

## How protection took the beauty from the land; conflicting values and meanings of Lake Mbuoro National Park, Uganda.

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### Summary

Uganda's Lake Mbuoro National Park protects the last remaining unenclosed rangeland known historically to the Banyankole Bahima pastoralists who once grazed it as 'The Beautiful Land' - Karo Karungi. For centuries Karo Karungi supported herds of long-horned Ankole cows, bred by the Bahima for their beauty, as well as for subsistence, a choice that entailed a sacrifice in terms of food production. This focus on beauty, backed up by taboos that further restricted access to food, established a powerful ethnic identity for the Bahima based on adherence to and pursuit of an idealised pastoralism that linked them and their cows to the landscape of their ancestors. The strength and exclusivity of this identity prevented other peoples with other values, most notably members of the Banyankole farming class, from turning Karo Karungi into a production landscape of farms and fences.

Economic development and cultural change over the past 100 years has led to the steady loss of the exclusively pastoral landscape. Though the establishment of the National Park in 1983 protected what remained of the open rangeland, the exclusion of Ankole cows rendered this last relict of the ancestral landscape meaningless to the Bahima. The result has been conflict between them and conservation authorities. In 1983, pastoralists were forcibly evicted, in 1985 pastoralists invaded and all but destroyed the park, and in 1986, 60% of the park was degazetted. Conflict continues to undermine the management of the remaining 40 percent. An innovative project is working to

resolve this conflict by sharing the determination of meaning and value of the park. A values-based approach to park planning and management allows for the integration of 'cultural cows' into the park, recreating the cultural landscape of the Bahima.

### A history of Lake Mbuoro National Park

Lake Mbuoro National Park (LMNP) straddles the equator in southern Uganda. The park's 260 km<sup>2</sup> cover a mosaic of habitat types including permanent swamps and rivers, gallery forests, seasonally inundated valleys supporting open grasslands, open woodlands and closed thickets. Though small, the park conserves a representative example of a biologically diverse interlacustrine ecosystem, supports Uganda's only population of impala as well as eland, topi, zebra and other 'plains game' (Muhweezi 1994), and harbours several bird species of regional or international conservation significance (Pomeroy and Kasoma 1992). Importantly, the park protects the last remaining unenclosed area of rangeland known historically to the Banyankole Bahima pastoralists who grazed it for centuries as 'The Beautiful Land' – Karo Karungi. Outside the park the land has been largely sub-divided to create small ranches and, increasingly, subsistence farming plots.

In 1933 the Lake Mbuoro area was gazetted as a controlled hunting area. In 1962 it became a game reserve. The decision to create a national park was taken in 1983 based



Lake Mbuoro National Park and surrounding areas. Photo: Mark Infield.



Mosaic of rangelands and woodlands. Photo: Mark Infield.

on conservation values and was supported by the international conservation community (Kingdon 1984). There were, however, also political motivations (Kamugisha et al. 1997, Mugisha 1993). The park disadvantaged the Banyankole people, especially the Bahima pastoralists, who were believed by the Obote II government<sup>1</sup> to support the anti-government rebels. All residents were evicted, though many held government permits to reside there, and the exclusion of cattle was strictly enforced. No effort was made to compensate dispossessed families, which, unsurprisingly, produced strong antipathy towards the new park (Kamugisha and Stahl 1993).

When the Obote II government fell following a long civil war, evicted families, especially pastoralists, re-occupied the park. Park staff were driven off, infrastructure was destroyed, the eradication of large mammals was attempted and returning evictees invited others to occupy the ‘free land’ in an effort to make the park unmanageable. In 1986, however, a government commission recommended that 40% of the area be retained as a national park.

