenjin*, *Sebei*, and *Ndorobo* or *Dorobo*. *Kalenjin* has been used by linguists (see Ehret 1971) to describe a Nilotic language family, which includes a number of mostly Kenyan ethnic groups. The Sabiny people of northern Mt. Elgon represent the only Ugandan member of the *Kalenjin* language family. Over the latter half of the twentieth century, *Kalenjin* has become an important political identity in Kenyan national politics (Lynch 2011), though this has not been the case in Uganda. *Sebei* is the ethnonym used by government administrators and other outsiders to refer to the ethnic group that has historically dominated the northern side of Mt. Elgon as well as a toponym to refer to their territory. Goldschmidt, one of the few ethnographers to work in the area, uses the term *Sebei* because of its wide recognition at the time of his research (1976:11), though he acknowledges that it is a “corruption” of the locally-used term, *Sabiny* or *Sapiñ* (his orthography).³ *Ndorobo*, a term of Maa-derivation, has been used to refer to the people who historically occupied the upper slopes of the Mt. Elgon and other upland forests in Kenya and practiced hunting and gathering as a main component of their livelihoods. Colonial administrators and early ethnographic writers often spoke of *Ndorobo* as distinct tribal or ethnic groups (see Hopley 1903; Johnston 1902) despite the fact that different *Ndorobo* communities were often more closely related culturally and linguistically to their neighboring non-*Ndorobo* groups than other so-called *Ndorobo* in other regions, reflecting

³ In this dissertation, I use the term *Sabiny* instead of *Sebei* because it was the term used by research participants to describe themselves.

more the colonial desire to define discrete tribal units than to describe any kind of cultural reality on the ground. The term has often carried derogatory connotations, implying primitivity and backwardness linked to the hunting and gathering mode of production many of these communities practiced. Over the last decade, Ndorobo has increasingly been used by various actors as a synonym for indigenous or to signify original or historic inhabitation with the intent to bolster land claims.

Of the endogenous terms, Sabiny is the most inclusive, used to refer to all speakers of the Kupsabiny language. With only a few exceptions, all research participants identified as Sabiny. The people I spoke with noted further divisions based on place of origin and other social attributes such as patrilineal clan, and religion. Benet, Yatui, and Kapsekek—all place names in the upper region of the mountain—have been used to refer to the people who were born in or inhabited those areas prior to displacement. Benet, in particular, was the name of one of the largest pre-displacement upland communities and was the name given to the resettlement area by the forest department. Over time, the term Benet has been used with varying inclusivity to refer to people from the original place known as Benet, to all people who came from the upland forest-grasslands as a whole, and more recently as in the 2005 consent judgment, to all residents of the resettlement area irrespective of their place of origin. Finally, the Sabiny concepts of *mosop* (up-mountain) and *soi* (down-mountain) are locally significant in day-to-day identity discourse. In my observation, *mosop* and *soi* were the most common adjectives used to describe people, places, and things in or from other areas. The adjectives are relational to the speaker, meaning that *mosop* and *soi* have no fixed boundaries aside from the extreme high and low points of the mountain (there can be no places higher up on the mountain than its summit

and no lower place than its base). However, these terms too have become politicized over the course of the past two decades of land conflict. When park managers promised new land allocations to select upland communities in exchange for support, *mosop* and *soi* categories took on new significance. These actions created incentives for people to identify as *mosop* and differentiate themselves from *soi* populations, creating new hard and fast boundaries between categories that were once relative and flexible.

Forced Migration Studies: A Fractured Intellectual Landscape

In the words of Elizabeth Colson, forced migration “hurts”(1971:1). More than six decades of research on the subject has documented the tremendous suffering people experience when they are driven from their homes and compelled to continue on in another location. Much of the pain stems from the multi-dimensional changes that displacement and resettlement bring about in the fundamental social and ecological structures in which people make their lives. Oliver-Smith (2010:10-11) writes that “Resettlement imposes forces and conditions on people that may completely transform their lives, evoking profound changes in environment, in productive activities, in social organization and interaction, in leadership and political structure, and worldview and ideology.” War, natural disasters, industrial development, and the establishment of conservation areas are just a few of the many forces that drive millions of people from their homes each year. Cernea (2000) estimates that during the 1990s over 100 million people worldwide were involuntarily displaced by large-scale development projects alone. By any standard, the scale of forced migration is staggering. Despite the establishment of international standards and guidelines promising “displacement with development” (see

World Bank 2004), the vast majority of resettlement exercises have resulted in tremendous misery and stress (Bartolomé et al. 2000; de Wet 2009; Oliver-Smith 2009c). As the traumas of displacement and resettlement have continued to define the experiences of countless households from American urban centers to the most rural regions of sub-Saharan Africa, forced migration and its long-term consequences have emerged as critical foci for social research (Castles 2003; Cernea and McDowell 2000; Oliver-Smith 2009c).

Two Orders of Fragmentation

Several authors have observed that the sprawling literature on forced migration has gravitated more toward conceptual fragmentation than theoretical holism (Button 2009; Cernea 1990, 1996; Muggah 2003; Oliver-Smith 1996; Turton 2006). The variety of terms used to describe the experiences of forced migration, many of which were crafted to make legal distinctions between categories of people (i.e. refugee vs. internally displaced person) or soften the political charge of a concept (i.e. involuntary resettlement vs. forced eviction), have contributed to such fragmentation. In the literature, the first order of fragmentation has been between the study refugees (displacees who cross international boundaries) and that of internally displaced people (displacees who remain within their home nation) (Black 2001; Cernea 1990, 1996). The former has tended to focus on international legal frameworks and rights provisions (Black 2001), while the latter has further fragmented into separate literatures by cause of displacement (Muggah 2003). The categories researchers have generally employed to describe internal displacement are 1) conflict-induced, 2) environmentally-induced, and 3) development-induced (Oliver-Smith and

Hansen 1982).⁴ Such categories have been analyzed separately, with little comparison or synthesis across the categories (Button 2009; Dwivedi 2002; Muggah 2003). To an extent, such separation has been justified; the nature of displacement can greatly influence the opportunities or constraints available to displacees. For victims of war or natural disasters, returning home may remain a possibility, while people displaced by dam construction or mining have no way to return to lands permanently submerged under reservoirs or hollowed out from the earth. Furthermore, Muggah (2003) observes that conflict- and environmentally-induced forced migration often happen with a degree of spontaneity, whereas development-induced forced migration must involve some kind of advanced planning or at least forewarning. Advanced notice opens the possibility of—though does not guarantee—planned resettlement. The further one gets from the displacement event, however, the greater the similarity in experience between people forced out by different processes (Button 2009).

As the number of protected areas has increased exponentially over the last three decades, environmental conservation has become an increasingly significant contributor to global forced migration (Agrawal and Redford 2007; Chatty and Colchester 2002; Cernea and Schmidt-Soltau 2003; Dowie 2009; Geisler 2003).⁵ Because conservation policy has been a major force of the displacement and resettlement on Mt. Elgon, conservation-forced migration warrants some separate attention here. Numerous researchers of conservation have shown how the drive to establish strictly protected areas free from human use or

⁴ The authors in Oliver-Smith's (2009a) edited volume prefer the term *forced* instead of *induced* because it draws attention to the violence inherent in all displacement

⁵ In the literature, conservation-induced displacement and resettlement is sometimes lumped in with other forms of development-induced displacement and resettlement (as in Oliver-Smith 2009b and Cernea and Schmidt-Soltau 2003) and other times seen as a distinct phenomenon (as in Dowie 2009 and Geisler 2003).

influence, an approach sometimes known as “Fortress Conservation,” rests on a philosophical divide between humans and nature (Adams and McShane 1992; Brockington 2002; Neumann 1998). The national park model, the template for the many contemporary protected areas worldwide, was born in Wyoming on March 1, 1872 with the establishment of Yellowstone National Park (Borgerhoff Mulder and Copolillo 2005: 15-16; Chatty and Colchester 2002; Stevens 1997). In an act signed by President Ulysses S. Grant, more than two million acres of land were “reserved and withdrawn from settlement, occupancy or sale...and set apart as a public park or pleasuring ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the people” (United States Statutes at Large 1872, cited in Nash 1967:108). The Yellowstone model, with its roots in 19th century romantic philosophy, which celebrated the inherent value of untouched “Nature,” embodied the spirit of strict protectionism: “all timber, mineral deposits, natural curiosities, or wonders within said park [were to be preserved]...in their natural condition” (United States Statutes at Large 1872, cited in Nash 1967:108). The creation of Yellowstone prohibited human settlement and denied numerous Native American populations access to resources within the gazetted area. As a result, the US military evicted thousands of Bannock, Crow, Sheepeater and Shoshone Native Americans, who had a significant historic role in shaping the presumably “natural” Yellowstone landscape (Morrison 1993, cited in Chatty and Colchester 2004:3). From the very beginning, forced migration has been a central element of the establishment of protected areas and the creation of wilderness. Following Oliver-Smith (2009b), I would argue that it is imperative to consider the ways the underlying philosophy of protectionism has been used to justify forced migration as well as how it has shaped conflicts between park managers and the people they displace and resettle.

The “Reformist-Managerial Approach” to Forced Migration Studies

The most prominent approach to the study of forced migration has been described as the “reformist-managerial approach”(Dwivedi 2002:712) and is perhaps best exemplified in the work of Michael Cernea and colleagues (1997, 2000; Cernea and Guggenheim 1993; Cernea and McDowell 2000). In the 1990s, Cernea (1997, 2000), a development sociologist for the World Bank, developed the most widely employed model for analyzing forced migration, the Impoverishment Risks and Reconstruction (IRR) model. Based on a comprehensive review of empirical case studies of displacement and resettlement from around the world, Cernea’s (1997) model (discussed in more detail in Chapter 4) identifies eight categories of impoverishment risks that result from forced migration: landlessness, joblessness, homelessness, marginalization, increased morbidity and mortality, food insecurity, loss of access to common property, and social disarticulation. Understanding the “anatomy” of resettlement failures, Cernea argues, enables development practitioners to design resettlement initiatives that avoid or mitigate these commonly observed negative effects. Such an approach views displacement as an inevitable, if regrettable result of development. In so doing, it tacitly accepts development, as it has been enacted through large-scale international institutions such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, as a necessary force for the promotion of human wellbeing and the collective good. In this view, the goal should be to minimize the damage of development, which has meant seeking to build better resettlement mechanisms such as the World Bank Operational Statement 4.12 (World Bank 2004).

To date, research in the IRR vein has done an excellent job providing an organizational framework for the articulation of the economic hardships and economic risks immediately caused by displacement and resettlement. While it represents an important and highly useful contribution to the literature, such a perspective presents several limitations for a nuanced anthropological understanding of forced relocation (Dwivedi 2002; Scudder 2009). First, such a perspective tends to portray forced relocation synchronically—as events isolated in time and space. Research, especially the work carried out under the aegis of the Gwembe Tonga Research Program, has shown that forced migration is a process that unfolds over a long period of time (Cliggett et al. 2007; Colson 1971; Scudder and Colson 1982; Thomas and Adams 1999). Research on disasters has made several important contributions that suggest the importance of a processual perspective in examining the effects of and responses to crises (Bankoff 2004; Blaikie et al. 1994; Oliver-Smith 1996; Watts and Bohle 1993). The concept of vulnerability, the lack of an individual or group's capacity to predict, respond and recover from a crisis event (Blaikie et al. 1994:9), has been central to contextualizing and explaining the aftermath of disaster events (Bankoff 2004; Blaikie et al. 1994; Oliver-Smith 1996; Watts and Bohle 1993). These scholars describe vulnerability as the confluence of social, political, economic, historical, and ecological processes wherein power and resource access are distributed unevenly across individuals and organizations, resulting in differential impacts of crisis events. This work on disasters calls attention to a second drawback of the managerialist approach, namely how the emphasis on income effects has led to an economic reductionism that overlooks the political, ecological, social, and cultural dimensions of forced migration (de Wet 2006a; Downing and Garcia-Downing 2009; Koenig 2006; Oliver-

Smith 2006). Such economic reductionism is evident in the disproportionate emphasis placed on the more easily quantifiable categories of impoverishment risks like homelessness or joblessness over the complex social categories like marginalization and social disarticulation (de Wet 2009). Processes of forced migration, including post-resettlement recovery (or lack thereof), do not play out in a microeconomic vacuum, but rather in complex social and ecological contexts, characterized by shifting power relations across multiple scales. Finally, in presenting the problem from a top-down, planners-eye view, the managerialist approach tends to paint resettlers as passive victims (Agrawal and Redford 2007; Dwivedi 2002; Malkki 1995; Oliver-Smith 2010). While understandable, considering the severe disempowerment and marginalization of many displaced and resettled populations, such an orientation ignores the active role resettlers play in building new lives and livelihoods as well as resisting the conditions of forced relocation (Beazley 2009; Dwivedi 1999; Haug 2002; Oliver-Smith 2006, 2010).

Toward a Political Ecology of Forced Migration

Political Ecology: Currents and Concepts

In light of these limitations and the fragmented nature of the scholarship, a growing number of scholars have begun to call for a more synthetic approach to the study of forced migration (Button 2009; Oliver-Smith 2009c). In this dissertation, I argue that a political ecological perspective can help to broaden the scope of forced migration studies and address the dominant managerialist approach's ahistoricity, economic reductionism, and its lack of agency. Before delving more specifically into how political ecology can contribute to the study of forced migration, it is necessary to examine the main currents and concepts

of political ecology. Political ecology refers to a diverse field of academic inquiry that has coalesced since the 1970s primarily within the disciplines of Anthropology and Geography, concerning the political, ecological, economic, and social dynamics of human-environment relations. Despite the profusion of unique definitions, topical foci, and genealogies for the field (see Blaikie and Brookfield 1987; Greenberg and Park 1994; Peet and Watts 1996),⁶ Robbins (2004) observes that most proponents and practitioners present political ecology, at heart, as an attempt to understand human-environment interactions through historical, political, ecological, economic, social, and cultural contextualization.

Early proponents of political ecology sought to link ecological change with political-economic forces operating at different scales. Land user behavior on the landscape, such authors averred, is mediated by a variety of political-economic asymmetrical relationships with markets and the state. Perhaps the most influential of these early authors were Piers Blaikie and Harold Brookfield. In their seminal work, *Land Degradation and Society* (1987), Blaikie and Brookfield argue that bringing together cultural ecology with Marxist political economy can provide a more comprehensive understanding of human-environment relations than either field had been able to provide independently. Consistent with Watts' (1983) earlier critique of cultural ecology, Blaikie and Brookfield advance a view of rural communities, not as bounded self-regulating isolates, but as collections of individual land users enmeshed within webs of political-economic relations. Blaikie and Brookfield operate with a broad conception of political economy, in which the environment is not merely a collection of resources that supply production. Humans and the biophysical environment,

⁶ Because political ecology draws from so many disciplines and subdisciplines (Dove 2001), each political ecological framework is bound to differ. While some scholars have seen this as a drawback, I argue that the heterogeneity of political ecology better suits the field to grapple with an array of complex and heterogeneous phenomena.

they maintain, are dialectically linked. That is, human productive activity changes the nature of the biophysical environment, which, in turn, influences the range of opportunities for future human activity in a dynamic feedback loop.

Neumann (2005:42) points out that the work of Blaikie and Brookfield and other early political ecologists was based on three analytical and methodological precepts. The first is the primacy of a historical perspective. Historical analysis, they argued, is the key to understanding the extent of environmental change, shedding light on the formation of geographical, social, and political relations that influence the direction of environmental change. The second is the necessity of carrying out analyses on multiple geographical scales. The relations that influence place-specific land user behavior and environmental change operate on a variety of geographical scales.⁷ Finally, early political ecologists maintained that ethnographic fieldwork, as a broad set of methods that seriously consider individuals' perceptions and decisions, was essential for understanding the connections between land user behavior and patterns and processes operating at other scales. The land user was at the center of their analyses, an analytical choice emphasized agency—the individual's "ability to act or perform an action" (Ashcroft et al. 1998:8).⁸ Power relations at various scales may shape the range of opportunities available for land users, but land users are not mere pawns in the thrall of, say, national agricultural policies or the expansion of

⁷ Zimmerer and Bassett (2003:3) note that such early conceptualizations viewed scale hierarchically, "as a series of pre-given sociospatial containers," a view that has been challenged by subsequent generations of geographers and political ecologists, who see scale as socially constructed (see Marston 2000).

⁸ The complex relationship between structure and agency has preoccupied anthropologists and others for over a century (Geertz 1973; Kroeber 1909; Ortner 1996). Historically, anthropologists have framed these debates in rigid terms: either culture/social structure determines individuals' behavior (Kroeber 1909; Evans-Pritchard 1940) or individuals create culture/social structure through their actions (Geertz 1973). In subsequent decades, political ecologists have adopted a more nuanced relationship between structure and agency, drawing on the work of Bourdieu (1977), Giddens (1976), and Ortner (1996), which holds that social structures—characterized by power differentials—condition individuals' actions, while individuals reproduce and contest those structures through their actions (Paulson et al. 2005; Peet and Watts 1996; Escobar 1996).

global capitalism. Rather, they possess the capacity to act within any given context and their specific rationalities deserve attention.

In *Land Degradation and Society*, Blaikie and Brookfield use their model, which they call the “chain of causation,” to explain the relationship between poverty and environmental degradation, observing that changes in the environment such as soil erosion and deforestation can be traced to inequalities within the relations of production: namely, poverty and marginalization. Rather than a result of irrational, or worse, ignorant practices of rural land users, they began to show how environmental change was driven by relations of inequality at local, regional, national, and international scales. This and other similar approaches were used to challenge many orthodox explanations for environmental degradation, including overpopulation, desertification, and the irrationality of swidden agriculture by highlighting the role market integration, commercialization, the dismantling of customary tenure and resource management practices, and marginalization played in shaping the land users’ actions that led to environmental problems (see De Janvry and Garcia 1988; Fairhead and Leach 1996; Jarosz 1996; Stonich 1993).

The insight that environmental problems and conflict often stemmed from divergent understandings and perceptions of a given environment proved inspirational for the next generation of political ecologists. In the early 1990s, a host of scholars began to integrate the work of poststructural social theorists such as Foucault, Giddens, Harraway, and others into political ecological analyses. The publication of Peet and Watts’ (1993) special double issue of *Economic Geography*, which later became the edited volume *Liberation Ecologies*, was a watershed moment for what is sometimes called the poststructural turn in political ecology. Building on earlier approaches, these political ecologists and their colleagues

dramatically expanded the topical range of political ecological analyses from environmental change and conflict in rural agrarian settings to include urban contexts (Pelling 2003), social movements (Bebbington 1996; Escobar 1996), international development (Carney 1996; Schroeder 1999), environmental conservation (Neumann 1998; Gezon 2005), and more. While these authors are by no means unified by one single theoretical outlook or methodology, they are linked by an aspiration to broaden the conception of politics beyond the purview of traditional political economy. In their view, power can be found in many more sites than earlier analyses had identified. An attention to discourse, or the ways knowledge and power articulate to shape how people talk about and understand reality (Escobar 1996:46), has been key to achieving a broadened treatment of politics. Pete and Watts (1996:11) argue that discourse analysis enables political ecologists to plumb new depths and ask new questions such as “why particular knowledges are privileged, how knowledge is institutionalized, and how the facts are contested.”

Bringing Political Ecology to Bear on Forced Migration

A political ecological perspective, one that foregrounds history, scale, power, and agency, offers a valuable adjunct to the managerialist approach to the study of forced migration. The fragmentation of forced migration studies has prevented scholars from looking past surface-level differences in the types of displacement to understand the ways such events are imbricated with some of the same broader political-economic processes such as international development and neoliberal economic reform as well as the ways forced migration creates common challenges for affected populations. Displacement and resettlement, whether producing refugees or internal displacees, or caused by war or

mining, can be understood through the common analytic of political ecology. Forced migration almost invariably involves the collision of local, regional, national, and international actors. The attention to patterns and processes of power relations operating on multiple geographic scales and how those particular constellations of relations came to be provides a more holistic understanding of forced migration. Through its focus on historical analysis, a political ecological perspective broadens scope of forced migration studies from an event-based synchronic approach to a processual diachronic approach, which opens up new possibilities for understanding how displacement and resettlement can continue to shape the distribution of opportunities and constraints for affected populations following forced migration. By taking a wider view of production as simultaneously economic, political, ecological, and social, a political ecological perspective helps to overcome the tendency toward economic reductionism found in the forced migration literature. Finally, through its attention to individual's decisions and perceptions within contexts of unequal power, a political ecological perspective enables the researcher to fully engage with the agency of forced migrants as they resist displacement and cope with the pressures of resettlement and recovery.

Anthropologists working with forced migrants have argued that displacement and resettlement continue to shape affected people's lives long after they are forced from their homes (Cliggett et al. 2007; Scudder and Colson 1982). Yet, the ways displacement and resettlement leave such a legacy has, to date, remained underexamined and undertheorized. This dissertation uses a political ecological perspective to shed light on the aftermath of displacement and resettlement. This dissertation is guided by two research questions. The first is: How did the processes of displacement and resettlement change the

relations of production within the Benet Resettlement Area? For many political ecologists, relations of production, broadly construed to include settlement patterns, social institutions, resource use activities, participation in markets, and property regimes, and other factors, forms the foundation for lives and livelihoods (Blaikie and Brookfield 1987; Neumann 2005; Peet and Watts 1996; Robbins 2006). From this perspective, changes in the relations of production, such as those caused by forced migration, have far-ranging implications, not only in people's material output but also in their values, desires, and even their understandings of place, and, as such, provide the key to understanding how displacement and resettlement continue to shape people's lives for decades after they migration. The nature of such changes and their implications cannot be grasped without an examination of the historical processes—ecological, social, political-economic—that shaped pre-displacement relations of production on the northern slopes of Mt. Elgon as well as those processes which led to the displacement and resettlement.

The second research question guiding this dissertation is: How have subsequent political-economic changes affected post-resettlement recovery? Political ecologists have long maintained that people make productive decisions within dynamic contexts. When assessing the long-term effects of displacement and resettlement, it is necessary to examine how changed relations of production intersect with post-resettlement political-economic shifts to determine the contexts for local action. Recovery, as a form of production, must be considered broadly to include decisions like whether or not to invest in soil conservation measures as well as formal and informal responses to livelihoods threats. The period following forced migration on Mt. Elgon was one of turmoil and political-economic restructuring at local, national, and international scales. The development of protectionist

conservation policies and new flows of international aid both to government institutions and communities interacted with the changed relations of production to create new possibilities for some residents while closing doors for others. As Colson (1971) demonstrated several decades ago, displaced and resettled individuals respond creatively and opportunistically to the changing contexts in which they must make a life and a living. A political ecological perspective illuminates how individuals' actions respond to and are mediated by the complex interconnections between people, institutions, and resources across space and time.

Walter Goldschmidt, Adaptation, and the Ethnography of the Sebei

This dissertation owes a serious debt to Walter Goldschmidt, who was among the few anthropologists to work with the Sabiny (or Sebei) people of northern Mt. Elgon and the only one to widely publish his findings (see Goldschmidt 1967, 1969, 1976). Goldschmidt, still affectionately remembered on the mountain as Labu, a wily and willing participant in drinking parties and other social events, conducted his research at the close of the colonial era in the 1950s and early 1960s, a period of intense change throughout the country. Though Goldschmidt set out to produce a comprehensive ethnography of a “traditional” people, he found the processes of change impossible to ignore and took as his subject the complex relationship between tradition and adaptation. In his major work on the subject, *Culture and Behavior of the Sebei*, he lays out his central thesis:

institutions are adaptive mechanisms designed to organize social action in terms of the situational requisites in which a people must operate. Behavior, whether individual or institutionalized, is responsive to the external environment: old forms are reshaped to meet new exigencies; there is continuity as well as change; and tradition exerts a powerful influence on the particular forms that exist at any one time (1976:5).

What follows is a detailed analysis of economy, settlement, warfare, social institutions, kinship, and metaphysics through the lens of adaptation and social and political-economic change. In contrast with other cultural ecologists of the time, Goldschmidt did not present his participants as a closed, homeostatic or self-regulating society. Instead, he situated what he saw as their adaptations to the environment, namely different modes of production tailored to the different ecological zones of the mountain and the adoption of commercial production, in time and space; he saw adaptation on Mt. Elgon as the result of interaction between his informants, external actors (which included competing ethnic groups and colonial officials), and the biophysical environment over the course of centuries. He writes, “In an orderly and unchanging world, there should be a perfect harmony within a system and between it and its environment, proceeding indefinitely through time. But, because the world is not orderly and unchanging and because the system is in dynamic interrelation with this outside world, such harmony is not what one usually, if ever finds” (1976:344). Goldschmidt was struck by the innovation and creativity he observed among his informants as they negotiated the changing political-economic landscape.

Though his treatment of political economy was limited to the regional scale, Goldschmidt’s work presaged that of political ecologists in linking the concerns of cultural ecology—the interaction between humans and their local environments—with broader political economic processes. As external conditions—environmental and political—are constantly in flux, so are the relations of production that govern people’s daily lives. Goldschmidt also took a broad view of production as material and symbolic activity,

responsible not only for the physical reproduction of people but also the reproduction of cultural beliefs and institutions. In many ways, this dissertation represents a continuation of Goldschmidt's project on Mt. Elgon. Displacement and resettlement dramatically reconfigured the ecological, social, and political-economic opportunities and constraints for residents of the Benet Resettlement Area and of the northern slopes of Mt. Elgon, more broadly. It is the anthropologist's job to attempt to understand how people interpret those changing circumstances and respond to them in both behavior and belief.

Research Methodology

This dissertation is based on 14 months of fieldwork conducted in two phases over three visits (2.5 months in 2005, .5 months in 2006, and 11 months from 2009 to 2010). The initial phase (three months) consisted of semi-structured interviews with 15 institutional actors and 42 resettlement area residents and participant observation. I began my research in the district capital of Kapchorwa, where I spoke with key local government officials, community leaders, and NGO workers, all of whom at that time were deeply involved with the land rights campaign in the Benet Resettlement Area. My affiliation with the World Agroforestry Centre, which had been conducting well-regarded soil conservation work in the district, facilitated my access to information concerning the park-people conflict that several officials said they might have otherwise been hesitant to share with an unknown outsider. These interviews covered the institutional history of displacement, resettlement, and subsequent insecurity and generated a variety of perspectives on changes in conservation policy and enforcement, the nature of administration during the political upheaval of the 1970s and 80s, the development of organized community

resistance, and legal strategy. I attended agricultural extension workshops, legal strategy meetings, and court hearings, during which I was able to gain insight into the institutional political terrain by observing the interactions between members of different governmental and non-governmental institutions and organizations. During this period, I also conducted semi-structured interviews with the Chief Warden, Warden for Tourism, and Community Conservation Warden for Mt. Elgon National Park, in which I elicited their perspectives on the history and nature of conflict in Benet, the challenges of park management, and the extent of local participation in conservation activities. The Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) had recently come under criticism in the Ugandan press for excessively violent law enforcement tactics and corruption. As a result, the UWA officials I spoke with did not exactly welcome my inquiries into the Benet case. Visiting the national park for several days as a tourist afforded more informal contact with UWA rangers, who were more forthcoming with me about their experiences working for the national park than were their superiors.

The village interviews were conducted in all six administrative parishes of the resettlement area (30 interviews above the 1993 line and 12 in the more secure area below). Due to the time constraints of the preliminary period, I selected participants opportunistically, speaking with a variety of men and women, young and old. These interviews covered a wide range of subjects, including displacement and migration experiences, historical and contemporary livelihoods practices, settlement patterns, in-park resource use, and conflict. I stayed with a family in Taragon, a village in the resettlement area, for the period during which I conducted these interviews. Not only did this provide opportunities for participant observation, but my continuous presence in the

village also helped gain the trust of many residents I interviewed. Though numerous *muzungu* (white foreigners) had passed through the resettlement area conducting brief surveys, residents told me that no foreign researchers had lived in the vicinity since Walter and Gale Goldschmidt in the 1950s and 60s. Several research participants, especially older women, relaxed visibly once I was able to explain to them in Kupsabiny⁹ that not only was I living with a nearby family but that I was eating *posho* (the maize porridge that is the staple of Sabinu diets) with them. Between interviews, I participated in village life, attending church services, working in the fields, and sitting with people around beer pots, tea kettles, and kitchen fires. Such participant observation enabled me to build social relationships with community members and provided a more intimate perspective on daily life in the resettlement area.

The second phase of research (11 months, from September 2009 to August 2010) consisted of the following activities: 1) life history interviews, 2) weekly livelihoods interviews and spot observation, 3) institutional interviews, 4) archival research, and 6) participant observation. For this second phase, I recognized that I could not grasp the effects of displacement and resettlement without understanding how lives and livelihoods in the resettlement area compared to neighboring non-displaced households. As such, I expanded my research scope to include residents of historical villages that neighbored the resettlement area. Due to research permission problems discussed in more detail in

⁹ Kupsabiny is an unwritten language of the Kalenjin family, spoken by the Sabinu population on the northern slopes of Mt. Elgon (approximately 200,000 people). During my research, I made a concerted effort to build my Kupsabiny language skills through informal instruction and practice. As English is the colonial language in Uganda, many participants especially those with access to formal education spoke comfortably in English. Where this was not possible, I did my best to conduct interviews in Kupsabiny and relied on a translator as necessary to fill in the gaps in my knowledge.

Chapter 4, the bulk of my research carried out in the resettlement area during this phase was limited to households below the 1993 line.

I began by conducting extended life history interviews with 20 elders (defined loosely as people over 60 years old) from seven villages (four within the resettlement area three historical villages outside). These interviews, some of which were spread over several visits, explored, 1) personal migration and displacement histories, 2) observed agricultural, environmental, and economic change, 3) local and regional governance from the colonial era to the present, 4) historical perspectives on social organization and social support, and 5) park-people interactions and conflict. Given the lack of written history accounts of life on the northern side of Mt. Elgon outside of a few written by colonial officials in the early 20th century and Goldschmidt's research (discussed more fully in Chapter 2), oral history provided important insights into Sabiny lifeways prior to displacement and resettlement unavailable elsewhere.

To gain an intimate understanding of contemporary livelihoods practices and household dynamics, I followed a sample of 50 households from five villages with weekly interviews over a period of 28 weeks. Four of the villages were primarily agricultural and one was a trading center. Two of the agricultural villages and the trading center were located within the resettlement area and the other two agricultural villages were historical (meaning that they predated resettlement) outside the resettlement area. Households were selected randomly from compiled village registers. The sample included displaced households, historical households (those whose families had lived in their village for more than two generations), and recent migrant households across the family cycle (from recently married, childless couples, to extended families, female headed households, and

single elderly households). I conducted an initial semi-structured interview with household heads, which covered livelihoods portfolios, seasonality, food insecurity, strategies for coping with shortage, resource access, and gender divisions of labor and resources. During subsequent visits, I recorded what each household member was doing at the time of my visit and conducted a shorter open-ended discussion concerning the news of the household. This spot observation gave some insight into the gender divisions of livelihoods activities and individual household economic strategies as they changed across the dry and rainy seasons. The act of visiting 50 households every week over a sustained period enabled me to get to know the members of each household personally, which encouraged many to share with me detailed rationales for their various decisions as well as elements of their lives such as illegal activities, conflicts, and memories that they left out of their initial interviews. The open-ended nature of these interviews also allowed people to bring up topics that I would not have known to ask about otherwise.

To further my understanding of daily life in the resettlement area, I participated in an array of quotidian activities including agricultural labor, shop keeping, wild plant harvesting, and household chores. I attended livestock markets, drinking parties, church services, weddings, and funerals, each presenting invaluable occasions for informal discussion. I lived and ate with the same family I had in 2005 and was nominally adopted into the Kabokir clan. My fictive familial relationships carried considerable social obligations especially during the series of rituals leading up to the marriage of the family's eldest son. I also participated in agricultural extension workshops led by local NGOs and district governmental meetings convened to discuss the park-people conflict. Finally, I made short visits to the areas from which the residents of the resettlement area were

displaced. These trips took me from the plains of Ngenge to former household sites inside the forest.

Building on the institutional interviews I collected in 2005 and 2006, I carried out semi-structured interviews with a larger sample of individuals from governmental and non-governmental organizations (26 in total). I spoke with nine local governmental representatives at all levels of the local council (LC) system¹⁰ and community leaders about the development of the land rights campaign, subsequent evictions from the national park, and changes in legal strategy. I also pursued these topics with five staff members from the Kapchorwa Civil Society Organisation Alliance, the Uganda Land Alliance, and ActionAid, the local, national, and international NGOs that were supporting the land rights campaign. I interviewed eight district governmental officials responsible for natural resource management and agricultural extension services about their efforts in the district, the distribution of their activities throughout the resettlement area, and their perceptions of local investment in soil and water. Finally, I was able to conduct a lengthy interview with the Community Conservation Warden and informal conversations with two employees at the Monitoring and Research Office at Mt. Elgon National Park. Because of my lack of formal research permission in the national park, my engagement with UWA staff was limited.

Through my relationships with local NGOs and Kapchorwa district officials, I was able to amass an archive of documents concerning governmental land/conservation policy and park-people conflict. These included internal and external correspondence from governmental and non-governmental organizations (memos, emails, letters), governmental reports from 1960s to 2010, NGO advocacy and strategy reports, a complete collection of

¹⁰ Local government is divided into five levels of administration from the village (LC1) to the district chairman (LC 5).

court affidavits filed in the Benet case against UWA, court rulings, meeting minutes, and relevant newspaper articles. The documents generated by and pertaining to the Forest Department and UWA provided a much more detailed account of protected area policy and practice than my restricted interviews with park managers. The documents also provided insight into the interconnections between institutional actors at various scales and the changing narratives different actors used to explain and legitimize their claims to rights and resources over time.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 2 presents the biophysical and cultural geography of Mt. Elgon. It describes the features of the landscape and explores the historical processes that formed pre-displacement relations of production and the political-economic currents that led to displacement and resettlement. Chapter 3 examines how displacement and resettlement fundamentally reordered the arrangement of people and productive activities on the landscape, leading to the rise of individualized tenure and intensive, commercialized agriculture. Chapter 4 examines how productive decisions have been affected by the intersection of changed relations of production and changes in conservation policy that led to widespread insecurity throughout the resettlement area. The chapter begins with an examination of how the Ugandan government and protected area managers enacted policies and practices that destabilized the lives of residents and then demonstrates how the experiences of displacement, resettlement, and insecurity have become reflected in the different opportunities, choices, and investments made by residents. Chapter 5 focuses on the diversity of claims and counter-claims made by park managers and resettlement area

residents over the 1500 ha of land above the 1993 line. This chapter examines how different actors mobilize divergent notions of place to both inscribe their presence on the landscape and articulate with broader institutional networks and flows of capital. Finally, Chapter 6 presents conclusions and explores directions for future research.

CHAPTER 2
THE LANDSCAPE AS PALIMPSEST: THE CONTEXT OF LIVELIHOODS IN THE BENET
RESETTLEMENT AREA

“Mount Elgon is not a mountain to be viewed from a distance. Though it rises more than 10,000 feet above the plains, its great breadth and gradual slope form a flat cone that can rarely be seen from below. Rather, it is a mountain to be on, for it offers vistas of exciting beauty” Walter Goldschmidt (1976:33).

Introduction: A View from the Mountain

Unlike the bold, assertive crags of the Himalaya, Mt. Elgon reveals its charms in stages, each ridge, each escarpment revealing verdant expanses previously hidden from view. For most of the year, heavy, gunmetal grey clouds form a low ceiling over the sprawling slopes, shrouding precipitous red and khaki basalt cliffs streaked black in places by seeping water. On a rare clear day in July, the middle of the rainy season, Kisito, a temporary settlement perched high on the mountain’s northwestern flank, affords an unusually panoramic perspective. To the south, facing up the mountain, secondary forest scrub, trampled in places by cattle, quickly gives way to a band of deep green moist montane forest. Wisps of mist cling to the unbroken canopy, where black-and-white colobus monkeys stake their territorial claims in guttural, croaking tones. Following the initial forest, a patchwork of grassland and forest blankets a series of increasingly jagged ridges. Just beyond the furthest ridge and out of view, more than a day’s arduous hike from Kisito, rise the rocky spires that form the rim of Mt. Elgon’s expansive caldera. In the early

morning, the occasional solitary figure can be seen leading a few cows into the dark of the forest or surreptitiously emerging from the brush, toting heavy bundles of firewood or a few long poles for construction.

To the northwest, facing down the mountain, the farms and trading centers of the Benet Resettlement Area form an entirely different kind of patchwork. Beneath the promontories of Kisito, clusters of small round mud houses with pointed thatch roofs are scattered among broad fields planted with maize, wheat, potatoes, beans and smaller plots of tussocky grass. One or two cows are staked to each grassy area, grazing lazily. The maize, planted three months earlier, is ankle-to-calf height and has just begun to fill in the ruddy fields with the light emerald green of young vegetation. Groups consisting mostly of women and children stand bent double amidst the maze and potatoes, uprooting weeds with rapid swipes of their hand hoes. Many of the fields in this upper area sprawl askew on the undulating and often steep valleys with seeming disregard for the contours of the land, their soils leaching off in sheets during the rains as if scraped away with the same hoes people use to weed. The red-black runoff also stains the countless streams and rivers a turbid café-au-lait. A few trees, remnants of the forest that stood here until the early 1980s, stud the fields and homesteads, their lower branches removed long ago for firewood. Further down, small trading centers, marked by rectangular iron-roofed shops and drinking joints, straddle the thin road that snakes between the fields and rocky outcroppings into the lower section of the resettlement area. Men huddle around buckets of *komek*, a hot, thick locally-made maize beer inside the dark, low slung shacks of the trading centers, exchanging the latest news and gossip. Here and there on the road, young men drive teams of donkeys laden with bulky 100 kg sacks of potatoes. What few roads

travel to the upper part of the resettlement area are largely impassable by truck during the height of the rains, so farmers must travel several hours down the mountain to sell their produce to middlemen, who wait with mud-streaked lorries.

After Tuikat, a village on steep slopes that extend to a hilltop that sticks up like a cocked shoulder, the road switchbacks several hundred meters down a sheer incline into the lower section of the resettlement area. In many respects, the landscape mirrors that of the upper slopes. Households are similarly scattered among the maize, potatoes, beans and wheat that dominate the local agricultural portfolio. Trading centers occasionally line the roads with the same kinds of shops and *komek* halls. Yet, the maize, planted at the same time as in the upper area, is waist-to-breast height and most of the potatoes and beans have already been harvested, owing to the lower elevation and concomitantly warmer climate than in Kisito. In many places, the round thatched houses are replaced by more expensive rectangular iron-roofed homes, their outside walls plastered with *bukaru*, a durable dirt that must be imported from the lowlands. Largely absent from the upper slopes, eucalyptus and gravelia trees buffer many streams and groves of *matooke* and coffee are nestled alongside the maize and other crops. Erosion remains a problem, especially on the steeper faces, yet the fields in the lower section tend to follow the contours of the terrain more closely and are often bisected by terraced strips of grass intended to keep the soil from sliding down the mountain.