LMNP is managed by the Uganda Wildlife Authority, which

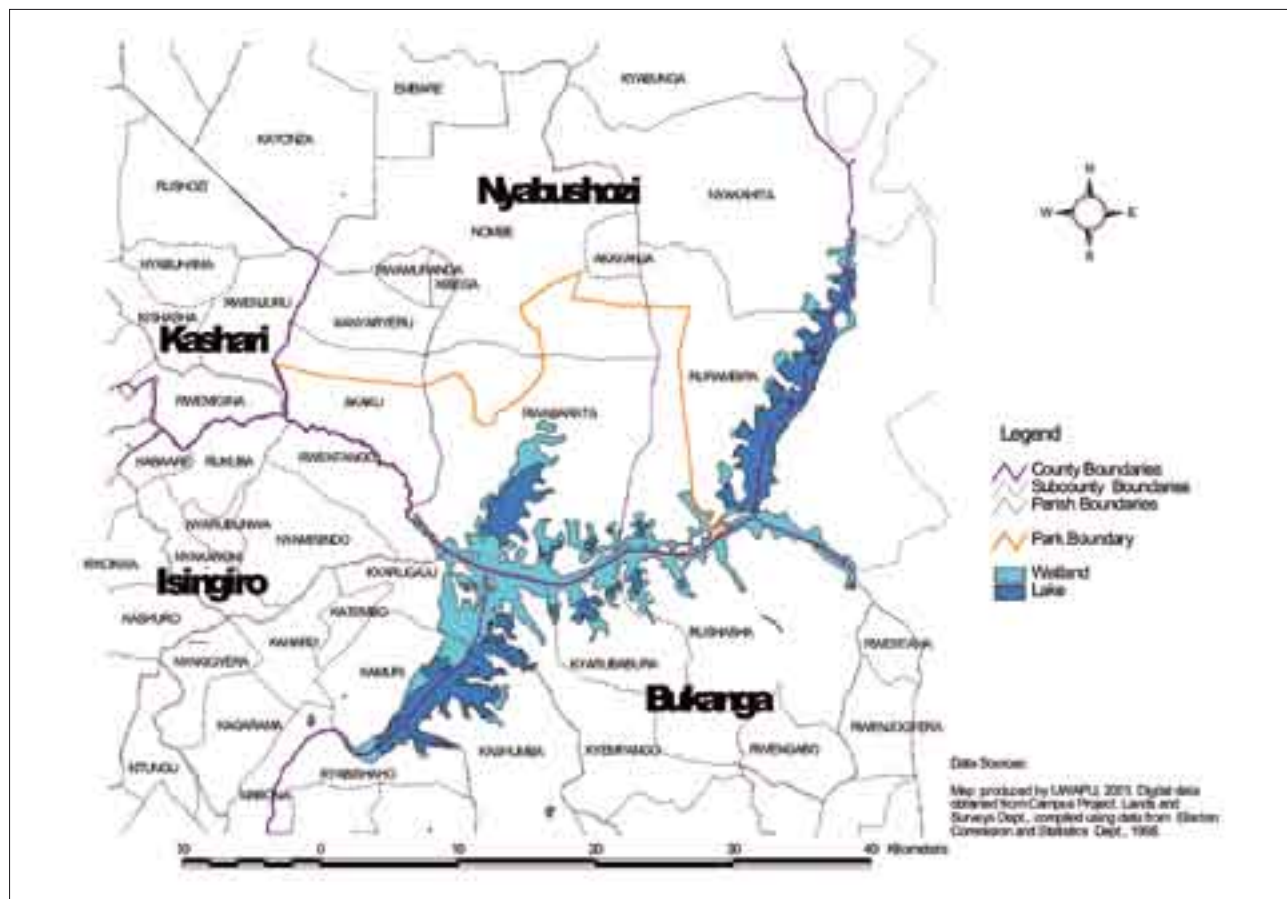
<sup>1</sup> President Obote held office twice. He was removed from government by Amin in 1971 and by the current president, Museveni, in 1985.

employs wardens and rangers who manage the park on the ground. Formal communications between park authorities and neighbouring communities are carried out through the Community Protected Area Institution drawn from and operating under the local government structure.

## Living in a cultural landscape

Constructions of the landscape amongst the Banyankole Bahima descend from myth and history. The mythological ancestors of the Banyankole, the Bachwezi, god-like figures who grazed their beautiful cows across this land, were a real people. Archaeological remains found some 50 kilometres north of Lake Mburo indicate that the site was the centre of a large and powerful empire founded on pastoralism that ruled most of southern and western Uganda (Schoenbrun 1993). Its rapid collapse and disappearance gave rise to a number of separate kingdoms including Nkore<sup>2</sup>. Mythology draws a direct line between the Bachwezi and the present day. Both Bahima and Bachwezi occupied the same landscape and each loved

<sup>2</sup> The Bachwezi gave rise to the creation myths of many interlacustrine peoples including the Batoro, the Buganda and the Banyarwanda, who retain many cultural and socio-political features in common.



Map 1. Lake Mburo National Park and surrounding areas

their long horned cattle and for as long as beautiful cows continue to graze the rich pastures of Nkore the mythologized landscape will persist.

Physical features of the landscape are believed to have been formed by Bachwezi heroes. The Bachwezi king, Mihingo, for example, shot an arrow from his bow and where the arrow landed a spring began to flow, turning a valley into the Kyansimbi swamp (Babiha 1958).

Many other sites are associated with mythological events. Ruroko, for example, a stone outcrop lying within LMNP, is named after an ancient cobra with a yellowish neck that resembles the white patch on the neck of an Ekiroko<sup>3</sup> cow.

The history of Nkore and its people is also remembered through the landscape. The days may be gone when the king of Nkore, the Omugabe, and his chiefs raided cows from their neighbours and celebrated their deeds with heroic recitations; nevertheless, the sites of these events are known. Numerous hills, valleys and lakes bear names associated with historical events. The forest in

which the kings of Nkore were buried lies just south of the park. The site where the Omugabe Ntare Kitabanyoro sacrificed the famous Ngabo<sup>4</sup> calf before defeating the Bunyoro for the first time, marking the decline of the Bunyoro Kingdom and the rise of Nkore, is known and named. Nshaara, which lies within the park and is remembered as the grazing area of the king's herds, was won back from the Bunyoro and incorporated into the kingdom (Morris 1957). The Bahima spend their days, therefore, in a landscape that reverberates with memories of their origins and history, confirming a historical continuity of place and people.

Banyankole mythology establishes both the separateness and union of the Bahima and Bairu classes of society (Lukyn William 1936, Kanyamunyu 1951, Morris 1953, Oliver 1953, Morris 1955, Mungonya 1958, Wrigley 1958, Posnansky 1966, Crazzolara 1969, Mushanga 1970). The myth of the creation of the Nkore nation is fundamental to an understanding of the separate identities of the three classes within the traditional social and authority structure of Nkore – the Abakama (the ruling class), the Abahima (pastoralists) and the Abairu (cultivators).