There is no marked boundary separating the bottom of the resettlement area from the older farms below and very little to suggest that just three decades ago the forest covered the entire resettlement area, now home to more than 30,000 people. Below the resettlement area, the coffee and *matooke* stands of Kapkwure, Binyinyi and other villages

are thicker and more extensive, reflecting the generations that families there have maintained the groves. The skinny and unreliable feeder roads that lead from the resettlement area dead end onto the wide, clay-surfaced road that connects Kapchorwa town with Bukwo and the Kenyan border to the east. Across the main road, heavily trafficked by the overloaded trucks of wholesalers and people on foot on their way to conduct business in town, the vegetation becomes increasingly dry and scrubby.

Settlements thin out after a kilometer or so and give way to thorny, uninhabited brush and exposed rock. Acacia trees trace the spidery outlines of the Greek and Atar rivers from the mouths of gorges down into yellowish green savannah that sprawls from the foot of the mountain. Young men use long sticks to urge unruly herds of cows and goats down the road, where the meter-high grass used for thatch crowds out much of the scrub. Among these herds, the flat backs of the cross-breed cattle, ubiquitous throughout the well-watered upper slopes, is replaced by the fatty hump of the older Zebu breeds that can better tolerate the challenging conditions of the plains.

The grass continues to dominate the vegetation, as the road abruptly levels out. Barely visible from all the way up in Kisito, Ngenge town is sandwiched between a conical volcanic plug and the towering escarpments of Elgon. Crumbling government offices and abandoned NGO offices abut clusters of round huts and metal-roofed shops. Unlike town centers up the mountain, in Ngenge, many houses are connected to fenced-in kraals, where inhabitants keep their animals at night for protection. The settlement is shambolic, even by rural Ugandan standards, and sparsely populated. The abundance of deserted buildings in various states of decay and palpable lack of activity gives Ngenge the feel of a ghost town. Few active homesteads extend past the town limits, though three decades ago the area was

widely populated by farmers, who tended fields of cotton, millet, sweet potatoes, cassava and maize alongside large herds of cattle, goats and sheep. To the north, the dramatic silhouette of Mt. Kadam lords over the flatlands of Karamoja, home to transhumant communities of Karamojong pastoralists, notorious for their vast livestock holdings and, since the 1970s, an enthusiastic embrace of automatic weapons.

The landscape from the Benet grasslands above Kisito, to the lush *matooke* plantations of Kapkwure, to the banks of the Greek River represents a palimpsest, on which the histories of generations of people have been inscribed. Such inscriptions have been scratched off in places by violence and in others by ideas about nature and conservation, yet the ghostly outlines of historic villages, kraals, and ritual sites remain both on the landscape and in the memories of their former inhabitants. The northwestern slopes of Mt. Elgon tell stories of dispossession, death, poverty, insecurity and change, but also of new beginnings, marriages, births, and the promise of new opportunities. Over the past three decades, displaced families and their offspring have begun to inscribe their own stories on the landscape of the Benet Resettlement Area. This chapter provides an overview of the biophysical and cultural geography of Mt. Elgon and the historical processes that have formed the context for contemporary livelihoods and conflict.

Physical Geography

Mt. Elgon's geologic origins can be traced to the Miocene era during the formation of the Rift Valley. Approximately 20 million years ago, low-viscosity lava began to flow from fissures in the earth's crust caused by the parting of the African and Arabian tectonic plates (Bussmann 2006). Lava continued to flow for 10 million years, creating a broad shield of a

mountain now more than 80 km in diameter. The summit of the mountain features an 8 km wide caldera at its center, one of the largest intact calderas in the world (Brock and MacDonald 1969; King et al. 1972). Rising to an altitude of 4321 m, 3000 m above the surrounding plains, Mt. Elgon sits astride the Kenya/Uganda border, 100 km northeast of Lake Victoria (1°N; 35°30'E). The mountain's gentle slopes (roughly 4° overall) are broken by concentric rings of cliffs, which form a shelf-like or terraced pattern most prominent on the Ugandan side. The terrain is further divided by countless valleys carved over millions of years by rivers and streams that radiate from the central caldera like the spokes of a wheel, contributing to the heterogeneity of slope and aspect (McMaster 1962).

Rainfall varies across the mountain, with rains heaviest to the western summit (2000-4000 mm/year) and lightest to the northern plains (approximately 625 mm/year) (McMaster 1962; NEMA n.d.). The western side of the mountain, which encompasses the Benet Resettlement Area is notably wetter, averaging 1500-2000 mm of precipitation, than the eastern side, which averages 1200-1500 mm (Bussmann 2006). Alternating moist south-westerly and dry north-easterly winds driven by the passage of the Intertropical Convergence Zone over Uganda produce a bi-modal rainfall pattern and a rain-shadow falling to the north of the mountain (Hamilton and Perott 1981; Reed and Clokie 2000). The rainy season stretches from April to October, with rains heaviest from April to May and September to October. The dry season spans from November through March, with December, January and February as the driest months. Mt. Elgon serves as a regionally significant water catchment basin, providing drinking and irrigation water for thousands of people in Kenya and Uganda (Howard 1991). Altitude greatly shapes the mean temperatures on the mountain, which vary from 15°-32° C on the plains, 13°-28°C on the

lower slopes (NEMA n.d). The temperature continues to decrease with altitude, decreasing to frost conditions at the mountain's highest points.

In combination with the heavy rains, Mt. Elgon's fertile soils, composed of volcanic ash and soda-rich agglomerates (Langlands 1974), support widespread agricultural cultivation up to 2200-2500 m and a mosaic of forest and grassland habitats above the cultivation zone. Vegetation analyses by Hedberg (1951), Langdale-Brown et al. (1964) and Hamilton and Perrott (1981) recognize four montane forest zones: 1) *Prunus (Pygeum)* Moist Montane Forest; 2) *Juniperus-Podocarpus* Dry Montane Forest; 3) *Hagenia-Rapanea* Moist Montane Forest; and 4) *Arundinaria* Montane Bamboo Forest. *Andropogon* grasslands, *Erica* heath and *Dendrosenecio* moorlands are interspersed throughout the upper forest zone (Howard 1991). Mt. Elgon is one of the so-called Afroalpine "sky islands," solitary mountains on which plant communities evolved in isolation from other montane environments, thus supporting high levels of species endemism especially in the grasslands, heath and moorlands (Bussmann 2006; Hedberg 1969; Reed and Clokie 2000; van Heist 1994). Researchers have suggested that Mt. Elgon features more extensive grassland areas outside its caldera than other East African mountains because of a long history of anthropogenic intervention through livestock grazing and burning (Reed and Clokie 2000; van Heist 1994). Elephants, buffalo, antelope and duiker once found across the mountain are now concentrated on the Kenyan side due to unrestricted hunting in the 1970s and 80s (Scott 1998). Leopards and hyenas have also been observed, along with black-and-white colobus and blue monkeys, and 144 bird species, among other fauna (Scott 1998). Though the ecosystems of Mt. Elgon do not support the degree of species biodiversity found in Uganda's western forests, the density of endemic plant species and

the mountain's role in regional water catchment, conservation biologists have argued, make Mt. Elgon an important focus for conservation activities (Howard et al. 2000; Reed and Clokie 2000).

Regional Ethnographic Context and Pre-colonial History

The Ugandan side of Mt. Elgon is occupied primarily by two ethnic groups, Bantu-speaking Bagisu agriculturalists (2002 population, 1,117,243) to the south and Kalenjin-speaking Sabiny agropastoralists (2002 population, 180,594) to the north (UBOS 2006:42). The Kenyan side of Mt. Elgon is home to roughly 280,000 Sabaot people, an ethnic group closely related through language and ancestry to the Sabiny (Kawachi 2010). The plains to the north have historically been controlled by Karamojong herders, the west by Teso agropastoralists. The Sabaot and Sabiny, along with the Pokot cattle-keepers just to the northeast, belong to the Southern Nilotic language family, the majority of whose member groups, including Tatoga, Nandi, Kipsigis, Turkana live in western Kenya and Tanzania (Ehret 1971). As many anthropologists have observed, considerable variation and flexibility is often subsumed or elided by facile ethnic or tribal appellations (Cohen 1978; Lentz 1995; Southall 1970). Sabiny themselves identify numerous overlapping subdivisions by clan, village of origin, ecological niche, linguistic accent, etc. that fall under the broad Sabiny ethnic umbrella. The presence of so many subdivisions, the boundaries of which are more often than not indeterminate, have long confused European ethnographers and colonial administrators, who sought to impose an unrealistic vision of tribes with hard and fast boundaries, territories and centralized political organization (Southall 1970; Ranger 1983). This was especially true in eastern Uganda, where ethnic Sabiny

communities across the mountain were categorized and re-categorized as a collection of separate “tribes” (see Hobley 1902; Johnston 1902) and a novel system of chiefs was imposed upon a clan-based acephalous society (Goldschmidt 1976; Norgrove 2002). The ethnic inventory presented here is intended to indicate the cultural and linguistic diversity present in the Elgon area. The current distribution of people, languages, livelihoods strategies and cultivars are the result of centuries of cultural interaction, sometimes friendly, in the form of trade, and at other times violent, in the form of conflict over land and livestock.

The paucity of archaeological investigation in the region (especially on the wetter, Ugandan side), absence of written records and the shallow time-depth of local oral history occlude a detailed view of Mt. Elgon before the 19th century (Ehret 1971; Goldschmidt 1976). Historical linguistics, which compares vocabularies across space, however, offers some important insights into historical patterns of cultural contact and production where physical documentary evidence is scant (Ehret 1971; Schoenbrun 1998). By 2000 years ago, it is thought that ancestors of the Southern Nilotic peoples of East Africa had begun to keep livestock and grow grains. Ehret (1971:44), who has compiled the most comprehensive Southern Nilotic linguistic history to date, writes that by that time “they kept cattle including humped breeds, goats, and donkeys. They branded their cattle, and they knew of at least two East African grains, sorghum and eleusine [millet]. Evidence is lacking, however, that they planted either bananas or root crops.” While it is not known when exactly Sabiny people began making their homes on Mt. Elgon, Ehret (1971:66) traces the differentiation of Elgon group dialects to the gradual expansion of Kalenjin peoples from the highlands of western Kenya that occurred between 1000 and 1400 years

ago. Hunter-gatherers similar to the populations who inhabited other forest uplands of East Africa such as Mt. Kenya and the Mau Escarpment may have lived on Mt. Elgon prior to the Kalenjin expansion (Distefano 1990), but little evidence linguistic or otherwise has yet been found to support this claim (Goldschmidt 1976).

Through an analysis of clan migrations and oral histories he collected in the 1950s and 60s, Goldschmidt (1976:15) concludes that by the 18th century, Kalenjin-speakers occupied the entire mountain. They possessed at least five central cultural traits long shared by Southern Nilotic groups that set them apart from neighboring Bantu and other communities: 1) age sets, 2) individualized homesteads, 3) extraction of upper incisors, 4) the lack of a taboo against women touching cattle, and 5) the lack of hereditary chieftaincy (Goldschmidt 1976). Ehret (1971) suggests that male and female circumcision, a distinctive feature of cultural life that persists to the present, was borrowed from Cushitic-speaking neighbors. An adaptive population, the Sabiny people tailored the grain cultivation-livestock mode of production, developed originally in the drier Western Highlands of Kenya, to the environmental variation present on Mt. Elgon. Goldschmidt describes how, since the migration of their ancestors to the mountain, Sabiny people experienced/enacted a major “shift in the economic order,” which “had repercussions throughout the organization of interpersonal relations and social sentiments” (1976:345). He hypothesizes that this transformation in emphasis from herding to agriculture, happened in two stages as people gradually adapted to the environmental conditions of the mountain and as population levels increased. The first stage—the intensification of traditional Kalenjin cultigen cultivation in the fertile and well-watered soils of the central escarpment—possibly occurred as late as the 18th century, but most likely much earlier.

The second phase—the adoption of a wider variety of exogenous cultigens, including plantains, sweet potatoes and later potatoes and maize—began in the 19th century and was ongoing throughout the first half of the 20th century.

Goldschmidt identifies four major consequences of this shift: 1) sedentarization; 2) the heightened value of and commoditization of private property; 3) individualization of settlement patterns; and 4) change in military stance from offensive raiding to territorial defense (1976:345-9). Where mobility and transhumance had been defining characteristics of economic life for Kalenjin-speakers throughout the region for centuries (Ehret 1971), a primarily agricultural existence for central-belt Sabiny rooted them on specific tracts of land. The year-round labor-intensive demands of cultivation required people, especially women who were expected to carry out the bulk of agricultural work, to remain close to the fields. Permanent, individuated households became the dominant settlement pattern, a change from collective settlements based on clan and age-set affiliations. Likewise, through agricultural production, land became the primary source of economic wealth. Cattle holdings remained significant barometers of wealth, but agriculture increasingly became the means for livestock acquisition. As population densities increased, land ideal for cultivation was claimed through clearing and individual holdings were divided among offspring, the scarcity value of land increased and land became an important commodity to be traded, allocated to relations, and bequeathed to sons. Finally, and perhaps most peripheral to the current analysis, the elevated importance of land and permanent settlement that resulted from the shift to agriculture reoriented military practices away from cattle raiding and toward the protection of privately held territory.

Goldschmidt (1976:37) observes that the balance of cultivation, pastoralism and foraging varied across three physiographic zones: 1) the plains from the foot of the mountain to the grassy areas that extend to 1220 m, 2) the fertile central escarpment between 1220 m and 2130 m, and 3) the highlands above 2130 m. Those living in the lowest zone kept gardens, especially in the marshy lands along the rivers, but placed more emphasis on livestock. Mobility was important to those who made their homes on the

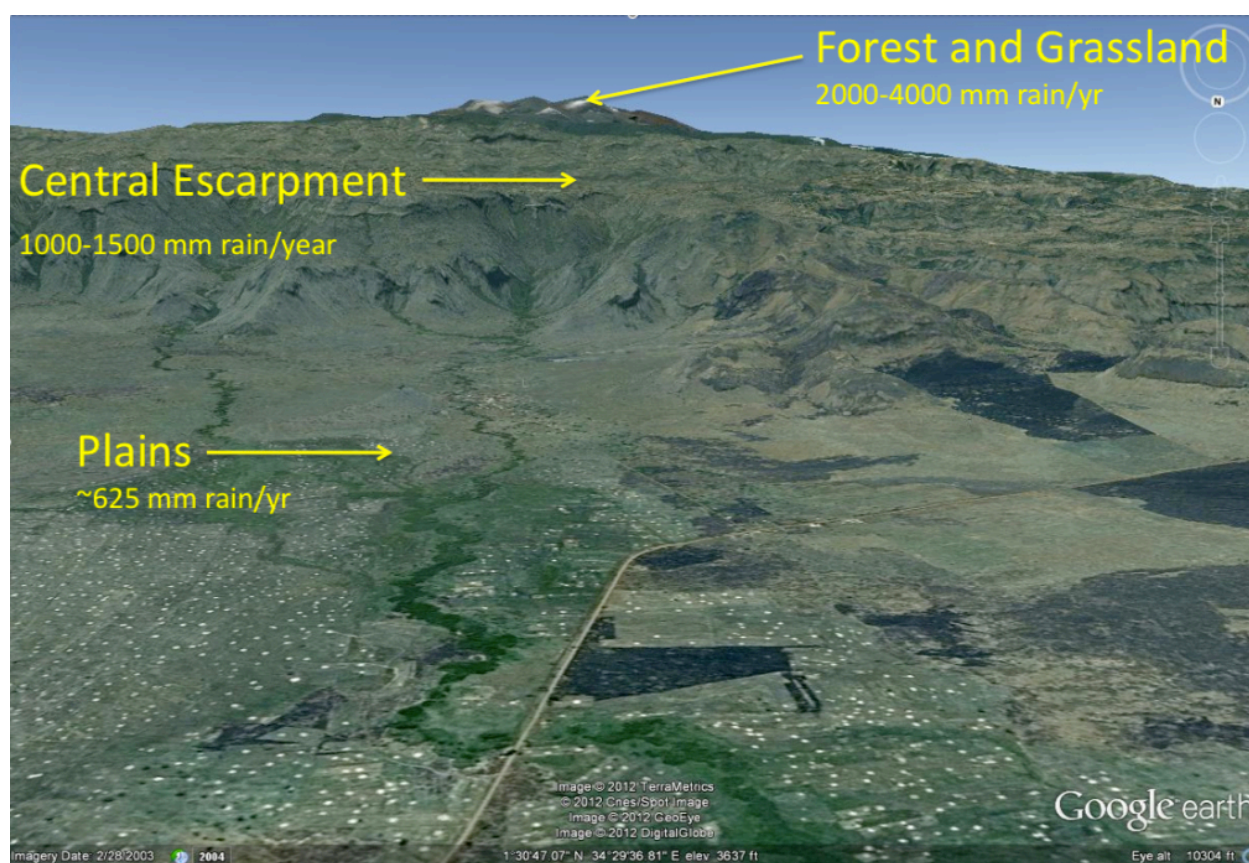


Figure 2.1 Physiographic Zones of Mt. Elgon

plains because of periodic drought and the ever-present threat of raids from the north, east and west. These pressures, coupled with abundant grazing land unsuitable for cultivation

because of rocky soils and irregular rainfall, led people to favor pastoralism over agriculture. Rights to specific garden lands were inherited patrilineally and held by individual households for as long as the family occupied them, the duration of which depended on the intensity of raiding in the region. There were few tenure restrictions on grazing lands; low population densities and large areas for grazing enabled more or less open-access arrangements (Goldschmidt 1976). Elders I spoke with from the plains, escarpment and uplands all maintained that the herds of cattle, sheep and goats kept on the plains and lower slopes were the largest in all of Sabinu territory, up to 1000 animals.

The second zone above the rocky scrub at the foot of the mountain was home to the majority of the Sabinu population.¹¹ The temperate climate, rich soils and ready availability of water were highly conducive to agriculture.¹² Moreover, the geographic position of these settlements provided more protection from raiding groups than the exposed villages of the plains. As such, cattle holdings, while remaining culturally important, were less extensive than those lower down the mountain. As noted above, millet and sorghum were most likely the earliest cultivars (Ehret 1971), though green bananas were adopted during the 19th century through contact with Bantu communities to the south (Goldschmidt 1976; Weatherby 1962). Jackson and Gedge, the first Europeans to summit Mt. Elgon, observed Sabinu farmers (whom they called Save) growing millet, pumpkins, bananas, yams and small sweet potatoes (Ravenstein 1891:202). They noted that banana cultivation was concentrated in the southwest, where Sabinu and Bagisu territories met. Maize, introduced

¹¹ Goldschmidt (1976:41) estimates that by the 1960s, 90% of the entire Sabinu population resided in this central zone.

¹² This region also happens to be the best documented in colonial reports. Early British administrators C.W. Hobley (1897) and Harry Johnston (1902) were both particularly taken with the amenable conditions of the central escarpment, which the latter to posit that the area could “someday become the seat of a most powerful industrial community of Europeans”(Johnston 1902:60).

most likely by Swahili trading caravans (McCann 2005), was absent from the earliest European accounts of the mountain and was not described in the central zone until 1897 (Austin 1903:74). As in the plains, cultivated land was held by individual men and bequeathed to their sons. Grazing was carried out in uncultivated lands both within the central zone and also the lands above and below in an open-access fashion. The agricultural abundance of the central escarpment and its defensibility made it a popular provisioning point first for Swahili ivory traders in the second half of the 19th century and later British explorers, colonial administrators and soldiers (Austin 1903; Hopley 1897; Johnston 1902; Ravenstein 1891).

Inhabitants of the third physiographic zone made extensive use of the forest and grassland habitats (Goldschmidt 1976). Small, clan-based settlements were concentrated on the perimeters of grassland areas, where they maintained sizeable herds of cattle, sheep, and goats. Grazing rights to specific pastures were loosely vested in the clans who lived in their proximity for the duration of their residence. Ecological analyses of the grasslands by Reed and Clokie (2000) suggest that herders rotated their animals among the patches of grassland to avoid overgrazing and practiced periodic burning, both of which helped keep forest plants from expanding into the grasslands and reducing grazing area. Though keeping livestock was the central focus of production, highlanders also hunted buffalo and antelope in the forests and foraged for wild products, including medicinal and food plants, honey, and bamboo. Elders from the area reported that agriculture was limited or non-existent until the first half of the 20th century, when, in response to droughts lower down the mountain, people began to grow small plots of potatoes.

An important element of Sabinu adaptation to the ecological variation on the mountain was the social and economic integration between the three physiographic zones (Goldschmidt 1976). While residents of different zones may have practiced divergent livelihoods, they did not consider themselves distinct ethnic groups. The Kupsabinu terms people used (and continue to use) to distinguish between the different populations of the physiographic zones were relational to the position of the observer on the mountain. *Mosop* was used to describe people or places above where the observer lived, while *soi* was used to describe people or places below. Sabinu households across the various zones were linked through networks of exchange, mutual-aid, marriage, clans, age-sets, and migration (Goldschmidt 1976; Weatherby 1962). Highlanders, primarily women, traded forest products, especially honey and bamboo baskets, in the lower zones for agricultural staples. Numerous older women I spoke with, who grew up in the uplands, described the trading excursions of their mothers and grandmothers as economically-inspired social calls that could last from several days to several weeks and cover wide distances on the Ugandan and Kenyan sides of the mountain. Women cultivated networks of trading partners in different areas around the mountain and would time their visits to correspond to harvest times, which diverged considerably across micro-climates. Weatherby (1962:201) describes such trade relationships as “parasitic,”¹³ yet benefits flowed both ways; the older women I spoke with from the upper areas and five others from lower areas described these relationships as important potential sources for assistance during hard times. The lowlands and highlands provided important grazing land for those in the central belt and cattle sharing arrangements, where individuals from grass-rich areas cared for the cattle of others in

¹³ Such a conclusion more likely reflects Weatherby’s biased feelings toward non-agricultural foragers.

exchange for milk and one or more of the shared animal's offspring, were common. Cattle sharing across physiographic zones not only strengthened social relations, but also enabled individuals to reduce their herd's exposure to disease outbreaks and raids. During times of intense cattle raiding pressure, lowland people sought refuge with their friends and relatives at higher altitudes.

During their research in the mid-20th century, Goldschmidt (1976) and Weatherby (1962) counted more than 200 Sabin patrilineal clans, which formed the exclusive basis for local social organization and governance prior to the colonial era. Institutional cross-clan alliances were created through a cyclic age-set system, which linked young men from different places and clans through the shared experience of circumcision.¹⁴ Goldschmidt's informants explained to him that while age-sets had "little to do with the functioning of the legal or governmental operations" (1976:106), age-sets were important for organizing defensive units and heavily influenced social relationships and networks of obligation and social support. Marriage was exogamous and patrilocal, joining families from different areas. Though women were nominally absorbed into their husbands' clans upon marriage, many maintained strong ties to their natal villages and returned to them for trade and assistance during times of stress (Goldschmidt 1976).

The Road to Displacement: Conservation Policy on Mt. Elgon 1938-2010

A Protected Area is Born, 1936-1948

The legal foundation for the Ugandan system of protected areas was laid in 1900 with the Buganda Memorandum of Agreement, which, in addition to cementing the

¹⁴ Female circumcision was also widely practiced (Barber 1961), but Goldschmidt writes that female age-sets were less prominent in social life than their male counterparts (Goldschmidt 1976:108).

relationship between the Buganda kingdom and the British, brought a vast area of forest land under the nominal control of the British Uganda Administration (FD 1961; Webster and Osmaston 2003). Through subsequent agreements in the Toro, Ankole and Bunyoro regions the British government assumed control of “all forest and waste and uncultivated land,” encompassing more than three thousand square miles (Webster and Osmaston 2003:125). As in many areas of the colonial world (Lynch and Alcorn 1994), the colonial administration justified these large-scale appropriations by claiming that the land was not held privately in the individualized British tenurial manner—despite long histories of use—and should be held in trust for African populations. Initial environmental management activities focused on the development of agriculture and meteorological and hydrological research (Turyahabwe and Banana 2008). Forestry and wildlife management emerged as separate mandates in the second decade of the 20th century, when the first Forest and Game ordinances were passed and the Forest Department was established to manage timber production and protect strategic water catchments (FD 1961; Norgrove 2002).

Early conservation efforts on the Ugandan side of Mt. Elgon were linked to the protection of cash crop agriculture on the mountain’s southern slopes. Colonial policy in Uganda emphasized the extraction of taxes and cash crops from native farms over settler production especially near market centers accessible to the newly constructed Uganda Railway (Parker 1952). Small-holder agriculture was already widespread throughout most of the Protectorate and colonial planners thought that the introduction of cash crops (and their taxation) into the existing system of production would be the most efficient form of colonial exploitation (see Johnston 1902:277-298). Despite early European enthusiasm for

the beauty and comfortable climate of Sabinu territory, then known as Sebei, the region was largely peripheral to the economic aims of the British colonial development in the Uganda Protectorate. While the relatively low population densities and inaccessibility of Sebei were not of much interest to early colonial cash crop schemes, Bugisu, the well-watered and populous kingdom that sprawled from the southwestern slopes of Mt. Elgon was a major center of cash crop production, especially coffee (Wrigley 1959).¹⁵

As the coffee industry in Bugisu burgeoned, colonial administrators turned their attention to the forests and grasslands on the upper regions of the mountain, which supplied water to coffee plantations. As part of a decade-long push to expand the Protectorate's forest estate, the Forest Department took control of Mt. Elgon's forest lands in 1938, creating a 690 km² Crown Forest Reserve that encompassed all land from the caldera down to the lower margins of the forest belt (Norgrove 2002; Scott 1998). In her analysis of colonial archival resources, Norgrove (2003:197) describes the initial management approach as "populist," in that officials permitted some resource extraction by forest-adjacent communities. Few restrictions were placed on the communities who had historically made their homes and livings within the Mt. Elgon Forest Reserve. An unpublished 1983 report from the Kapchorwa Forest Department to the Chief Forest Officer attributes the initial lack concern for upland communities to their low population densities and the nature of their livelihoods: "By the time of gazetting Mt. Elgon Forest Reserve in 1938, these people were left inside the Reserve and continued to live scattered with their traditional mode of living by nomadism." The implicit assumption was that as

¹⁵ In 1928, when interest in protecting the Elgon watershed began, coffee production in Bugisu accounted for 13% of all native lands dedicated to the crop (Wrigley 1959:42). By 1958, small holders in Bugisu produced two thirds of Uganda's Arabica harvest and the monetary value of total coffee exports for the Protectorate exceeded raw cotton, cotton seed and cotton oil combined (McMaster 1962:92).

long as in-reserve residents maintained their “traditional,” non-agricultural practices, they posed no threat to the integrity of the reserve. Though the establishment of the Mt. Elgon Forest Reserve had little immediate effect on the lives and resource access of upland communities, who continued to graze their animals and collect, it was significant in expropriating the control of the upper part of the mountain from its historical residents to the government and set the parameters for future livelihoods constraints.

Protectionism Rising, 1948-1990

In subsequent decades, the legal status of the protected area on Mt. Elgon changed from Crown Forest to Central Forest Reserve in 1948 and to a Demarcated Protection Reserve in 1951 (van Heist 1994). Forestry activities expanded dramatically; in the 1950s the Forest Department planted more than 1500 hectares of softwood plantations in Kapkwata and Suam (Scott 1998). When the boundary was measured in the early 1960s, the Reserve encompassed 1,200 km², twice the Forest Department’s initial estimation (Norgrove 2002:198). Throughout these expansions, the attitude of the Forest Department toward in-Reserve residents gradually shifted away from benign neglect toward progressively strict protectionism (Ditiro et al. 2008). Independence itself in 1962, though a transformative event for the nation as a whole, had little immediate effect on this trajectory of conservation activities on Mt. Elgon. Forest Department officials emphasized continuity between colonial and post-colonial forest policy, retaining many of the same expatriate staff and making no major changes in their overall program, which was geared toward reducing local pressure on protected resources (FD 1961; Webster and Osmaston 2003). However, the political instability that followed independence especially during the

1970s and 80s did affect natural resource managers abilities to enforce such protectionist policies (discussed in more detail below).

A key manifestation of increasing protectionism was the development of the Ugandan national park system (Chhetri et al. 2003). The first three national parks—Murchison Falls, Queen Elizabeth and Kidepo Valley—were designated in 1952 with the goal of diversifying the cotton-coffee export economy through the promotion of international tourism (Mamdani 1982). These new national parks were fashioned in the image of Yellowstone National Park, in which lands were reserved for tourism and wildlife; human resource use and habitation was prohibited (Hulme and Infield 2001). Suddenly, with a few strokes of the colonial pen, activities central to African livelihoods for centuries, such as collecting firewood, grazing of livestock, hunting, gathering of medicinal plants, harvesting of timber all became illegal. As in many other parts of the continent (Adams and McShane 1992; Brockington 2002), the expropriation of land for national parks in Uganda was undergirded by the notion of unspoiled “wilderness,” in which human habitation and use of resources had no place. An official tourism brochure advertised Kidepo Valley, an area with a long history of human settlement and resource use, as “Uganda’s third, newest, remotest, and by general consent scenically the most astonishing national park is the Kidepo Valley National Park...Kidepo will appeal to those who like their nature *raw and undisturbed*” (my italics, in Mamdani 1982:71).

Antipathy toward human settlement in the Mt. Elgon Reserve began to permeate Forest Department policies in the 1950s and 60s at the same time upland communities began to cultivate small plots of potatoes in abandoned cattle *kraals*. An internal Forest Department report from 1983 notes that “The colonial Governments did not bother much

about the settlement of these people but gradually as their numbers grew bigger and their mode of living slowly changed from nomadism to land tilling, a marked destructive effect on the Forest Estate was realized.” Leaders of the upland communities reported that, starting in the early 1970s, the Forest Department began attempts to induce in-Reserve residents to relocate to the northwestern edge of the protected area with promises of land and threats of eviction. They described meetings from the 1970s and early 80s where Forest Department representatives, perhaps to quash resistance and ensure compliance, promised continued unrestricted grazing access. The prospect of increased participation in agricultural markets without having to abandon the previous mainstays of upland livelihoods—grazing and foraging—drew many households to the proposed resettlement area. The new arrivals began to carve out small farms from the forest, using slash and burn techniques to clear the underbrush and hand axes to fell remaining trees. Kokop Joshua, an elder who moved from Benet in the 1970s, recalled that, for some time, it was common for people to leave their herds on the moorlands with a son or young male relative while the rest of the household worked to clear the forest in what would become the resettlement area.

Official efforts to drive out the reserve’s human inhabitants began in earnest at the outset of the 1980s, culminating in three-month-long resettlement exercise in 1983 (Luzinda 2008; Scott 1998). A committee of district officials, Forest Department staff, and county chiefs allocated plots of land to 2872 households on an estimated 6000 ha between the Kere and Kaptokwoi rivers, which they came to call the Benet Resettlement Area (Luzinda 2008). Perhaps for reasons of expediency (to my knowledge, the official reason has never been publicly disclosed), displaced people from the plains and lower escarpment

and “needy” people from the central escarpment were included in the resettlement exercise and comprised 2/3 of the allocations (Luzinda 2008). While the “needy” category was originally intended to include widows and other particularly indigent households, a number of wealthy farmers from the central escarpment were able to use their influence to secure desirable tracts of land. The resettlement exercise exclusively granted land and did not provide any services to help people move, clear their new plots or information concerning their rights to use of protected area resources. Moses Mwanga, an influential upland community leader who took part in the allocation process, recounted that while many people left their settlements in the reserve voluntarily, others did not wish to leave their abundant pasture land and way of life to become permanently settled farmers. Those who refused to move watched as Forest Department rangers burned their houses along with all their worldly possessions and forced them down the mountain. By May 31, 1983, the allocation committee concluded the resettlement amidst allegations of unfair distribution and misappropriation. A small population remained in the uplands and many of those who were resettled continued to graze, hunt and collect forest products, but the resettlement exercise brought about two major changes in the lives and livelihoods of the people of the highlands: 1) it effectively cleared out the majority of human occupants from the upper zone, thus ending centuries of continuous human habitation, and 2) for the populations from the plains and uplands, it reoriented livelihoods away from mobile pastoralism toward agricultural cultivation fixed on nucleated, individually-held plots of land.

The Transition to National Park, 1992-2010

A new era of confusion, conflict and land tenure insecurity for those in the Benet Resettlement Area emerged with the transition of the protected area from forest park to national park in 1992 at the urging of USAID, IUCN, NORAD and other donors (Norgrove 2002; Scott 1998; Ditiro et al. 2008). At the time, all human use of natural resources inside national parks was illegal and, unlike during the previous period of political instability, the new managers had donor-provided resources to enforce regulations in a much stricter manner (Chhetri et al. 2003). Residents of the resettlement area felt betrayed by the new restrictions. “They tricked us!” Kokop Joseph, a woman who moved from Benet to the resettlement area in 1972, remembered bitterly. “They told us we would be able to grow our own food here and continue grazing” up the mountain. Violent conflicts arose as “law enforcement rangers” began to impound cattle found in and around the park’s new boundaries and levy severe fines against anyone collecting forest products. Addressing unsanctioned forest clearance along the edges of the protected area, a practice that had become widespread during the management vacuum of the 1970s and 1980s, and emerged as a central policy mandate of the newly created National park (Norgrove 2002; Scott 1998). The IUCN initiated the Mount Elgon Conservation and Development Project (MECDP) in 1987 and as Scott (1998) notes in a report on the project that “in the first two phases [lasting into the early 1990s], the project focused on assisting the Government of Uganda in regaining control over the protected area of Mount Elgon. Re-establishment of the 1963 boundary was necessarily a major activity.” Securing the boundary and reclaiming encroached land was further motivated by an agreement between the Park

managers and the Dutch Forests Absorbing Carbon-dioxide Emissions (FACE) Foundation to plant 25,000 ha of trees along the margins of the Park (Lang and Byakola 2006)

When the governmental body in-charge of the administration of the park (then Uganda National Parks, now the Uganda Wildlife Authority) resurveyed the park boundaries, they found that the resettlement area which was supposed to have been no larger than 6000 ha was in fact more than 7500 ha. Despite the fact that the government had allocated land to households throughout the 7500 ha, which the households subsequently cleared and planted, the Uganda National Parks staff redrew the park boundary, removing the 1500 ha from the resettlement area and declaring those who lived there “encroachers.” Over night, approximately 6000 people who had invested great effort and resources clearing and planting the 1500 ha were told the land no longer belonged to them and they would have to relocate once more—this time without an allocation of land.

Both villagers and their local government representatives vehemently protested the new boundary, eventually securing a Parliamentary order calling on UWA not to forcibly relocate any residents until the dispute could be resolved (Okwaare and Hargreaves 2009). Numerous phases of governmental investigation, boundary marking exercises, promises, and resolution plans over the next few years yielded little concrete action by the central government. Meanwhile, UWA rangers continued to pressure residents of the resettlement area, spreading rumors of fresh evictions and reallocations. Hoping to force a resolution to the land tenure insecurity that hung like a pall over livelihoods in the resettlement area, leaders from the resettlement area joined with NGOs, ActionAid and the Uganda Land Alliance to pursue litigation against the Ugandan government in 2003. The lawsuit culminated in a 2005 “consent judgment” or settlement between the parties, recognizing

the legitimacy of land claims in the resettlement area. Though lauded by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR and IWGIA 2009:55), UWA and the central government had failed to resolve the issue by the time I concluded my fieldwork in 2010. Tenure insecurity within the resettlement area was further exacerbated in 2008, when, following the murder of a Belgian tourist inside the national park, UWA, with assistance from the army, drove out several settlements on the upper edge of the resettlement area.

Community-based conservation and revenue-sharing initiatives have been part of management plans for Mount Elgon National Park since the park's inception (Barrow et al. 2001; Hulme and Infield 2001; Norgrove 2002; Scott 1998). Barrow et al. (2001) write that community conservation initiatives were largely donor driven and the government played a minor role, tending to observe rather than be directly involved. Nevertheless, certain elements of the community-conservation efforts in the southern and western borders of the Park such as resource use agreements have positively contributed to the livelihoods of Park-adjacent communities (Ditiro et al. 2008). Because of the unresolved conflict, however, no communities in the upper region of the Benet Resettlement Area qualified for these privileges. While parts of the Benet Resettlement Area have remained technically national park land, villages within the contested zone have been ineligible for basic social services such as agricultural extension, healthcare, education and road construction.

Even after official resettlement, when environmental protection policies continued to intensify, at least on paper, the national political instability of the early 1980s and concomitant atrophy of law enforcement of all types did little to discourage grazing inside the protected area boundaries. While many upland households sold portions of their herds

to finance relocation and the extensive labor involved with clearing their new farms, the individuals I spoke with told me that rapid cattle loss for upland families did not begin in earnest until the early 1990s. The elevation of the protected area to national park status in 1993 coincided with stricter resource-use prohibitions and enhanced enforcement. Rangers patrolling the park were empowered to levy punishments, with little oversight, against those they caught grazing illegally. The farmers I spoke with along the upper edge of the forest, most of whom admitted to grazing their animals illegally, described a range of penalties, which almost always included the impounding of the offending cattle.¹⁶ To get their animals back, owners had to pay cash fines and bribes, which more often than not necessitated selling one or more cows, creating a negative feedback loop that steadily eroded cattle holdings throughout the upper region of the resettlement area.

The implications of the change in the status of the protected area to national park were far-reaching. Heightened resource use restrictions and strict enforcement made grazing and collecting forest products within the park economically risky and even physically dangerous. The change in status also marked a dramatic increase in the involvement of foreign donors, who brought a variety of different goals and objectives. In the service of satisfying these new mandates, Park officials initiated two decades of land tenure insecurity and lack of access to social services among households within the resettlement area.

¹⁶ According to residents of the upper zone, corporal punishment, in the form of caning, also often accompanied arrests and fines, especially when offenders lacked money for bribes. Displaying the long keloids left by rangers' canes on the back of his thighs, one man who was caught collecting building materials in the park, told me, "When they see you, it's only canes!"