<sup>3</sup> The names given to Ankole cows describe their appearance, including details of the patterns and locations of white patches (Infield 2003).

<sup>4</sup> The name given to a cow with many large white patches (Infield 2003).



*Tending the beautiful cows. Photo: Mark Infield*

“In the beginning [Nkore] had no kings. The first king was Ruhanga (the Creator) who they also called their god (Nyamuhanga). Ruhanga came from heaven to earth and when he arrived, three sons were born to him. When he wished to choose an heir he put his three sons, Kakama, Kahima and Kairu, to a test to keep a milk pot filled for one whole night. Kakama won and was charged with the rule of the country. Kahima, who had given some milk to Kakama, was made to look after the cattle, while Kairu, who had spilled his milk, was to till the soil.” [Adapted from Lazaro Kamugungunu’s *Abagabe B’Ankole* (The Kings of Ankole) published in 1955, in Muvumba (1982) and from Doornbos (1978)].

The belief that the Bahima were charged with the care of cattle provides a powerful basis for their attachment to their cattle, while the divine origins of the separation of Bahima and Bairu underpins the concept of an exclusive pastoral landscape.

The myths also record the love of the Bachwezi for their beautiful cows, a love that the Bahima emulate. Two stories presented here demonstrate this.

“The Bachwezi owned many cattle, amongst which was a cow named Bihogo bya Mpuga, regarded as the most beautiful of their cows. Mugyenyi loved this cow greatly and swore that should it die, he would himself die. When Bihogo bya Mpuga suddenly died, Mugyenyi was determined to kill himself. Though the other Bachwezi scoffed at him for wishing to cast away his life -the life of a god- for that of a cow, an old aunt mocked him for failing in his promise. Her words pierced Mugyenyi and he swore, “I am despised and jeered at, therefore I will leave the world: it is corrupt and no place for the gods.” The other Bachwezi agreed. They collected their herds, wives and goods and departed, and were never seen again. But Ruhinda, who had shown interest in the affairs of the people of the Earth remained, becoming the first king.” [Adapted from Mungonya (1958)].

“Nyamiyonga, ruler of the land of ghosts, invites Omugabe Isaza to make blood-brotherhood. Isaza is afraid and sends his Chief Minister instead. Nyamiyonga is angry and decides to lure Isaza to his kingdom. He sends his beautiful daughter to Isaza who falls in love with her. But when she returns to her father to give birth to a child, Isaza does not follow. But she has discovered where Isaza’s heart lies. He had told her, bluntly, that he loved his cattle more than her. This time Nyamiyonga sends a pair of his finest cows. When they escape from his kraal and return to the land of ghosts to calf, Isaza follows them and is trapped forever.” [Adapted from *Twilight Tales of the Black Baganda* by A. B. Fisher 1911, quoted by Wrigley (1958)].

## Legal status of LMNP

LMNP is protected under Uganda’s National Park Statute and is listed under the World Database of Protected Areas as a Category II site. Though the statute actually allows for considerable flexibility, its status as a national park and the history of conservation in Uganda means that LMNP is managed as an exclusive wildlife area.

Human agency has, however, had a profound impact on the area for several hundred years (Schoenbrun 1993) and an intimate relationship persists between the area covered by the park and the Banyankole Bahima pastoralists. Though managed as a Category II national park, it is arguable that the area is best understood and managed as a Category VI protected landscape.

## Beautiful cows, cultural exclusion and creating a pastoral landscape

Landscapes are social constructions as much as they are physical terrain (Schama 1996). The influence of the Bahima and their pastoral lifestyle on the physical landscape is discussed below. Nevertheless, in order to discuss LMNP as a protected landscape, it is necessary to understand the relationship between the Bahima and the land of Nkore in social and economic terms and examine how this has contributed to the creation and maintenance of both the physical and cultural landscape.

Banyankole society was stratified socially, politically and economically through the separation of pastoral and agricultural economies (Mungonya 1958, Kiwanuka 1968, Crazzolara 1969, Karugire 1971, Doornbos 1978, Muvumba 1982, Bonte 1991). Three classes, Bahinda, Bahima and Bairu, united by a common creation myth and a common language, were ruled within the centralised state of Nkore by a single king.

Though rare elsewhere, this structure of multiple classes ruled by a single king was common to the peoples of the interlacustrine region (Doornbos 1978, Bonte 1991). The degree to which the classes were separated, however, and the mechanisms that enforced it, were not the same. Amongst the Banyankole, separation was almost complete. The Bairu were entirely agriculturalists and the Bahima entirely pastoralists (Karugire 1971, Doornbos 1987).

Cultivators occupied higher, more humid places, while pastoralists occupied drier, flatter areas. However, most of Nkore is suitable for farming (Elam 1974). The annual precipitation of 750 to 875 mm is sufficient to support rain-fed agriculture (Macdonald 1967), as the steady spread of farming into pastoral areas in recent decades demon-

strates. Though populations were low with little competition for land, it is surprising that farmers did not infiltrate pastoral areas over time given their historical and numerical advantage (McMaster 1966, Karugire 1971, Doornbos 1978). The social dominance of the pastoralist ideology over farming maintained the separation of Bahima and Bairu and ensured that the rich pastoral lands were kept for the cows.