Oral History Box 1: How Kityo Francis Lost His Cows

Kityo Francis¹⁷ was born in the 1940s in a small settlement deep within the protected area known as Chepukut. Kityo describes his childhood as a happy one. His father and clansmen who lived nearby maintained ample herds of livestock and honey was plentiful. He was aware that he and his family lived within a protected area, but rarely encountered Forest Department rangers. When the time of resettlement came in the 1980s, local leaders convinced him to remain in the protected area and Kityo missed out on early land allocations. He continued to tend to his herd unmolested throughout the 1980s until 1990 when park managers burned his compound and drove him down to the resettlement area. Squatting on land that managers repeatedly told him belonged to the park, Kityo found himself with two options: sell off his cattle and search for agricultural land to buy elsewhere or remain closer to where he grew up and surreptitiously graze his cattle in the grasslands. He told me how his dignity and identity as a man were inextricable to his herd and how herding was all he knew, making the thought of selling his cows and becoming a settled farmer intolerable. This sentiment was echoed by his neighbor, an older man, who having lost all of his cows, lamented, “We feel we have no life without cows. We are just waiting for death.” Younger men were more adaptable, he said, and could adapt to agriculture. Not so, for the elders who knew no other way of life. To avoid capture, Kityo rose hours before his neighbors lit their pre-dawn breakfast fires, and led his 20 or so cows through the forest. Kityo darted ahead of his grunting animals at regular intervals to listen for the snapping branches and radio chatter of ranger patrols. Kityo’s strategy only carried him so far; between 1991 and 2005 he had been discovered by park guards numerous

¹⁷ All names in this dissertation have been changed to protect the identities of the people discussed except where individuals asked to have their names mentioned or were speaking in their professional capacity.

times and officially arrested four times. He was able to bribe his way out of some of those encounters, but for each of the four arrests he had to sell off at least three of his cows. When I last spoke with him in 2005, Kityo had adopted a fatalistic attitude toward his dwindling herd. Though he had seen friends and neighbors lose all of their cows in the same manner, he was still unwilling to sell off his remaining six cows and led them each morning into the forest mists.

Cattle Raiding and the Desertion of the Northern Plains

As noted above, there was a long history of cattle raiding in the northern plains and foothills of Mt. Elgon (Weatherby 1962). Gray (2000:401) points out that, prior to the colonial era, “livestock raiding played a critical role in the response of nomadic pastoralists to environmental uncertainty.” The area between the Atar and Greek rivers, known as Ngenge, where the Sabinu population was most concentrated, lay at the territorial margins of several cattle-oriented peoples including the Karamojong, Pokot, and Nandi. Frequent droughts in the regions to the north and west, directed pastoralist attention to the relatively well-watered Ngenge plains, making it an epicenter for raids throughout the 19th and 20th centuries and most likely long before. Weatherby (1962) and Mirzeler and Young (1999) notes that intense droughts in the second half of the 19th century touched off a wave of particularly violent raids as Karamojong and other cattle-keepers herders sought to replenish their herds. These reports are confirmed by Jackson and Gedge, the explorers who made the first European ascent of Mt. Elgon in 1890, who reported that

the inhabitants [of the plains] talked of removing themselves elsewhere, as they were continually being harassed by Masai and Wa-Nandi. Even whilst the caravan was present in the district the latter invaded its western portion,

carrying off some 200 head of cattle, besides killing a lot of people and burning their villages (Ravenstein 1891:202).

Though young Sabiny men comprised a warrior class, the elders who directed their military activities placed more emphasis on defensive maneuvering than acquisitive raiding (Goldschmidt 1976; Weatherby 1962). Maintaining relationships with their neighbors up the mountain was of critical importance for lowland Sabiny, who turned to them for protection and shelter during times of particularly intense raiding.

The establishment of military garrisons and expansion of civil administration at the turn of the century brought some measure of protection to Ngenge (Gray 2000). Colonial policies sealed off Karamoja, the northern region home to the largest population of cattle raiders in the region, and fragmented its economy through various destocking and land-enclosure programs (Mamdani 1982). Raids continued, but occurred at a smaller scale than the preceding decades. George Cherop, an older man who spent most of his life in the plains, recounted that though Karamojong warriors had a national reputation for ferocity, he and his contemporaries possessed comparable armaments, spears and arrows, and were often able to deflect smaller raiding parties. Individuals occasionally died in these face-to-face incursions, he told me, yet severe injury was uncommon and the number of cows lost was generally limited.

The *Pax Britannica*, however began to crumble in the years following independence and had all but evaporated by the 1970s. The political instability that began during Idi Amin's rule and continued into the 1980s (discussed in more detail below) radically changed the face of cattle raiding in northeast Uganda (Gray 1999; Mirzeler and Young 1999). The flow of firearms into public hands, which began as a trickle at the beginning of

the century, became a torrent as across the country, barracks and armories fell and soldiers fleeing Amin's dissolving army discarded their uniforms for the tatters of peasants, hoping to avoid persecution from the new regime. Many took their arms with them and sold them for money to start their own farms or trading them for cows (Narman 2003; Mkutu 2006). There was a brisk market for guns and Sabiny elders in Ngenge said to me that an AK-47 in good condition could fetch as many as 20 to 30 cows. By the 1980s, it was estimated that 30-40,000 firearms had flooded into Karamoja (Narman 2003:131). After decades of impoverishment, many young Karamojong men took advantage of the increasing accessibility of automatic weapons and began to carry out raids with deadly efficiency. The withdrawal of military and police presence coupled with the influx of weapons into Karamoja brought a wave of bloodshed to Ngenge, driving thousands of Sabiny agropastoralists from their homes. Many of those displaced from their homes on the plains relocated to the northwestern edge of the Forest Reserve, which would soon become the Benet Resettlement Area. The sizeable population of displaced families and the ongoing threat of violence on the plains led sympathetic Forest Department officials to include them in the land allocations of 1983.

Oral History Box 2: George Cherop's Flight from the Plains

Born on the semi-arid plains of Ngenge in 1940, George Cherop grew up tending his father's herd of 80 zebu. Eighty cows, a figure that today in eastern Uganda would place any man at the pinnacle of the socio-economic scale, was considered moderate for the time while an extremely wealthy man could have over 1000 cattle. George's responsibility as a boy was to lead the lumbering, dewlapped beasts from the marshlands that lined the banks

of the Greek River to the rock-strewn brush of Mt. Elgon's lower escarpment. Like most families in Ngenge, George's family maintained small subsistence plots of millet, sorghum, sweet potatoes and later maize, but cattle was the principal focus of their livelihoods. There were few grazing restrictions and George ranged widely with his father's cows, toting a spade-tipped spear taller than he was. Such mobility enabled him to provide the cows with enough food and water even during the swelter and parch of the dry season.

In 1961, George eloped with Helen Cherotin, paying the brideprice over time with the reluctant help of his father and other relatives. In the patrilocal Sabinu tradition, George and Helen built their own household next to his parents' compound. They constructed two round grass-thatched huts from saplings smeared with clay and dung—one for sleeping and the other for cooking and eating. They also assembled several small granaries and a livestock enclosure built from the thorny branches of the acacia trees that stud the plains. His father provided him with a few cows and a large tract of agricultural land when he married.

George continued to help his father, but he began to put more of his energy into building his own herd. Cows were George's passion and he gradually increased his cattle holdings one by one. Over the ensuing two decades, he and his wife produced two sons, Chebet Swakar and Francis Kabungech, who took on the responsibility of grazing the family's more than 200 cattle. Karamojong cattle raiders were an ever-present threat to Sabinu herds in Ngenge as George was growing up, but as the country plunged into the civil wars of the 1970s and 1980s, raids' frequency and virulence intensified. George and his family weathered the first wave of cattle raiding violence that followed the fall of Idi Amin in 1979, which tapered off slightly during Milton Obote's return to power. In the months

after Yoweri Museveni and his National Resistance Army took power in 1986, as the country began to rebuild its infrastructure and military presence was focused elsewhere, cattle raids once again reached a fevered pitch.

Historically, raids occurred as surprise attacks in the night, but flush with the confidence of success afforded by ubiquitous guns and the absence of law enforcement, young Karamojong warriors began to mount brazen daytime raids. One hot afternoon in 1986, as George, Helen and their two sons were resting in the shade of their kitchen house, a band of Karamojong warriors stormed their compound, AK-47s blazing. Without guns of their own, they knew they stood no chance and fled into the surrounding brush. George and his wife escaped, but both of their children were gunned down. They bled to death as the raiders rounded up all 200 of George's cows and led them north into Karamoja. After days in the bush, George and Helen returned to their home to bury their sons and rebuild their life together. For Helen, the obstacles seemed insurmountable. Soon after the raid she took her own life. In one afternoon, at the age of 46, George lost everything he had worked so hard to piece together. His remaining asset was the land he had received from his father, which was virtually worthless due to the regional instability and was a constant reminder of his deceased family members. "How could I stay where my children died?" he asked me, the anguish still fresh after almost 25 years.

From Taxation to Structural Adjustment: The Creation of Peasant Production

The Colonial Era

When the first agents of the Imperial British East Africa Company arrived in the 1880s, the interlacustrine region that would become the Uganda Protectorate was

characterized by extreme environmental and cultural diversity. The glacier-capped mountains, rainforests, vast lakes and swamps, and semi-arid grasslands were home to peoples who spoke more than 80 distinct languages with countless dialects (Schoenbrun 1998). Political organization varied from the expansive kingdoms of Buganda, Toro, Ankole and Bunyoro, to the smaller agricultural chiefdoms of Busoga and Bugisu, to clan-based Karamojong and Jie pastoralists and small bands of foraging peoples like the Batwa and Ik. Yet, it was not the allure of specific extractable resources or fertile land for European settlement that led the British to declare Uganda as an imperial protectorate in 1894, but intrainperialist rivalry (Mamdani 1979:40). Harry Johnston, a key player in establishing the protectorate, writes in a chapter entitled "Commercial Prospects:" "I maintain that inasmuch as we entered upon the assumption of Protectorates over East and Central Africa mainly in the interests of the natives...in preference to allowing them to come under the sphere of another Power"(1902:281). Establishing a colonial infrastructure in the Uganda Protectorate was a costly endeavor. Wars and mutinies from 1894-1900 required large outlays of soldiers and monies from the British exchequer, so much so that early colonial officials Lugard and Johnston had to fend off multiple orders to withdraw from the protectorate entirely for lack of funds (Ofcansky 1996:21).

As a result, the colonial administrators were under significant pressure to transform Uganda into a stable, profitable colony as efficiently and quickly as possible. Establishing a settler colony was deemed to require too much time, money and people, so they turned to a native system of taxable agricultural production overseen and enforced by a newly empowered minority otherwise known as indirect rule (see Lugard 1968[1893]; Johnston 1902). Changes in production, tax collection and enforcement necessitated a political

infrastructure and to further reduce British personnel and prevent unified resistance to colonial rule, the protectorate's architects empowered the kingdom of Buganda as their agents of empire. In 1901, Johnston wrote that the agreement signed with the leaders of Buganda "was a practical attempt to establish on a sound basis a ruling oligarchy, which, under British guidance, might do for Buganda what the landed aristocracy had done...to give stability to the government of England"(in Mamdani 1976:41).

Once agreements had been signed and power was consolidated through the spread of Baganda infrastructure across the protectorate, the colonial regime was faced with the formidable task of creating markets and transforming subsistence producers into money-making tax payers (Mamdani 1976; Vincent 1989). In the absence of labor markets in most regions of the country, the Department of Agriculture promoted small-holder cultivation of cash crops like cotton, coffee and tobacco for export (Parker 1952; Wrigley 1959). The construction of the Uganda Railway, which connected Mombasa with Lake Victoria in 1901, provided the means for export, yet the colonialists found that farmers required external motivation (read: coercion) to replace food crops like *matooke*, millet and sweet potatoes with inedible cash crops (Jamal 1978; Mamdani 1976). Starting in 1900, the government levied a poll tax, in which each male household head was required to pay a fixed sum per year or provide a month of free labor to the government (Jamal 1978; Mamdani 1976; Wrigley 1959). The degree of taxation and forced labor varied by region, but was, by many accounts, highly successful in compelling participation in market activity (Parker 1952). The missionary, A. R. Tucker (1911:288) observed that the poll tax "Stirred to action and electrified into life the whole nation. Men knew that by a certain date the requisite rupees must be forthcoming. Thus it came about that the element of wages was introduced into the

life of the Baganda, and another revolution—the economic one—was effected.”

Though Sebei, the northwestern swath of Mt. Elgon, was not an economic hub like Bugisu to its south, the “economic revolution” touched off by the imposition of the poll tax gradually swept through Sabiny households. When the first European expeditions stopped to trade for provisions, cowry shells and iron were the primary currencies of exchange (Austin 1897; Ravenstein 1891). By 1904, Baganda administrative control extended from Bugisu into Sebei, bringing the Sabiny population into closer contact with the colonial regime and Baganda tax collectors and introducing cash into the economy (Goldschmidt 1976). According to elders in the resettlement area, tax collectors focused their attentions chiefly on the more accessible settlements, which were located in the central and lower zones. Households in the lowlands began selling animals at the newly established markets in Mbale to the south and Namalu, further north in Karamoja and cultivating cotton. The temperate climate of the central escarpment and even colder environment of the uplands were not suitable for cotton. Maize, though not among the export-oriented crops promoted by the Department of Agriculture, became an increasingly important source of tax money for the residents of the central zone in addition to *matooke* and, by 1920, coffee (Goldschmidt 1976).¹⁸

The period between the 1920s and 1960s witnessed a dramatic agricultural expansion throughout Sebei. Increasing availability of consumer goods provided added incentive for farmers to produce for the market. Contemporary Sabiny farmers told me that

¹⁸ Agricultural historians, Miracle (1966:99) and McCann (2005:30) postulate that Swahili traders may have introduced the crop to the southern kingdoms of Uganda in the mid-19th century, but note that the history of its introduction is murky at best. Maize was first documented in northern Mt. Elgon in 1897 (Austin 1903) and several of my oral history participants suggested that their grandparents brought back maize seeds from Kenya at the beginning of the 20th century. Nevertheless, respondents were uniform in maintaining that the increased need for cash production drove the expansion of the crop.

their grandparents found that maize stored well, was more prolific and less labor intensive than millet and sorghum, making the crop more conducive for the production of saleable surpluses. Maize cultivation spread quickly across the mountain, largely replacing millet and sorghum as primary staples. In the central zone, coffee production grew apace, as the government enacted policies encouraging its production (Mamdani 1976). The transition away from traditional grains was hastened by the adoption of ox-drawn plows, which enabled farmers to manage larger fields than they had been able to previously with hand hoes.

Access to markets also dramatically increased during this period. During the first two decades of the 20th century, access to the eastern region's main agricultural and livestock markets in Mbale, 65 km to the south, was limited. Footpaths linked Sebei with Bugisu, but the journey transporting produce on the backs of donkeys was long and arduous. The first road to from Mbale to Kapchorwa, the economic center of Sebei, was built after World War I and gradually extended eastward to Kenya by 1960 (Goldschmidt 1976:147). The construction of the road revolutionized farmers' access to markets by bringing the first middlemen and their produce transport trucks to Kapchorwa, albeit unreliably especially during the rainy season, when the road could be closed for weeks.

Post-colonial Chaos and the Rise of the National Resistance Movement

In 1962, Milton Obote became the first prime minister of the newly independent nation of Uganda, putting an end to 68 years of British colonial rule. Over the ensuing nine years, Obote responded to the ethnic factionalism that had been fostered under the colonial system of indirect rule by consolidating his government's power through authoritarian

means (Himbara and Sultan 1995; Reagan 1998). Obote appointed himself Executive President in 1966, dismantled local elections and centralized both administrative control and the economy (Norgrove 2002). Under Obote, the agricultural sector, long the lynchpin of the Ugandan economy, was dominated by state-subsidized agricultural cooperatives that were in practice rife with corruption (Brett 1991). Despite considerable investment in social services health care and education, especially in the early years and in urban areas (Bigsten and Kayizzi-Mugerwa 1999), Norgrove (2002:69) writes that “by 1970, decay had set in throughout the rural areas. Local people were called upon to sacrifice for the national good, but instead they withdrew from the market economy.” Obote’s reliance on the military to support his unpopular interventions backfired when the leader of his army, Idi Amin, overthrew him in 1971 (Himbara and Sultan 1995).

Despite initial optimism among the populace and western powers alike, Amin’s rule soon proved even more socially and economically devastating than the Obote years. Amin further dismantled the remaining shreds of democratic governance, violently suppressing opposition and enacting an “economic war” against the Indian bourgeoisie, who the British had brought early in the century to control the mercantile sector (Mamdani 1976). Under Amin’s violent, rapacious regime, more than 500,000 citizens were killed, infrastructure was demolished and the industrial and export economy collapsed (Bigsten and Kayizzi-Mugerwa 1999; Collier and Reinikka 2001b). Abetted by the Tanzanian government, civil war engulfed the country by the late 1970s. The fall of Amin in 1979 was followed by a series of short-lived regimes and the second rise of Obote in 1980. Obote managed to rule the country for four years through unrelenting military action against resistance forces, but was ousted by military factions in 1985. Okello succeeded Obote, but was quickly

dispatched by National Resistance Army, led by Yoweri Museveni, thus concluding the bloody game of musical chairs that was Ugandan politics (Tindigarukayo 1988).

Unsurprisingly, the protracted political chaos and violence wrought havoc on the Ugandan economy. Economists have called the 1970s in Uganda “the lost decade,” during which the per capita GDP fell by approximately 42% (Jamal 1988:679). The economy fared little better in the early to mid-1980s with production similarly stagnant and annual inflation rates topping 240% (Muhumuza 2007:57). Between 1961 and 1989, the World Bank reports that Uganda had the lowest growth rate of any country in sub-Saharan Africa (World Bank 1989). Institutionally, the Ugandan government inherited by Museveni was a burned out shell, “social and institutional structures had been decimated and a climate of fear pervaded many aspects of life” (Norgrove 2002:71).

During this period of turmoil, the Sabiny farmers and herders of Sebei, which became Kapchorwa District after independence, did what most rural producers did throughout the rest of the country: abandon market production in favor of subsistence (Norgrove 2002).¹⁹ Most of the political violence was concentrated in the center and south of the country, isolating the eastern region from markets. William Cheptegei, a farmer from the Kapraron and former Forest Department ranger, told me that he and his neighbors rarely ventured far from their homes and fields: “we never went to Mbale or Kampala,” for fear of unrestrained cattle raiding and predatory soldiers, “who could just take anything.” As noted above, the disintegration of security forces in Ngenge and the concomitant rise in raiding violence led to the virtual desertion of the lower zone and mass migration up the

¹⁹ Collier and Reinikka (2001b:20) state that between 1971 and 1986, subsistence activities increased from 21 to 36% of the national economy.

mountain. Thus, most people welcomed the relative stability ushered in by the National Resistance Movement (NRM) regime.

Museveni's government brought sweeping change to the nation. A comprehensive survey of NRM policies is beyond the purview of this chapter, but the market-oriented economic transformation was of particular import to rural livelihoods. Though the government was initially resistant to external aid from multilateral lenders like the World Bank and IMF, Museveni quickly relented, welcoming aid money and becoming an ardent proponent of economic liberalization (Museveni 1997). Foreign donor money flooded into Uganda, averaging 52% of the government's total yearly expenditure and net lending between 1991 and 2007 (Brownbridge 2010:277). Annual foreign aid and loans to Uganda rose from \$179.7 million in 1989 (Hauser 1999:626) to \$1.8 trillion in 2009, making Uganda the 6th largest recipient of official development assistance in all of Africa (Nyanzi 2011).²⁰ The structural adjustment programs that were attendant with the high influx of foreign aid brought a market-based ideology to the fore of the Ugandan economy and produced what Collier and Reinikka have called "one of the most ambitious programs of economic liberalization on the African continent" (2001a:1; see also Muhumuza 2007). Trade liberalization, devaluation of the currency, privatization, retrenchment of social services were all enacted with the aim of stabilizing the economy and fostering GDP growth (Bigsten and Kayizzi-Mugerwa 1999; Collier and Reinikka 2001a; Muhumuza 2007; Whitworth and Williamson 2010).

²⁰ Aid has not come without foreign influence in domestic affairs beyond the economic. Schlichte (2005:168) observes that "in present day Uganda, the means from external sources cover the entire public investment underlining how important it is for the present—indeed for anyone within the state apparatus—to be on good terms with Western governments, without whose support not even schools and roads could be built."

The results of economic restructuring were immediate and dramatic: runaway inflation was slashed and the GDP grew at a sustained rate of 6% per year (Collier and Reinikka 2001a ; Whitworth and Williamson 2010).²¹ Among economists, Uganda became the triumphal poster child for structural adjustment. In a volume published by the World Bank, Collier and Reinikka describe Uganda as “the main model of successful postconflict recovery in Africa” (2001b:15). Nevertheless, some scholars and aid practitioners have challenged the unmitigated success narrative, arguing that GDP growth has occurred at the expense of the rural poor, who make up 90% of the population. Consistent with Sen’s (1999) critique of Gross Domestic Product figures, Mamdani (1990) points out that the GDP growth figures touted by development economists were misleading, masking the concentration of wealth among an urban elite, who were better positioned to take advantage of privatization initiatives. Others argue that the introduction of hospital and school fees have reduced access for the poorest and most vulnerable people (Bigsten and Kayizzi-Mugerwa 1999; Muhumuza 2007). The overwhelming dependency on foreign loans and aid have led some to question the model’s sustainability (Belshaw et al. 1999). As Igoe and Kelsall (2005) observe for other parts of Africa, structural adjustment programs created a void in the social services sector, filled by a florescence of foreign NGOs. Poor coordination, duplication of efforts, and minimal skill transfer have limited NGOs abilities to effect lasting change (Bigsten and Kayizzi-Mugerwa 1999).

Structural adjustment also had major implications for small-holder farmers. In terms of immediate effects, the removal of long-standing government subsidies on

²¹ It is important to note that the economic boom, in which the economy more than doubled, would not have been possible without the reduction of large-scale conflict and the restoration of law and order throughout most of the country (Collier and Reinikka 2001b).

agricultural implements and inputs significantly raised the cost of cultivation, which were put even further out of reach by the 66% devaluation of currency (Muhumuza 2007). More fundamentally, however, the new economic project of reform, in a move that echoed the colonial goals of the early 20th century, sought to steer rural production away from subsistence back toward the market (Collier and Reinikka 2001b; Jamal 1988). From the perspective of foreign economic advisors, the emphasis on subsistence production, which enabled the vast majority of the population to survive the mean years of political instability, was a major cause of poverty (see Belshaw et al. 1999). This view is clearly reflected in the Government's Plan for the Modernization of Agriculture (PMA), which states as its mission "eradicating poverty by transforming subsistence agriculture to commercial production" (MFPED 2000:31). The PMA has sought to draw people into the monetary economy through taxation and increase agricultural output through the promotion of agricultural technologies and improved crop and livestock breeds (Ellis and Bahigwa 2003; Mukadasi 2007).

For residents of the Benet Resettlement Area, the reforms of the NRM era have been felt in a number of ways. Farmers told me that market production has sharply risen in local importance as the need for cash has increased. Farmer's access to markets has improved and economic opportunities expanded with the tarmacking of the Mbale-Kapchorwa road in 2002. Sumotwo Chebet, a retired soldier and farmer, succinctly summarized the change, "People now just look for money!" Chelimo Godfrey, a young man who makes most of his living collecting grass in the lowlands, observes, "These days, money speaks. Money has won." The introduction of fees for healthcare and education, in addition to uniform and school supply costs have had significant effects on household decisions. Outside of shop

keeping and agricultural wage labor, there are few opportunities for cash generation outside of selling one's food crops. To produce surpluses, many farmers have reduced fallowing and increased the amount of land under cultivation by converting pasture to fields. This has contributed to rapid depletion of the soil and a growing sense of land shortage throughout the area, which in turn has constrained the number of livestock people are able to keep. Striking a balance between selling enough produce to meet the monetary and dietary needs of the household has become a challenge, resulting in widespread seasonal food shortages. There is also a growing sense that the drive to make money has promoted individualization, eroding social support networks and contributed to increased theft. One grandmother, Kokop Fini, described this as "the money problem." Kokop and many of her neighbors look back on the days before intensified market production with nostalgia, noting that relationships that were historically central to coping strategies such as cattle sharing and mutual assistance have been replaced by "this culture of money."

Conclusion

In the Benet Resettlement Area, contemporary livelihoods practices, opportunities, and constraints, have been shaped by the confluence of many historical ecological, political, and economic processes. This chapter has sought to provide an overview of some of the most influential of these processes. The mountain's volcanic history produced a diverse base of forest and grassland resources. Over the course of centuries, the Sabiny population adapted a primarily pastoral mode of production that originated in the semi-arid savannahs of Kenya and Ethiopia to the three distinct physiographic zones of the northern

slopes of the Mt. Elgon. Steady rainfall, fertile volcanic soils, and the physical protection offered by the mountain's topography led to the concentration of the population in the central zone of the mountain, where people reduced their emphasis on livestock and intensified their agricultural production. The heavy rains, while supporting the intensification of agriculture, when combined with the slopes of the mountain also presented a serious challenge in the form of soil erosion, a threat that would become increasingly serious over the course of the twentieth century. In the upland forest and grasslands and on the lowland plains, smaller, mobile Sabinu populations retained the emphasis on livestock production and made considerable use of available wild flora and fauna. These three populations, separated by their adaptations to their respective resource bases, maintained extensive trade relations with each other that not only ensured the distribution of a wide variety of products but also provided a safety net during crises. Because of the environmental variation present on the mountain, outbreaks of disease, drought, and other threats tended to be localized, underscoring the importance of social support networks that spanned the physiographic zones. Such adaptation and change continued in response to political-economic changes wrought by colonialism. The progressive integration of local agricultural production into regional markets, related in part to the institution of taxation, was a major force of change especially for the agriculturalists of the central escarpment. However, due to the physical isolation from markets and centers of governance, the process of agricultural commercialization was more gradual in northern Mt. Elgon than in other parts of the country. Displacement and resettlement in the 1970s and 80s rapidly accelerated the process of commercialization and livelihoods change, more broadly.

A historical perspective illustrates how the displacement and resettlement that so radically altered the lives and livelihoods opportunities of thousands of people on Mt. Elgon were not isolated events, but rather produced by the conjuncture of two powerful, historically contingent processes: post-colonial political upheaval at the mountain's base and the development of conservation policy on the upper part of the mountain. While cattle raiding had been a major influence on Sabiny lives for centuries, the unprecedented availability of modern weapons due to the fall of Idi Amin and the subsequent political struggles changed the face of cattle raiding on the plains. With the new automatic rifles, Karimojong and others cattle raiding groups were able to intensify the frequency and violence of their raids with impunity, which led to the near complete desertion of the Ngenge plains. Residents of the plains scattered throughout Sabiny territory, many relocating to the edge of the forest reserve, where Forest Department officials had plans to resettle the upland Sabiny population.

Conservation efforts on Mt. Elgon began in the first part of the twentieth century as British colonial administrators cordoned off the upper third of the mountain as a forest reserve. The establishment of a protected area on the mountain was tied to the broader program of colonial land appropriation as well as the desire to protect commercial production of coffee and other crops concentrated on the southern side of the mountain. The Ugandan national parks system, enacted toward the end of the colonial era and expanded more recently through the support of international donors and NGOs to include the protected area on Mt. Elgon, reflected the institutionalization of a protectionist philosophy that sought to preserve a vision of wilderness as untouched and pristine, despite the long history of human use and occupation. The mainstreaming of this

protectionist philosophy strongly influenced the trajectory of conservation policy, ultimately leading to the resource access prohibitions that resulted in the displacement and resettlement of the upland Sabinu population on Mt. Elgon as well as subsequent efforts to strengthen government control over the protected area. It is important to recognize the role that international donors came to play in the most recent phase of conservation in Uganda. Upon his rise to power, President Yoweri Museveni welcomed unprecedented levels of international aid and loans, many of which came with structural adjustment conditionalities that demanded, among other things, the dramatic pairing down of governmental services. In terms of conservation practice, structural adjustment increased Ugandan natural resource managers' reliance on international donors for financial and logistical support and created the need for conservation areas to generate revenue. Ugandan dependence on such new streams of revenue afforded foreign actors unprecedented influence, leading to the incorporation of often conflicting mandates into national conservation policy. The involvement of international donors and NGOs and relative weakening of the state have also presented new opportunities for local activists, who have been able to use their connections with powerful international institutions, movements, and discourses as leverage in their resistance to conservation.

It is against this complex ecological and political-economic backdrop that residents of the Benet Resettlement Area have made their lives. Looking up in scale and back in time in the manner of Blaikie and Brookfield (1987), it is evident that such land user decisions on Mt. Elgon are linked to a broad array of processes at a variety of spatial and temporal scales from the local (the high soil fertility, high rainfall of the local mountain environment) to the international (structural adjustment policies and the rollback of the state).

Displacement and resettlement, the defining events in the history of the Benet Resettlement Area, represent a highly specific articulation of multi-scale historical political-economic processes that radically altered the array of local opportunities and constraints. The next chapter takes a closer look at how displacement and resettlement on Mt. Elgon transformed the fundamental conditions of production—settlement patterns, livelihoods portfolios and engagement with markets, and property relations—in the Benet Resettlement Area.

CHAPTER 3

WHEN “EVERYTHING CHANGED”:

RESETTLEMENT, ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION, AND LAND TENURE INSECURITY

Introduction: Kokop Linas’ Journey

When Kokop Linas²² was in her late teens and starting her family within the forest reserve in the 1960s, she said, individualized land tenure and commercial agriculture were not major concerns for her and her peers. These concepts were important to varying degrees for her trading partners down the mountain, she knew, but they did not sit well with land use and livelihoods in the moors and forest. Kokop moved to her husband’s family’s encampment in Benet²³ upon their marriage. The settlement was too small to be considered a village, she said; just a collection of a few households, including her husband’s parents, a few of his brothers and their families, nestled in a grassy heath not far from a thick stand of bamboo. As she recounted it to me decades later by a stream in the resettlement area near Kapkwomongesai, it was a busy, subsistence-oriented life. Kokop spent most days milking her husband’s cows, tending to the settlement’s small potato patch, and collecting firewood, bamboo, and edible and medicinal plants. Meanwhile, her husband tended to his beehives, grazed his cows, goats and sheep with the other men of the settlement in the surrounding grasslands, and occasionally went on a hunt for small game

²² *Kokop* is an honorific Kupsabiny term for grandmother that is often joined with the name of her first grandchild, in this case whose name was Linas.

²³ The Benet referred to here was the name of an area within the protected area historically home to many *mosop* settlements and later provided the name for the resettlement area.

or antelope. Having come of age in the uplands, Kokop was highly proficient at transforming the green, arm-thick bamboo trunks into the tightly woven baskets, *sesok*, that were, through trade with the agricultural villages of the central escarpment, the main source of staple foods for the upland villages. In the evenings, after she put her young children to bed, she worked the thin, straw-yellow bamboo strands into durable hemispheres, their lips rounded on one end and cinched on the other like the half of an hourglass.

After a short time in her new household, Kokop began to join some of the other women from the area and a few donkeys on their journeys down the mountain to trade *sesok* for millet, maize and other agricultural products that would provide the starchy compliment to the milk, game and wild plants that made up the rest of their families' diets. These trades were almost always for food, not money. "What did we need money for? What could we buy? There were no shops. We didn't have consumer goods, but we had enough milk and life was okay." During Kokop's time within the reserve, government presence was minimal. There were no schools or other infrastructure and tax collection was sporadic if not largely non-existent in the inaccessible upland areas. What little food she and her family grew was exclusively for household consumption and men like her husband, when they did trade in livestock, preferred to trade animals for more animals (a few chickens for a goat, a few goats for a calf). There were a few resources to which individuals had exclusive rights, such as beehives and specific animals, but individualized, exclusive rights to land did not exist. "In *mosop*," she said, "land was communal. Elders made the decisions [about grazing rights]. When the grass was too low [verging on overgrazed], we moved to a new area."

According to Kokop, “Everything changed” the day in the early 1980s when Forest Department rangers burned her settlement in the protected area and drove Kokop and her growing family down to the nascent resettlement area. As she began to describe this painful period of her life, a storm seemed to pass over her face. Her milky eyes appeared to darken, her brows knitted and the network of creases around her mouth deepened. “We thought we were going to a good place, but it was not...When we came here, they gave us individual plots and we found a culture of selling crops. People began selling their plots,” seduced by the easy access to cash and new prevalence of consumer goods. “We thought that we could always go back [to the forests and grasslands], that we could always graze. The soldiers [Forest Department rangers] told us so.” For Kokop and her neighbors, the years following their resettlement brought more change and confusion. Compared with the cold of *mosop*, “it was like a desert to us. Our cows were not used [to it]. Our children were not used [to it]. There were new diseases and many died,” including several of her children and many of her husband’s cows. Kokop’s husband sold much of the land he was allocated, some to cover the labor costs of clearing the land, some for the treatment of his children’s mysterious diseases, some for spending money. He and his remaining sons took their animals daily into the protected area for grazing, as the resettlement exercise left no space for common grazing. Kokop told me how she worked hard to learn the ways of planting maize on the steep inclines of their land, but the practices were unfamiliar and yields decreased from year to year because of soil erosion.

During the bad seasons when her seeds were washed down the mountain or her family hadn’t managed to reserve enough food for household consumption, she returned to the bamboo forests for the materials to make baskets, which she traded to make up for the

shortfall in food reserves. After they had spent nearly a decade in the resettlement area, the protected area became a national park and restrictions on in-park resource use tightened dramatically. When caught grazing or collecting bamboo by the new park guards, Kokop and her husband faced beatings, fines, even rape, she said. At that time, she told me, “there was no more *sakandat* [food-sourcing journeys] for us. When UWA took over, we had no more access to the bamboo. That’s why hunger has disturbed us so much.” With limited access to in-park resources, Kokop and her husband had only their meager plot of land to fall back on. Aside from the challenges entailed in intensifying production on a small, steeply-pitched field, Kokop and her husband found that the government had declared the land they had cleared and planted with potatoes and maize park land. National park guards became a common presence in her and her neighbors’ fields. “They called us encroachers, but they gave us the land!” she exclaimed with resigned indignation. Over the next two decades, Kokop witnessed waves of evictions, double-talking politicians, and boundary marking exercises that seemed, in her eyes, to claim more and more farm land for the national park—all of which brought increased uneasiness and uncertainty about the future. After her husband died, their sons sold the remaining scrap of land to pay for the funeral, leaving Kokop without a home of her own. Looking down into the knobby tangle of her arthritic fingers and reflecting on the tremendous changes she had witnessed over the past decades, she murmured, “At times I feel like hanging myself.”

Kokop Linas’ story reflects the experiences of many families in the resettlement area and others around the world who have suffered at the hands of displacement and resettlement. De Wet observes, “Forced resettlement not only disrupts peoples lives and values but also casts them into wider sets of structures and relationships and into a process

of accelerated socioeconomic change” (2009:81). In the Benet Resettlement Area, the individualization and privatization of property, enclosure of common grazing areas and denial of access to wild resources forced the entire resettled population—both those displaced from the protected area and those displaced from the foot of the mountain—to shift the emphasis of their livelihoods from livestock to commercialized, intensive agriculture, an economic pursuit long argued by economists and others to be predicated on land tenure security. Yet, since the 1990s, with the help of foreign donors and conservation agencies, the Ugandan government and its natural resource managers have enacted formal policies and informal practices that have actively promoted tenure *insecurity*, imperiling livelihoods throughout the resettlement area. Within a fixed and fragile montane land base, the long-term viability of livelihoods on the mountain requires that farmers make significant soil and water conservation investments, which are difficult for farmers to make within an atmosphere of uncertainty and fear. Moreover, as Cernea (1997), Scudder and Colson (1982), and others have observed, reconstructing livelihoods following the upheavals of displacement and resettlement depends on strong social networks of mutual support, which themselves require investments of time, energy, and trust.

To understand the long-term implications of displacement and resettlement for livelihoods in the Benet Resettlement Area, it is necessary to examine how those processes fundamentally restructured property relations and the range of livelihoods opportunities as well as the challenges those in the resettlement area have faced as they have striven to construct new lives in the aftermath of displacement. In the Benet Resettlement Area, many farmers have come to view government-induced tenure insecurity as a chief constraint on their livelihoods, shaping not only their decisions to invest in soil conservation measures

and local social support networks but also the form and content of resistance to the national park. This chapter examines how displacement and resettlement, by transforming the fundamental relations of production, made tenure security a fundamental necessity for the residents of the resettlement area. I argue that, contrary to the evolutionary claims of many property theorists, the rise in significance of tenure security was neither natural nor inevitable, but the result of the specific ways displacement and resettlement changed settlement patterns, resource access and livelihoods activities, and property relations.

Land, Property, Property Rights, Access, and Security: Some Preliminary Definitions and Taxonomy

Ellickson observes, “Because human beings are fated to live mostly on the surface of the earth, the pattern of entitlements to use land is a central issue in social organization”(1993:1317). As such, from Plato and Aristotle to Locke and Marx, the breadth and historical depth of theories of land and property are expansive. The literature on land and property rights in Africa is similarly vast, the subject having attracted scholars from varying disciplines across the spectrum of social science from the colonial era to the present (see Anderson et al. 1976; Bennett et al. 1986; Noronha 1985). Despite, or perhaps because of, the profusion of work on the subject, consensus definitions even for the basic terms (land, property rights, tenure security, etc.) have all proven difficult to achieve. For the sake of clarity, I will begin this section with some definitions of key terms before moving into a discussion of debates within property rights theory as they apply to the experiences of residents of the Benet Resettlement Area.

Shipton (1994) points out that the concept of land can be protean and pregnant with both material and symbolic meaning. He writes, “land can mean soil and sand, a piece of a map, a political power base, an aspect of divinity, or a resource to be exploited” (Shipton 1994:348). Researchers have shown that such meanings vary both across and within cultural contexts (Bassett 1993; Shipton and Goheen 1992) and that the processes through which those meanings are constructed and articulated—and by whom—are shaped by power relations (Moore 1996; Peet and Watts 1996; Shipton 1994; Shipton and Goheen 1992).²⁴ Within the parameters of this chapter, I will focus on the biophysical and utilitarian dimensions of land as an accumulation of pedological and hydrological resources, the extraction and management of which form the basis for livelihoods on Mt. Elgon.

While the concept of property rights or tenure²⁵ can vary tremendously in form and content, it is generally agreed across disciplines to consist of a bundle of characteristics concerning the relationship between individuals or groups and physical property and among people relating to that property (Alchian and Demsetz 1973; Bromley 1991; Feder and Feeny 1991). These characteristics can include, among others, exclusivity, inheritability, transferability, and enforcement thereof. Property rights can also be thought of in utilitarian terms. Property rights are, as stated by Arnot et al. (2011:297), “the utility received by a property right holder of a resource over time that arises from practices such as extraction, consumption, or habitation” that exists within a context of social rules, laws,

²⁴ Critical theorists might argue that the meanings ascribed to or erased from any term, whether land or otherwise, are similarly political (see Foucault 1980).

²⁵ The two are used interchangeably in the literature (see Arnot et al. 2011).

regulations and norms.²⁶ An important cross-cutting element of scholarly conceptions of property rights is that they are fundamentally social and political phenomena. That is, rights are relational and gain their specific meaning and force from the social and political contexts within which they are maintained, negotiated, and contested.