The core identifier of being a *muhima* is the breeding of *enyembwa*, beautiful cows. Derived from and enriching this core pastoral ethic is a tradition of poetry, dance and design, and a strongly defined aesthetic and reverence of beauty linked to the cows. Together, these form a powerful mechanism of social exclusion.

Food taboos reinforce Bahima identity and social exclusion. Though many pastoralists claim to follow diets based entirely on milk, meat and blood, most commentators suggest that the vagaries of pastoral production make this impossible (Spear 1993). Traditionally, however, the Bahima did seem to stick to such a diet and avoided all agricultural produce and most wild foods. Food avoidances were explained in terms of the health of the cows (Elam 1974). If food mixed with milk in the stomach it was believed the cows would become sick. Anyone who ate agricultural produce had to be purged before milk could be taken.

Other restrictions also regulated milk consumption. The ancestry of a cow, its dedication to spirits, its relationship to individuals or its association with specific clans meant its milk could only be drunk by certain people. Menstruating women were not permitted to drink milk. Meat and milk were not taken together. These avoidances and restrictions, widely followed until relatively recently, reduced the availability of food to the Bahima, thereby focusing their attention on their herds and strengthening the ethnic, social and spatial separation of Bahima and Bairu. A complex set of dietary rules is a powerful mechanism for establishing



Ankole cows watering. Photo: Mark Infield

and reinforcing ethnic identity – it is difficult to mix socially if people cannot eat together and such a limitation makes spatial integration less likely.

The pursuit of beautiful cows is the ultimate signifier of Bahima identity. *Enyembwa* is defined as the height of beauty in a cow and results from *okubikyirira*, the practice of breeding beautiful cows. The preferred colour is a dark red brown (*bihogo*), while the horns must be large, shapely and white. As well, the cow must be large, tall and long-legged.

The characteristics the Bahima use to select cows demonstrate that it is the pursuit of *enyembwa* that determines breeding decisions. Infield (2002) asked herders to identify their 10 most-prized animals and explain their selection. Almost 80% of the characteristics mentioned referred to appearance and only 15% referred to production. The top three characteristics used to select cows were horn shape (17%), horn whiteness (13%) and skin colour (16%).

That the Ankole cow is a sanga breed derived from taurine long-horned cattle further demonstrates the pursuit of bovine beauty over production. Zebu or indicine breeds are better adapted to survival and production in semi-arid environments than the more ancient, less efficient humpless taurine breeds (Galaty 1993, Lamphear 1993, Spear 1993), a fact that led to zebu cattle rapidly replacing taurine and *sanga* breeds throughout most of the continent (Hanotte et al. 2000).

Type of characteristic	Frequency	Percentage
Appearance	558	79.7
Production	106	15.1
Behaviour	6	0.9
Other	30	4.3
Totals	700	100.0

Table 1. Characteristics of prized cows selected by owners (n=700).

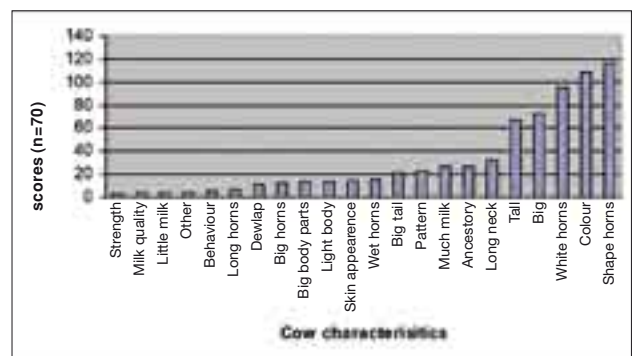


Figure 1. Characteristics used by their owners to select prized cows.

The retention of the Ankole cow by the Bahima was possible because of the richness of the pasture lands of Nkore. High rainfall correlates directly with plant production and high carrying capacity for herbivores (Coe et al. 1979), which made it possible for the Bahima to retain a less productive breed and still compete with zebu-owning pastoralists. It also made the 'defence' of these pastoral resources against encroaching farmers necessary.

The immediate result of the pursuit of beautiful cows is that Ankole herds have a distinctive appearance, dominated by the deep red brown of *bihogo* and the graceful white curves of their horns. The ultimate result is that Bahima are set aside from their Bairu countrymen and other neighbouring tribes.

This was necessary to retain the pastoral way of life. Rangelands with erratic and uncertain rainfall are described as systems at disequilibrium (Behnke et al. 1993). Pastoral production is possible in such areas only when cattle can be moved freely to the best locations at any particular time. Despite its high rainfall, this also applies to the Nkore rangeland. The patchy distribution of pastoral resources such as permanent water, salt grasses or shade also requires herds to move. Fallow periods, when herds move away, allow the recovery of grazing and prevent the encroachment of woody vegetation as part of a long-term cycle of sustainable pastoral production in an extensive system (Behnke and Scoones 1993). Periodic movement of herds also helped control tick-borne diseases. The Bahima way of life was threatened, therefore, by anything that restricted the free movement of their herds or converted key pastoral resources to other uses.