Though property rights can entail access to resources, the two concepts are not synonymous. Ribot and Peluso (2003) note that resource access differs from property in that access represents an *ability* to benefit from a resource while property represents the *right* to benefit from it. The distinction is significant because people may have access to resources that they might not have official rights to (Sikor and Lund 2009). In this formulation, access is a much more flexible concept with a wider scope than property rights. Ribot and Peluso write,

Access is about *all* possible means by which a person is able to benefit from things. Property generally evokes some kind of *socially acknowledged and supported* claims or rights—whether the acknowledgement is by law, custom, or convention...The rights associated with law, custom, and convention are not always equivalent. Some actions may be illegal under state law, while maintaining a socially sanctioned base in customary or conventional realms of collective legitimacy, or vice versa (2003:156).

Such a distinction is particularly relevant for African contexts, where land rights and access relationships have been shown to be highly fluid and overlapping and where colonial histories established private property laws alongside so-called customary law (Berry 1993; Bruce et al. 1993; Migot-Adholla and Bruce 1994; Reyna and Downs 1988; Shipton and Goheen 1992).

²⁶Sjaastad and Bromley (2000:366) argue that a property right is not merely the ability to exclude others from land or transfer it to one's offspring; rather, it includes the protection of those abilities by a state or other authority.

For heuristic purposes, property theorists have identified four general categories of property rights regimes: open access, communal property, private property and state property (FAO 2002; Feder and Feeny 1991).²⁷ For resources under open access, no specific rights are assigned and all individuals and groups may utilize them without restriction. For resources under communal or common property, rights are held by a group of individuals. Property theorists in the 1950s and 60s, writing from an economic perspective, tended to conflate open-access with communal regimes, which have often lacked the formal documentation and legal frameworks of private property regimes (Sjaastad and Bromley 1997; Robbins 2004; e.g. Gordon 1954; Coase 1960; Hardin 1968). Since then, studies of common property have proliferated. Such studies have found that true open access resources are rare and found usually in areas of low population density and that a multitude of social arrangements and regulatory frameworks can be found within common property regimes (see Berkes et al. 1989; McCay and Acheson 1987; Ostrom 1990). In contrast with common property, individuals are the primary rights holders within private property regimes, while the state or similar, large-scale administrative body controls state property. All regimes can exist simultaneously or in various combinations within a given society or even on a single tract of land (Feder and Feeny 1991). For example, in contemporary Uganda there are grazing lands held in common by villages, agricultural fields under individualized private tenure, and national park and forestry land controlled exclusively by the state. Before the colonial era, during which all “unused” land was claimed for the Crown, some open access grazing resources

²⁷ Alternatively, Ellickson (1993:1323) divides property regimes into two spheres, private property and public property. Within the private sphere, land can be held by an individual or by a household. Within the public sphere, land can be held by a group (c. 13- c. 1000 entrants), a horde (c. 1000-millions of entrants), or all people (open access).

did exist especially in the sparsely populated north where transhumant pastoralism was the dominant mode of production, though the extent of such open access range lands was most likely less extensive than the colonial administrators claimed (Mamdani 1982).

Property theory has not been confined to mere taxonomy. The relationship between the various tenure regimes, resource use efficiency and, most recently, investment in conservation activities has long been the focus of vigorous debates, both within academic and policy circles (for a historical perspective, see North 1981). Before addressing these debates, it is necessary to examine the concept of tenure security, which, for many economists, has come to represent an “important determinant in explaining the economic behavior of property holders (Arnot et al. 2011:297). For Bruce et al. (1994), tenure security represents the degree to which a rights holder has control over resources in terms of duration (the longer, the more secure), assurance (the lower the risk of rights loss, the more secure), and breadth (the wider the array of rights, the more secure). Building on those three elements, Place et al. (1994:19) write that “land tenure security can be defined to exist when an individual perceives that he or she has rights to a piece of land on a contiguous basis, free from imposition or interference from outside sources, as well as the ability to reap the benefits of labor and capital invested in that land either in use or upon transfer to another holder.”

While this definition and its variants have been widely employed (see Arnot et al. 2011), it has increasingly drawn criticism. Sjaastad and Bromley (2000) argue that assurance—the rights holder’s feeling that his/her/their rights will be protected from infringement or dispossession—is the only viable factor in determining security across contexts. They observe that there may be multiple situations where level of security is

identical but rights are held for different durations. For example, a person may have a 35 year lease on a piece of land guaranteed by the government while her neighbor possesses title to his land without any time restrictions. For both, the government may guarantee those rights equally and tenure security is the same. Similar situations could be said to exist with breadth of rights. The type or range of rights a person has does not always affect the security of those rights. In other words, duration and breadth *describe* the rights themselves—their content—not their security per se. Lund (2000) points out that definitions such as those employed by Bruce et al. (1994) uses the characteristics of private property (individualized exclusivity) to define high tenure security. Such an observation has important implications for evaluating land reform interventions which seek to enhance tenure security, a point to which I will return shortly. When duration and breadth are stripped away, we are left with a definition of tenure security as the assurance that rights will not be lost. Tenure insecurity, therefore, is the absence of that assurance. Both tenure security and insecurity are expressed in terms of the rights holder's perception of the likelihood of rights loss, not just the likelihood itself (Barrows and Roth 1990; Migot-Adholla and Bruce 1994; Sjaastad and Bromley 2000). The emphasis on subjective perception is crucial for understanding how tenure insecurity is enacted and how it shapes and constrains people's livelihoods decisions.

The Property Rights Paradigm and Its Discontents: On the Relationship between Tenure Regime, Security, and Investment

The notion that high tenure security encourages the highest levels of investment and hence productivity has formed the basis for much Western property theory at least

since the writings of Adam Smith, John Locke, and other 18th century Enlightenment philosophers (North 1981). This view, sometimes labeled the “property rights school” or “property rights paradigm,” is concisely expressed by Low, who wrote in 1844, “If a farmer cannot look to the future with security, little can be hazarded by him beyond the expenses which the returns of the year will defray; and not only will all great improvements, but even the most common works of the season, be imperfectly performed”(in Bruce and Migot-Adholla 1994:iii). Early political economists like Low, Smith, and others viewed the emergence of individualized property and the importance of tenure security as a natural evolution from a less efficient economic system (feudalism) to a more efficient one, capitalism. Economists have posed three main arguments for the positive link between land tenure security and efficiency-improving and natural resource management-oriented investments (Besley 1995; Ellickson 1993; Place et al. 1994; see Alchian and Demsetz 1973; Coase 1960; Demsetz 1967; Feder and Feeny 1991). The first is that tenure security provides freedom from expropriation, which in turn guarantees that farmers will be able to take advantage of the returns provided by investments. The second argument maintains that tenure security encourages the establishment of land markets and that, as such, farmers are more likely to invest in improvements under conditions where they can take advantage of proceeds from land transfers. The third, and more recent argument, avers that secure private property enables farmers to better participate in credit markets because land can be used as collateral for loans.

As initially laid out by economists, the property rights paradigm maintains that tenure security, and thus investment and productivity, is argued to be highest where property is individually owned, clearly delineated, and the protection of those

individualized rights are institutionally guaranteed by a powerful state (Ellickson 1993). In arguing for the supremacy of private property, the property rights paradigm poses a parallel critique of other forms of property, most notably common property, has run parallel to this argument. The critique has progressed along two paths. The first, sometimes known as “the tragedy of the commons”(Hardin 1968), argues that common property regimes do not provide resource users with the requisite incentives to curtail overuse and to invest in the long-term conservation of a resource; the logic being that the lack of individual ownership would lead individual users to maximize their individual returns by overusing a resource, thereby externalizing the costs of overuse to the broader community of users and ultimately degrade the resource (Gordon 1954; Coase 1960; Hardin 1968). Researchers of common property have objected to this critique on the grounds that so-called tragedy theorists mistake common property for open access (Berkes et al. 1989; McCay and Acheson 1987; Ostrom 1990, Sjaastad and Bromley 1997). Common property regimes often contain institutions, regulations, and norms geared toward reducing the potential for “tragic” overuse. Nevertheless, with some refinement, the logic of the tragedy theorists does seem to hold for true open access resources, especially under the conditions of high population density (Robbins 2004). The second line of critique has been primarily leveled at customary or indigenous land tenure practices found outside of the West, which often, though not always, have been found to contain some degree of common property or access. This argument states that within such tenure regimes, ownership is not defined well enough to instill a sense of responsibility or garner sufficient protection from the state, leading to inefficient and unsustainable land use (Dorner 1972; Harrison 1987).

Addressing the “Crisis of Underproduction”: The Property Rights Paradigm Goes to Africa

In response to the widely publicized famines of the African Sahel in the 1970s, scholars from a wide range of disciplines turned their attention to what became known as the “crisis of underproduction” in African agricultural systems (Barker 1989). Indigenous or customary land tenure systems²⁸, which more often than not entailed some form of common property or overlapping rights, became the focus of much development scrutiny and policy intervention seen as impediments to modern capitalist production (Bassett 1993; Berry 1993). Economists contrasted the efficiency of private property regimes with the inefficiencies and apparent low productivity of African property systems (e.g. Dorner 1972; Harrison 1987). Specifically, customary tenure regimes were viewed as impediments to the capitalization of agriculture and the integration of rural economies into national and international markets. Critics also highlighted the “socially-embedded nature” of customary tenure regimes, which they felt impeded rational decision making and led to the exclusion of those outside dominant social groups (e.g. Harrison 1987; Hyden 1986). Furthermore it was pointed out that the practice of partible inheritance, the practice of dividing a parent’s landholdings among his or her offspring, a common trait of customary regimes throughout the continent, led to land fragmentation and conflict (Migot-Adholla and Bruce 1994). Following their logic, African systems of production needed to be remade in the more highly evolved European image.

²⁸ Several researchers have shown that African tenure systems called alternatively traditional, indigenous, or customary do not represent vestiges of static, pre-colonial practice, but in fact have been and continue to be dynamic systems of property rights and access, responsive to changing political and economic conditions (Bassett 1993; Berry 1993, 2002; Chanock 1991; Peters 2007; Migot-Adholla and Bruce 1994). Moreover, Colson (1971:196) observes that “customary law” in many cases did not reflect traditional practices, but was a product of colonial rule, imposing communal holding where it might not have existed previously.

Drawing on the insights (and assumptions) of the property rights paradigm, many African governments and international donors initiated policies to individualize tenure systems along the European model of freehold tenure (Bassett 1993; Bruce et al. 1993; Bruce 1988; Lund 2000; Migot-Adholla and Bruce 1994; Reyna and Downs 1988). Development interventions from this era emphasized land titling that aimed to increase productivity by 1) replacing inefficient customary tenure regimes with a system of individualized tenure and 2) providing legal guarantees of tenure security (Dorner 1972).²⁹ However, subsequent evaluations of property reform initiatives in Africa and elsewhere have indicated that merely providing land titles was not always the panacea that development practitioners had hoped for and that the relationship between tenure security and investment was not always as straightforward as had been assumed (Bruce et al. 1993).

Until the 1980s and 90s, the property rights paradigm's analyses were primarily retrospective, looking to historical events such as emergence of privatized land markets in Canada for validation (e.g. Demsetz 1967). As the property rights paradigm gained traction within development policy, a great number of empirical studies sought to test the paradigm's fundamental hypotheses. The relationships examined included tenure security and productivity investments (Besley 1995; Braselle et al. 2002; Migot-Adholla and Bruce 1994; Roth et al. 1994a, 1994b), tenure security and soil conservation/fertility investments (Birungi and Hassan 2010; Deininger and Jin 2006; Matlon 1994), and tenure security and credit use (Do and Iyer 2008; Roth et al. 1994a;). Empirical research has demonstrated the complexity of the relationship between property rights and rights holders' decisions.

²⁹ Berry (2002) points out that it is not difficult to see how titling initiatives could gain such widespread traction at a time when structural adjustment programs were radically reshaping national economies.

Several studies found that within contexts of poor governmental and market infrastructures, inadequate credit availability, limited commercial opportunities, and environmental hazards—conditions common throughout sub-Saharan Africa—tenure security (often *defined* as tenure individualization) did not lead to the various types of investment predicted by the property rights paradigm (Braselle et al. 2002; Do and Iyer 2008; Bruce et al. 1994; Place et al. 1994a; Platteau 1996). In Ghana (Besley 1995), Burkina Faso (Braselle et al. 2002; Gray and Kevane 2001), and Uganda (Place and Otsuke 2002), researchers found that farmers made land-improving investments in efforts to strengthen tenure, turning the conventional model on its head. Tenure individualization has also been shown to concentrate land and power in the hands of wealthy elites, resulting in the further marginalization and impoverishment of the rural poor (Berry 1993; Gray and Kevane 2001; Reyna and Downs 1988). Other research supports the security-investment hypotheses. Besley (1995) describes how farmers in Ghana with full private property rights are more likely to invest in soil fertility through tree planting, mulching, and fertilizer use than sharecroppers with less secure rights. Similar findings have been reported in Uganda (Birungi and Hassan 2010), and Ethiopia (Deininger and Jin 2006).

Perhaps because the property rights paradigm, with its underlying argument that individualized tenure security leads to land investments, has been used to assert the superiority of private property over indigenous or customary forms of tenure, anthropologists and others have expended considerable effort calling attention to counter-examples and contradictions. More than one empirical study has suggested that since the property rights paradigm's assumptions do not hold for all situations, the tenure-investment hypothesis is "inconclusive" and as such, should be discarded (see Braselle et al.

2002; Gray and Kevane 2001; Soini 2007). This would seem short-sighted in the face of so many studies that show positive relationships between tenure security and investment. The question should not be, “Does secure tenure always lead to investment?”—a question many have argued to be overly simplistic (Besley 1995; Bruce et al. 1994; Sjaastad and Bromley 1997; Sjaastad and Bromley 2000). Instead, I would argue that researchers need to ask when and under what conditions does tenure security become an important factor in people’s decisions to invest in their land and other aspects of their livelihoods. Clearly, such a question that assumes the complex interrelationship of political-economic, historical, and socio-cultural processes does not lend itself exclusively to the cool mathematics of economic formulae and national level surveys (c.f. Arnot et al. 2011). Instead, Grigsby (2002) advocates an “embedded,” ethnographic approach that views tenure as thoroughly and simultaneously economic and social and attempts to capture the conditional dynamism of tenure. Following Grigsby (2002), the next section examines how displacement and resettlement, in the moving of people, allocation of land, and enclosure of common pool resources, effected major changes in the relations of production for those displaced from both the low- and highlands of Mt. Elgon, creating a situation where tenure security emerged as a new and vitally important component of livelihoods.

Transformation of Settlement, Livelihoods, and Property

For those displaced from the plains and uplands, the changes in property and livelihoods brought about or, in some cases, accelerated by displacement and resettlement can be broken down into three major, interrelated categories: 1) settlement patterns; 2) livelihoods portfolios and commercialization; and 3) property relations (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1 Settlement, Livelihoods, and Property Before and After Resettlement

Location	Settlement Patterns	Livelihoods Portfolio and Commercialization	Property Relations
Plains (pre-resettlement)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Nucleated -Patrilocal -Dispersed -Mobile -Low population density 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Livestock emphasis (large herds; >50 cows) -Subsistence cultivation of grains and tubers -Limited commercial cultivation of cotton and grains -Sale of livestock common -No land market -No wage labor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Livestock individually owned -Grazing resources open access -Agricultural fields individually owned -Partible inheritance to male offspring limited but increasingly common -Cultivate to claim -Disputes resolved by elders
Uplands (Pre-resettlement)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Clan-based -Multi-household -Dispersed -Mobile -Low population density 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Livestock emphasis (large herds, >50 cows) -Subsistence foraging of wild products (plant and animal) -Barter trade in forest products -Subsistence cultivation of potatoes -Sale of livestock limited -No land market -No wage labor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Livestock individually owned -Some grazing resources held communally by clan for duration of use -Some grazing resources open access -Forest resources open access except for individually maintained bee hives -Potato fields held communally by clans -No inheritance -Disputes resolved by elders

Resettlement Area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Nucleated -Concentrated -Fixed land base, no mobility -Growing urban areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Agriculture emphasis -Reduced livestock (small herds, <5) -Mixed subsistence and commercial cultivation -Increased participation in markets -Reduced access to wild resources -Wage labor common -Sale of livestock common -Active land market 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Land and cattle under individual ownership -Enclosure of common grazing areas -Partible inheritance to male offspring -Government the authority in matters of land
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As noted in Chapter 2, Sabiny livelihoods in the central escarpment and to a lesser extent on the plains underwent what Goldschmidt (1976) describes as a tremendous “shift in the economic order” from livestock to agricultural production. Increasing commercialization of production over the 20th century only intensified those processes of change. Displacement and resettlement forced migrants from the plains and uplands to follow in the footsteps of their relatives in the central escarpment, moving away from livestock toward agriculture, with similarly far-reaching consequences, though involuntarily and over a much shorter time period.

A baseline is important for understanding any type of change, especially those resulting from displacement and resettlement (Colson 1971; Scudder and Colson 1982; Scudder 2009). For the case of the Benet Resettlement Area, detailed data concerning population and settlement patterns, livelihoods practices, and property rights are not easy to come by. The displacement and resettlement events occurred more than three decades

ago, during a time when the country was consumed by the chaos of post-colonial strife. Official record keeping for marginal areas such as the northern side of Mt. Elgon was spotty at best and independent research for that time was non-existent as far as I have been able to tell. Nevertheless, Walter Goldschmidt's two major ethnographic works, *Sebei Law* (1967) and *Culture and Behavior of the Sebei* (1976), conducted before the civil war era, provide detailed ethnographic accounts of Sabiny (then called Sebei, the exogenous ethnonym used by colonial administrators) belief, legal custom and lifeways that can assist in assembling pre-displacement information.³⁰ In the absence of official records, the following account of livelihoods and property change is based primarily on oral history interviews (n=62) and informal conversations conducted with countless other residents in the Benet Resettlement Area, the central escarpment, and to a lesser extent the plains in 2005, 2006, and between 2009 and 2010. In constructing a pre-displacement baseline, I do not mean to imply that the livelihoods and tenure systems in place in the plains and uplands were isolated vestiges of a pre-colonial past. Both areas maintained extensive contact with external communities, Sabiny and otherwise, from the distant past to the post-colonial era. The productive systems in place at the time of displacement and resettlement were shaped by and depended on those connections.

Settlement Patterns

On the plains in the 1970s, outside the trading and administrative center of Ngenge, settlements consisted largely of nucleated households that were dispersed across the grass and acacia-dominated landscape. Such households were often patrilocally

³⁰ Goldschmidt carried out the bulk of his research in the central escarpment, the geographic zone home to the majority of the Sabiny population, but his work does include treatment of the populations of the plains and uplands to a varying degree.

multigenerational as was the case for George Cherop (the subject of Oral History Box 2 in Chapter 2). Others originally from the plains told me it was common for young families to establish their own distinct households after they had built up their herds. If a young man's father had no arable land to give him upon marriage, there was enough unoccupied land, which the young man could claim by cultivating it. Agriculture was only possible during the rainy season and households frequently moved during the dry season, following the availability of water and forage for their livestock. Mobility was also tied to periodic threat of cattle raids (Goldschmidt 1967, 1976; Weatherby 1962). Settlements in the uplands were also dispersed, however they were larger (though smaller in total population) and contained multiple adjoining households. Informants from the uplands told me that such settlements were clan-based. Relatives kept livestock in communal kraals and grazed their individually held livestock together in the surrounding grasslands. Though they did not face the same dry-season constraints on water as those lower on the mountain, overgrazing was periodically a concern. In response, settlements occasionally moved to other unoccupied grasslands or divided into new settlements, which moved to other areas. Moses Kizza, an older man displaced from the forest, said, "In *mosop* [the uplands], we had elders—clan leaders really—to make the decisions about land and moving about. When a place [settlement] became crowded with too many people or too many animals the elders came together to decide who should move and where." Though I was unable to find population density figures for the plains and highland areas prior to displacement, all informants agreed that populations in both areas were much smaller and less dense than the heavily populated central escarpment, historically home to more than 90% of the total Sabiny population (Goldschmidt 1976).

The resettlement exercise brought about a settlement pattern of permanent, nucleated farmsteads on a fixed land base and concentrated the population more than it had been previously in either the plains or uplands. Individual plots of land were allocated to the male household heads of individual nuclear families.³¹ The dispersed nucleated household pattern was not a major change for families from the lowlands, but farms were arranged cheek-to-jowl, leaving no lands for common grazing or expansion. The permanent nature of the new households put an end to the mobility that had been a central feature of livelihoods in both the plains and uplands. The new arrangement took more adjustment for those displaced from the uplands. “We used to live together,” one elderly woman from the uplands told me. “Our clan members were with us and we worked together. Our cows grazed together, we women went trading baskets together. After [resettlement] it was not so communal. Everyone had their own house and land and only looked for themselves,” disrupting established relations of mutual support. Population within the resettlement area was further concentrated in the growing trading centers that sprung up to provide commercial goods to the settlers and housing for migrant laborers, who were helping settlers clear their lands.

Livelihoods Portfolio and Commercialization

Chapter 2 provides a detailed description of historical livelihoods portfolios in the plains and uplands, so I will characterize them only briefly here. Though subsistence and commercial cultivation had become important components of livelihoods in both areas by

³¹ In most cases, women and children were expected to gain access to land through their relationship with a male household head, though a Forest Department officer who took part in the allocations told me that in a few cases widows were allocated their own, albeit smaller plots.

the time of displacement, livestock production remained the central economic focus. Mutulei Stephen, a man who grew up on the plains, told me that before displacement, “We had some small subsistence farming of millet, maize, sorghum and sweet potatoes. We even sold some of these. But for us, the cow was more than all these things.” Similarly, respondents from the upper zone frequently mentioned that while they maintained small-scale potato cultivation and collected a range of wild products, their livestock formed the core of their livelihoods. Interview participants from both areas described large herds, though most agreed that average herd sizes were larger on the plains. Because of their relative proximity to Mbale, the regional economic and administrative seat, residents of the plains had more contact with markets and government tax collectors and agricultural programs. Livelihoods were more commercialized on the plains than they were in the forest. For the uplanders, trade took the form of barter of forest products and crafts for agricultural staples and livestock sales were rare owing to the distance from markets. “What did we need money for? What could we buy? There were no shops. We didn’t have consumer goods,” Kokop Linas, the elderly upland woman described in this chapter’s introduction, told me. By contrast, Ngenge was home to a major livestock market and the colonial government promoted commercial production of cotton in the area since the 1920s (Goldschmidt 1976). On the whole, participants said that land and labor markets did not exist in either place. These accounts confirm Goldschmidt’s observations of the plains from the 1950s and 60s: “Cultivation was of limited extent and shifting in character...Because land could only be used a few years in succession and potentially arable land was plentiful, ownership of land as a basic capital asset could not have been meaningful”(1976:149).

Displacement and resettlement coupled with protected area resource use restrictions transformed the displaced people from the plains and uplands from semi-mobile pastoralists who practiced some agriculture to settled, intensive agriculturalists, who might keep a few livestock on the side. For those displaced from the plains, the transition away from the pastoral life was hastened by the decimation or outright obliteration of their herds at the hands of cattle raiders. Many of the people I spoke with who fled from the lower area left with no animals. One man, who lost all of his 17 cows in a single raid, exclaimed, "We even had to beg our neighbors to borrow oxen for plowing! Only begging. We had nothing." For the upland population, the loss of cows that contributed to the rise in importance of agriculture was delayed by the absence of grazing restrictions and enforcement in the early years after resettlement. Farming, especially for those who lived in the upper portion of the resettlement area adjacent to the forest reserve, was more of a supplement to livelihoods built around the utilization of forest and grassland resources. "At first, life was good. We could grow a little maize for food. Sell it for school fees and household things like soap and cooking oil," Kamta Kibet a widow from the uplands said of her initial experiences after resettlement. "But it [agriculture] wasn't everything like it is now," she continued. "My son, Kibet, could graze our cows. We still had milk. We had bamboo for baskets and could trade. Medicines from the forest too." When access to those resources was denied, starting in the early 1990s, it became impossible to maintain the emphasis on livestock the land reserved for farming took on new importance. Without access to grazing land above and below (because of the continued risk of violence) the resettlement area, agriculture became the mainstay of livelihoods.

The agriculture of the central escarpment, which formed the model for the residents of the resettlement area, was a far cry from the agriculture practiced in the plains and high grasslands. In the resettlement area, both groups encountered new crops, new techniques, and new environmental conditions. For those used to shifting cultivation of millet and sorghum along the banks of the Greek River and the flat, dry lands beyond, the steep pitch of fields and persistent heavy rains of the resettlement area posed significant challenges. “We never had to do anything to stop the soil” from sliding down the mountain, Walter Chemangei said to me. “But when we came here, it was running, running.” Goldschmidt (1976:149) writes that farmers on the plains dealt with soil fertility loss by moving to new land, a practice that became impossible within the limited land base of the resettlement area. The plots of potatoes that accounted for the bulk of upland cultivation were of such a limited scale and duration that efforts to protect the soil from erosion were largely unnecessary. Moreover, as many of these plots were located in former cattle enclosures where soils were highly enriched by animal manure, the women I spoke with who tended to such plots told me that soil fertility was never a concern for them. As noted in Chapter 2, the steep slopes, heavy rainfall, and soil stratification combine to make the soils of the central belt highly unstable (Knapen et al. 2006). The soil instability found on Mt. Elgon is not only a threat to soil fertility and agricultural yields, but also to human safety. Landslides have become increasingly common in recent years in the resettlement area and across the Ugandan side of the mountain, killing hundreds of people and displacing thousands more (Wesonga 2011). Since the beginning of the 20th century, central belt farmers curbed erosion on their fields with mixed banana and coffee plantations and by leaving wild trees on parts of their land, which helped to hold the soil in place. They also used bands of land

planted with grass to divide fields as a sort of terracing. As the population increased and all remaining arable bush land came under cultivation in the resettlement area, increased investments in soil and water conservation became necessary for ensuring long-term soil productivity, though few in the resettlement area were familiar with soil conservation measures before migration (NEMA 2004). Such investments have become a major priority for government-led and NGO agricultural extension programs (IUCN 2005; NEMA 2004).

Resettlement stimulated unprecedented participation in the market economy. Agriculturalists in the central escarpment had a long history of commercial trade with middlemen from Mbale, the regional economic center to the south. Such middlemen were eager to tap into the new source of maize, potatoes, and wheat provided by the colonization of the resettlement area. The plains people had a long history of selling livestock, but agriculture was mostly subsistence-oriented. "We sold some cotton and maize, but our fathers and mothers mostly grew for home consumption," Chemusto Albert told me, a man who migrated from the plains when he was a young boy. "The real money came from cows and goats. When we needed money, our fathers sold the animals. After the K-jongs [a colloquial abbreviation for Karamojong pastoralists] came and stole my father's cows and we came here [to the resettlement area], money came from the maize and what [other crops]." The people I spoke with from the uplands agreed that potato cultivation was exclusively for subsistence. The "culture of selling crops," as Kokop Linas, the elderly woman described in this chapter's introduction, put it, represented a dramatic change from the subsistence cultivation they were used to.

Shortly after resettlement, land emerged as a new and important commodity and a vigorous land market developed. Once news of the allotments spread, the resettlement area

attracted wealthy farmers from the central escarpment as well as landless migrants from other areas, all seeking to purchase, rent land or work wage labor clearing the land. Newly resettled families faced two pressures to sell off allocated land. The first was that before people could sell or even grow crops, they had to undertake the labor and capital-intensive process of clearing the trees on their allotments. Many farmers I spoke with sold portions of land to pay for the necessary tools and labor. "It was expensive to clear and plow the land we got from government," Chelimo Musobo, an uplander, said. "It was all bushy here. There were big trees. Just forest. My children were just small and the government didn't give me any money to hire labor to cut the trees. I sold two big pieces to a rich man from Siron [a village adjacent to district capital] to hire those boys [migrant laborers from a neighboring district] and a chainsaw." The second pressure was the allure of what one upland elder, Arap Bomet, described as "free money." "We never sold land in the forest," he said. "Land was just something for grazing." Men like Charles Arap Bomet viewed the proceeds from selling land as a way of participating in the economic changes occurring elsewhere in the country, of "becoming modern." The temptation to sell was especially strong at first when people had relatively unfettered access to protected area resources and so could continue with their previous livelihoods strategies. By the time the protected area became a national park and access to upland resources was constrained, many upland families had little or no land on which to support themselves. Kokop Chemtai, a woman from deep within the forest reserve said, "We were not used [to the selling]. Our husbands wanted to sell all and buy motorbikes and radios, drinking *komek*, what and what! Our land became small and our granaries became empty too too early."

Commercialization was further encouraged by increased contact with the government and governmental services. By the end of the 1980s, the government began to collect poll taxes, albeit sporadically and unevenly. Health services, even government-run clinics, required money. But the financial demands of educating their children, many people said, were the most significant factor in their increased participation in the market economy. Kokop Joshua, an elder originally from a village not far from the Kenyan border told me, "When people began to go to school, they needed money. That is why people wanted to commercialize crops." Since 1960, national education policy has fluctuated between a free and fee-based public school system (Penny et al. 2008), but even when public education was freely available cash was required to pay for uniforms and school supplies. Throughout my interviews and informal conversations, parents complained how school expenses and fees, regardless of whether their children attended public or private schools, accounted for a large proportion of household cash expenditures. The periodic demand of school fees led many households within my weekly interview sample to take out informal loans or sell livestock or produce in bulk that they would not have otherwise elected to sell. When I asked a group of cattle traders at the Branch Cattle Market if there were any times when the volume of livestock sales peaked, they answered emphatically in unison, "When school fees are due!"

Finally, the progressive integration of resettlement area livelihoods into markets generated new sources of income. Wage agricultural labor, especially during weeding and harvest seasons, became a ubiquitous pursuit, though it was not entirely monetized (many worked for food instead of money). As I mentioned before, land became an important commodity. Milk also became a good to be sold in the growing trading centers (and later in

larger towns when road infrastructure improved), which became an important source of cash for women. The burgeoning trading centers themselves spawned a variety of economic opportunities, some of which were present prior to resettlement, others not. These included activities such as construction work, alcohol manufacturing and sale, wholesale trading in agricultural produce, shop keeping, selling prepared foods, and others. For the residents of the resettlement area, displacement and resettlement radically altered the economic landscape. Both agriculture and the market economy may have been present to varying degrees in the livelihoods of the plains and upland populations, but the conditions created by displacement and resettlement provided an environment where agriculture of a settled, intensified, and commercial nature replaced livestock as the economic mainstay, a change that rippled out through all aspects of economic life.

Property Relations

In *Sebei Law*, Goldschmidt (1967) writes that Sabiny beliefs concerning property were fundamentally dichotomous. That is, historically, resources and material goods were divided into two broad categories: “those that are the product of nature, the provision of God, to which man has added nothing, and these are all in the public domain; and those in which some investment of labor or human skill has been made, and these are held as the private rights of individual adults”(1967:143). For his informants, the public sphere included uncultivated grazing land, rivers and streams, clay, iron salt and other minerals, wild plants and animals, while the private sphere included livestock, land under cultivation, bee hives, houses and household goods, and medicines and magic. These views are generally consistent with the descriptions of property relations my own research

participants provided. As both populations were primarily pastoralist, property relations in the plains and uplands were similar, a patchwork of private, common and open access property, with only a few variations.

According to the people I spoke with from both areas, livestock were the private property usually of men, though women could own animals under certain circumstances. Women were accorded some subsidiary rights to their husbands' agricultural land and livestock, specifically areas for kitchen gardens and cow milk. As noted above, uncultivated grazing land on the plains was unrestrictedly open access. "There was so much grass and there were so few people. You never thought that this area was for this one and this area was for that one unless it was planted with crops" Soyekwo Arap Seluk, an elderly man from the plains explained. A person, also usually male, achieved individual control over agricultural land by either inheriting it from his father or clearing it and planting it himself. In the 15-20 year period between when Goldshmidt conducted his fieldwork and the displacements of the 1970s and 80s, I was told that commercial cultivation had expanded and that certain lands became valuable. In those areas, a form of partible inheritance was becoming increasingly common. Community elders, not necessarily agents of government, were responsible for resolving land disputes.

As indicated above, people I spoke with from the uplands indicated that grazing resources were not entirely open access. Perhaps because the available grazing land was not as extensive as was in the plains, certain grazing areas were held communally, for as long as they were in continuous use, by clans, who claimed them by living in proximity to and using the grazing resource. Goldschmidt writes that in the uplands, "Sebei informants vaguely indicate that private rights to grazing land were acquired patrilineally, but non-

kinsmen let their animals graze together and where the cattle graze usually is determined by the location of the owner's house "(1976:40). Households or groups thereof held rights to potato plots similarly for the duration of use. Beyond settlement land and grazing areas, forest resources were mostly considered open access. When I asked Charles Arap Bomet about historical restrictions on hunting and other foraging in the forest, he told me, "In *mosop*, we men hunted antelope and monkeys in the forest. I never asked anyone if I could hunt there. No one could say, 'You man, this is my forest or my antelopes.'" Manmade beehives, he said, were an exception: "If I make a bee hive in the forest, no man can take the honey. That one is mine. If you make a bee hive, that one is for you," a notion echoed in Goldschmidt (1976:40). Since settlements were semi-mobile and agricultural cultivation was limited, land inheritance or grazing rights were rare. Outside of the vague indications made by Goldschmidt's informants, no one I spoke with from the uplands mentioned it. Clan elders were the authorities in matters of land. They dealt with disputes, monitored common grazing areas, and instigated migrations to unoccupied areas when grazing areas were at risk of overuse.

Resettlement privatized landholdings, replacing mosaics of property rights regimes—open access, communal, and private—with individualized plots for individual nuclear families. "When the Forest Department came," said Stephen Chebet, a man from the uplands, "they gave all the land [in the resettlement area] to households for farming. I thought that was okay because I could go and graze [in the reserve]. But when UWA came and said, 'No more grazing,' I thought maybe I was in trouble. I was only surviving from my own land." Individualized property was not a new concept for either the plains or upland populations (though land was not considered private property in the uplands), but had

always existed alongside public access resources. The enclosure of common and open access resources, by violence on the plains and by conservation policy in the uplands, dramatically reduced the area of publically available resources and made private property the dominant property regime in the resettlement area.

In terms of inheritance, residents of the resettlement area followed the convention of the central escarpment farmers, which was for a man to divide up his land among his male heirs upon their marriage. “When I got married, I got some small land from my father,” explained Shaban Soyekwo, whose parents migrated to the resettlement area when he was still a young boy. “My brothers, two of them, also got [land] from the father. Maybe one acre. It was the way they did then. Me, I’m not sure how I can give all of my children land when they grow. They will have to cater for their own [needs].” Shaban mentions a problem faced by many others in the resettlement area: land shortage caused by a combination of population growth, partible inheritance, and a fixed land base. Several people told me that conflicts between brothers over inherited land were increasing, even turning violent. While conducting an interview in Kamakosa, a village in the center of the resettlement area, the man I was interviewing, Chekwel Julius, was called away to attend a clan meeting concerning such a conflict. Before he left, he recounted the story:

There were two brothers, my clanmates. Both of them, they claimed the same piece of land that came from the father. It was in the morning last week. The older one went to his *shamba* and found the younger one plowing and planting the land with maize. The older became so angry and confronted him. He tried to chase the young one, but the young one says ‘No.’ They were beating each other in the field! Terrible! When they were fighting, the younger took his *panga* [large machete] and hit that one [the older brother] in the head. Ah! I saw him at the clinic. So much blood. Those things are becoming too common nowadays.

The clan, Julius explained, was meeting to try to convince the local government and police to let them handle the matter. “For us, land is a clan issue,” he said, but another outcome of the resettlement was that it established the government as the most powerful authority in matters of land. “We have government now.”

Conclusion

As Shipton (1994:349) notes, anthropologists have hesitated to embrace the concept of tenure security, the security-investment hypothesis, and other legalistic concepts for fear of imposing “alien assumptions or emotional charges on African tenures.” However, due to the nature of economic change that has shaped property rights and systems of production more generally in recent decades, the insights of the property rights paradigm (namely, the importance of tenure security) are in some circumstances more applicable to African contexts than ever before. In the Benet Resettlement Area, the economic changes brought by displacement and resettlement have made tenure security increasingly important factor in people’s long-term investments in their livelihoods. Before displacement and resettlement, populations on the plains and in the highlands were relatively small and settlements were characterized by varying degrees of mobility. Resettlement created a pattern of nucleated and permanent households, concentrated to an unprecedented degree. With that concentration and the subsequent enclosure of common grazing lands, large-scale livestock production was no longer a viable focus for livelihoods. Intensive agriculture became the backbone of livelihoods, providing the main source for households’ food and increasing cash needs. While tenure security was largely inconsequential to herders on the plains or in the uplands where mobility afforded a

degree of adaptability and flexibility, within the economic system brought about by resettlement, tenure security rose significantly in importance with respect to long term investments in production and people. However, since 1993, increasingly protectionist conservation policies have actively produced tenure insecurity in a large portion of the resettlement area. The next chapter begins with an examination of how such tenure insecurity has been enacted and its differential distribution throughout the resettlement area. The chapter then uses Cernea's (1997) Impoverishment Risks and Reconstruction model to explore the ways such insecurity has influenced people's livelihoods decisions and investments.



Figure 3.1 Women originally from the uplands on a bamboo basket trading expedition.



Figure 3.2 The individualized farmsteads of the Benet Resettlement Area.



Figure 3.3 An aerial view of Kapnarkut, a rapidly growing trading center with the plains in the background.



Figure 3.4 The lone road that runs through the Ngenge plains, taken at the start of the rainy season.



Figure 3.5 A landslide in the Benet Resettlement Area. Fields were destroyed but no one was injured. Residents report that landslides such as this have become increasingly common.

CHAPTER 4

STAYING LIKE PRISONERS, CULTIVATING LIKE THIEVES: THE LEGACY OF DISPLACEMENT, RESETTLEMENT, AND INSECURITY

Introduction

On the morning I first met Alfred Cheptuket in December 2009, he was sitting on a low bench in his Kaseko homestead, assiduously scrubbing the mud off a pair of brown plastic wingtips. A fragment from a pocket mirror and a comb lay on the bench beside. A grey flannel sport coat, mended in the shoulder and elbow with sturdy black thread, was carefully draped over a wooden folding chair nearby. His wife, Priscilla, sat in the dark, smoky kitchen hut, tending to a pot of sweet milk tea for Alfred and their five school-age children, who were chasing each other between the two buildings of the homestead. Alfred was preparing to go to the Century Bank in Kapchorwa town, where he intended to withdraw money from his savings account for a contribution to his local Anglican Church. He estimated that the journey from his home in Kaseko, a village in the Benet Resettlement Area, just below the 1993 park boundary, to Kapchorwa town might take several hours by foot if he wasn't able to secure a ride on a passing produce truck or with a friend on a motorbike. On his way, which would take him through several trading centers, he hoped to exchange news with members of the numerous economic, agricultural and religious groups in which he and his wife were active.

Subsequent visits to Alfred and Priscilla's home revealed that his excursion to Kapchorwa town was not an isolated occurrence; Alfred spent many of his days talking with other men and attending meetings for the National Agriculture Advisory Service (NAADS), the Kapnarkut Savings and Credit Cooperative (SACCO), the Kaseko Soil and Water Conservation Group (for which he was the secretary), the Chemanga Christian Dairy Group and several others. He explained that his scattershot participation in a broad range of community groups helped him build relationships and trust with his neighbors and gain access to ideas and material support from government and NGO extension programs, though his wife liked to point out that his frequent meetings enabled him to shirk some of his agricultural duties. Motioning to the surrounding hillsides of the resettlement area, he said, "We are all migrants here. When you are a migrant from another place you face many challenges. To create relationships and developments is not easy." Starting over in a new place is difficult for everyone, he opined, but it has been the relationships that he has built slowly over time with likeminded neighbors and the external support that they have been able to secure through the establishment of community groups that softened the transition.

Like many farmers, especially in the lower portion of the resettlement area, Alfred and his family migrated to the Benet Resettlement Area in the early 1990s, fleeing from the cattle raiding violence that flared up just after Museveni came to power. Alfred was 15 in 1988 when his family lost the last of their cows to a night assault on their homestead in Kaproron, a village on the lower northern escarpment. Friends and relatives had already fled up the mountain to Kwosir, a safer village in the resettlement area where fragmentary plots of land were available for purchase. Alfred's parents followed their relatives and used their meager savings to buy a few acres of brushy land in Kwosir. Though he showed

promise at the primary school in Kaproron, the move to Kwosir put an end to Alfred's studies; his parents needed all their children's labor to develop the new land into a farm. One by one, Alfred's older brothers married and their father carved off a small piece of land for each of them. By the time Alfred married Priscilla in 1999, there was not enough of his father's land left for him to start a family on. With some assistance from his father and brothers, Alfred bought a small piece of land just big enough for a house and small garden in Kaseko. He was attracted to the area, he told me, by its reputation for regular rains. It also helped that several of his clanmates had already established small farms in Kaseko and were willing to lend him the use of some of their land until he could get on his feet.

By most measures, Alfred Cheptuket was not a wealthy man. During the time of my fieldwork, he and his family lived in a small iron-roofed house plastered with local mud (wealthier households import special plaster from another district) and owned one crossbreed cow (a cross between local *Bos indicus* breed and a European *Bos taurus* breed) and one acre of land. Yet on that single acre, Alfred and Priscilla managed to do a lot with relatively little. In their homestead compound, the wide, palmate leaves and ropy vines of a local squash variety trellised up the side of their kitchen hut and stretched toward an avocado tree and a stand of cocoyams (malanga). In the corner, next to a small granary, stood the work-in-progress frame of a zero-grazing enclosure in which Alfred intended to intensify his livestock production. Just below their compound lay a grove of *matooke* intercropped with coffee seedlings he received from an agricultural extension program. The floor of the banana-coffee patch was heavily mulched with old banana leaves and neatly divided by a crosshatching of ditches designed to protect the soils from rain runoff. Next to the grove of tree crops, Priscilla maintained a garden of tomatoes, cabbage, *sukuma*

(a kale-like leafy green), and onions, which, along with avocados and a few eggs from her chickens, she sold in small quantities to her neighbors and small shops. Dense strips of terraced earth (known as “bunds” in soil conservation circles) planted with napia grass, which they regularly cut for cattle fodder, separated the garden from slightly larger fields above and below, forming barriers against sheet erosion. On the larger fields, Alfred rotated maize, potatoes, beans, wheat, and barley, with an eye toward maintaining soil fertility.

In terms of material wealth—land, cows, and house type, the three most common colloquial measures of material wealth in the Benet Resettlement Area—Kokop Francis and her husband, Majje, had about as much as Alfred Chekwoti and his family. Their compound, located just below Kisito, the temporary settlement village on the upper edge of the resettlement area described at the beginning of Chapter 2, contained the same basic elements as Alfred’s, with its iron-roofed house and detached kitchen. Their single cow grazed on a balding apron of grass surrounding the homestead. Beyond the grassy margin of Kokop Francis’s homestead, there were few signs of the diversity of plans and activities so manifest on Alfred’s land. Kokop Francis and her husband exclusively planted short-term crops—no bananas or coffee—and had yet to make any major efforts to prevent the sheet erosion that each year, her son told me, reduces their yields. Where Alfred’s approach may be summarized as future-oriented diversification, Kokop Francis and her husband’s approach was oriented around making what she can in the present while she can. A glimpse into the recent history of Kokop Francis’s family helps to explain the stark contrast between the livelihoods of these two households.

When I spoke with Kokop and her youngest son, Timus, she was sitting in the sparse shade of her compound's solitary tree, worriedly milking a sinewy, chestnut-colored zebu (a local breed). Her husband had left minutes earlier to take a grandchild the day's hike down the mountain to a government-run health center in Kapnarkut for treatment of severe diarrhea. The girl had to be carried on her grandfather's back as the nearest road was more than a half an hour walk away and was impassable to most vehicles for several kilometers. Kokop and her husband, both in their 60s, were among the families convinced by local leaders to remain inside the protected area during the Forest Department resettlement exercise and so were not originally allocated land. Unlike many of his friends and neighbors in Yatui³², Majje bought the acre they currently live on in the late 1980s as a precaution in case they were forced to move from their original home. As Majje feared, a cadre of Forest Department rangers arrived at his upland home on a cold April day in 1990 with an eviction notice. Several of their neighbors' houses were already aflame, when a ranger, a rifle slung conspicuously around his shoulder, informed them that they were to vacate the area immediately. Neither Kokop nor Majje wanted to leave their life in the grasslands and forest. In the days before they were pushed out, Kokop said, "we didn't know hunger. We had animals. Us women survived on [trading] baskets." Majje had a respectable herd of cows and goats, which provided ample milk and occasional meat while she made periodic trips down the mountain to trade bamboo baskets and honey for maize and other foodstuffs. They supplemented their diet with a small patch of potatoes planted

³² Yatui was originally the name of an area of grassland and forest within the protected area. The inhabitants of Yatui carried the name with them to the upper portion of the resettlement area, when they were forcibly evicted from the protected area.

next to their home, which was especially important during times when drought reduced the harvests in the lower slopes.

The initial transition from upland life was full of hardship, she said. Increased ranger patrols and severe punishments, which were often meted out not through formal channels but “in their own courts” where rangers made up for low salaries by enriching themselves with impunity, effectively cut the people of Yatui off from the resources around which they had built their livelihoods. Aside from the emotional trauma, the expenses of relocating, clearing the forest, and planting new crops drained what economic reserves they were able to save from the fires of the eviction. With few other options, Majje joined some of his neighbors in selling off his livestock at low prices even though it meant dispensing with his family’s primary form of security (and his status as a man, as my research assistant, Aggrey, pointed out). Since the entire community was in dire straits, social support networks that had helped individual households weather crises in the past were dismantled, as even the most well-off households could not afford to assist their friends and relatives. “Hunger came close” in those days, Kokop recalled, but she held hope that with hard work and investment in their land, she and her family would eventually be able to ward it off.

Kokop’s optimism, however, was not long lived. Not long after they had been able to harvest their first crop of potatoes, word of fresh evictions began to circulate among the households along the forest edge as teams of rangers and foreign advisors were observed surveying the resettlement area. These rumors were confirmed when the government announced its intention to make the Forest Reserve a National Park with a new boundary that bisected the resettlement area and made all the households in Yatui and its vicinity

overnight encroachers. Kokop Francis shook her head as she remembered encounters she had with rangers, who stopped her and her children in their fields to tell them that the land belonged to the National Park and that they would soon be removed. Though community leaders secured temporary injunctions against further displacements, the injunctions were issued with the conditions that the people in the contested section of the resettlement area could not make further permanent investments in their homesteads and land until the matter was officially put to rest. Since the new boundary was announced in 1992, uncertainty has pervaded all aspects of her life and livelihood. "We weren't able to build permanent houses or make other developments!" she exclaimed. "Even me, I waited 20 years to put on an iron roof!" There were no government schools in the upper zone and what few schools there were, relied on parents to pay teachers directly. Poor roads, decaying since the withdrawal of government presence, made marketing produce difficult and further reduced access to the government health clinic a day's journey away by foot. Evictions in the uppermost parts of Yatui in 2008 only exacerbated Kokop's feelings of insecurity and powerlessness. She said, "we are just in the hands of the government. Anything they decide to do, they can." When I asked her to compare the livelihoods of her and her neighbors with those in the lower part of the resettlement area, she responded that "because you are not sure how long you will be here, you only grow short term crops. We could grow *matooke*, but we are not secure...We can't keep the soil because we aren't sure it's our land." Gazing distractedly at her teenage son, she told me that she feared for the future of her children and grandchildren: "We don't know where we will go."

As Ellis (1998) and others have observed, every household is unique and its livelihood a dynamic constellation of historical, political-economic, and ecological

processes and actors with divergent resources, capabilities and aspirations (Bebbington 1999; Cliggett 2005; Sen 1999). While neither Kokop Francis's nor Alfred Cheptuket's household perfectly represents all the households in their respective areas above and below the contested 1993 boundary, a comparison of the two does illustrate how their differential experiences of forced relocation and subsequent insecurity constrain livelihoods and shape the decisions that people make in response. During the time I knew his family, Alfred was constantly planning for the future, building social relationships, looking to expand his land holdings, improving the soil on his family's land, protecting it to ensure future yields. Because of her experience with repeated evictions, however, Kokop felt that she could only think about just getting by in the present. Displacement and resettlement changed the fundamental nature of production for both households, yet their abilities to build new lives were greatly shaped by the differential distribution of government-induced tenure insecurity. This chapter examines how post-resettlement governmental practices intersected with the changed relations of production to leave a lasting legacy in the array of available opportunities and the choices and investments that farmers make in the different parts of the resettlement area. After a discussion of how tenure insecurity has been enacted, I use Cernea's (1997) Impoverishment Risks and Reconstruction (IRR) model to structure an ethnographic exploration of the enduring effects of displacement, resettlement, and tenure insecurity. I argue that while forced relocation has, on balance, negatively influenced livelihoods for all residents of the resettlement area, sustained insecurity focused in the upper part of the resettlement area has produced differential social and economic marginalization, which in turn has hindered people's abilities to reconstruct viable lives and livelihoods.

From Farmers to Encroachers: Government Enactment of Land Tenure Insecurity in the Benet Resettlement Area

In the last chapter, tenure security was defined as a “rights holder’s feeling that his/her/their rights will be protected from infringement or dispossession.” Such a definition encapsulates a variety of social relations both between rights holders and between rights holders and an external actor responsible for guaranteeing those rights (in most cases, the state). Following Sjaastad and Bromley (2000), tenure security and its inverse, tenure insecurity, are matters of external action and subjective experience. Thus to understand how the Ugandan government has enacted tenure insecurity in the Benet Resettlement Area, it is important to begin with governmental action and then examine how those actions have been perceived by residents. It is important to note that by transforming the relations of production, displacement and resettlement affected not only livelihoods practices, but also people’s perceptions.

Land tenure insecurity in the Benet Resettlement Area, in the form of fear of government-initiated eviction, began in earnest in the early 1990s. In the early years of the Museveni regime, the Forest Department and central government started to take a harder line against in-reserve settlements and resource use with an eye toward taking stronger control of protected areas. In a letter to the Minister of Environment Protection dated May 28, 1991, the Kapchorwa District Administrator proclaimed the end of encroachment:

“There is no more encroachment in the gazetted forest reserve. This was achieved not only due to concerted efforts by the Forest Department but also the political wing existing in the District as well as firm stand [sic] taken by

the office of District Executive Secretary. This culminated in the forceful eviction of the remaining hard-core encroachers from the various parts of the Reserve in April, May and June 1990...Through this force, all houses, food stores and cattle kraals still existing in the Forest Reserve were completely destroyed by the Forest Patrol units and the Environmental Task Force.”

The 200 families of evictees, referenced in the letter, from an area called Yatui, were urged to take temporary refuge above the 1983 boundary in the Benet Resettlement Area and await further instructions. Later that year, teams of Forest Department rangers and IUCN advisors began the first of several boundary measuring and marking exercises. Rumors spread throughout the resettlement area that a change was in the air, but no one knew what shape the change would take until it was announced that Mt. Elgon would be made a national park. The new boundary, referred to as the 1993 line (after the year its measurement was completed), ran directly through the resettlement area, excising approximately 1500 ha from the original allocations. Community leaders opposed the new surveys and were able to pressure the government to establish a Ministerial Task Force to evaluate the situation and make recommendations. The Task Force’s report, issued in 1996, recognized the shortcomings of the original resettlement exercise and, to the relief of residents, recommended that the 1983 boundary be upheld and that those living above the 1983 boundary in Yatui be provided land below the boundary. The government adopted the recommendations and established an Implementation Committee, which was hamstrung by the fact that funds for implementation supposedly offered by the World Bank

were never issued and Parliamentary degazettment was not initiated (Lang and Byakola 2006:38).

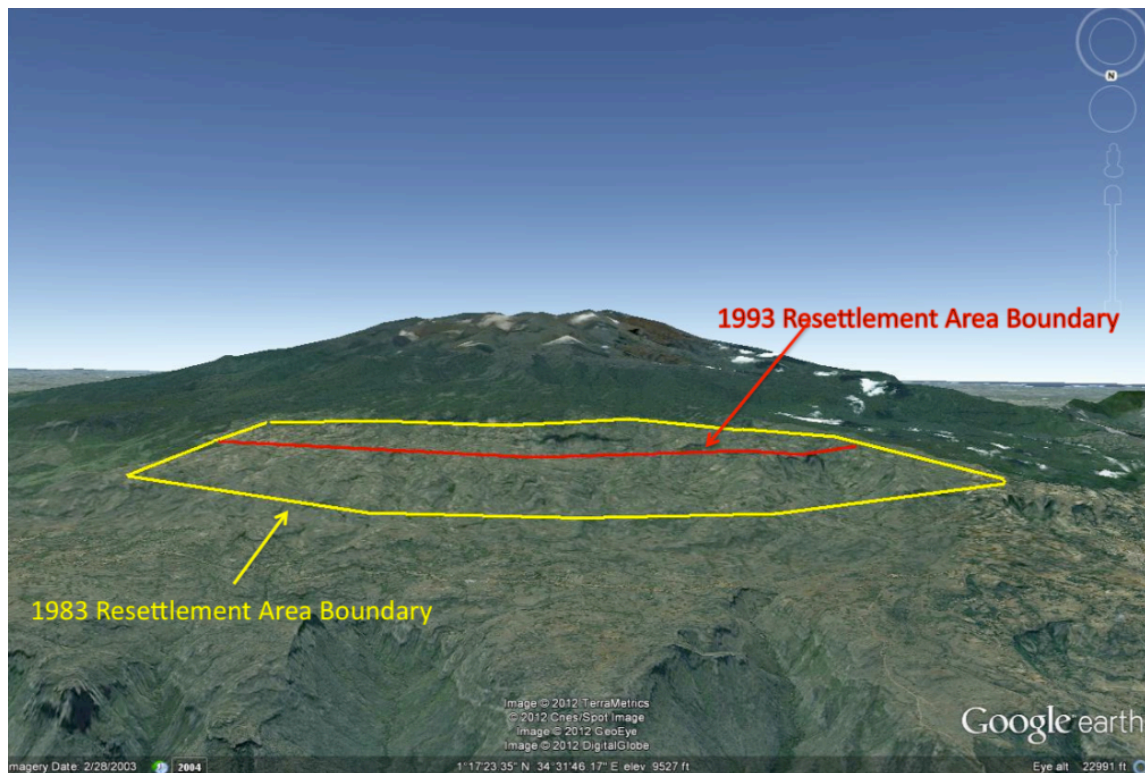


Figure 4.1 Benet Resettlement Area boundaries.

A new era of surveillance followed the announcement of the 1993 boundary. Armed rangers, employees of Uganda National Parks (the predecessor of the Uganda Wildlife Authority), began to patrol the forest margins and upper portion of the resettlement area. In the forest and moors, the frequency of fines, corporal punishment and confiscation of tools, cattle and illegally harvested forest products reached a pitched intensity. Rangers also began to interrupt people in their fields, informing them of impending eviction. Friday Kibet, a man who lived in Kwosir, a village in the upper portion of the resettlement area, recounted several intimidating encounters with UWA rangers (one of which is described in

detail in Chapter 5). He said that every time he spoke with a ranger, either on his land or in the trading centers, “it’s always ‘Get ready to move, get ready to move.’” His experience was echoed by Cheptui Kiprop, a resident of Kwoti, a village on the edge of the forest, who said that UWA rangers frequented his farm, “asking me ‘Why do you stay on government land? You cannot make any changes to your house or the land. No developments. We own everything.’” Seventeen of the 30 residents of the upper portion of the resettlement area I spoke with between 2005 and 2010 had had similar first-hand encounters with rangers and all 30 knew people who had such encounters. Government pronouncements ignited an abstract sense of insecurity, but surveillance and harassment brought farmers face-to-face with the insecurity on a daily basis.

Following the court injunction, UWA officials began a campaign of surreptitious contacts with individuals from the uplands, many of whom were landless and disenfranchised. UWA officials told those present at the private meetings that upland families were the only legitimate residents of the resettlement area and that the people from the lowlands were occupying land that rightfully belonged to them. Moses Kiptala, the secretary of the Benet Lobby Group, an upland activist group, described the meetings that he and his fellow uplanders attended with UWA:

They [UWA] said, “No! We only needed [intended to give land to] the indigenous people. We didn’t want what? The non-Benets.” So now you see they [UWA] are bringing the division. Then they come in now and they talked to the indigenous [people], they tell those ones “Ah, no. For us [UWA], we are only for you. So if you support us, we shall again evict these [lowland] people, then we give you that land...So, now government was using the ignorance of the people to divide the people.

Kiptala pointed out that such meetings were periodically successful in dividing the population of the resettlement area, pitting uplanders against lowlanders, *mosop* against *soi*—a division that had not been heretofore significant. The meetings between UWA and landless uplanders introduced the notion that within the resettlement area there were legitimate and illegitimate rights holders. The meetings also introduced the possibility that individuals deemed by UWA to be legitimate could acquire new lands from those deemed illegitimate in the lower portion of the resettlement area. Intentional or otherwise, the meetings created conflicts within the resettlement area between upland and lowland people, extending the uncertainty from the upper portion to the entire resettlement area. Those below the line began to worry that their land might be reallocated by the government to other individuals or simply taken by force by newly empowered uplanders.

Three complete and several other partial boundary measuring and marking exercises were carried out by UWA and its NGO supporters between 1993 and 2008 exacerbated feelings of insecurity among resettlement area residents. In a series of letters to local government in Kapchorwa, which I acquired from local activists, IUCN and UWA officials present the boundary marking initiatives as economic opportunities for local people, who were to be hired for tree planting along the boundaries. Community leaders told me that these tree-planting, initiatives intended to curry favor with local communities and build support for conservation, had the perverse outcome of alienating residents, who were expected to plant rows of UWA-controlled eucalyptus trees on what they considered community-controlled land. The numerous boundary marking exercises, which were intended to clarify the boundary for management purposes rather than obscure it, created confusion among resettlement area residents, whose inclusion rarely extended beyond

hired labor. Residents saw the boundary-marking exercises as assertions of government power, conveying the message that the government had the power to change park boundaries at will. A farmer who owned land in the lower area of the resettlement area said to me, "Those UWA fellows, they were shifting the boundary every week. We were never sure when we would become encroachers on our own land!" Another farmer, Nyangas Arthur, who was informed that the new boundary bisected his farm, laughed and said, "I wake up as a legitimate farmer, have breakfast, weed my potatoes. But when I go to harvest my maize, ah! I am an encroacher!"

Feelings of tenure security were momentarily bolstered by Parliament's official degazettment of the lands below the 1993 boundary in 2002 and the High Court's consent judgment of 2005, in which UWA and the central government agreed to degazette the remainder of the resettlement area including Yatui, the uppermost section of resettlement area settled by upland communities who were not allocated land in 1983. An activist and community leader described his elation to me following the court victory: "I was so excited, I was jumping! I was on television jumping! We were all jumping! We felt we had won, really." However, the initial optimism steadily eroded over the ensuing years as the consent judgment's implementation failed to materialize. A new wave of violent evictions by UWA and aided by Uganda People's Defense Force (UPDF) soldiers in Yatui in 2008 extinguished what little hope of tenure security people in the upper, yet-to-be degazetted area had retained.

In response to the murder of a Belgian tourist in the interior of the park, UWA identified the northern edge of the resettlement area as a haven for the criminals behind the murder and descended swiftly on the villages, burning homes and driving an estimated

800 families down the mountain (Jaramogi 2008; Ssempogo 2008). News reports from the time describe how some among the evictees, with nowhere else to go, took refuge in caves (Jaramogi 2008). The District Chairman, Nelson Chelimo, told a reporter, “The situation in Benet is pathetic. People have no food and shelter following their eviction by Uganda Wildlife Authority and the army...They are living like wild creatures. The Government should immediately intervene to avert the looming disaster”(in Jaramogi 2008). Public outcry at the humanitarian issues raised by the 2008 eviction led to the establishment of a temporary settlement, Kisito (the upland village described at the beginning of Chapter 2), where some of those evicted were allowed to reside until the matter was resolved by a district government-UWA coalition. Though UWA emphasized that Kisito was a temporary settlement, the coalition repeatedly pushed back the completion dates for their recommendations. They finally issued a report in June 2010, which recommended that Yatui evictees should be given land surrendered by individuals who “irregularly got land in 1983” in the upper portion of the resettlement area. The report provided few details concerning the identity of those individuals, the irregular methods they acquired land, how they would be identified, and how the resultant land would be reallocated.

I attended the meeting on July 16, 2010 in Kapchorwa town, wherein the “steering committee” presented the report on the Yatui resettlement. Community representative after community representative expressed his (a few women were in attendance, but none spoke) frustration with the committee’s foot dragging and challenged the plausibility of implementing the recommendations. In a stentorian voice made scratchy by a cheap PA system, Moses Kiptala, secretary of the Benet Lobby Group, began, “This struggle has been long and some of us have almost given up!” Over the next few minutes, he drew attention to

the buck-passing methods of the district leadership, who had been successfully “dodging” substantive action for far too long. The Resident District Commissioner (RDC), Assistant RDC, Chief Administrative Officer and an UWA representative greeted these objections with hollow promises (“Permanent resettlement is coming. Just wait”), seemingly irrelevant tangents (the RDC confused the crowd by recounting a recent visit to London, where she went shopping and met Prince Charles—“How many of you can say that you had your picture taken with a Prince?!”), and admonishments against questioning a government that had given them so much (“Don’t break the legs of your leaders!” and, more ominously, “Be careful. Problems come from threatening government.”). When I asked the Assistant RDC how and when the owners of ill-gotten lands would be identified, he demurred saying, “This is not our [the committee’s] job. We could not pinpoint all those individuals. Central government must do this.” The eight-hour meeting concluded without a clear roadmap for proceeding, leaving the residents of the upper portion of the resettlement area with no greater assurance that they would not face further eviction and dispossession.

Skirting the 1993 Line: Some Notes on My Data and Data Collection

The contested nature of the upper portion of the resettlement area (the approximately 1500 ha above the 1993 line) posed some logistical challenges in terms of gaining official research clearance from the Ugandan government. For my preliminary research in 2005, I had to get separate permission both from the Uganda Council for Science and Technology and UWA as the upper zone was technically national park land even though it had been allocated to farmers in 1983. Gaining permission from UWA to conduct research in Benet at that time required some persistence, especially considering

that several staff members at the sprawling UWA headquarters in Kampala denied the existence of a populated contested zone. Yet, finally, with some assistance from the research NGO the World Agroforestry Center (which financially supported my preliminary research), I was able to secure papers that legitimized my presence in the upper portion of Benet. In the years following my initial research, UWA was the subject of considerable foreign criticism concerning human rights abuses both in Benet and in other places. The land rights movement in the Benet Resettlement Area, supported by ActionAid and the Uganda Land Alliance, succeeded in getting “the Benet” added to the International Work Group on Indigenous Affairs list of the world’s indigenous groups (IWGIA 2006). The plight of the Benet people was also brought to the attention of the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights delegation that evaluated human rights concerns in Uganda and featured prominently in a major report (ACHPR and IWGIA 2009). The carbon-offsetting, Forests Absorbing Carbon Emissions (FACE) program in Mt. Elgon and its connections with forced displacements and violence, especially in the southwestern region, was also source of foreign scrutiny. Chis Lang and Timothy Byakola, a journalist and activist respectively, produced a scathing critique of the project for the World Rainforest Movement (Lang and Byakola 2006), which generated substantial press coverage in publications ranging from *The New Internationalist*, *grist.org*, and *21st Century Socialism* to the *Christian Science Monitor*, *The Guardian*, and *Fortune Magazine*. An independent researcher working with UWA and the FACE project told me that the widespread criticism deeply affected the commercial viability of the project, which was a major source of funding for UWA’s operations in Mt. Elgon National Park. The researcher wrote to me in an email dated June 19, 2012, “my understanding is that the international lashing that the project received

(thanks not least to reports from the World Rainforest Foundation, Fortune Magazine, and Hurinet-Uganda) prevented them from selling credits, or renewing their FSC [Forest Stewardship Council] certification.” While I do not wish to overstate my own influence in these matters, Lang and Byakola drew heavily from the working paper I wrote for the World Agroforestry Centre (Himmelfarb 2006), prominently citing blocks of text. Leaders of the land rights movement in Benet also used my working paper, which argued for increased tenure security for farmers in Benet, in various capacities to support their cause. The paper did not earn me many friends among UWA’s ranks and gaining official UWA permission to work in the contested portion of the resettlement area for the extended portion of my research (2009-2010) was not possible, especially since the conflict had become even more contentious following further evictions in 2008.

Without regular access to the upper portion of the resettlement area, the area above the 1993 line, my ability to collect much systematic livelihoods data there beyond the 30 interviews and two months of participant observation I conducted in 2005 was limited. During my extended period of research in the resettlement area, I was able to supplement my initial data by venturing into the upper part of the resettlement area several times to observe livelihoods activities and talk with leaders, residents, and to visit the temporary settlement in Kisito (where the people who were displaced in 2008 were living). As this was not officially sanctioned and put the rest of my research in the lower part of the resettlement area at some risk, I had to restrict my presence above the line between 2009 and 2010 more than I would have liked. Interviews I conducted with local government officials, community leaders, and development workers involved in the land rights movement and other projects in the contested zone in addition to the work of researchers

at the Norwegian University of Life Sciences,³³ some of whom were able to gain more consistent access to the area than I was, have provided an important supplement to my investigations. It was from these 2009 and 2010 interviews with key actors and the handful of interviews I was able to conduct with residents of the resettlement area above the 1993 line, that I was able to conclude that the situation of insecurity described to me in some detail in 2005 and, to a lesser extent in 2006, had not changed in any dramatic way. If anything, the 2008 evictions and the ensuing “temporary” resettlement had further destabilized lives and livelihoods in the contested zone. The nature of my data collection means that the comparison of livelihoods activities, strategies, trends and their frequencies that follows is largely qualitative and, to an extent, speculative. Further large-sample livelihoods surveys perhaps coupled with remote sensing GIS analysis of land use and tree cover could provide an important ground-truthing enhancement to my observations and those of my research participants.

Staying Like Prisoners, Cultivating like Thieves: Impoverishment Risks in the Resettlement Area and Beyond

In this section, I will use the IRR model to explore the effects of displacement, resettlement, and tenure insecurity within the resettlement area. To do so, I will ethnographically compare the conditions of landlessness, joblessness, homelessness, marginalization, morbidity and mortality, access to common property, and community disarticulation for the communities above the 1993 line (where insecurity has been the

³³ Over the past decade, several students from the Norwegian University of Life Sciences and under the direction of Paul Vedeld have conducted research on livelihoods and development among the communities surrounding Mt. Elgon National Park. Taken together, their efforts represent the only sustained research program in the area (at least to my knowledge) since Walter Goldschmidt’s work in the 1950s and 60s.

most intense) with those in the resettlement area below the 1993 line and with those of historical residents. Historical residents, defined here as people whose families have lived continuously in the central escarpment for several generations without facing the challenges of forced relocation, provide an important baseline against which to gauge the legacy of displacement and resettlement. The northwestern side of Mt. Elgon has long been an economically and politically marginalized region of Uganda and it would be misleading to attribute all characteristics of impoverishment exclusively to displacement, resettlement, and the insecurity that has ensued. Like most of Uganda's rural population (see Ellis and Bahiigwa 2003), historical residents and displacees alike face seasonal food insecurity, land shortage, soil fertility loss, limited off-farm economic opportunities, meager or ineffectual agricultural extension services, and poor quality health care and education. Additionally, among both the historical and migrant populations, women (especially the youngest wives in a polygamous family), widows and widowers, the landless, elderly, disabled, and the sick experience a disproportionate share of the burdens of poverty (MFPED 2000). Nevertheless, the following examination of impoverishment risks shows that while displacement and resettlement have left a lasting imprint on lives and livelihoods throughout the resettlement area in the form of changed relations of production, sustained insecurity has focused the pressures and stresses on those who live above the 1993 line.

Landlessness

Perceived land shortage, where households feel that they do not have enough land to provide for the needs of their families, has become prevalent among young adults, both

migrant and historical alike. Respondents from my research, Luzinda's (2008) work in the Benet Resettlement Area, the Kapchorwa District PPA report (MFPED 2000), and other government reports (NEMA n.d, 1998, 2004) attributed increasing land shortage to the confluence of population growth, minimal unclaimed land for expansion, and the practice of partible inheritance. Land in the resettlement area has been subject to particularly intense fragmentation due to high levels of land sales and in-migration and a restricted land base to begin with. For many households in the resettlement area, the amount of land they were allocated was relatively small to begin with and the process of fragmentation began to affect them more quickly than in the central escarpment, where landholdings have been historically larger. This was especially true for upland households, who, because of their lack of representation on the land allocation committee and their lack of political clout, received smaller and less productive plots of land than others (Luzinda 2008).

Farmers told me that two acres of productive and fertile land would be sufficient to satisfy the monetary and subsistence needs for an average family. "On two acres," Chelimo Difas, a farmer in his middle 30s and father of four, who migrated to the resettlement area from Moyok (a village in the central escarpment on the northern side of the mountain) in 2000 because of cattle raiding and land shortage, said, "I would be happy. I could have a plot for bananas and coffee. Some land for maize, and potatoes. My wife could have some small small [land] for *sukuma* and tomatoes. Even grass for grazing, if we had a cow." As it was, Chelimo owned a half an acre of rocky land on the edge of the Kaseko trading centre, large enough for two thatch rondavels, a few plantains, a small stand of maize, and a tiny kitchen garden. "It's not enough even for school fees," Chelimo said. He derived the bulk of his income from agricultural labor and collecting heavy bundles of grass thatch on the

plains and selling it locally, while his wife operated a sporadic milk selling business. Without sufficient land, he said, he and his family lead a precarious existence. "We must live day to day. Each day, we eat from what work we do that day. When there is no work, or the rain keeps me from collecting [grass], or someone does not pay me or my wife, there is no food." Chelimo's fears were borne out during the months of May and June, 2010. Chelimo's wife, Sande, became weak with an illness she identified as brucellosis and was unable to sell milk. Meanwhile, the heavy rains kept Chelimo from collecting thatch and there were few opportunities for contract labor. "Without enough land, we are really suffering," he said.

Among both displacees and historical residents, young adult men, whose fathers were the last generation to have inherited or otherwise accumulated sufficiently sized plots, have felt the brunt of increasing land fragmentation. Yet, true landlessness is concentrated above the 1993 line, particularly among those families displaced from within the protected area. One day in the dry season, as I was driving home after a long day of interviews, I stopped to give a young man a ride. As soon as he folded his tall rangy frame into the front seat of my truck, he said, "David, I have been looking for you." I was surprised, as I had never, at least to my knowledge met, the man before. Chebet Simon explained to me that he and several of his peers had formed a "pressure group" to advocate for the rights of landless young men living above the 1993 line and was hoping I might help support their cause. "How can you assist us?" Chebet asked me. "Our fathers sold the land before they could give it to us. They didn't know the importance of that land. Now we are the ones to suffer." I heard versions of this story numerous times during interviews and discussions with young upland men and their mothers (though not usually with their

fathers, who were hesitant to admit that they had sold their land). Chebet said his father had sold the last of the family's allocated land by the late 1980s and that his family stayed with relatives in the upper portion of the resettlement area, where they had continued access to forest resources and grazing lands.³⁴ When access to those resources was cut off, Chebet's family's landlessness plunged them and others like it deeply into poverty. The problem was particularly acute for young men like Chebet, who were seeking to marry and start a family. "Our sisters could marry out to men from in other places. Ones who had land and cows. But us men, we had to stay. Where could we go?" Chebet's father lost his few remaining cows to UWA confiscation. Without cows to pay for a bride price and land for farming, Chebet wondered grimly, "How can I now marry? I am just eating from contract labor and getting what I can."

Landlessness is also prevalent within the uppermost portion of the resettlement area among the households originally from Yatui, who stayed inside the reserve during the allocations of the 1980s only to be evicted twice, once in 1990 and again in 2008. A government report from 2010 (UWA and GoU 2010) acknowledges that though nearly 200 households were allocated temporary land in Kisito following the controversial 2008 evictions, "a few" households were left out. Moses Kiptala, community activist and leader, contended that the "few" who lost out comprised almost 300 households (compared with the 194 households that were temporarily resettled). Moreover, as the land in Kisito was intended as a sort of temporary loan, even the residents of Kisito who were given use of land are technically landless until the matter is resolved. As Kokop Francis, the elderly

³⁴ Several upland community leaders explained to me that after resettlement, many upland families disposed of their land allocations and moved to the upper area of the resettlement area to be closer to kin and their former resource base. This resulted in a concentration of households originally from inside the park in the upper region of the resettlement area.

woman described in this chapter's introduction said to me, "We are just in the hands of the government. Anything they decide to do, they can." Not long after I interviewed Kokop, a man who lived in a neighboring village took my arm and said in a thin, reedy voice, "This insecurity has given us more suffering. Because of the small land we have, we only grow potatoes and vegetables. Short term crops only and not much. When the food runs out, Ah! There isn't even enough milk to feed the children. It's like they are killing us slowly."

Joblessness

Luzinda (2008) argues the transition away from cattle keeping and foraging represented a major loss of occupation for the men and women who had built their livelihoods around those activities (see also Vangen 2009). Agriculture has become the primary source of income for most residents of the resettlement area. If possible, farmers I spoke with generally preferred to work exclusively on their own land, utilizing household labor. In practice, many depended on kin or other relations for assistance and those who could afford it, hired workers. *Contaras* (the Kupsabiny word for contract or hired agricultural labor), though socially stigmatized,³⁵ has become an important part of livelihoods for historical residents and displacees both as a short-term coping strategy and an income-generating mainstay. With few exceptions, historical and resettled households listed *contaras* as their strategy of first resort when faced with seasonal food shortage. During the weeding and harvesting seasons, hired labor was readily available below the

³⁵ One man became suspicious when I asked him if he or anyone else in his family ever worked contract labor. Defensively, he asked me in return, "Why are you asking me this? Why are you trying to find my weaknesses?" Though commonly practiced, *contaras* was generally considered, by the men I consulted, as an indication of failure. Women seemed less concerned with the stigma and freely admitted to working wage labor whenever they could and saw it as a good way of providing food for the household as they were often paid in food.

1993 line and in the historical villages. Above the 1993 line, however, residents informed me that the opportunities for agricultural labor were not as widespread because farmers had less ability to pay laborers. Kissa Titus, a farmer from Mengya (above the 1993 line) said that he would like hire laborers to help him harvest his potatoes. "I can give them potatoes [referring to the common practice of paying for labor with produce], but then I don't have enough potatoes to eat and sell." Sande Kinjo, a woman from Piswa (above the 1993 line) explained that she and her neighbors had to walk a long distance to the lower part of the resettlement area if they wanted to get contract work: "It is so far. When I work down there, I have to leave before sunrise." More often than not, she said, her household obligations kept her at home.

For landless or land-short households and for those lacking education, there are few options for formal or off-farm employment. Trading centers are hubs for non-farm employment and economic opportunities. Most trading centers like the one in Kaseko (below the 1993 line) are relatively small affairs, consisting of a row or two of iron-roofed, mud buildings flanking a feeder road. During the period of my research, the Kaseko trading center, located in the center of the resettlement area, was no longer than about 100 meters and home to two small shops, a drinking joint, a tailor shop, and a generator-powered mill for grinding maize into flour that doubles as a seasonal wholesale produce venture along with a few iron-roofed houses for the businesses' proprietors. The range and number of businesses in trading centers is constantly in flux, tied to the rising and falling fortunes of their surrounding villagers and the business savvy of their owners, among other factors. As such, trading centers above the 1993 line tended to be smaller and house a smaller range of

businesses than larger ones further down the mountain like the sprawling and rapidly growing trading center of Kapnarkut, located just below Kaseko.

From above, Kapnarkut resembled a starfish, with several densely populated roads radiating out from a central knot of businesses and an open-air market. Over the past three decades, Kapnarkut has become a center for both commercial and governmental activity. Businessmen from Kapchorwa and as far away as Sironko and Mbale brought their trucks to Kapnarkut to buy produce wholesale from traders and farmers alike. Kapnarkut offered more of a diversity of business enterprises than smaller trading centers like Kaseko and ones above the 1993 line. Aside from the usual drinking spots and shops selling household goods like soap and cooking oil, I observed clothing shops, butcher shops, hair-cutting salons, cell phone charging services, veterinary and agricultural supply shops, pharmacies, private health clinics, tea houses, restaurants, and a small movie house, where men gather to watch soccer matches and action films. Kapnarkut was also home to a small local government office, a police station, and the largest and best-equipped public health clinic for miles in any direction.

Residents told me that much of Kapnarkut's growth and development was recent and tied to the official degazettment of the lower part of the resettlement area in 2002. "Once the land was degazetted," William Chepetgei, my host father said, "business was better. There were more people coming for work, trucks, what. More money to start a shop." As a burgeoning peri-urban center, Kapnarkut has attracted many people facing limited opportunities elsewhere. I knew several landless young couples like Tom Cheromoi and his wife, Beatrice Chebet, who rented a small room in a row of ramshackle mud houses. Over the months that I visited their household, Tom and Beatrice pieced together a living

from many sources. Tom got work where he could, concentrating his efforts in the trading center (partly, I suspect, because it kept him closer to his favorite drinking establishment). He worked stints as a day laborer in construction, for a flour mill, and in a butcher shop, while Beatrice worked in the surrounding farms, planting, weeding, or harvesting depending on the season. For people with more education, like Moses Chelangat, who graduated from Makerere University in 2004 and worked as a teacher at the Chemanga Seed School on the outskirts of town, or Albert Kiptala, who finished his A-levels³⁶ in 2000 and got a job working for an NGO-funded agricultural extension project, Kapnarkut offered a some opportunities for salaried positions, but these were relatively few and fiercely competed for. Because there are no governmental services extended above the 1993 line and NGOs have only just begun to work there, salaried jobs are largely non-existent above the 1993 line.