The glorification of the Ankole cow and the idealisation of a pastoral ethic was a passive mechanism aimed at defending the land against farmers and peoples with other breeds of cattle. Lamphear (1993), discussing the now vanished Sirikwa people, referred to their long-horned black cattle as an "oral shorthand" for their identification as Sirikwa. The same can be said of the Bahima and their *enyemebwa*.

The attachment of the Bahima to their cattle achieved two things. Firstly, it reinforced the physical separation of Bahima and Bairu communities, effectively blocking the spread of agriculture into pastoral areas. As the Bahima were nomadic, the agricultural Bairu, who were relatively settled, could easily exclude nomadic pastoralists by converting the land for farming (Karugire 1971). Mechanisms that excluded Bairu from Bahima society by reinforcing their separation prevent this. Positive attitudes towards cattle and negative attitudes towards farming were so effective that even in the 1960s Elam (1974) found only four Bairu farmers living in 30 Bahima camps totalling 1,004 people.

Secondly, enshrining the love of cattle as the defining principle of Bahima identity was critical to the maintenance of the class system. The economic system produced and exchanged goods and services in relation to the strict separation of the two groups. For the Bahima, this system was constructed around Ankole cows and the religious, historical and cultural values associated with them.

Three elements combined to form a mechanism that linked the rangeland of Nkore to the Bahima and protected it from agricultural encroachment: beautiful but unproductive cows, the stratified social system and the richness of the rangelands. Together, they provided a passive mechanism for creating an exclusive pastoral landscape. The richness of the rangeland would have encouraged encroachment by farmers, threatening pastoral production. Farming and farmers, therefore, had to be resisted. Nevertheless, the rich, high-rainfall rangeland meant that the Bahima did not have to worry excessively about food shortages and thus could be less concerned about the productivity of their herds. This allowed them to retain an unproductive breed and ensured that the pursuit of beauty could become the dominant expression of the pastoral ideal.

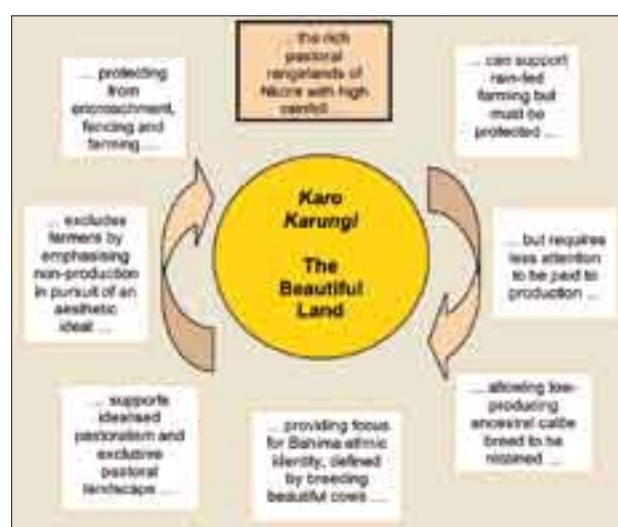


Figure 2. How breeding beautiful cows protected the landscape from farming.

Reduced production entails a sacrifice exemplified by the retention of a less productive breed and the selective breeding of more beautiful rather than more productive cows. The Ankole cow therefore provides the basis for the ethnic identity of the Bahima. The pastoral ideal requires the exclusion of other ideals and also excludes people unable to make or uninterested in making the sacrifice. The ethnic identity of the Bahima and their love of their beautiful cows allowed them to resist demands to manage land for agricultural purposes, thus closing the land to competing uses emphasizing production. This refusal protected

the land of their ancestors and enabled the perpetuation of the Bahima pastoral ideal.

### Land of milk and honey<sup>5</sup>: understanding the idealised pastoral landscape

For the Bahima, there is no place suitable for cows where cows should not go. They followed the pasture, rains and water. During the dry seasons, they grazed their herds close to the permanent sources of water, the Katonga and Rwizi Rivers and the permanent lakes and swamps of Katchera and Mburo. During the wet season the herds would disperse across the landscape. If water and grazing were present, a Muhima would graze his cows there. The land was held by the king, but individuals had the right to use any piece of it (Mackintosh 1938). An *eka* or household established temporary rights to nearby grazing, but these expired when the *eka* moved on.

Even sites of religious or historical significance are freely grazed. Bigo bya Mugenyi, for example, remains an important site for the Bahima and is used for religious rites associated with the Bachwezi cult, as well as for Christian worship. Nonetheless, the entire area of the site is grazed (Infield 2002).

Figure 3 shows the Bahima terms for land outside the *eka*. All categories are described by their use by cattle. The terms refer to increasing distances of grazing areas from home, but all refer to the grazing.

Specific terms are used to describe the movement of cattle through the environment from one space to another: for example, *okusetura* refers to the moving of cows to grazing in the morning and *okutsyora* to the moving of cows to water. The divisions of the Bahima day exist in terms of where the cattle will be and what they will be doing (Lukyn Williams

1936). If there is grazing and water, the land is perceived in terms of cows, but if there are neither, Bahima have little interest in it. Land with pastoral resources and no cows has no meaning within Bahima cosmology. Infield (2002) reports a respondent saying “How would people conceive of an area of land with water and grazing, but no cows? That would not be land. How can I put it? It would not be anything.”