Homelessness

Homelessness, in the sense of people living without shelter, was not a major consequence of the initial displacement and resettlement in Benet. Following the 2008 evictions from Yatui, however, some 400 households were left homeless for several months until they were allocated temporary land in Kisito. As noted above, some households were further left out of the 2008 re-allocations and remain without homes of their own. Upland community leader, Moses Kiptala, who was involved in coordinating relief efforts, expressed his indignation, “Our people were staying in caves like what? Like animals!” Other leaders of the upland community and NGO workers told me that eventually most of

³⁶ Within the British-style educational system, A-levels, or Advanced Levels, refers to secondary school examinations used to qualify for university admissions.

those households left out were able to find shelter with relatives lower down in the resettlement area, but that their sustained presence had begun to create tension. As landlessness increases, especially above the 1993 line, more and more households have had to depend on their relatives for support and housing. Among the historical residents I spoke with, homelessness was largely unheard of. When I asked Swakar George, a former village Chief for Kapkwure (a historical village), if there were any homeless people among the historical residents, he replied, "Ah, no. Never. Maybe in Kapchorwa town you see some guys sleeping in doorways. But here in the rural areas, no. I have never seen."

Research on forced relocation indicates that homelessness is not necessarily limited to physical lack of shelter; the loss of one's sense of place can exact a heavy psychological toll that may continue long after the relocatee has a roof over his or her head (Colson 1971; de Wet 1995; Downing and Garcia-Downing 2009;). Several studies from Sudan, Zambia, the United States, and elsewhere have suggested that the grief of leaving one's homeland is often particularly acute for the elderly, who are more apt to "die of a broken heart" (Cliggett 2005; Colson 1971; Fahim 1973; Khera and Mariella 1982; Perlman 1982). Consistent with Luzinda's (2008) work in Benet, I found this to be the case for many of the older resettlers, both above and below the 1993 line. Time and again they expressed their grief not only for lost relatives, but for a lost sense of place and livelihood activities. Suicide and death were common topics of conversation. One elderly man originally from Yatui explained, "For us old men, we feel we have no life without cows. We are just waiting for death. Those young ones, they can farm. They can learn new ways. It would have been better to let us old men stay with out cows [in the protected grasslands]. Let us die there. And let the youth begin farming." The man's friend, put down his medicine bottle of *waragi* (locally distilled

whisky), and unsteadily exclaimed, “They [the government] want to send us to Ngenge [the plains], where they say there is land. Ah! It is too hot. Ndorobos [another term for the upland population, sometimes but not always used in a derogatory way] cannot stay there. Our cows will die! It would be like taking a fish from the water. We will dry up and die!”

Marginalization

The process of marginalization as it has taken shape in the Benet Resettlement Area represents the confluence of pre-displacement relations of inequality and post-displacement insecurity. For Cernea (1997:1574), marginalization represents a multidimensional process of social, political, economic, and even psychological “downward mobility.” How far down an individual, household, or community slides depends where he/she/it stood before displacement and the nature and distribution of pressures exerted following displacement (Oliver-Smith 1996; Scudder and Colson 1982). Of the three categories of resettled people (upland, lowland and so-called needy from the central escarpment), the upland communities were the most politically and economically isolated. Despite the trade in forest products and cattle and limited tax collection efforts described above and in previous chapters, prior to the 1970s, upland communities had little interaction with the central government and external markets. As Moses Mwanga, an outspoken upland leader and activist, told me (and any other outsider who cared to listen—similar quotes to this have appeared in several news articles, activist reports, and academic theses), “We were left in the forest as if we were part of the trees! The government was nowhere. Until there was some farming [in the reserve], no one cared to even think about us. They thought we were primitive, backwards because we stayed in the

forest. It was marginalization, really.” Another upland leader, Moses Kiptala, agreed: “Before the 1970s, no one was thinking about us. We were comfortable getting what we needed from the forest. There was rain and cold... but we had cows and honey. Up [the mountain] there were no roads, government schools. Some Catholic [missionaries] had a small small school for some time. For most people, there was little exposure to the outside ways.” He also explained that prejudice was not confined to government agents. “*Soishek* [lowland people, most likely referring to people from the central escarpment], those ones were connected. They had education, markets, commercial goods, what. When they saw a *mosop* man, with the blanket wrapped like this [around his head and shoulder like a shawl], they would laugh and say, ‘That one is Ndorobo [a derogatory term for a hunter-gatherer]. He eats from the forest. Ah! So backwards.’ Those ones could cheat us.” Such a lack of experience interacting with government and history of marginalization, these leaders argued, meant that they lacked the ability and power to achieve adequate representation on the resettlement land allocation committee. As such, they and Luzinda (2008:48) argue that upland households tended to receive smaller and less productive pieces of land than more politically savvy migrants, disadvantaging upland families from the very start.

Perpetual insecurity left households above the 1993 line, many (but not all) of which were already disadvantaged uplanders, in an uncomfortable, isolated stasis. As discussed in the previous chapter, the land conflict between residents above the 1993 line and the government froze social services in the contested zone. Because the area was officially national park land, governmental support for schools, roads, health clinics, agricultural extension and other development activities were withdrawn. The activities of NGOs, increasingly important service providers in the region, were similarly curtailed in

the contested zone. George Chemwaja, a farmer who lives above the 1993 line in Piswa, described his feelings of desperation concerning the withdrawal of services: “The government abandoned us! When they drew that line, it is like we were no longer people. The clinic is far. Schools are only for [the people] down [in the lower part of the resettlement area]. Two of my small ones [children] go to our community school [funded by the parents], but mostly we can’t pay the teacher so he doesn’t come. The children go to the school, but they are waiting only.” Other residents in the contested zone affirmed the unreliable nature of the parent-initiated community schools. Driving through the upper resettlement area, I observed multiple dilapidated community schools, their thatch roofs caving in and walls crumbling. Some were in use, people told me, others, they said, represented the failed hopes of a community trying to provide better lives for their children. Wilson Chemutai, a middle-aged man who had been involved with such a failed community school effort told me, “For long, there was no local school. I sent my youngest down to the government school in Kwoti [below the 1993 line]. It was too far and she stopped going. We thought if we built a school, then government would see and assist us.” Wilson went on to explain that before long, he and his fellow parents ran out of money to maintain the school building and pay the teacher. The last time I saw the school, a young boy was grazing a small herd of goats in what was once was a classroom.³⁷

For residents of the resettlement area and historical villages alike, education is commonly seen as important investment not only to help their children succeed but also

³⁷ An exception to this dismal record above the 1993 line was provided by a recent partnership between the NGO, Food for the Hungry International (FHI) and local leaders in Mengya. Flaunting government edicts, they took a risk and built a private school for the children who live above the 1993 line. Their school, attracting several hundred students, some of whom walk hours to get to school each day, seems to have been an isolated, yet promising success.

for coping with livelihoods pressures and attaining support in one's old age. In a casual conversation in Kapnarkut center, an older man spoke of education as a type of investment: "That one [education] is a big bank. Better to lack some things and [for] the child go to school. You never know how it will assist you [later on in life]." Another man sitting close by added, "In the past, wealth would come from cows. These days wealth comes from education." Education, he said, enabled people to take advantage of development opportunities like the agricultural education programs offered in the lower part of the resettlement area by an organization Kapchorwa Commercial Farmers' Association (KACOFA). "With knowledge, you can understand the things they [project facilitators] are saying. Because I went to school, I am somehow confident at those meetings." Sambiriri Kissa, a lay preacher and farmer in Kamakosa (below the 1993 line), explained that he had undertaken great pains to send his oldest son to secondary school. "It was not easy for me to arrange for school fees. Even now, I sold a cow for what? School fees for Sadok [one of his sons]. Julius [the eldest son] is now a soldier with UPDF [Uganda People's Defense Force] in Somalia." Over the course of my research in 2009 and 2010, the remittances Julius was able to send to his father enabled his family to weather a period of intense food shortage and even build a small addition to his house. As noted above, salaried jobs are rare and difficult to get for most rural households (both resettled and historical) even for those who were able to educate their children. But without consistent access to education, the people above the 1993 line have watched as the few existent opportunities there are recede out of their children's reach. Illiteracy, which perhaps unsurprisingly, local government officials and NGO workers told me, is concentrated above the 1993 line and has also impeded residents' abilities to participate in local government and take advantage

of various development opportunities that others below the line and in historically occupied areas have been able to access (see also Luzinda 2008).

Residents consistently discussed the poor quality of the road network (its decay and limited extent) above the 1993 line source of social and economic marginalization. For agricultural families, commerce depends on roads. Soini (2007) reported that, for communities around Mt. Elgon National Park, proximity to passable roads was a critical factor in households' income and levels of productive investment. Yet, torrential rains for much of the year make road maintenance throughout the northern region of the mountain a constant and Sisyphean task especially on the steeper grades. Two ragged, vertiginous feeder roads connect the lower portion of the resettlement with the upper, one angling up from Kitanyi in the east and the other from Tuikat in the west. Under the best conditions, in my experience, both roads posed a serious challenge to even the strongest of four-wheel drive vehicles. Few produce wholesaling truck owners I spoke with reported venturing into the upper part of the resettlement area, leaving farmers there to transport their produce to lower areas on their backs or by donkey. "Let them bring their potatoes down with donkeys," one driver said. "Why should I risk my truck just to get some potatoes?" His comments indicate not only the general inaccessibility of the upper region, but also the perception of a limited range of available crops. Though some roads in the lower part of the resettlement area and the central escarpment are seasonally impassible, they remain relatively closely linked to the main commercial corridor, the Kapchorwa-Bukwa road, which saw considerable government investment leading up to the 2011 elections. The improving road networks in the lower region of the resettlement area have enabled

farmers there to participate in newly expanding markets. While above the 1993 line, the lack of passable roads significantly limits their capacity to participate in cash crop markets.

Aside from access to markets and social services such as health clinics and schools, the poor road infrastructure has also impeded access to the various poverty alleviation and agricultural extension programs available below the 1993 line. Over the past decade, there has been a profusion of development initiatives in Kapchorwa District. DANIDA, NORAD, World Vision, IUCN, the World Food Program and others have all funded projects aimed at reducing rural poverty and food insecurity. Other organizations such as ActionAid, the World Agroforestry Centre, African Highlands Initiative, and the National Agriculture Advisory Services (a governmental program) have made considerable efforts to promote soil and water conservation, with programs encouraging perennial tree crops, agroforestry, contour bands, and other erosion control measures. As discussed in Chapter 3, neither upland nor lowland households practiced intensive montane cultivation before displacement and migrants from the central escarpment had little experience with soil fertility management outside of fallowing (which relied on an extensive land base). As a result, few displaced households were prepared for the problems of soil loss that confronted them in the resettlement area, underscoring the importance of access to agricultural extension. Yet, because of the contested nature of the upper zone, these organizations have had to focus their energies in areas below the 1993 line and inaccessible to those living above it.³⁸

³⁸ There are indications that this situation is gradually changing. In 2007, IUCN initiated a “Landscapes and Livelihoods” project that explicitly targets community groups above the 1993 line (IUCN 2008). Progress has been slow, however, a manager for the project informed me, due to pervasive mistrust among participant communities.

For those above the line, exclusion from development and conservation activities is not solely a matter of physical marginalization. Even in the lower part of the resettlement area and historical villages where these activities have been concentrated, social connections and access to information were essential criteria for gaining inclusion in these projects. (Alinyo and Leahy n.d.:8). Below the 1993 line and in the historical villages, I observed many men like Alfred Cheptuket (described in this chapter's introduction) devoting a considerable percentage of their time building relationships, attending meetings, and hanging around trading centers seeking out the latest gossip.³⁹ I knew several wealthier and better-educated men than Alfred, who made daily pilgrimages from their houses to Kapchorwa town for the same purpose. My host father, William Cheptegei, was one such man. He went so far as to take a wife and establish a second household on the edge of Kapchorwa town, where he spent the majority of his time. When I asked him why he spent most nights away from his farm, he responded that the urban center was a major hub of information and activity. William clearly thrived in meeting-intensive atmosphere of town life, his chest puffing out when he described his busy schedule that brought him in contact with high-ranking governmental officials, foreign aid workers, and others. Plus, he added, "You never know what you will hear in town." Farmers living above the 1993 line told me that they frequently missed out on meetings and other opportunities, only hearing about them after the fact.

Insecurity and exclusion have manifested in differential agricultural decisions and investments in erosion control above and below the 1993 line, which has put households

³⁹ Though such male networking activities are often carried out at drinking establishments and viewed by outsiders and women as lazy inactivity, Whitehead (2000) argues that they can represent important contributions to household viability.

that fail to invest increasingly at risk. Landslides, perpetually diminishing yields and resultant food shortages, and drinking water siltation all threaten the health and livelihood sustainability of households that fail to take remedial measures. Throughout the lower area of the resettlement area, there are numerous small woodlots, intercropped banana and coffee tree plots, and napia grass contour bands amidst the maize and potato fields. Whereas in the upper area, there is hardly any evidence of soil/water conservation efforts; there are few long-term tree crops and the maize and potato cultivations are often riven with erosion gullies. In addition to having little access to agricultural extension services, numerous farmers in the upper area told me they were hesitant to invest in energy and resource-intensive soil conservation measures due to the uncertainty of how long they will be allowed to stay there. “We have become like prisoners!” Simon Cherotwo, a middle-aged man who lived above the line, not far from the Kisito temporary settlement. “When I tried to plant trees, *sikarek* [soldiers, the term used to refer to UWA rangers] said no. When I tried to organize [the money] for an iron roof, we were told not to build. No changes until government says, ‘Okay, this is your land.’ Soon I stopped trying.” The sense of being held hostage by insecurity was mentioned by 25 of the 30 people I interviewed above the line in 2005, many repeating variants of the question, “Why should I invest or plant trees when I don’t know how long I will be allowed to farm here?” When I asked Jackson Cherotin, a farmer from Kaseko (below the 1993 line) how his livelihood compared with his neighbors above the 1993 line, he summed up well what I heard over and over again in my interviews,

Those people above the line, they are cultivating like they are stealing! They only plant potatoes and wheat—those short-term crops. They can’t plant permanent crops like bananas, coffee, trees—those things I plant so much of here. Those ones [crops] help me through food shortages, but people up

there are only temporary maybe. They can't build permanent houses. At any time, [UWA] can chase them. There is no education, no clinics. Roads? No trucks can pass. They are suffering too much!

There are several important elements to Jackson's statement. First, he contrasted the variety of crops he plants with the limited range found above the 1993 line. Like Alfred Cheptuket (described in this chapter's introduction) and others farmers I spoke with below the 1993 line and in the historical villages, Jackson felt that crop diversification lent flexibility and resilience to his household's livelihood. "If the maize fails," he told me in another conversation, "there is always something else that can carry you." Second, Jackson connected the general absence of perennial tree crops and woodlot trees above the 1993 line directly to the pervasive insecurity focused there. Jackson explained that the perennial tree crops he and his wife had planted and the other labor-intensive soil conservation practices they had undertaken, which included digging trenches, heavy mulching, and terracing, not only enhanced the long-term viability of their livelihood, but also represented a symbol of his enduring control over the land, an example of the "planting to claim" practices observed in Ghana (Besley 1995), Burkina Faso (Braselle et al. 2002; Gray and Kevane 2001), and Ethiopia (Deininger and Jin 2006), among other places. Within the climate of insecurity above the 1993 line, farmers I talked to found that planting trees did not have the same effect. Instead, it made them targets for UWA harassment (see Chapter 3). In describing the approach to farming above the line as "stealing," Jackson referred to a lack of a feeling of ownership, which he felt fostered a "get it while you can," soil-mining style agriculture.

Though reluctance to make to investments in long-term crops and soil conservation measures was perhaps initially a purely practical response to tenure insecurity, over time,

it became a sort of “weapons of the weak” form of resistance (see Scott 1985). As noted in the above, several farmers above the line spoke with indignation at being declared encroachers by the government. Farmers like Kokop Linas, Kokop Francis, Nyangas Arthur and others indicated that if the government continued to perceive them as thieves, illegally occupying government land, then an unsustainable, extractive approach could be viewed as a form of resistance. Activities such as planting trees became associated with UWA and hence something to reject. Moses Mwanga, the upland leader, local government representative, and advocate of conservation, explained that above the 1993 line, it was politically incendiary to suggest that people who do not have tenure should invest in soil and water conservation. He told me that he must speak differently to residents above and below the 1993 line; in his words, “with a different heart.” Below the line, he said that he feels free to openly promote conservation measures, but above the line “you mainly ask people to be patient and focus on the struggle to achieve security...Even though I try, I can’t convince [those people] to do the right thing because of the insecurity. Many of those households, they don’t care about soil erosion, soil management. Their yields are getting worse each year, but when you say, ‘Maybe you can protect the soil, what...’ Ah! You are [an] enemy.” Moses Kiptala, another leader and conservation advocate, described similar experiences promoting conservation activities above the 1993 line:

When you talk about terracing, you tell people about trees, somebody will say, ‘Afterall, how long do I know I will be here?’ You know, like where we are now, where we are, there is still a dispute between government because the line is down here [gesturing toward the line]... So legally here is still a national park. But you have seen these trees [gesturing toward his woodlot of eucalyptus trees]—I am just planting because I know what I mean even if government takes [them] tomorrow, we shall have air... But others! They say, ‘Why do I plant that?! Why, why terraces? Why? Will I know that I will be there for all that time? Maybe government will take it.’

Within a context of rapidly decreasing yields, limited access to markets, and insecurity of tenure, a sole reliance on agriculture is perceived as a less viable livelihood strategy in the upper region of the resettlement area than it is in lower areas. People have increasingly turned to resources from the interior of the park to diversify their livelihoods. Not all residents of the resettlement area depend on in-park resources equally. As insecurity has been concentrated among communities closest to the forest edge, in-park resource use has become most important to families in those areas (Luzinda 2008; Vangen 2009). Many people who live above the boundary graze their cattle in the park's grass lands. Others also gather firewood, bamboo shoots and other wild products and harvest timber, which they sell to others down the mountain. Any use of national park resources is illegal, and those who venture into the forest risk heavy fines and physical violence. Villagers are well aware of these risks—nearly everyone I interviewed in the upper area had either been punished or knew someone who had been punished for utilizing in-park resources—yet because they felt they could not derive a sufficient income given the constraints of insecure tenure, they felt they had no other option than to pursue these illicit resources. Frequent punishment has further contributed to the economic marginalization of those with insecure tenure and fostered animosity within communities and towards park managers.

Increased Morbidity and Mortality

As described above, coping with the psychological stresses of displacement and resettlement was particularly difficult for older people, who had built full lives and families in their home communities. Elders described an outbreak of suicides among first

generation displacees. George Cherop, the man from Ngenge described in Chapter 2, explained that memories of cattle raiding violence that claimed the lives of their two sons drove his first wife, Helen, to killing herself. "It was just too much for her," he said, trailing off. For some like Helen it was the specific traumas of displacement, witnessing loved ones murdered and hard-won property destroyed. For others like Kokop Linas, the elderly woman described in the introduction to Chapter 3, thoughts of suicide were provoked by feelings of placelessness and loss of a former way of life. Though specific figures are difficult to come by, the elders I spoke with indicated that post-displacement suicide and depression was a problem throughout the resettlement area, not concentrated above or below the 1993 line. First generation displacees from the plains and uplands reported that the change in climate (cooler and wetter for people in the plains and warmer and drier for people from the uplands) brought new diseases, though these observations were nonspecific and some people from the plains felt that the environmental conditions of the resettlement area were more favorable than their home environment. Furthermore, Luzinda (2008:75) found that insecurity-induced coupled with the stresses of displacement and resettlement contributed to increased incidences of hopelessness and anxiety, above the 1993 line, which in turn contributed to elevated rates of alcoholism and domestic violence.

In terms of health, prolonged insecurity has affected the population above the 1993 line in two primary ways: disproportionately restricted access to health care services and intensified experiences of food insecurity. I have already discussed at some length how the withdrawal of government services (which included healthcare) above the 1993 line and poor roads connecting the upper area to available services below the line have restricted

people's access to those services. The government poverty assessment found that even for people who lived with some proximity to healthcare facilities, poorly trained staff, treatment fees, inadequate drug supplies, and lack of transport all hindered their abilities to get effective treatment (MFPED 2000:75). Their findings are consistent with what my interview participants told me below the 1993 line and in historical villages. "When you go for treatment to one of those public clinics," Mamadi Francis, a local government representative and farmer from Kapteng (a historical village), said, "sometimes no one is there to treat you or the drugs, they are not there. This happened to me last week. My daughter was sick with diarrhea and I took her to [the public clinic in] Kapnarkut. There was no doctor, nurse. I thought maybe I [should] go to a private clinic, but, ah no. No money. They have drugs but you can't get drugs without money." Though specific health statistics for the upper part of the resettlement (and the entire district, for that matter) are lacking, it stands to reason that diminished access to services however shoddy would result in higher levels of disease and death. Cheromoi Samuel, a carpenter from Kaseko (below the line), recounted the story of his sister-in-law, who was critically injured on her farm above the 1993 line when a tree fell on her. Her legs were crushed and had grave internal bleeding. She died before her husband and neighbors were able to get her to a clinic. Cheromoi's grief was compounded, he said, by the fact that "if she lived closer, she could get to the clinic faster. Maybe she would be alive still." The women I spoke with above the line were particularly concerned about the lack of nearby health clinics. For women, Freeda Chemutai, a woman in her 30s from Cheberen (above the line), said, "our biggest problem is no clinics. Me, I have three children, but every time I give birth I am fearing. Some women they have problems [during child birth] but no one can help them and they die."

Food Insecurity

Multiple studies carried out in Kapchorwa have reported that seasonal food insecurity and hunger affect most rural households to some extent (Alinyo and Leahy n.d.; MFPED 2000; Luzinda 2008), though there has been little systematic data collection with respect to resultant health issues such as malnutrition and related diseases. Both displacees and historical residents described a pattern common to most peasant agriculturalists, who must depend on household production to satisfy both consumptive and monetary needs. Maize, as the preferred staple food, accounts for the bulk of household consumption and, for most farmers, is the primary focus of agricultural activities. Planting usually takes place from March to April, weeding from May to September, and harvesting from September to November. Farmers I spoke with in both resettled and historical villages told me that their food stores begin to dwindle in May and food shortages are most intense in July and August leading up to the maize harvest. A full accounting of the distribution and intensity of food insecurity and the long and short-term strategies farmers have developed to deal with it is beyond the purview of this chapter. Nevertheless, government officials and NGO workers concerned with livelihoods in the resettlement area, as well as the farmers themselves, indicated that food insecurity was particularly ubiquitous and intense above the 1993 line compared with the lower areas. They told me that food insecurity was more pronounced in the upper region for four primary reasons all related to insecurity: 1) the lack of access to poverty alleviation and other food security programs, 2) a smaller range of crops planted, 3) lower yields due to soil erosion, and 4)

reduced capacities for social support due to generalized poverty and conflict (discussed in more detail below).

Loss of Common Property

As described at length in Chapter 3, displacement and resettlement brought about a tremendous loss of common property for the upland and lowland populations who were forced to leave their homes. For both populations, restricted access to common grazing areas promulgated major changes in production, most notably a shift away from pastoralism, the mainstay of livelihoods, to intensive agriculture. The creation of the resettlement area and allocation of former forest land also reduced access to common property for historical residents, who told me that they had previously hunted and gathered wild plants along the forest margin, though these activities were not central elements of their livelihoods. For upland and lowland populations, the transition to away from commons-heavy pastoralism to individualized agriculture was not an easy one. “How could we know how to farm like these people up?” Stephen Sumotwo, who was displaced from Ngenge as a young man, asked. “I helped my father with some millet, but, ah! It is different here. We can only look at the ones who were already farming here. [In Ngenge] Cows was it—what took you through hard times. [In the resettlement area], If [you have] no land for grazing, there is no place to take the cows.” Both upland and lowland displacees also lost access to foraging and hunting resources from displacement and resettlement. Loss of regular access to bamboo was a serious blow to upland women, who had long relied on basket weaving as a central source of income. A middle-aged woman I encountered on the road one day, selling baskets she had woven from illegally harvested wood, told me that

for her and other women from the uplands, “We cannot live without bamboo. That one [bamboo] is our land,” indicating that bamboo sustained her in the way that land sustained farmers. She acknowledged the risks of collecting protected resources, saying, “It is dangerous. You can maybe be raped. Some women no longer go. But for me, it is a must.” Due to the nature of resettlement, with upland and lowland households scattered throughout the resettlement area, the loss of common property was not restricted to the upper zone, though insecurity seems to have perpetuated a dependence on once commonly held protected resources especially among landless upland households. Since 2007, UWA, prompted by IUCN, has for the first time begun to offer resource-use agreements to a small handful of residents above the 1993 line. Participants, however, complained that restrictions were too tight to make any concrete contribution to their livelihoods and any expansion of the program has been stalled by the ongoing conflict over land.

Social Disarticulation

Cernea (1997:1575) writes, “Forced displacement tears apart the existing social fabric: it disperses and fragments communities, dismantles patterns of social organization and interpersonal ties.” Resettlers I talked to affirmed Cernea’s observation. Rosemary Sikoria, a farmer from Tuikat (just above the line) who was displaced from inside the protected area as a young girl, recounted how her extended family was scattered across the resettlement area. “We used to stay all in one place [referring to the clan-based settlements found in the protected area] a clan. When we had to come down, it was each one here, each one there. Sometimes more than a day’s journey.” Without these relations to provide mutual support as they faced the mammoth task of rebuilding, she said, “There was so

much suffering along the way.” Other residents of the resettlement area described mistrust and friction in those early years following resettlement. Stephen Chemangei, a farmer originally from Kaproron (further north in the central escarpment), told me how some of his neighbors initially mistrusted him. He said, “Of course you have, you have those people looking around. Looking to see how much [land] this one got, the quality [of the land]. There were jealousies. People had yet to cut all the trees and there were conflicts. Those normal things...It was not so bad, though until the national park came. That was when things got really hot!” Stephen, who bought land in Taragon in the lower region, recalled that the redrawing of the park boundary and subsequent threat of eviction and reallocations put the entire resettlement area on edge. “There were so many rumors going around” at that time, he said. “No one knew what would happen. After all, where should we go? I had nowhere else to go and government might come and give these other ones [uplanders] land for me.”

Stephen and others traced the growing rift between upland and lowland populations to what some community leaders described as the “divide and rule” policies of the new national park managers. As described in Chapter 2, following the remarking of the boundary, the national park’s managers’ approach to resolving the ensuing conflict was to specifically target “Ndorobos,” or former hunter-gatherers, whom they declared the only legitimate beneficiaries of the resettlement exercise. William Cheptegei, my host father, farmer, and land rights activist, explained to me how UWA set up clandestine meetings with landless upland youth and told them that the resettlement area land would be redistributed. “UWA really fanned the flames of conflict between *mosop* and *soi*. It was divide and rule, really.” Laughing, he continued, “They say history repeats itself. Those

young *mosops* became angry. There was tension growing and even some young men were arming with *pangas* [machetes] like for a war. Some *mosopishek* called us [lowlanders] *kusukok*" or burned tree stumps that had to be pushed down the mountain by brute force. There were several outbreaks of violence, including targeted theft and the destruction of property, which were generally understood to have been sanctioned surreptitiously by UWA. Recounting one such act of violence in which a tractor belonging to a farmer from the lowlands was burned, Aggrey Nyangas, a young man who grew up in the resettlement area, told me that he thought the incident was intended by UWA to incite a broader upland-lowland conflict. "UWA had a hand," he said, "but an invisible one." Though the conflict cooled down below the 1993 line after 2002 when the lower portion of the resettlement area was officially degazetted, continued insecurity above the line has kept the two groups wary of each other. When I asked him about the state of the intra-community conflict in 2010, Moses Kiptala, upland leader, said, "Things are somehow better below the line, really. Even today, I am going to a wedding between a *mosop* and a *soi* down in Taragon. But up, like Mengya [a village above the 1993 line], it is not easy. It is difficult to live with so much distrust." He went on to tell me how mutual jealousies and suspicions were standing in the way of a both a unified resistance to the national park, community cohesion, and relationships of mutual support.

For the households I visited weekly, social support networks played a critical role in mitigating periodic stresses such as food insecurity or labor shortage. Despite claims that economic individualism had diminished social support, for most households, few weeks went by without a household member giving aid to a friend, relative, or neighbor. These same households reported receiving some kind of aid only slightly less frequently. More

often than not, these exchanges were considered an act of generalized reciprocity, as a way of, as many put it “building good relationships.” In fact, the Kupsabiny word most often used to describe these types of exchanges was *telyanetet*, which translates to “friendship.” Dismas Ndiwa, a young man who operated a small shop in Kapkwure, explained that during the plowing season he frequently lent out his oxen to friends and relatives without. When I asked him if he ever charged them money for the service, he laughed. “No, no. It is only to help them. Not business at all. But sometimes,” he conceded, “when I need help those ones remember very well I lent them oxen and they can give me money.” Kin networks were particularly important among historical residents, who tended to live in closer proximity to a wider range of relatives than displaced households both above and below the line. For residents below the line, social networks of mutual aid tended to focus on neighbors and friends in the surrounding area. Shaban Alex attributed his ability to rebuild his livelihood after being displaced by cattle raiders from Bukwo (on the Kenyan border) to good relationships with his neighbors, “Without those ones, Ah! If they weren’t around, I would have suffered so much.”

Aside from informal social networks, in recent years, there has been a profusion of community-based savings and loan groups aimed at formalizing relationships of mutual support. Despite wide variation in the specific terms and charters of these groups, most operated in the form of rotating savings and credit associations or ROSCAs (see Besley et al. 1993), where each member makes a monetary contribution at regular intervals to a central “pot,” which is then either presented to a single member on a rotating basis or used for a collective project. When I began my research in the area in 2005, these groups were just beginning to become popular, especially among women. Kokop Ndiwa, an older woman

from Kapteng, joined such a group in 2000. “These women were my neighbors, friends. We came with good hearts to improve the household.” Her group collectively raises goats and distributes the resultant offspring among its members. During hard times, she said she was able to fall back on the goats she had been able to accumulate through the group, but also the relationships she had established and strengthened through participation in the group; “I am just eating from there.” No one was able to trace the specific origin of the practice, though one woman told me she heard about it at her church. By the time I returned for a longer stint of research in 2009, the savings and credit groups were no longer limited to women. Many men I spoke with reported forming similar groups. Tom Cheromoi, the young man described above from Kapnarkut, reported joining several such organizations, “I saw what my wife was doing and it was good. She could buy utensils for the household. I thought maybe I should also join.” Not all groups were aimed at improving household livelihoods; one of the groups of which he was a member was saving up to purchase farm equipment while another was a drinking organization where men pooled their money for collective buckets of the local maize brew. Furthermore, not all groups were a success. I spoke with several people who described how organizations they belonged to collapsed when one or more members abused the system, either stealing the “pot” or failing to make regular contributions. Their comments underscored how these organizations depended on mutual trust among members, which seems to explain why such organizations are more common below the 1993 line than above it. Several women above the 1993 line expressed their reluctance to form or join a savings group due to high levels of distrust among neighbors. Rosemary Sikoria, the woman who described the scattering of her social relations above, told me that it was not simply because she and her peers were unfamiliar

with “those women’s groups down [below the 1993 line]” that they were unwilling to start a group. “Some [women] go and join down, but here there is maybe one, two. I thought that maybe I would make a group here. But what if someone takes my money and just goes?” While ROSCA members reported that the proceeds of their efforts accounted for only a fraction of their household incomes, most agreed that their participation enhanced their ability to weather hard times, not only in the form of the money or other goods they received, but also the social connections they formed.

Conclusion:

The processes of displacement and resettlement exerted tremendous pressure on those affected. Like the millions of others displaced around the world each year, households in the Benet Resettlement Area faced the challenges of adjusting to the new property regimes, livelihoods practices, environmental conditions and social geometries presented by displacement and resettlement. De Wet (2009:79) writes, “No matter how well the resettlement process is planned and funded and no matter how participatory the exercise is, the complexities involved are such that it simply cannot be guaranteed that people subjected to forced resettlement will emerge from the process any better off than before”. In Benet, the resettlement process was grossly mishandled from the outset. Lack of governmental preparation, limited time scale, insufficient funds, corruption, and poor representation of the upland population all combined to impede any kind of planning or preparation on the part of affected communities prior to resettlement, which Scudder and Colson (1982) maintain is critical for mitigating (to the extent possible) the physiological, psychological, and sociocultural. Starting with the remarking of the park boundary in 1993,

government-induced tenure insecurity placed added pressure on so-called “encroachers” above the new boundary. Constant surveillance and harassment kept the traumas of displacement and resettlement alive for many households and hindered the reconstruction process through the denial of access to critical social services and information, creating and exacerbating intra-community conflict and mistrust, and prolonging a risk-averse, conservative livelihoods approach. Meanwhile, below the 1993 line, the absence of insecurity and access to social services and markets seems to have freed households from the short-term focused, “get it while you can” approach found among their neighbors up the mountain. Resettled households below the line continued to face a host of challenges such as seasonal food insecurity, land shortage, and others, but their increasing adoption of technological (e.g. soil conservation measures) and social (e.g. ROSCA’s) innovations indicate that they have been able to move on and plan for the future. The tenure security-investment or freedom from expropriation hypothesis seems to have been borne out in the resettlement area; those who fear losing their land are less likely to make long-term investments for fear of not being able to reap the rewards. The comparison between households above and below the 1993 line indicates that, for the households in the contested zone, conditions of conflict, impoverishment, and environmental degradation are likely to continue as long as their livelihoods remain insecure. According to a Sabinian proverb, “there can be no prosperity without peace,” and in this case there can be no peace without security. The next chapter looks more closely at the long-standing conflict between the residents of the resettlement area and park managers over such insecurity. I examine how the struggle over land and land tenure security has come to represent the conflict

between divergent notions of place, notions formed in the crucible of displacement and resettlement and shaped by subsequent changes in flows of capital and information.



Figure 4.2 A view from Kisito looking north down into the contested zone. The 1993 line runs behind the promontory in the background. Note that there are few trees planted (the trees pictured are remnants from the forest) and few long-term investments.



Figure 4.3 A homestead below the 1993 line. Note the banana plantation, eucalyptus woodlot, and anti-erosion bunds.



Figure 4.4 Sheet erosion above the 1993 line.



Figure 4.5 A girl from above the 1993 line selling firewood. Her parents collected the wood from the national park in the lower part of the resettlement area. Adults frequently send their children to sell forest products because children receive reduced fines from UWA rangers than adults.



Figure 4.6 Parent-funded community school in the temporary settlement of Kisito. More than 200 children attend the four-room school.



Figure 4.7 A road in Mengya (above the 1993 line), impassable by vehicle.

CHAPTER 5
OF SOIL AND SEMIOTICS:
CONFLICT AND PLACE MAKING FROM THE HILLSIDES TO THE HIGH COURT

Introduction: Friday Kibet's Encounter

“It was June,” Friday Kibet said, recalling a day ten years earlier. “I know it was June. I remember because the maize was only this high.” He gestured to the place on his calf where his torn trousers were tucked into the top of his muddy gumboot. The morning had been clear and sunny, the sky a brilliant blue. Though the rains usually tapered off in June, providing a brief respite between the peak months of the rainy season, Friday remembered that the rains that year had continued largely unabated for much of the month, keeping him and wife inside their dark kitchen, huddled together around the smoky kitchen fire. It got cold—a wet, bone chilling cold—during the rainy season in Kwasir, a village in the upper portion of the resettlement area, not far from the forest edge. A common joke maintains that most children are conceived during those cold months when enormous banks of dense rain clouds descend from the upper reaches of the mountain, bringing furious, days-long downpours and making farm work particularly onerous. That morning, Friday and his new wife, Juliet—they had married just a few months earlier—took advantage of the clear weather to get out of the house and weed the half-acre of land that Friday had inherited from his father. As they worked through the field with their hand hoes, chopping at the

weeds that had grown thick between the young maize stalks, Friday considered how, over the preceding years, the plants had become shorter, thinner, and less vigorous than they had been when his father first began planting the land.

Over the previous weeks, Friday had watched with concern as the heavy rains carried the topsoil off his field, leaving thick black trails of dirt in the small paddock of grass below his field. While helping his father sell a young bull some weeks earlier, Friday had heard some men discussing the benefits of tree planting at the Branch cattle market, also the site of an IUCN-supported agroforestry nursery. Friday was intrigued by the idea of using trees to stem the tide of soil runoff. Plus, he said, a small woodlot might provide Juliet with a source of firewood, which was increasingly difficult to come by in Kwasir since most of the trees had been cleared to make way for farms. Enthused, Friday used some of the money he had made from weeding a neighbor's potato field to buy 20 seedlings from the nursery. He brought the trees, a mixture of grevelia and eucalyptus trees, back to his homestead for planting. Friday told me that he was unsure how or where exactly to plant the trees because there had been no agricultural extension workshops in his area—"They don't come up this far. We never see those ones." The seedlings languished for several weeks in the shade of the wooden scaffolding Juliet used to dry plates until that clear June day when Friday decided he had better plant the trees before they died. After a lunch of boiled potatoes and beans, Friday surveyed his land, looking for the best place to plant the seedlings. He identified a promising strip of grass above his maize and took up his shovel and began digging. The moist earth was soft and the work went quickly. Before long, he had managed to nestle 10 trees into the ground. "I didn't know if I was doing it right," he said. "I was just trying." Like an experiment? I asked. "Like an experiment. Exactly."

Leaning on his spade, its handle worn smooth and shiny through use, Friday took a break from the digging. The wind had picked up. "There were some clouds there," he said, pointing to an area of forest to the southeast, "and I thought maybe it will rain." As he paused to consider the likelihood of a storm, Friday saw three men walking down from the direction of the forest. They were dressed in the green fatigues and carried binoculars and rifles. Having been caught grazing his father's cattle in the forest not long before, Friday was well acquainted with these UWA law enforcement rangers or *sikarek*, soldiers, as he called them. "Those ones are always around, even now," Friday told me, indicating toward a small trading center nearby. He explained that the UWA rangers charged with preventing illegal resource use in the forest and grasslands around Benet spent many afternoons drinking pots of warm local brew and they often chose the path that ran adjacent to Friday's land as their route. Friday's initial response was to run: "I was fearing. Really fearing." His previous encounters with the rangers, during which he was caned and lost several cows to fines, left him wary and inclined to limit his interaction with them as much as he could. "But then I thought, 'This is my land. Why should I be fearing?'" Friday picked up his shovel and continued on with the planting, hoping the rangers would pass him by without incident. He had just finished putting another seedling into the ground when I found the rangers standing on the edge of his field, watching him compact the soil around the base of the slender tree. "They asked me what I was doing. It was not so common—planting [trees]. When I told them, Ah! They laughed! They said, 'Thanks for planting our trees for us. Those ones are UWA trees on UWA land!'" Before heading on down the path to their favored drinking establishment, the rangers goaded him further, informing him, as they customarily did, that "the land was park" and that he and his family should make

arrangements to relocate. When I asked him what happened to the trees that he planted that day, Friday told me that he never finished planting those trees or planted any other trees on his land. In fact, once the rangers were out of sight, Friday told me that he uprooted all the seedlings that he had so carefully put in the ground. He explained that he destroyed the seedlings partly out of fear that the trees would somehow vitiate his claim to the land and partly out of anger at the rangers. If the trees symbolized the park, somehow *made* the park, as the rangers implied, he wanted nothing to do with them on his land.