Before it was named Nkore in the eighteenth century, the homeland of the Banyankole was called Karo-Karungi, the ‘Beautiful Land’. It is, however, the cows that govern responses to the landscape, which is perceived in terms of pastoral resources. Karo-Karungi is commonly translated by the English idiom, “land of milk and honey”. Talking about the park, a Muhima said “[We] really want to go back and graze in it. Because of its special beauty, the grass, the trees, the nature. You know, it is flat. We really love it” (Infield 2002).

The flat land consists of the seasonally flooded valleys, open grasslands favoured for grazing because the pastures are good; cows can move freely, there are sufficient big trees to provide shade and dams for water can be constructed easily. Beauty and utility are linked. Poetic recitations praise the land, but describe it in terms of its pastures, water and locale for cows. A recitation describing cattle grazing in Nshaara within the park provides a wonderful example.

“The grass of Rwanyakizhu is burnt.  
Bwaitimba is bare.

The fire has gone to the shores of Lake Katchera,  
and burnt Ruragara.

And the cows stand still at Rukukuru,  
as the ripened fruit of enyonza.”

[Adapted from Mackintosh (1938)].

The poem is more than a catalogue of production characteristics. The cows are likened to the fruit of *enyonza*, *Carissa edulis*, a shrub with deep red edible berries. This

<sup>5</sup> A biblical reference, this phrase is in common usage and reflects the conversion of most Bahima to Christianity.

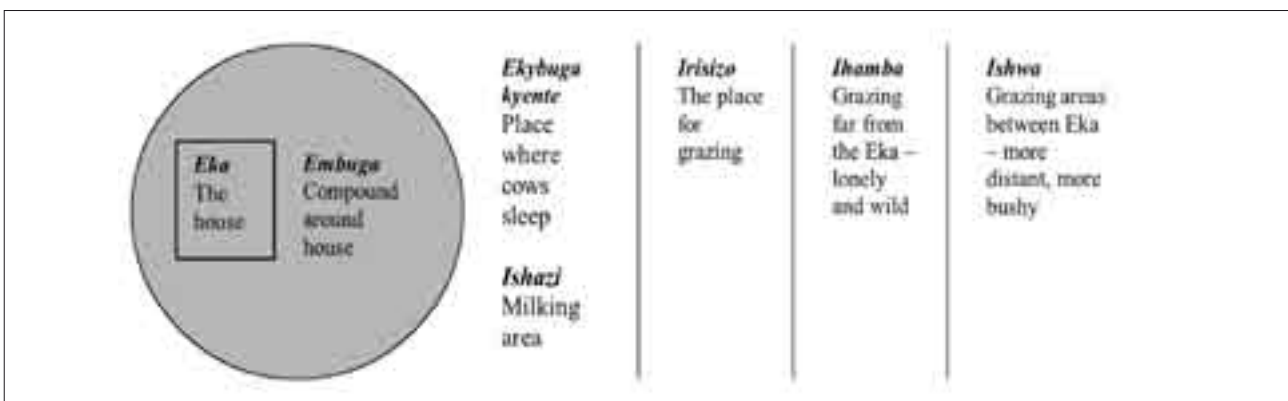


Figure 3. Bahima labels for the landscape outside the household compound.

produces a powerful sense of place and captures the Bahima aesthetic perfectly. The poet sees the rich red cows standing against the black burnt grass, like sweet *enyonza* berries hanging on the bushes. Unusually, the cows are still. Perhaps they are weak, as the burnt grazing indicates the end of a dry season and perhaps drought. The image also refers to a great drought in the eighteenth century, when *enyonza* fruit were collected as food and used instead of cows to pay bride prices. The state of the land, the condition of the cows and the plight of the people are thus all contained within this short description.

The sight of a herd of Ankole cows confirms the power of the Bahima construction of landscape. The Ankole cows are part of the environment. Their red brown colour matches the red soils. Their curved white horns resemble the long white thorns of *Acacia sieberiana*, a locally common tree. They move across the hills and valleys, raising dust, grazing the grasses, existing within, changing and completing the landscape.

The idea of penning Ankole cows is disliked by Bahima, who believe the cows are not 'happy' when penned in. A happy cow runs and jumps, is energetic and animated. A cow is happy when it has good grass and water and, importantly, space to move in. The desire to move long distances is seen as a defining characteristic of Ankole cows.

"[The Ankole cow] has its nature ... It moves. It can move miles and feed and move miles and water ... When confined in small areas, it is not the same" (Infield 2002). Ankole cows should not be constrained by fences (and therefore by concepts of private ownership of land), but should be able to walk and graze freely.

"Ankole cows like to move into the wind. This wind, then, makes the man happy. A fence will stop the cows following the wind" (Infield 2002).

The perception of a happy cow is rooted in the landscape itself and is represented by an image of a herd moving. In this image, the Muhima herdsman follows the long line of his red cattle, singing. The happiness of the cow and the happiness of the Muhima are linked and both result from movement within and through the landscape. The Bachwezi are remembered too in this way, moving with their cows though the land. This sense of the mutual well-being of the Bahima and their cows is important to the way the landscape, the cows and the people interact.

Critical to this construction of landscape is its exclusive nature. In the same way that the Bahima have preserved an image of the ancestral cow of the Bachwezi, remembered as the ultimate pastoralists, the landscape remains that of the Bachwezi too. The mechanisms that prevented encroachment of rangeland by farming supported the re-



The beautiful land of the Bahima. Photo: Mark Infield



tention of a mythologized landscape. By its nature, this landscape is an exclusive one given meaning by the presence of Ankole cows and the absence of all other human agency.

The acts of grazing and watering locate the Muhima and his herd in the landscape. The act of grazing is a solitary act, made exclusive by ritual and tradition and idealised through music and poetry. Today, elite Bahima, whose lives are increasingly urban, associate grazing the cows with relaxation, meditation and traditional values.

The mechanisms that excluded competing land-uses and create the exclusive pastoral landscape now conserved within LMNP (ironically as an exclusive wildlife landscape) were also associated with the day-to-day practices of nomadic pastoralism that directly affected the landscape.

Cattle grazing affected the appearance of the physical terrain by reducing the height and thickness of the grassland vegetation through grazing and trampling, which opened out the landscape. These open landscapes were preferred by pastoralists as they allowed the cattle to graze freely. This also modified the relative abundance and distribution of pasture species, although not to a significant extent (Infield 2002)

The movement of large numbers of cattle to important watering sites established marked trails, very different in appearance to wildlife tracks.

The extensive cutting of the bush, largely the small acacia species, to construct the traditional huts of the Bahima and the extensive protective walls to protect the herds from lions and other carnivores had a particular influence on the appearance of the landscape and created a mosaic of different age classes of woodland vegetation. Bahima homesteads were often located towards the top of hills and the typical open hilltops in the park seem to be the result of their repeated clearing.

The landscape was affected by factors associated with grazing patterns. The relationship between grazing, burning and bush encroachment is complex, but is generally understood to maintain open rangeland in disequilibrium (Behnke and Scoones 1993). The open grasslands of the park's valleys are believed to have been created and maintained by a combination of grazing and burning. The Bahima will regularly burn the pastures in order to stimulate a flush of fresh grazing at the end of the dry seasons. Traditionally, the pastures would be burned before an eka moved away, helping to control ticks and allowing a fallow period for grazing to recover. In the absence of burning, the climax vegetation of Nkore is closed thick-

et (Langdale-Brown et al. 1964; Lind & Morrison 1974). Currently, there is significant bush encroachment in the park, although it is hard to demonstrate a direct relationship between this and the decline in grazing.

## How conservation threatened the cultural landscape

A historical process set in train by British imperial interests in the late nineteenth century undermined the pastoral landscape and replaced it with, first, a production landscape<sup>6</sup> and then with an exclusive conservation landscape. The Nkore rangeland was steadily enclosed and taken into individual ownership for farming or ranching, or placed under wildlife-protected areas. The exclusive pastoral landscape of the Bahima was replaced by landscapes reflecting very different constructions of nature. The Bahima responded to these changes, first by withdrawing from society and avoiding authority, then by relocating and, finally, by active resistance.

Concepts of wildlife in Uganda have changed over time. Under the British protectorate attitudes were nakedly utilitarian: wildlife was seen either as a source of revenue (via hunting and trade) or a threat to revenue generation and economic development. Nevertheless, more complex and less utilitarian perspectives of wildlife began to influence policy in later decades and continued until economics returned to the forefront as plans were laid for Uganda's independence (Willock 1964, Kinloch 1972).

Perhaps surprisingly, following independence in 1962 the values of wildlife were increasingly explained by the authorities in national, aesthetic and scientific terms. This emphasis, however, disguised a struggle for control over land and resources in the newly independent country. In the 1970s and 1980s, arguments that the national parks were economic assets, when it was clear they were not, helped conservation professionals retain control over the lands that were irreversibly linked to their social, cultural and economic capital.

Despite game reserve regulations severely limiting their use, there was little enforcement in the first decade of LMGR's existence. The determination to exclude farmers and pastoralists strengthened in the 1970s as concern grew over the increasing level of use. Officials explained their pursuit of an exclusive conservation landscape by invoking scientific, economic and aesthetic arguments, and by championing national over local or individual in-

<sup>6</sup> The British started this process by requiring the Bahima to produce and sell ghee to pay taxes, before proceeding to settle immigrant farming communities in the area, open the lakes to commercial fishing and establish beef ranching and dairy production schemes.

terests. Whatever the justifications, it was inevitable that exclusion of the Ankole cows would create conflict.

The Bahima landscape, designed to exclude farmers, inevitably excluded any other use. Removing cows from the land removed meaning from the landscape. Lake Mburo National Park as a cow-free zone, like the game reserve before, undermined Bahima constructions of landscape and threatened their identity and culture. Important as competition for control over the economic resources of the park might have been, the underlying cause of the conflict was -and remains- the clash of two highly developed, mutually exclusive socially constructed landscapes.

The National Resistance Army made the injustice of the park's creation one of its causes when fighting against the Obote II regime. On assuming power, however, President Museveni<sup>7</sup> pleaded with the Bahima to leave the park. A Muhima retorted that the president must have been bewitched as nothing else could explain his order (Mugisha, pers. com).

<sup>7</sup> President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda is himself a Muhima.