Friday Kibet's run-in with UWA rangers was only one of myriad conflicting interactions between residents of the Benet Resettlement Area and park managers that have stretched from the hillsides of Benet to the High Court of Mbale and beyond. Insignificant as it may have been in the course of the long-standing conflict, the fleeting encounter illustrates how the struggle over land in the resettlement area represents the collision of two distinct visions of the land. Friday saw the land as a social and productive space that constituted it as homestead, farm, and village. The reconstruction Friday and his family have been engaged in since his father was allocated the land in 1983 is a very explicit form of place making, that imbrication of social values, relationships, and the biophysical world. From what was uninhabited forest, residents like Friday carved out spaces in which to rebuild their social and economic lives. Similarly, when the forest reserve became a national park on paper, managers were charged with the simultaneously material and symbolic task of making the space a national park—a very particular type of place, with its own norms, values, and aims. This chapter examines how the diverse claims and counter-claims that have constituted the enduring park-people conflict are deeply embedded within historically conditioned understandings of place and practices of place

making. For residents of the resettlement area, these understandings and practices grew out of the experiences of forced relocation. For national park managers, such understandings and practices developed from a foundational ethos of protectionism. Over time, the understandings and practices of place-making for both residents and park managers have responded to international political-economic shifts by articulating with broader networks of actors and new flows of ideas and capital.

Place, Space, Forced Relocation, and Conflict

Over recent decades place has become the focus of significant scholarly attention and debate within anthropology, geography, and related disciplines as much more than the empty stage on which cultural behavior unfolded (Appadurai 1988; Casey 1993; Escobar 2001; Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003; Rodman 2002).⁴⁰ The persistence and even prominence of place and place attachment in social life despite the time-space compression, hypermobility, deterritorialization, and fluidity of a globalizing world have led many researchers to take place seriously as “a constituent element of social life and historical change”(Gieryn 2000:463) and as fundamental to people’s “way of seeing, knowing and understanding the world”(Cresswell 2004:11).⁴¹ What then is “place?” Historically, geographers have had the most to say on the subject of the definition of place and its correlate, space. At its most basic, Tuan (1977) argues that place is space, physical

⁴⁰ Anthropologists’ unquestioned assumptions about place in ethnography have been the subject of considerable critique. Appadurai (1988) argues that, in taking place for granted, anthropologists perpetuated the problematic view of cultures as bounded and isolated units. While Fernandez (1988) takes exception with the way anthropologists have used certain locales (villages, regions) to stand, metonymically for whole nations.

⁴¹ Nevertheless, Escobar (2001) and Gieryn (2000) point out that for some scholars, especially for those taken with the processes of globalization, place has retreated into the analytic background in favor of transnational flows and other concepts that privilege more of a global optic.

terrain, imbued with meaning and sociality (see also Agnew 1987; Cresswell 2004; Harvey 1996). Taking these definitions apart Gieryn (2000:464-65) writes that there are three fundamental features of place (for a similar approach, see Agnew 1987). First, places have a geographic location, “a unique spot in the universe”(Gieryn 2000:464). Such geographic locations can be nested—a nest on a tree, a tree in a bog, a bog in a valley, and so on. Second, places have a material dimension; they represent assemblages of things and people at particular geographic locations. Third, places are invested with meaning and value by people. He observes that places are “doubly constructed,” built physically and simultaneously interpreted, felt, and imbued with sentiment (Gieryn 2000:465). To gain analytic power, Gieryn (2000) maintains that all three of these dimensions must be taken together as a “bundle,” rather than examined separately. Such a view of place as simultaneously material and symbolic echoes the work of political ecologists, who conceptualize human-environment relations as, in the words of Donald Moore (1996), soil and semiotics. As such, place has become an increasingly important focus within political ecological analyses (Escobar 2001; West and Carrier 2009).

For the purposes of this chapter, there are several important dimensions of place. Places have to be “made.” That is, space—terrain without attached meaning—is transformed into place through social action or agency. Likewise, senses of place are multiple and dynamic (Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Rodman 2002); different actors may have different perceptions of and attach different meanings to a particular space, which then change over time. In Benet, park managers and residents alike are active participants in fashioning the contested space of the resettlement area according to their divergent understandings of place. People make places or “inscribe spaces” through narratives and

praxis, both through what they say and what they do (Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003:14). To understand place making and attendant conflict in Benet, one must consider both the discursive claims and counter-claims actors have made within the formal legal context as well as the everyday practices of place making that take place on the landscape. Place is also intimately bound up with identity (Tilley 1994). Indigeneity, as an identity category, has come to signify a specific type of connection between place and people formed over long periods of time (Merlan 2009; Niezen 2000). With the rise of the international indigenous movement (discussed further below), indigenous status has provided a powerful avenue for certain people to stake their claims to place and land in certain contexts. Indigeneity has been a key site of conflict and place making activity among national park managers and resettlement area residents. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, place is political (Escobar 2001; Rodman 2002). The meanings, sentiments, values, and ideas that comprise an actor's sense of place are not *sui generis*, they emerge from and are contested within specific historical political contexts. When divergent visions of place are invoked in conflicts over control of resources, which visions are accepted as legitimate as well as who is in a position to decide is determined by shifting relations of power. Though space and place have received little attention in the study of forced relocation in favor of impoverishment risks, Oliver-Smith (2010:11) argues that

Place and space are key concepts in the problem of resettlement. A sense of place plays a central role in individual and collective identity formation, in the way time and history are encoded and contextualized, and in interpersonal, community, and intercultural relations...The human need for an environment of trust is fundamental to the sense of order and predictability implied by culture, and threats of removal from these spatial and symbolic environments are profoundly disrupting.

Whether for the construction of a super highway, a hydroelectric dam, or a national park, the forced relocation of a human population inevitably represents the imposition of a new vision or visions of place over other historically established visions. Concomitantly, forced relocation compels those individuals who were *displaced* to build a new sense of place in another physical location to the extent that they are able. In Chapters 3 and 4, I described how displacement and resettlement profoundly reordered settlement patterns, property relations, and livelihoods for the residents of the Benet Resettlement Area and how subsequent insecurity destabilized efforts to reconstruct their lives and livelihoods. As expressed in the anguish of depression and suicide among older displacees like Kokop Linas, George Cherop, and others I spoke with, feelings of placelessness lie at the heart of the psychological traumas of forced relocation. While these feelings may have proven too much for some of the displaced to bear, many others took up the challenges of reconstruction and re-emplacement. Years later, park managers efforts to reclaim the 1500 ha of contested land as national park—a place without people (or at least local people)—challenged the vision of place that resettlers had begun to establish. The many forms of resistance that emerged in response can also be seen as extensions of the understandings of place that began during reconstruction. As argued in the last chapter, the focus on impoverishment risks in the work of Cernea and his colleagues can overshadow the agency of resettlers (Agrawal and Redford 2007; Beazley 2009; Dwivedi 1999). An examination of the place making activities of reconstruction and resistance contributes to the study of forced relocation by bringing the agency of resettlers to the fore and demonstrating the different ways agency is exerted, constrained, and enabled in different contexts. Conceptualizing the conflicts surrounding conservation-related displacement and

resettlement as contests over place provides a framework for understanding the complex collision of actors, practices, and ideas encompassed therein.

The International Indigenous Revolution and Indigeneity in African Social Movements

In recent years, the some of the most vocal proponents of place have come from members of the international indigenous rights movement (Dove 2006; Escobar 2001). As many have observed, the rise of the international indigenous rights movement, or “indigenous revolution” (Morin and d’Anglure 1997) as it is sometimes called, relies on a central paradox: claims of indigeneity are “globally local” (Ceuppens and Geschiere 2005; Conklin and Graham 1995; Dove 2006; Hodgson 2002b; Li 2000; Merlan 2009; Niezen 2000, 2003, 2009). That is, indigenous movements are intensely “local” in that they are enacted with reference to specific places and peoples, but also “global”—expressed through a vocabulary shared by audiences far from the places and practices invoked and disseminated through cross-cutting networks of activists, and technological and bureaucratic structures. Since the 1980s, the international indigenous movement has made great strides in gaining widespread support and influence in international governance circles. The ratification of international agreements such as International Labor Organization’s Indigenous and Tribal People’s Convention 169 and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the establishment of the Working Group on Indigenous Peoples, which later became the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues in 2000 represent major victories in legitimizing and publicizing the struggles of indigenous peoples worldwide. As indigenous status has gained legal significance, the often thorny

questions of who counts as indigenous and who has the authority to decide have become increasingly important in land conflicts.

Within the various international agreements, definitions of indigenous and indigeneity have abounded (Dove 2006; Niezen 2003; Pelican 2009). Merlan (2009:304) writes that in most contexts,

Indigeneity is taken to imply first-order connections (usually at small scale) between group and locality. It connotes belonging and originariness and deeply felt processes of attachment and identification, and thus it distinguishes 'natives' from others. Indigeneity as it has expanded in its meaning to define an international category is taken to refer to peoples who have great moral claims on nation-states and on international society, often because of inhumane, unequal, and exclusionary treatment.

She observes that most definitions draw on two approaches: criterial and relational (Merlan 2009:305). Criterial definitions suggest a series of conditions such as historical inhabitation, mode of production (most often hunting and gathering), type of social organization, small population size, etc. Relational definitions base indigenous status on the asymmetric historical relationship between the people in question and dominant "others" such as the state, majorities descended from colonial powers, etc. These distinctions are important to note because each approach differs in terms of its flexibility and inclusivity, which may have consequences in determining the outcomes of specific conflicts.

Over the past two decades, social movements throughout Africa have increasingly begun to identify as indigenous. Maasai warriors, with their ornate beadwork, stretched ears, and red togas, and San "Bushmen," silently stalking game amidst the thickets of the Kalahari, have become internationally recognized symbols of indigeneity. At the same time, many African governments have outspokenly resisted the concept of indigenous peoples as defined by international conventions (Oldham and Frank 2008; Pelican 2009). Definitions

of indigeneity found in documents such as the UNDRIP and ILO 169—largely reflecting the experiences of native peoples from the Americas, northern Europe and Australia—are based on a conception of indigeneity that emphasizes original inhabitation contrasted with colonial settler populations. This type of definition fits uneasily with many African contexts (Bowen 2000; Hodgson 2002a, 2002b; Igoe 2006; Niezen 2003, 2009; Saugestad 1999, 2001, 2008; Sylvain 2002). The absence of a dominant colonial population in most parts of sub-Saharan Africa makes the issue of indigeneity highly contestable and contentious especially in states with a tenuous grasp on national unity.⁴²

By taking up the vocabulary of the international indigenous movement, emphasizing cultural distinctiveness and marginalization, numerous historically exploited or ignored groups across the continent have been able to access new avenues of financial and logistical support previously unattainable (Hodgson 2002a). Donning the indigenous mantle and thereby linking local claims to transnational discourses, symbols and indigenous rights networks also carries risks. Anthropologists have been quick to point out that to portray themselves as indigenous, groups must appeal to Western stereotypes and categories, plastering over social and economic nuances in favor of “strategic essentialisms” (Hodgson 2002b; Li 2000).⁴³ Beteille (1998) and Kuper (2003) contend that the essentialism inherent current usages of the term “indigenous” render it at best anthropologically useless and, at worst, politically dangerous as a manifestation of “blood and soil” ideologies that have periodically animated genocides. While some scholars view the manipulation of identity as

⁴² Resistance to recognizing African groups as indigenous has not been limited to states; Saugestad (2008) notes that African participation in the UN Working Group on Indigenous Peoples has been fiercely debated within the group itself.

⁴³ Anthropologists have long observed the messy nature of identity—its fluidity and negotiability (Barth 1969; Cohen 1978; Southall 1970). Recent literature on indigeneity and indigenous movements is in many ways an outgrowth of Barth’s early work on ethnicity in Pakistan and several Africanists’ critique of the concept of tribe in the 1970s (Igoe 2006).

an emancipatory form of globalization “from below” (e.g. Morin and d’Anglure 1997), others have pointed out the problematic applications of such simplifications in the unrealistic expectations they generate for the behavior of indigenous groups and (e.g. Conklin and Graham 1995; Li 2000). Further problems arise out of the fact that not all groups can successfully position themselves as indigenous equally; rather, the emancipatory categories are only open to people who fit externally defined criteria, leaving out some of the world’s most destitute and disadvantaged populations (Igoe 2005, 2006; Li 2000; Pelican 2009; Sylvain 2002). The critical perspective also poses ethical dilemmas of representation for researchers, whose “accounts and critiques may be appropriated by the opponents of these movements and deployed against them” (Brosius 1999:180; see also Dove 2006; Hodgson 1999). Portraying indigeneity exclusively as a strategy can challenge the authenticity of a movement (Li 2000), undercutting its claims and doing a disservice to the emotional resonance such identity categories can have for the people who adopt them (Geschiere 2009).

Li (2000) uses Stuart Hall’s (1996) concepts of “articulation” and “positioning” to theorize indigeneity and identity more broadly as neither totally fixed nor totally invented. Articulation, she writes, is “the process of rendering a collective identity, position, or set of interests explicit (articulate, comprehensible, distinct, accessible to an audience), and of conjoining (articulating) that position to definite political subjects” (Li 2000:152). Importantly, Hall (1996:140) notes that his concept draws on the two senses of the word articulation, to say or express and to connect or integrate. Articulation, in this way, is a highly contingent process, neither natural nor inevitable. Instead, the articulation of a specific identity at a specific time, represents the exercise of agency at the juncture of

many currents—historical, political, economic, etc. “While there is a tactical element in the cut of positioning which may become explicit at times of heightened politicization and mobilization, the flow of meaning from which an articulation is derived and the fields of power with which it is engaged transcend that temporary fixity”(Li 2000: 153). Hall’s (1996) theoretical formulation applies well to notions of place, which as discussed earlier, are similarly fluid, socially constructed, historical, and political. This perspective enables researchers to move beyond the simple observation that identities and places are exclusively “social constructs” and work towards “a historical understanding of how such representations and positionings have been constrained and enabled by colonial legacies, capitalist incursions, ‘development’ interventions, and other modernist discourses, practices, and institutions”(Hodgson 2002b:1040). As Pelican (2009) notes, analyses of indigeneity in Africa have tended to be one-dimensional, focusing on the ways groups like Maasai, San, and others articulate their claims to indigenous status, failing to seriously account for how states and state actors engage with the concept and the role indigeneity may play in their own claims and positionings.

Identity categories are no less untidy in the Benet Resettlement Area, their negotiability lying at the heart of the park-people conflict, especially as it has taken shape in the context of the Ugandan court. Over the past 10 years, both representatives of local communities and their park manager adversaries have employed discourses of human rights and indigeneity, drawing on the concepts’ moral authority to better position their land claims with respect to foreign donors and the Ugandan court. While hesitant to embrace the term directly, park managers have developed a rigid, state-arbitrated criterial approach for determining legitimate beneficiaries of resettlement. Such a view of

indigeneity has enabled them to provide rights to a smaller group of people, strengthening their control over national park lands while appeasing their international donors' human rights requirements. This vision contrasts sharply with a more flexible, relational definition of indigeneity claimed by the representatives of the resettlement area, whose use of the term has been part of a deliberate discursive strategy to promote a new indigenous identity category that elides the complexities of local identity categories and draws legitimacy (and financial support) through their connections to the international indigenous rights movement.

Seeing like a Park Manager: Competing Mandates and the Politics of Land Tenure

Insecurity

The Politics of Park Making

Given that the disputed portion of the Benet Resettlement Area comprises just over 1% of the National Park's total area (111,000 ha), it was not immediately clear to me why UWA and the central government have so fiercely attempted to hold onto it for so long even after they signed a consent agreement ceding the upper zone to the "Benet Community" in 2005.⁴⁴ Throughout my research visits, I made repeated efforts to elicit explanations from UWA staff along the chain of command, from rangers to UWA researchers to assistant wardens to, at one point, the interim chief warden of the national park. Among some of the UWA officials I spoke with in Kampala, I faced outright denial. When I was applying for a permit to document the resource use and access in the contested area in 2005, an official told me that I would be wasting my time considering that there was no contested area for

⁴⁴ Several UWA officials I spoke with in 2010 denied the legitimacy of the court settlement. One warden dismissed it as "a bit erroneous" and explained that, as such, it carried no authority.

anyone to live in.⁴⁵ The most common response I received was to take a hard line against “the encroachers,” who were endangering the fragile resources of the park and posed a threat to ranger safety. In the words of one UWA employee at the monitoring and evaluation office at the national park headquarters in Mbale, “all those people above the 1993 line are illegal encroachers. All of them. They look like villages, but they’re not. It’s park.” Others refused to discuss the matter altogether, saying that it was “a long story” and “very complicated.” One UWA officer I spoke with in 2006 expressed his worry that conceding the land would set a “dangerous precedent,” which could make UWA seem vulnerable and set off a slew of other land claims throughout the country. When I pointed out that the precedent had already been set in the Benet Resettlement Area in 2002 with the degazettment of lands below the 1993 line, he repeated the theme I heard time and time again: “it’s complicated.”⁴⁶ An interim Chief Warden summed up his view as he ushered me out the door of his office after a brief interview, “People want access, but we manage what we are given.” At the heart of these statements is a way of seeing the contested land as “park,” in which local people have no place except as encroachers. Such a view also positions UWA as the authority to decide what activities are permissible and forbidden, who is included and who is excluded. Thus, to make the park, UWA had to establish control not only over the land but also over the people living in and around the land.

⁴⁵ Vangen (2009) faced similar denial from UWA officials as she attempted to collect information regarding forced displacement in the southern region of Mt. Elgon National Park.

⁴⁶ UWA’s concerns regarding precedent have proven legitimate. Since the residents of the consent judgment was settled in 2005, other groups in Kapchorwa, Mbale, Manafwa, Bududa, Sironko and Bukwa Districts have made similar land rights claims against the national park (Edyegu 2008; Lang and Byakola 2006; Mafabi 2011, 2012).

The duality repeatedly outlined by the officials—park vs. village land—can be seen as a manifestation of the wilderness/civilization divide that has long underscored protectionist approaches to conservation (Adams and McShane 1992; Brockington 2002; Neuman 1998). Park land, a wild space controlled by government managers for the protection of wildlife, gains its meaning through the contrast with the village land, as a social space controlled by farmers for the production of crops and livestock. Hulme and Infield (2001) note that such a divide has been central to Ugandan conservation policy since colonial times. For much of the history of the protected area on Mt. Elgon, managers were able to uphold the distinction between village and protected area by seeing the pastoralist-foragers who lived in the interior more as part of the fauna than as villagers. Internal Forest Department documents repeatedly refer to the upland population as “Ndorobo,” an Anglicization of the Maa term *il-torrobo*, meaning people who live like “wild animals,” subsisting mostly from hunting and gathering (Cronk 2002:32).⁴⁷ One report from 1983 explains that as they did not cultivate, but subsisted mainly on wild products and cattle—“the traditional mode of living by nomadism”—the Ndorobos were not seen as an environmental threat and left largely to their own devices. The report continues, “The colonial Governments did not bother much about the settlement of these people but gradually as their numbers grew bigger and their mode of living slowly changed from nomadism to land tilling, a marked destructive effect on the Forest Estate was realized.”

⁴⁷ In his two volume treatise on the anthropology, zoology, geography and linguistics of the Uganda Protectorate, Harry Johnston, explorer and Special Commissioner to the protectorate, characterizes the hunting and gathering forest peoples on Uganda’s western and eastern frontiers as “ape-like” savages who occupy “the lowest stratum of the aboriginal population” (1902:511). In lurid detail, Johnston describes how Andorobos, as he termed them, survived “exclusively by the chase” (1902: 870), gorging themselves on raw meat “no doubt, as our most remote ancestors devoured slain bison 200,000 years ago” (1902:871).

For UWA and their predecessors the two competing visions of the landscape cannot exist simultaneously in the same space. The land was one or the other, park or village. The national park model is based on a way of seeing the landscape as wild and incompatible with certain types of human presence and activity (Neumann 1998; Stevens 1997). When people violated that particular vision of place, in the case of the uplanders of Mt. Elgon by adopting agriculture, they had to be removed. One warden informed me UWA was charged with protecting the land they were given at all costs. "Our duty," he called it. Pointing to a large poster on his wall with the UWA logo and motto, "Protecting for Generations, he explained, "We have to own what is ours," thereby imposing UWA's particular construction of place over the farmsteads of the resettlement area.

Despite UWA's history of protectionist policies (Chhetri et al. 2003; Hulme and Infield 2001) and the protectionist view of parks as places without people expressed above, collaborative and participatory approaches to conservation have been part of UWA's policies, at least on paper, since its inception in the 1990s. Scott (1998:7) writes, "As part of the merger process between Uganda National Parks and the Game Department [which formed UWA], revised legal and policy documents have been prepared, incorporating a stronger policy to address the needs of populations living adjacent to the country's national parks and game reserves." Uganda-wide efforts to involve local people and build support for conservation activities included "sensitization" and education programs, gate fee revenue sharing, and resource use agreements (Hulme and Infield 2001; Norgrove 2002). UWA's Mt Elgon National Park management plan from 2000 explains the rationale for these community-based conservation and development initiatives: "This program is based on the premise that long term conservation of the Mt. Elgon ecosystem can be assured only if

residents of adjacent communities understand Park management issues, and share both in the benefits flowing from the protected area and in the responsibilities for managing that area”(UWA 2000:5). One UWA Community Conservation Warden, whose office walls were lined with pictures of smiling villagers and an enlarged copy of a newspaper clipping with the headline, “UWA’S POVERTY ALLEVIATION INITIATIVES BOOST RURAL LIVELIHOODS,” explained to me that such efforts were examples of UWA’s commitment to upholding human rights.

The embrace of seemingly contradictory approaches is the result of a complex institutional politics, the broad outlines of which come into focus when one considers the historical context of the Museveni regime and the involvement of foreign donors in Ugandan conservation and the state, more broadly. On a national level, the period between 1986, when Museveni’s National Resistance Movement took power, and 1995, when the national constitution was promulgated and initial elections were held, was one of power consolidation. Following the chaos of the civil wars, Museveni’s government sought to achieve national stability through the establishment of a strong single-party government (Hauser 1999; Museveni 1997; Norgrove 2002). The new government faced multiple challenges. Among them was the need to earn the confidence of both a battle-scarred populace and the foreign donors the regime looked to for monetary support. The appearance of strength was crucial for gaining support from both parties. In terms of conservation policy, this muscle flexing took the form of increased law enforcement in the nation’s protected areas (Ditiro et al. 2008). In addition to restoring the rule of law through increased police presence and accountability in many places throughout the country, the government distanced itself from previous regimes’ problematic policies. On Mt. Elgon,

Ministers of Trade and Tourism and other government representatives periodically disavowed responsibility for the fallout resultant from poorly handled resettlement exercise. An UWA warden asked me, “Why should we be responsible for the problems of the past?”

Furthermore, the governmental infrastructure inherited by the new National Resistance Movement government was a morass of poorly functioning parastatal bodies with unclear and often overlapping responsibilities (Bigsten and Kayizzi-Mugerwa 1999). This was particularly true for the natural resource management and environmental conservation sector. Consolidating, coordinating and clarifying the activities of the numerous organizations and offices responsible for natural resource management and conservation proved an enormous challenge (Ditiro et al. 2008). The bureaucratic complexity of the task was further complicated by the fact that donor support, which flooded into the country at that time, was similarly uncoordinated. Different donors invested in different governmental bodies and were resistant to an institutional overhaul that might eliminate their favored candidate (Ditiro et al. 2008). In an interview, a former Forest Department official concurred. He told me that when he was with the Forest Department he observed considerable competition among his superiors: “The money for all of us from government, from NGOs was small. We had to fight for it.”

Since the inception of Uganda National Parks, UWA’s predecessor agency, conservation activities under Museveni’s regime have had deep engagements with foreign development agencies such as USAID, DANIDA, NORAD, GTZ and the World Bank among others and international conservation organizations like IUCN and WWF (Brownbridge 2010; Hauser 1999; Lang and Byakola 2006; Nyanzi 2011). The push to dramatically

expand the national parks system and on Mt. Elgon in particular can be traced to two ambitious donor-driven programs. Starting in 1987, the IUCN, with major funding from NORAD, instituted a decade-long project, the Mount Elgon Conservation and Development Program (MECDP), the stated goal of which was “assisting the Government of Uganda in regaining control over the protected area of Mount Elgon”(Scott 1998:21). Similarly, the \$33,000,000 USAID Action Program for the Environment (APE) sought “to assist Uganda’s public and private sector to more effectively and sustainably manage its natural resources base”(USAID 1991:11). André de Georges, a regional advisor for USAID’s conservation efforts in Easter Africa in the early 1990s, recalled the pressure USAID put on the Ugandan government to expand the area under strict protection: “We said to them, ‘we won’t give you money if you don’t create parks.’” These actions also came on the heels of the Convention on Biodiversity meetings in 1992, which called for increased international support for expanding conservation in developing countries. However, amidst the calls for increased protection, development and human rights mandates were also part of international donor agendas and found their way into the aforementioned major conservation projects. Moreover, all of Mt. Elgon National Park’s largest donor organizations have identified promoting human rights and upholding international agreements on human rights as priorities (see IUCN 2010; NORAD 2001; Palacio 2006; USAID 1984). Under the umbrella of human rights, these organizations have also issued statements supporting the rights of indigenous peoples (see Cromer 2011; NORAD 2001; IUCN 2010; USAID 2010). Prolonged dependency on foreign donors with competing and often conflicting mandates has put conservation policy makers in Uganda in a difficult position and has resulted in often contradictory policies and disjunctures between

national-level and local level staff (Clausen et al. 2003; Ogwang and DeGeorges 1992; USAID 2003).

It would be a gross oversimplification to portray UWA and the Ugandan government as mere puppets carrying out the mandates of wealthy foreign donors. The fledgling NRM government also depended on its populace for support. The tension between garnering local support and satisfying external agendas has contributed to the mixed messages fed to the residents of the resettlement area. Former Chief Warden, James Okonya, told leaders in Kapchorwa in 2002, “There is a lot of pressure that this land be changed into gardens, but the Government has resisted and will continue to resist because your lives depend on it. This is an area of interest to you and the rest of the world” (New Vision 2002). Relinquishing park lands for agricultural use, while a locally popular solution, could be seen as antithetical to the internationally-supported mandates to increase protection. Yet, wholesale evictions from the contested area, the only way to realize the full protectionist vision of national park, could be seen as a violation of its commitments to human rights. Highly conscious of its national and international image, in the Benet Resettlement Area, UWA has pursued a protectionist path on the ground, carefully couched in the language of rights promotion in the courts.

Making the Park

Making the park in the protectionist image began with the evictions of the 1980s. UWA’s predecessors in the Forest Department sought not only to physically remove the human population from the forest reserve, but also to erase the traces of human presence from the landscape. People who were driven out from the reserve described to me how

teams of soldiers dressed in olive green fatigues with rifles and bandoliers hung around their shoulders, kicked in doors, burned houses and cattle enclosures and used machetes to slash crops in the fields. Years after the evictions, I visited the former site of a settlement inside the park with Lazaro Kapsabat, a man who had watched his own house burn not far from where we were. Lazaro described to me how the grassy knoll before us had once been a vibrant, social space with houses, granaries, and a cattle enclosure. He was friends with the people who lived there, he said, and liked to stop in to visit whenever he was grazing his cows nearby. During the evictions, all of the buildings were reduced to ash by Forest Department rangers. Trying to recall the configuration of the buildings, he said, "It is like no one was ever there."

When the forest reserve became a national park and new managers stepped forward to increase the degree of governmental control over the protected area, park managers turned their attention to boundary surveying and marking. As noted in Chapter 3, the park boundary was officially measured and marked numerous times between 1993 and 2008. An internal UWA report from August 2003 explains the importance of physically marking the boundary:

This phase will involve placement of physical markers like concrete pillars or planted lines of trees along the surveyed boundaries. These distinct features will enable every one to know where the park/reserve starts and ends so that in future there are no cases of human encroachment. The people who will be found to be inside the PA boundaries after the demarcation will be genuinely resettled...

There are several important elements of this statement. First, that the concrete pillars and trees are important symbols intended to convey "to every one" what land is park. Second,

the statement asserts that UWA has the power to decide the location of that boundary and hence what land is park and what is not. Third, it describes a vision of the land in which human presence represents illicit “encroachment,” for which the solution is resettlement. As Paasi (2005:120) notes, “power and governance are part and parcel of the construction of boundaries.” Boundaries, as physical indicators of rights, are hence often the loci of intense conflict. Their creation and manipulation are intensely political acts, which confer and deny rights. On Mt. Elgon, the placement of the park boundary held dramatic consequences for residents of the resettlement area. The park boundary had the power not only to distinguish park from village, but also legal resident from illegal encroacher. Though repeated boundary-marking exercises were justified as an effort to establish the basic “truth” of boundary location, they had the secondary consequence of asserting UWA’s position of dominance over the people of the resettlement area.

The marking of the 1993 boundary through the resettlement area may have officially claimed the 1500 ha of allocated land above the boundary for the park, but UWA managers were not able to muster the political will of the government in the face of community and donor opposition to endorse the evictions necessary to complete their vision of the area as national park (Luzinda 2008; Okwaare and Hargreaves 2009). Nevertheless, UWA rangers asserted their claims over the land on a day-to-day basis through their interactions with the resettlement area population. Though no UWA official would discuss the matter with me, farmers like Friday Kibet, Kokop Francis (described in the introduction to Chapter 4), and others living in the upper zone (described in Chapter 3), all reported frequent encounters UWA rangers, in which the rangers intimidated them and repeated the message that that the land they were living on was park land and that they

should prepare to relocate. Throughout these interactions, rangers—men, usually between the ages of 25 and 40, trained in surveillance and law enforcement—assumed the position of authority to determine the “true” nature of the contested zone and resettlement area residents.

As indicated in this chapter’s introduction, for farmers in the contested zone and park managers, trees became powerful symbols of the park. Not only did park managers use trees to mark park boundaries, they also planted trees to reclaim areas of the forest that had been cleared for agriculture in the 1980s. Tree planting in encroached areas of the park has been a major focus for protected area managers since the early 1990s, central to projects funded by IUCN and the FACE Foundation (Lang and Byakola 2006; New Vision 2009). The FACE initiative warrants some particular attention, as it has remained a large source of funding for Mt. Elgon National Park over the past two decades. In 1990, the Dutch Electricity Generating Board set up the FACE Foundation (Forests Absorbing Carbon-dioxide Emissions), which set the goal of offsetting the emissions from a coal-fired power plant through the planting of 150,000 trees in the developing world. Uganda was among the countries targeted for tree planting and an agreement was reached between UWA and FACE to plant 25,000 ha of land in Mt. Elgon National Park and 10,000 ha in Kibale National Park (Lang and Byakola 2006:59). Later, the arrangement was expanded to include the sale of carbon offset credits to airline passengers (Faris 2007). Thus, disputed areas such as Benet, where land has been cleared for agriculture, represent lucrative opportunities for UWA. Though most UWA officials declined to discuss the UWA-FACE partnership with me, one warden did emphasize how important FACE has been for Mt. Elgon National Park, where the meager gate fees do not come close to covering the park’s operating costs.

However, due to the virulence of the conflict in the Benet Resettlement Area, there have been no efforts so far to plant FACE trees there, though I heard from government officials that it had not been ruled out. Though he did not mention FACE by name, a Forestry Officer from Kapchorwa District told me that his department had been involved with UWA efforts “to educate them [people above the 1993 line] that the land actually belongs to the government of Uganda...These people of the national park, they are planning on planting trees in that area. They want to carry out a regiment planting...When there is the final plan to resettle them, they will do that. Those people will be pushed out and there will be a regiment planting. It is already in the plan.” Through its involvement with FACE, UWA has been able to use reforestation to generate revenue while strengthening and extending its control over land.

Divide and Rule: Legitimacy and the Search for the “Genuine Ndorobos”

When Uganda National Parks (UNP), the parastatal predecessor organization to UWA, took charge of the protected area on Mt. Elgon and began its “rehabilitation” efforts, to use USAID’s terminology, they inherited the legacy of the Forest Department’s poorly implemented resettlement exercise. Due to the vagaries of the resettlement, the population of the Benet Resettlement Area, included not only people originally from the protected area, but also from the plains and central escarpment. Some were allocated land, some bought land, and others had moved into the forest without official permission. The drawing of the 1993 boundary raised the complicated question about what to do with the people who had made their homes there. Park managers’ first response was to brand the entire population encroachers and announce impending evictions (Luzinda 2008). As noted in

Chapter 2, the central government intervened, halting evictions and convening a series of governmental panels and advisory committees to address the issue.

Soon after it became clear that across-the-board evictions without compensation or resettlement was politically untenable, national park managers amended their strategy. Though the central government put evictions officially on hold, UWA continued to advance its eviction agenda. Amidst the surveillance and harassment, UWA officials began to hold clandestine meetings with upland youth, in which the officials suggested that only uplanders were the only legitimate beneficiaries from the original land allocations and should be the only recipients of future resettlement and land allocations (for a more detailed description of these meetings see Chapter 3). UWA documents from the 1990s and early 2000s echo the sentiments expressed in the meetings, though in less incendiary language. An UWA “Funding Proposal for Resettling the Benet Community of Mt. Elgon National Park, Kapchorwa District,” dated November 2000⁴⁸ is particularly illustrative

...the Benets have continued to live in the forest even when the forest reserve attained the status of National Park. The problem has been compounded by displacement of people from the plains due to insecurity and cattle rustling by the neighboring Karimajong and Pokots. The Benet population has continued to expand opening more forestland [*sic*] for cultivation and grazing. The continued presence of Benets in the park has overtime [*sic*] become a decoy for encroachment by non-Benets and this has caused severe damage to the forest threatening the ecosystem and its water catchment values.

Consequently when the forest reserve attained National Park status Uganda National Park and Ministry of Tourism Trade and Industry (MTTI) recognized the need to assist the Benets [to] acquire land rights for proper settlement in order to improve their welfare and restore the conservation status of the park...

⁴⁸ The document does not make it clear from whom the proposal is seeking funds from, though the fact that implementation costs are listed in USD seems to suggest an international donor audience (UWA budgets and financial statements customarily list costs in Uganda Shillings).

[The objectives of this exercise are:]

- 1) To resettle the Benets who pose management problems to the park and threaten the Mt. Elgon Forest ecosystem and biodiversity.
- 2) To enable the Benets [to] acquire secure rights to land by resettling them outside the park.
- 3) To stop further encroachment on the park.
- 4) To restore the conservation values of the forest and ensure its protection.
- 5) Improve on the community-park relations with the neighboring communities.

In proposing to undertake this resettlement programme, UWA is mindful of the rights and welfare needs of the Benets, and the need to conserve and sustainable manage park resources.

In this document and others like it, UWA repeatedly call into question the validity of the original land allocations, asserting the upland minority, termed alternately Ndorobos or Benets, were the only legitimate recipients of land. By extension, those who fall outside the UWA-arbitrated category of Benet, were illegitimate usurpers. To emphasize the illegitimacy of other categories of resettlement area residents, the proposal vilifies these “non-Benets,” who it asserts used their Benet neighbors as “decoys” to hide their encroachment. Another UWA brief from 2003 argues that non-Benets “took advantage of the marginalized social position and ignorance of the Benets to manipulate the situation, and acquired most of the land within the 6,000 ha area excised off the reserve.” “An encroacher,” William Cheptegei, a community leader and activist pointed out, “is someone who is guilty of an offense” and it is much easier to justify harsh treatment of criminals. “You don’t have to consider the rights of criminals.” These documents rarely acknowledge that the Forest Department elected to allocate land to displaced lowlanders and others.

Where those allocations are mentioned, corruption of the resettlement exercise is emphasized.⁴⁹ Importantly, UWA officials identify themselves as the appropriate arbiters of legitimacy, spearheading numerous censuses above the 1993 line. One document as describes such a census as “A verification exercise aimed at identification of genuine Ndorobos.” District leaders are invited to inspect the list, but the document makes it clear that they have no direct influence on its composition.

As community leader, Moses Kiptala, recalled in Chapter 3, UWA’s offers of support were enticing to many young upland men, who had been left landless in the years following the original resettlement. Young men I spoke with who had been at those meetings told me how the promise of new land led them to embrace the new resettlement exercise that would clear all villages from the contested zone, a policy they would not have endorsed otherwise. Such offers also proved highly divisive among the population of the resettlement area, culminating in outbreaks of property destruction and physical violence between upland and lowland populations. Moses Kipatala and others likened UWA’s strategy to colonial practices of “divide and rule.” William Cheptegei observed that in addition to stifling a unified resistance movement, “If they [UWA] could make a division [in the resettlement area population], they could give land to fewer people.” In other words, by classifying all residents but the “genuine” Benets as illegal encroachers, UWA rejects any obligation to provide any kind of compensation for their loss of land and asserts the obligation to evict them.

⁴⁹ A document entitled “Statement by the Director Field Operations- Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) on Ndorobo Resettlement in Benet Area of Kapchorwa District” from 2001 states, “In 1983 an attempt was made to settle the Ndorobos in part of the forest reserve of 6,000 ha, but the process was not properly handled due to: a) Some people who were responsible for the implementation of the settlement plan allocated themselves, un-proportionate chunks of land. b) Non-Ndorobos were also allocated land...”

Finally, it is important to consider the language UWA documents use to frame the second displacement and resettlement exercise, practices recognized by international bodies as having a high potential for human rights abuse. The above proposal from 2000 presents the proposed resettlement exercise as a way of addressing the historical marginalization of the Benet community, of being “mindful of the rights and welfare needs of the Benets,” of helping “the Benets [to] acquire secure rights to land.” While UWA documents stop short of using the term indigenous to describe the Benet (under the 1995 Uganda Constitution, all groups living in Uganda before colonization are identified as indigenous), they do emphasize the uplanders’ original inhabitation, their history as hunters and gatherers, and their marginalized status—all common criteria for international definitions of indigeneity. Though I was unable to get any UWA officials to comment on the matter, several NGO workers familiar with the conflict believed that UWA officials crafted their case with their international donors in mind. “How could they not?” one worker asked. “With so much money coming from abroad, they [UWA] are always thinking like that.” In his opinion, UWA’s focus specifically on uplanders, with their resemblance to international conceptions of indigenous people, was “UWA’s escape route”—their way of claiming as much land for the park as they could, while appearing to promote human and even indigenous rights.

Seeing like a Resettlement Area Resident

Burn the Boundary, Make the Village: Weapons of the Weak

Despite seemingly defeatist statements like “we are just in the hands of the government. Anything they decide to do, they can” (Kokop Francis, quoted in Chapter 3),

individual residents of the resettlement area have not been passive victims of state brutality. As Scott (1985) demonstrates, resistance to assertions of power can take many forms, both implicit and explicit. Until the organized resistance movement of the past decade (discussed below), residents' resistance to the national park was diffuse and covert, much of it falling more into the category of Scott's (1985) "weapons of the weak" than of outright opposition. "Most subordinate classes are," Scott writes, "after all, far less interested in changing the larger structures of the state and the law than in what Hobbsbawm has appropriately called 'working the system...to their minimum disadvantage'"(1985:xv). In her 2003 dissertation on park-people relations on the southwestern side of Mt. Elgon National Park, Norgrove (2002) makes extensive use of Scott's (1985) notion of weapons of the weak to analyze the relationship between local communities and park management (see also Norgrove and Hulme 2006). While her research was largely conducted among Gisu communities to the south of the Benet Resettlement Area, many of the practices of resistance she documented were also pursued by the forest-adjacent residents of Benet. Norgrove (2002:280) describes the extensive "armory" of covert, decentralized strategies villagers used to resist the actions of park managers or manipulate the system for individual gain. These included providing false oral histories staking ancestral claims, active and passive cooperation with park management for personal benefit, bribes to rangers to overlook illegal activities, manipulating boundary markers, feigned ignorance of the boundary location or regulations, obstruct paths in the park to impede ranger surveillance, ideological resistance to park management and activities, avoidance or non-cooperation, and feigned compliance with resource use restrictions. In Benet, such everyday acts of resistance have taken place within the context

of eviction and the subsequent reconstruction of lives and livelihoods. As such, the quotidian livelihoods activities of residents' above the 1993 line have come to represent a key form of resistance to park managers' efforts to exert control over land and the residents themselves. In the face of UWA's continuous pressure to move, merely staying in the contested zone represents a form of resistance. In the minds of many people I spoke with, simple acts of place making such as clearing a field or building a house attained symbolic meaning as acts of resistance as soon as protected area managers attempted to supplant residents' notion of the place as village land with a more powerful view of the land as a place without people.

As Foucault (1990:93) observes, every assertion of domination provokes resistance, though not necessarily unified or coherent. Responses to initial threat of evictions from the forest reserve varied, yet resistance was present from the start. Some households moved voluntarily in advance of the official resettlement exercise with the hope of taking advantage of new agricultural opportunities. Kokop Chemusto, an elderly woman originally from Benet, told me that she and her husband moved in to what was then the forest's edge and would become Kaseko, a village in the lower part of the resettlement area, in 1972, a full decade before resettlement. "The rangers told us to leave and so I thought, okay maybe we go. There was hunger then," she said, referring to a period of intense drought when uplanders were unable to trade for agricultural staples due to low yields. Moving was a way for Kokop and her family to work the system to her minimum disadvantage. Yet, voluntary migrants were few compared with the numbers who waited to move until they were forced out of their homes at gunpoint. Officials involved in the displacement and resettlement told me that violent resistance to Forest Department evictions was limited, but denial of and

refusal to prepare for the evictions were rampant. The militaristic, jackbooted style of the evictions discouraged people from taking direct action against the Forest Department rangers. “Me, I wanted to beat them!” one older man said to me, recounting the fear and anger he experienced during his family’s eviction. “But they have the power,” he continued, “because they have the guns.” The older man’s foot dragging and lack of preparation was a way for him to resist the evictions without risking violent reprisal. Others, like the communities of Yatui and Kapsegek further to the east, resisted the Forest Department’s evictions by fleeing to inaccessible areas deeper into the forest and grasslands. Continuing to graze and use the forest and grassland resources as they had they represented a rejection of the protected area managers’ vision of the park as a place without people. James Cheboriot was among those from Yatui who fled into the forest. He explained to me, “We wanted to stay together like we were before the soldiers came. We used to eat like one family. They said the land was not for us, but we were staying up [the mountain] for long. Before the fathers of our grandfathers.” Even though he lamented missing out on land allocations years later, staying in the forest reserve after the Forest Department for so long without further eviction was a point of pride. For almost a decade, he said, “The forest was for us. No one could touch us.” The tactic of evasion succeeded for these communities during the tumult of the 1980s only to fail once the government began to shore up its control over protected areas in the early 1990s.

For many of the people displaced from the uplands, continued use of in-park resources after evictions were an important way of remaining connected with the places of their past as well as acts of resistance. When I talked with people about in-park resource use, they tended to emphasize their historic connection to the resources in question. Kokop

Titus, a woman in her 50s who grew up in the uplands, was hesitant at first to talk about how she and her neighbors continued to use the forest after they were resettled, preferring instead to describe how her parents and grandparents collected honey and bamboo in the forest and grazed their livestock in the grasslands. "They used to get so much!," she recalled. After some prodding, Kokop admitted that she and many of her neighbors continued to use the forest and grasslands, but surreptitiously, "in the dark." "You have to go carefully to avoid those rough boys [UWA rangers]." When she went to the forest, she told me, she liked to return to the place where her mother harvested bamboo as a way of remembering her mother and their previous way of life. For men like Francis Kityo (described in the Chapter 2), who continued to graze their livestock in the park despite repeated punishment and loss of animals, grazing where they and their fathers had before displacement meant more than merely providing their animals with fodder. "When I go to graze," Francis, "I think of [the] past. I remember." Few people I spoke with about the illegal resource use framed their practices explicitly in terms of acts of resistance. They expressed anger at their official exclusion from in-park resources, indignation at what they perceived as unnecessary violence and corruption of UWA guards, fear of punishment, but stopped short of making the direct connection between illicit resource use and resistance. Yet, I would argue that such actions, understood by resource users as reaffirming their place attachments through use and memory, can be seen as resistance. In her work on forestry and conflict in Java, Peluso (1992:15) argues that whether conceptualized as acts of resistance or not "the forest dweller's acts change the forest or land cover, alter the distribution of benefits from the forest, and contest, implicitly or explicitly, the state's authority in the forest."

Once resettled, households faced the challenge of creating villages—social and productive spaces—out of the forest. New residents of the resettlement area applied the customary Sabinu notion that control over agricultural land is established through the investment of labor to their allocated lands (see Chapter 3, pg. 33 and Goldschmidt 1967:143). Though some allocatees had enough money to formally purchase title deeds to their land, older residents told me that such documents provided little protection against claim jumping. Instead, it was the conversion of the land into homesteads and farms that truly signified (at least to other resettlers) one's control over the land. As Chelimo Musobo, who was one of the first uplanders to acquire land in the resettlement area (quoted in Chapter 3) told me, "It was all bushy here. There were big trees. Just forest." Clearing the trees to make room for houses, fields, and pastures was a central means of staking ones claim over the land. Chelimo described how, with the assistance of hired laborers, he started clearing the trees on the edge of his land first, establishing a boundary "so no one else could jump it." Clearing was the first step, but plowing and planting land represented the full transformation of the land, in their eyes, from forest to village.

UWA's repeated efforts to mark and police park boundaries generated significant animosity among resettlement area residents. Many residents felt that each boundary marking exercise claimed progressively more land from the resettlement area. "Each time [the boundary was re-marked] it was more," Wilson Cheboi said. "It is like UWA was greedy. Wanting more and taking more land." Residents also took exception with how moving the boundary could change a person from a law-abiding farmer into an "encroacher" over night. In the words of the farmer quoted in Chapter 3, "Those UWA fellows, they were shifting the boundary every week. We were never sure when we would

become encroachers on our own land!" Given the history of evictions, it is not hard to see how ever-shifting boundaries could inspire fear and anger. As such, destroying boundary markers became a popular act of symbolic subversion. One UWA ranger I talked to expressed his frustration that under cover of darkness, villagers were destroying the boundary marking saplings as fast as his coworkers were able to plant them. In some places the young trees were burned, he said. Elsewhere, they were uprooted or poisoned. I myself observed evidence of dismantled boundaries. When I looked for the concrete pillars that UWA officials told me were poured to mark the path of the 1993 line through the resettlement area, no villager was able to direct me to their location. "Maybe someone pushed them over," one man suggested, though he would not say more. In Kisito, I walked through an area the length of several football fields that was planted with saplings to demarcate the edge of the temporary resettlement zone in 2008. What should have been a flourishing plantation was instead several thousand dead sticks in the ground. When I asked a woman passing by what happened to the trees, she replied simply, "They died." Did people kill the trees? I asked. Her mouth turned up at one corner almost imperceptibly, she shrugged her shoulders, and continued walking down the path.

Many people above the 1993 line like Friday Kibet, the man described in this chapter's introduction, have come to see soil and water conservation practices as extensions of UWA's place efforts to turn the contested zone into park land. UWA's use of tree planting to mark boundaries and reclaim cleared areas has effectively established trees and tree planting as symbols of the national park. Friday Kibet's neighbor in Kwosir, Muneria Cherotwo explained that he was reluctant to plant trees not only because he was not sure how long he would be allowed to continue to farm, but also because "When *sikarek*

[soldiers—UWA rangers] see your trees, they say, ‘Ah, this one is park.’” The community leaders and NGO workers who have begun efforts to extend agricultural extension programs into the contested zone despite the official prohibition told me that they had encountered vehement opposition. As noted in Chapter 4, Moses Kiptala reported that despite people’s diminish yields, “when you say, ‘Maybe you can protect the soil, what...’ Ah! You are [an] enemy.” Moses found that his neighbors above the 1993 line linked his soil conservation entreaties with UWA and, as such, tended to reject them. A Kapchorwa District Forest Officer, confirmed Moses’ observations. People below the line, he said, have been highly receptive to conservation measures. “They have now learned to plant trees. They have accepted to carry out these conservation measures, which we have encouraged them to do. They have now dug up trenches...They are stabilizing [the soil] with either napia grass or these agroforestry trees. So, in fact, they are coming up. Many people are now asking us to give them more trees.” Above the line, people have been hostile. “The problem is that there is conflict between the people and the national park...When they see you, they are running.”

Organized Resistance: Strategic Simplifications and the Articulation of a New Indigenous Group

On October 27, 2005, dozens of villagers, community leaders and local government officials from the Benet Resettlement Area packed into the dusty courtroom of the High Court of Uganda in Mbale, the administrative seat for Uganda’s eastern region. They had boarded busses before dawn to make the two-hour journey down the mountain from their homes on the edge of Mt. Elgon National Park to witness the culmination of more than two

decades of land rights struggle with the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) and the central government. One by one, the legal representatives for the communities, UWA and the Attorney General signed a Consent Judgment and Decree (a form of settlement agreed upon by all parties to the lawsuit and endorsed by the court) that recognized the “Benet Community” as “historical and indigenous inhabitants” and hence legitimate occupants of the disputed area officially designated as a national park. Hailed as “the most significant legal case involving indigenous peoples’ land rights” (ACHPR and IWGIA 2009:55) in Uganda, a country not known for its outspoken promotion of indigenous rights, the Benet land rights struggle was not always framed in the terms of the international indigenous rights movement. Before 1999, when community leaders were approached by the Ugandan branch of the UK-based NGO ActionAid, few residents of the Benet Resettlement Area had even heard the terms *indigenous* or *indigenous rights* let alone connected their land claims to broader networks of activists, resources and transnational NGOs. And it was not until 2006, following the Consent Judgment, that “the Benet” were listed in the International Work Group on Indigenous Affairs’ (IWGIA) *Indigenous World* as one of Uganda’s indigenous peoples alongside the more picturesque forest people, the Batwa, making the Benet one of the more recent African groups to “become indigenous.”

As described above, local efforts to resist eviction were scattered, contentious and largely ineffectual throughout the 1990s. The specter of intra-community violence loomed over many attempts to lobby the government for the recognition of land rights. By the late 1990s, two community organizations had emerged as the most vocal representatives in the struggle for land rights—the Benet Lobby Group (BLG), which advocated on behalf of the upland communities, and the Benet Settlers Association (BESA), which represented those

displaced from lower areas and other settlers. In 1999 the Ugandan branch of the British NGO ActionAid arrived in Kapchorwa and began to assist the Benet Lobby Group's advocacy work. At that time, ActionAid was "in transition from a service delivery approach to a rights-based approach to development" (Okwaare and Hargreaves 2009:20) and saw the upland community organization as an ideal candidate for raising human and indigenous rights awareness. Indigeneity was a novel concept for local leaders. Moses Kiptala, one such leader, described its introduction to me: at that time, the government "was treating us like animals! [Residents of the resettlement area] lived like beggars. No one knew what we were entitled to. No one knew their rights... That [the concept of indigenous rights] is the thing that saved us, that helped us begin to speak with confidence."

ActionAid facilitated national and international meetings where indigenous representatives from Uganda, Kenya and other countries spoke, networked and talked tactics. As a result, local government and community organization leaders began to understand and frame their struggle in terms of the broader international human and indigenous rights movements instead of as a national and exclusively economic conflict. These experiences were transformative for many local leaders, who began to see the benefits of positioning themselves as marginalized and primitive indigenous people. Moses Mwanga, another influential upland community leader, remembered an early meeting with ActionAid: "There were many people there with different agendas. ActionAid was deciding who to support. What direction to go, really. When I told them the situation of the Benets—how we were backward, no education, hunting in the forest—I could tell they had interest. Their eyes were big!" An individual heavily involved with local and international NGOs in

the area explained the interest in primitivity: “Those people [NGO workers and local leaders]...want to make [present] people as primitive as possible...because they want to win donor support, they want funding. Here, donors consider primitive people and primitive things to be backward” and therefore more suitable for intervention. He went on, “if you don’t paint things as primitive, they don’t seem as serious.” Several upland community leaders told me that they began to embrace the term Ndorobo, with its associations of primitivity, despite its historical stigma to attract support from external donors like ActionAid.

Meanwhile, conflict between upland and lowland factions continued to flare and ActionAid made efforts to bring rival factions together in 2002. ActionAid convened a meeting where they promised financial and logistical assistance provided that the two groups formed a “loose coalition.” ActionAid then connected the resultant coalition with the Uganda Land Alliance, a consortium of national and international NGOs and individuals that provides legal assistance for community land claims, that later filed a lawsuit in the High Court of Uganda against UWA and the central government on behalf of “The Benet Community,” a novel identity category created to refer to all the residents of the resettlement area. Bringing the land rights struggle into the legal domain represented a fundamental change in the nature of the local resistance movement. A central feature of the Uganda Land Alliance’s argument, as outlined in numerous affidavits filed between 2003 and 2005, was that the “Benet Community” or “the Benet” are the “indigenous and historical inhabitants” of Mt. Elgon and, as such, have a strong place attachments that warrant special protections and rights assurances. While the term *indigenous* is largely absent from local day-to-day village discourse, indigeneity has been central to the

arguments made by the leaders of the resettlement area and their NGO advocates. In an unusually frank assessment of their interventions, ActionAid discusses their role in actively pressuring local leaders to adopt the concept of the Benet Community, which they describe as a “cobbled-together entity”(Okwaare and Hargreaves 2009:17), fraught with conflict. The report notes that “The terms ‘Benet’ and ‘Benet community’ were revitalized to describe the people in that area (both settlers and Ndorobo) for the purposes of pursuing the legal strategy”(Okwaare and Hargreaves 2009:2). Moses Kiptala’s account of the indigenization of the land rights movement is highly illustrative:

We, the leaders first, because first it was only the Benets fighting to see that we were fighting for the rights of the indigenous, but along the way there were certain things which came in. We thought things like, “We need to network in order to win the war against the government.” We need to network with all the people who have come to live in this area so that in this process, we shall share knowledge and we shall be able to win government. So for us...we knew the community which came to settle here as migrants. We knew that they had their rights. So what we did now was, since the issue, the contention between the government and the Benets was “Are you encroachers? Or you are indigenous?” So we told now our friends that the biggest issue and the biggest reason why government gave this land was to resettle the indigenous. So what we need to do now is let us use the word indigenous when pursuing the court issue, but when it comes down here, we are fighting as the Benet community including even those ones who came here...We should not create a conflict for ourselves. That was the biggest step.

Originally, Benet was the name of an area of moorlands and forest situated within the protected area, where several clan-based communities kept cattle, gathered forest products and hunted game. People residing in the area could collectively be called Benet, though as discussed earlier “Ndorobo” was more commonly used by government administrators and other outsiders. Etymologically, one elder suggested to me that the name derives from the Kupsabiny word *kabenyi*, meaning “to have stayed for a long time.”

Benet was later used as the name for the resettlement area and, in subsequent negotiations with the government, to refer to the entire population of people resettled in 1983.

Reflecting the protean usage of the word, an elder activist originally from Benet, who asked to remain anonymous, said, “When we talk about the Benets, the [meaning of the] name has been changing every day... after 1983 [when people were resettled], you know there were these other brothers who were displaced from down and that produces another community—people who have come now to settle with us. But as we talk now, we talk as the Benet in general—all of them because everybody has a right over this land now.”

Another activist, whose family was displaced from the lower slopes of the mountain concurred, saying “Now, we are all Benets.”

Though ActionAid had a hand in the emergence of the new indigenous identity category, and its recognition beyond eastern Uganda, over the past decade, *Benet* has gained traction in the ways that local leaders and residents think and talk about their identities especially with outsiders. This is not to say, however, that intra-group tensions and sub-factions do not exist, only that *Benet* has come to represent an inclusive, locally salient, albeit dynamic identity category that emphasizes indigeneity and shared heritage between the communities who were displaced from the upper and lower regions of the mountain. This new identity category presents a view of indigeneity that is far more flexible and inclusive than the one recognized by the central government and UWA. The emphasis on indigeneity, as a morally legitimate claim to place, also set the Benet community apart from the thousands of Uganda’s other in-park communities, whose claims UWA has successfully vitiated by labeling them poachers and encroachers. Movement leaders made the strategic decision to create a unified identity for the resettled

population—the Benet Community, or simply, Benet—that elided intra-community divisions. By connecting the identity category to the international indigenous movement, community leaders self-consciously mobilized “strategic essentialism” to generate international support with which to leverage against UWA in court. Creating an identity category for the population of the resettlement area can also be seen as a way community leaders sought promote harmony on the ground and to inscribe the space of the resettlement, a way of expressing the connection between the population and place they had made collectively.

Conclusion

Oliver-Smith (2010:72) writes that the conflicts surrounding displacement and resettlement are highly complex: “the multiplicity of phenomena and processes operating in varying dynamics in resistance to resettlement present a significant challenge to identifying all the different social actors, scales, levels, strategies, and goal structures operating in such contexts and then describing the way they interact with each other in the complex processes of political struggle.” In this chapter, I have suggested that the concept of place—bringing together material and meaning, agency and power—provides a useful lens through which to evaluate and understand the complex relationships and processes that help to determine how different actors articulate their claims and counter-claims that constitute such conflicts. Through evictions, boundary marking, surveillance, and reforestation, protected area managers have sought to fashion the space above the 1993 line according to a vision of the land as park. Residents of the resettlement area actively contested such a vision of place by refusing to evacuate the park in the first place, dragging

their feet during the evictions, using prohibited resources, converting the land, destroying boundary markers, and resisting conservation measures. When the conflict entered a new arena, the Ugandan court, both parties presented their visions of place with language that reached beyond the contested area, drawing heavily on international discourses of human rights and indigeneity. Highly dependent on foreign donors with human rights mandates, national park managers were careful to frame renewed evictions as a way of promoting the human rights of a marginalized population. With the assistance of a national and international NGO, community leaders framed their land claims as a struggle for indigenous rights and were able to get recognition by major international indigenous rights institutions, which helped them secure a landmark settlement that recognized the legitimacy of their claims in 2005. Yet, paper recognition has not translated into meaningful state action. In fact, when I concluded my research in August 2010, the government seemed no closer to degazetting the upper portion of the resettlement area than it had been seven years prior. Though residents of the resettlement area have so far been able to keep the park at bay, they have yet to achieve security and make the village once and for all.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION:

TENURE INSECURITY AND THE LONG SHADOW OF FORCED MIGRATION

Introduction

This dissertation has concerned itself with the changing arrays of opportunities and constraints in which people have made lives and livelihoods in the aftermath of displacement and resettlement. In the three decades since the nearly 30,000 people were forced from their homes, the Benet Resettlement Area has become home to some of the most severe poverty, highest levels of illiteracy and food insecurity, and most intense soil and water degradation in the region. Simultaneously, the Benet Resettlement Area has seen tremendous livelihoods innovation. People have banded together in novel ways and experimented with new technologies to cope with periodic crises and take advantage of new opportunities. The resettlement area has also become a battleground, the site of intense conflict that has pitted resident against national park manager and resident against resident. Over the past decade, leaders have organized a campaign that has used claims of indigeneity to secure government recognition of individualized land rights for the residents of the resettlement area. Nevertheless, the conflict has continued to rage and insecurity has continued apace as national park managers have redoubled their efforts to stamp out encroachment and claim what they perceive as their territory. The political ecological perspective adopted here shows how these particular constellations of opportunities and

constraints came to be as dynamic conjunctures of ecological, cultural, social, political, and economic processes at local, regional, national, and international scales. The Benet case demonstrates how displacement and resettlement represent transformative processes that create new relations of production, which then shape how affected individuals negotiate future political economic change and crisis.

Forced Migration as a Historical Process

The findings of this dissertation support Oliver-Smith (2009) and Scudder and Colson's (1982) argument that forced migration is a process with deep historic roots. A historical-processual perspective demonstrates how displacement and resettlement events are produced by the intersection of local and broader-scale historical processes, which then affect the ways in which resettlement is enacted. On Mt. Elgon, the forced migrations from the low- and uplands both emerged from the colonial experience. The displacement of the lowland population was an indirect consequence of the political paroxysms that gripped Uganda (and many other newly independent African nations) in the wake of colonialism. Cattle raiding besieged the lowland Sabinu communities for centuries. While raiding led to periodic migrations in the past, the plains and lower escarpment had remained permanent home to a sizeable Sabinu population and provided a vital source of grazing land and wild products for those living up the mountain. Historically, the frequency and virulence of raids were limited by weapon technology (spears and arrows) and, during the colonial era, a military presence on the plains. The years of post-colonial civil war generated a political vacuum on Mt. Elgon and other marginal areas of the country. As competing militias battled for control in the center of the country, law enforcement on the plains evaporated and

weapons flowed into the region, a deadly combination facilitating the decimation of Sabiny herds. The raids of the 1970s and 80s were unprecedented in scale and bloodshed, leaving many people dead and many more destitute. Facing the continuing threat of violence and few economic opportunities for rebuilding their herds on the plains, the majority of lowlanders fled, some to relatives in Kenya, but most to the northern edge of the forest, where they hoped to eek out a more stable existence.

For the upland population, forced migration was much longer in the making and more directly tied to colonialism. The British claimed the upland forests and grasslands, home to a substantial minority of the Sabiny population, as crown land in the first part of the twentieth century. The establishment of a protected area on Mt. Elgon grew out of the commercial interests of the nascent regime: the development of forestry and the protection of the water supply for coffee plantations in the southern part of the mountain. During this initial period, as long as the upland Sabiny population remained small, did not clear land for agriculture, and clung to their pastoral-foraging way of life, the colonial interests were not threatened and the upland population was left to do as they pleased. Though this development had little initial impact on the upland communities, the creation of the protected area, however, marked the point of legal alienation of land rights to the colonial government and laid the foundation for displacement decades hence. In the 1950s, forestry activities expanded on Mt. Elgon, leading to further governmental appropriations of land and to increased restrictions on resource use within the protected area. The increased restrictions at that time corresponded to the expansion of the national conservation program, which included the establishment of the national parks system. The founding of the national park system marked the institutionalization of an ideology of protectionism.

With its roots in European philosophy, the protectionism that came to undergird conservation efforts in Uganda emphasized the preservation of untouched nature; local resource use, particularly agricultural, represented a violation of such a vision. As the protectionist ideology filtered into the management agenda on Mt. Elgon, protected area managers became increasingly concerned with the activities of the upland population, who had begun small-scale agricultural cultivation. Managers began to see them less as irrelevant features of the landscape and more of a threat to the protected area's environmental integrity. Plans to displace and resettle the upland population were discussed as early as the 1960s, but because of political instability they were not enacted until the early 1980s. Though the forced migration was primarily justified as a way to reduce pressure on the environment, an examination of documents from that era illustrates another governmental mandate: to bring a marginal, mobile group of people under government control. Resettling the upland population on the edge of the reserve and refocusing their economic activities from livestock and foraging to intensive agriculture, government managers hoped, would not only protect the forest, but also render the population, legible, controllable, and taxable.

Displacement, Resettlement, and the Transformation of Production

A central argument of this dissertation has been that displacement and resettlement leave a lasting legacy through the ways they transform the fundamental relations of production. For the displacees of the Benet Resettlement Area, such transformations occurred in three interrelated domains: settlement patterns, livelihoods activities, and property relations. In the decades before forced migration, the Sabiny

populations on the plains, central escarpment, and forest-grasslands practiced systems of production heavily influenced by the ecological conditions of mountain's different physiographic zones. The semi-arid climate of the lowlands necessitated mobility and households were nucleated and dispersed across the landscape. Cultivation of grains and tubers was possible along the rivers that ran down from the mountain and wild products such as game and grass thatch were readily available, but livestock formed the backbone of the lowland economy. Though there was some commercial cultivation, livestock was the source of commercial activity. Wage labor was limited and the land market was not well established outside the trading centers. In terms of property relations, grazing resources were open access, while agricultural fields were individually owned for the duration of use. The upland population also focused on livestock production, though the forest-grassland mosaic of the uplands provided a very different resource base. Upland settlements were clan-based and consisted of multiple households. They were mobile and dispersed throughout the grasslands, moving less often than their counterparts on the plains due to the high levels of rainfall. Uplanders supplemented their livestock production activities with foraging in the forest and the small-scale cultivation of potatoes. Women traded bamboo baskets and other forest products with partners in the central escarpment for agricultural staples. Other market activity was limited by the communities' inaccessibility. The property regime in the uplands was primarily a mix of commonly held and open access resources. Clans held rights to certain grazing resources and agricultural fields surrounding settlements, while other grazing and forest resources were open access, an exception being individually maintained bee hives. Both low- and upland populations maintained extensive social and economic relations with the larger communities of the central escarpment,

where residents lived on nucleated farms, were heavily integrated into regional agricultural markets, and most land was under private ownership. The networks that linked these three populations and their diverse resource bases provided a vital safety net against localized livelihoods threats.

In a short time, the forced relocation of the low- and upland populations radically altered relations of production that had been formed over centuries. The Benet case illustrates how the specific ways resettlement is enacted can shape the nature and direction of changes in production. The Forest Department staff responsible for the resettlement exercise had no prior experience or training in the complex practice of resettlement. The exercise proceeded swiftly in a top-down manner with minimal planning and financial support from the government. Several local leaders were included on the land allocation committees, yet they had no say in the mechanics of the exercise, only to whom land should be given and how much, opening the process up to considerable corruption and abuse. The guiding principle for resettlement in Benet was to give land and everything else will follow. That is, provide individual plots of land to male household heads and overnight the resettled population will become intensive commercial farmers. There was no consideration for maintaining historical social networks or communities, how resettlers would afford the costs of clearing and planting the land, or the lack of knowledge concerning farming on steep slopes.

In contrast with historical settlement patterns on the up- and lowlands, the settlement pattern established by the resettlement exercise was more highly concentrated on a fixed land base. All land within the estimated borders of the resettlement area was allocated to individual families, leaving no land for common grazing, wild resource

foraging, or future migration during periods of stress. Resettlement put an end to the mobility that had a long been a central feature of lives in both areas. Resettlement also dramatically reduced the range of livelihoods opportunities by reducing the variety of resources and amount of land to which people had access. The small plots of land could not accommodate the large herds of cows, goats, and sheep that resettlers had previously kept. Intensive agriculture replaced pastoralism as the focus of livelihoods in the resettlement area. Resettlement accelerated the process of commercialization by increasing access to residents into closer contact with agricultural markets. As residents needed financial resources and labor to clear their allocated land, the bare-bones style of resettlement allocation instigated vigorous labor and land markets. Changes in settlement and livelihoods were facilitated by the fundamental change in property relations. The Forest Department resettlement eliminated open-access and common pool forms of property rights, leaving all land under private property. Land became a resource owned by individuals with exclusive rights that were (at least in theory) guaranteed by the government.

A central consequence of these changes was the rise in importance of land tenure security. Prior to resettlement on the plains and in the uplands, private property was extended to livestock and a few other material resources like beehives, but rarely land. The enclosure of up- and lowland resources combined with the new conditions of commercialized agriculture on individualized plots of land within a limited land base elevated the significance of privately held land as the main source of livelihoods. Residents explained to me that the intensive montane cultivation they began to practice after resettlement required significant investments to maintain viable yields and incomes over

the long-term. Among the necessary investments, residents identified soil conservation and social networks as particularly important. High rainfall and steep slopes make the region highly susceptible to soil erosion and landslides. Soil conservation investments such as terracing, tree planting, heavy mulching and other practices, many observed, are crucial for the long-term maintenance of soil fertility. Social support networks help households address shortfalls of labor and food, but require significant investments of time, resources, and trust to build and maintain. Residents of the resettlement area reported that, tenure security (the assurance that they would not be dispossessed) became an important pre-condition for long-term investments in their land and social networks following resettlement. It is significant to note that tenure security was not an inherent pre-condition for investment as many economists have argued, but rather the direct outcome of the relations of production created by resettlement.

Insecurity, Post-Resettlement Recovery, and Resistance

In the years that followed displacement and resettlement, novel political economic processes interacted with the changed relations of production to create new opportunities and constraints for the lives and livelihoods of resettled populations. In Benet, displacement and resettlement produced an economy founded on private property and tenure security, yet changes in conservation policy over the past two decades have threatened the tenure security of hundreds of families in the resettlement area with wide-ranging effects. A multi-scalar perspective demonstrates how changes in the management of the protected area on Mt. Elgon imperiled livelihoods in the resettlement area were linked to broader political economic shifts at the national and international scales.

The era of insecurity in the resettlement area began with the rise to power of the National Resistance Movement and president, Yoweri Museveni. Museveni's wholehearted acceptance of international aid, loans, and the economic restructuring conditions that came with them brought a degree of foreign influence in national policy unprecedented since Uganda's independence from Britain in 1962. Amidst a flurry of international meetings and agreements promoting the value of biodiversity, foreign governmental and non-governmental organization streamed into the country to promote a wide variety of conservation projects. The largest of these initiatives sought to increase the area of land under strict protection by expanding the national park system and strengthening the government's control over existing protected areas, activities which resonated with the protectionist ethos that had long gained traction among natural resource managers in Uganda. On Mt. Elgon, this meant changing the status of the protected area from forest reserve to national park, intensifying resource use prohibitions, and increasing attention to the integrity of the park's boundaries. When the park boundary was remeasured in 1993, it was discovered that the Forest Department had allocated 1500 ha more land than originally intended. Park managers responded by claiming the land for the national park, a decision that has been perhaps the most significant determinant in the distribution of livelihoods constraints in the resettlement area since resettlement itself.

The creation of the 1993 line, excising the 1500 ha from the upper zone of the resettlement area not only destabilized land rights for the 6000 residents of the upper zone but also cut them off from social services like health care, education, and agricultural extension. Surveillance, harassment, repeated boundary marking, and, most recently, small-scale evictions above the 1993 line, have perpetuated the hardships of displacement

and resettlement and, for many, stalled the recovery process. Likening themselves to prisoners, farmers in the upper zone are cut off from markets by poor roads and attributed their reluctance or even outright resistance to make the investments in soil fertility and social networks increasingly embraced by their neighbors in the lower zone to the ever-looming threat of eviction.

Soil erosion, a problem throughout the region, has become particularly intense above the 1993 line, resulting in dwindling yields and ever more common landslides. The few agricultural extension projects aimed at curbing soil erosion in the upper zone have attributed the widespread failure to invest in soil conservation measures to farmer ignorance. In their view, if properly “sensitized,” farmers will make the logical choice to invest. However, such initiatives fail to recognize how the soil mining approach to agriculture, while unsustainable in the long run, is on the one hand, a economic rational response to sustained insecurity and on the other, a political act of resistance. As yields decrease and agriculture has become a less viable source of income, people in the upper zone have increasingly turned to the protected resources of the national park for their living despite the dangers of getting caught. Between the discouraging investments in soil conservation and fostering an increased reliance on in-park resources, park managers’ protectionist approach to conservation has had the perverse effect of exacerbating the very processes of environmental degradation they have sought to prevent.

The intersection of changed production relations and post-resettlement political economic shifts is also manifested in the form and content of resistance to government-induced insecurity. The psychological traumas of displacement and resettlement weighed heaviest on the older population, people who had lived in their home environments in the

plains or high grasslands their whole lives, who had raised families there, and formed deep attachments to place. For the younger generations, many began to develop different senses of place based more on the conditions of the resettlement area. Due to the ways land was allocated in the resettlement, individual rights to property became an important element of the ways families made new lives and established themselves in their new environment. Clearing and planting land for individual use became a central practice of placemaking in the resettlement area. Though resistance to government-induced insecurity has taken many forms, the notion of individualized rights to property has manifested in both informal/implicit and formal/explicit forms of resistance. Some residents above the 1993 line explained to me how trees have become symbolically associated with the park; to plant trees is to make the park. By contrast, clearing trees from one's land to make way for individual cultivation has become a way of resisting the park and marking as the land as an individual's property.

Securing individual land rights has been the central goal of the social movement formally resisting the government efforts to reclaim the upper part of the resettlement area, however the ways leaders have framed their claims are related to new flows of ideas and financial support. Interestingly, such new flows and strategies have emerged from the same political economic shifts that led to intensified protectionism on Mt. Elgon. When Museveni opened the door to foreign assistance in the early 1990s, there was a proliferation of foreign and domestic civil society, human rights, and development NGOs. With the dismantling of state services, NGOs expanded their presence and their influence on government policy increased. Some NGOs, like ActionAid did on Mt. Elgon, exposed rural leaders to new concepts such as human rights and indigeneity and the international

movements that had organized to promote them. By reframing their struggle as an indigenous rights movement, leaders of the Benet Resettlement Area were able to take advantage of new flows of support and connect to wider activist networks. Leaders hoped that they could leverage their newfound international connections against the state, which had become ever more sensitive to foreign criticism as its dependence on foreign aid increased. Their hopes were well founded and they were able to secure a settlement that recognized land rights of the “Benet community” on account of their historical occupation of Mt. Elgon. However, the movement’s leverage has not yet proved strong enough to pressure the Uganda Wildlife Authority and central government to honor the settlement. For years, government actors have dragged their feet, denied responsibility, deferred blame, and privately dismissed the settlement as “erroneous.” Meanwhile, the fates of farmers above the 1993 line have remained uncertain.

Directions for Future Research

The comparison of lives and livelihoods above and below the 1993 line featured in this dissertation begs additional systematic research. Because of government restrictions, I was unable to collect much quantitative livelihoods and resource use data above the 1993 line. The trends described were based largely on qualitative observations. Larger-scale survey data and other forms of quantitative assessment would strengthen these qualitative findings. For example, while the general absence of soil conservation investments above the line was easily observable on the landscape, a geo-spatial assessment of the precise distribution of different types of investments above and below the line could be extremely useful in identifying more detailed behavioral patterns. Such analysis may also shed light

on patterns of non-investment below the 1993 line (while more common, they have not been universally adopted) and provide insight into what other factors besides tenure insecurity constrain investment.

Throughout my research, residents emphasized the importance of social support networks in household strategies for coping with periodic crises, particularly seasonal food shortages. The changing dimensions of social support in the wake of displacement and resettlement warrants further scrutiny. Rotating credit and savings organizations have emerged as a new avenue for the formation of social support networks. Religious organizations and churches have also proliferated in recent years. More research is needed on the extent to which participation in these new networks contributes household incomes and coping abilities. A longitudinal perspective that follows specific houses as they weather seasonal shortfalls and other crises could be highly illustrative.

Another dimension of social networks deserving of attention is the effect of resettlement on the geographical extent of such networks. Historically, the wide-ranging social networks established through trade linked people in different ecological zones. During times of localized crisis, people were able to turn to their partners in other areas, who may not have been affected as severely for support. Resettlement reduced the array of available ecological niches and disrupted these historic networks. The extent to which have resettlers built environmental variation into the networks that they have created following forced migration may have important implications for coping with future crises.

With increasingly unpredictable seasonality due to climate change, reduced social services because of structural adjustment, and highly volatile agricultural markets, making a living in rural Uganda has become an increasingly challenging task. Numerous livelihoods

scholars have emphasized the importance of adaptive diversification and innovation for people to achieve sustainable and fulfilling livelihoods. Such adaptability is particularly important for populations rebuilding their lives and livelihoods after displacement and resettlement. Throughout my fieldwork, soil conservation measures and social support networks were the two most commonly mentioned sites of livelihoods innovation. Further research is needed to identify other avenues of creativity and innovation in the Benet Resettlement Area.

A final topic for future research is how the shift in livelihoods from livestock to agriculture has been incorporated into social and ritual life. For at least two thousand years, cattle have been a cultural mainstay for Sabiny communities and their ancestors. Despite the drastic reduction of cattle holdings that resulted from forced migration, my observations suggest that cattle have remained culturally important as key signifiers of status, the source of bonds between friends and relatives, and central to circumcision, marriage and death rituals. Research is needed to explore how and why cattle and cattle exchange have remained at the center of social life.

Conclusion

The Benet case clearly shows that long-term effects of displacement and resettlement cannot be understood outside of how forced relocation transforms relations of production. But looking at how displacement and resettlement reconfigure local relations of production does not tell the whole story. Subsequent political economic developments, such as the increased influence of international donors on national policy or the development of new markets, interact with these changed production relations to

determine the dynamic distribution of opportunities and constraints for resettlers.

Changed relations of production are reflected not only in the productive decisions people make but also in how people think, in their senses of place and concomitantly the ways they resist threats to their livelihoods.

This dissertation has shown how private property came to define production in the Benet Resettlement Area. Such a transformation did not represent an inevitable evolution from a primitive customary property regime to a more modern and efficient regime, but rather the specific outcome of forced migration. In the moving of people, allocation of land, and enclosure of common pool resources, forced migration made tenure security a novel and important component of livelihoods, expressed both in people's decisions and how they think about place. Protectionist conservation policies linked to international mandates and funding focused tenure insecurity above the 1993 line. While those living below the line have begun to invest in the long-term viability of their livelihoods, residents above the 1993 line have responded to chronic insecurity by pursuing present-oriented, unsustainable practices. Apathy has become widespread, severe poverty and food insecurity have become entrenched, landslides claim property and lives with greater frequency, and many people I talked to feared for the future. Though tenure security does not represent a magic bullet that would end all suffering in the Benet Resettlement Area, this research has demonstrated that within the economic system enacted by resettlement, tenure security has become an essential precondition for the investments and innovations necessary for residents to move forward out of the shadow of forced migration and toward more viable, sustainable livelihoods.

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