## The recreation of a cultural landscape within the National Park

Relationships between landscape and culture are expressed or symbolised in many ways (Croll and Parkin 1992). The strength of Bahima 'attachment to place' stems from their attachment to Ankole cows and the values associated with them. It is the relationship between the Bahima and Ankole cows, therefore, which drives the conflict with the park authorities.

The Bahima still drive their cows into the park, despite the risks<sup>8</sup>, even when there is adequate grazing and water outside. The existence of cow-free rangeland is impossible for pastoral Bahima to accept. It represents a vacuum devoid of meaning. There is therefore a cultural imperative to fill the park with cows. Park managers hold that the exclusion of cattle is based on scientific assessments of the impact of grazing on biodiversity. However, Infield (2002) found few if any impacts. Preconceptions and narrow ex-

<sup>8</sup> Risks include arrest, fines and confiscation of cattle, and exposure to ticks and predators.



Inside the Enidi ranch. Photo: Mark Infield

pectations rather than empirical observations seem to be responsible for reports of degradation and damage.

Meanwhile, social, economic and land-use change is rapidly altering the landscape and Bahima culture outside the park. Initially, the land was enclosed by members of the Bahima elite and emigrants. A second wave of enclosures occurred in the 1960s and 1970s with the establishment of commercial ranches funded by the World Bank. Finally, as traditional nomadic pastoralism became unsustainable, further subdivision of the land occurred when Bahima households were allocated small ranches in the 1990s.

The open rangelands of Nkore remain only in LMNP and government ranches. As an inevitable consequence, the breeding of Ankole cows for beauty has declined. Until recently the male line of the Ankole breed was kept pure. Infield (2002) found only taurine genetic markers on the Y chromosome. Despite centuries of cross-breeding, only cows were introduced into herds, never bulls. Today, in order to increase production quickly, exotic bulls are being imported. This will result in the rapid loss of the Ankole breed and is already leading to the loss of *enyemebwa* and with it the hallmark of Bahima culture.

Recognizing the conflict between the Bahima and the park authorities as a conflict between opposing sets of cultural values presents an opportunity to defuse the conflict and conserve Bahima culture and their cows. Infield (2002) proposed that broadening the values represented by the park to include those of the Bahima would achieve this. By returning Ankole cows to the landscape, sharing the right to define the meaning of the landscape, the park can become a mechanism for conserving Bahima culture and values, ensuring the survival of a unique breed of cattle and increasing the park's sustainability by building a bridge to the community. Three key recommendations were:

- The exclusion of cows and the history of conflict that stemmed from this must be understood and responded to as a conflict between cultural constructions of nature and landscape.
- LMNP should be made responsible for the conservation of the Ankole cow and be presented to the Bahima as an entity that conserves values of importance to them.
- Appropriate institutional and management structures that will allow for the integration of Ankole cow conservation into existing values and functions of the park must be investigated and developed.

With financial and moral support from the Macarthur Foundation, the Uganda Wildlife Authority and Fauna and

Flora International have initiated the Culture, Values and Conservation Project to implement these recommendations.

The project is demonstrating how local interest in and support for protected areas can be built by designing and managing parks to reflect the cultural values that underlie local social constructions of nature and landscape. This entails integrating herds of 'cultural cows' into the landscape of the park and integrating their associated values into the management framework of the park. A range of activities are being undertaken to achieve this.

The management plan of the park has been modified to contain explicit recognition of Bahima cultural values and to include practical measures that allow for the day-to-day management of Ankole cows within the park. Implementing these measures is proving more difficult than anticipated for both cultural and practical reasons. The strength of the tradition of conservation makes it hard for managers to support the introduction of cows into the park, while replicating extensive management of Ankole cows in the park requires new infrastructure, staff and management skills. Agreement on the number of animals to be allowed, where they should graze, how the question of ownership should be dealt with, what to do with the natural increase in the herds, and many other issues still need to be resolved. A key but difficult concept for all partners is that the cows must be 'cultural cows', not 'economic cows'. This is necessary to distinguish their presence in the park from privately owned cattle that continue to be grazed in the park and to ensure that the conservation objectives of the concept are not overwhelmed by commercial considerations.

A real concern for park managers is how tourism might be affected by the presence of the cows in the park. That many tourists do not expect to see cows and may complain if they do has led park management to suggest concealing the 'cultural cows' in little visited corners of



Ankole cows and zebras. Photo: Mark Infield

the park. This demonstrates a continuing difficulty with appreciating the concept underlying the integration of the cows. It also underestimates the potential tourism value of these magnificent animals. The project is addressing these issues by working with the tourism industry to develop materials explaining the historical relationship between the Bahima and the park's landscape and the very unique nature of the cows themselves.

Finally, the project has also helped establish an institution to champion the cultural values of the Bahima, support the process of integrating Bahima values into the fabric of the park and help translate the Bahima construction of nature and landscape into practical action. The Ankole Cow Conservation Association negotiates with the park authorities. This institution will also support the selection of animals to ensure their 'beauty', advise on the management of the herds and share in the ownership of the cows by employing traditional institutions associated with the giving and loaning of cows amongst the Bahima. In the future it is expected that this group will also provide education and awareness about the beautiful cows and the park amongst the local community.

Positive impacts on the conservation status of the park are already resulting in changes in the relationship and interactions between the park authorities and the Bahima community. This approach is already beginning to influence policy and practice of protected area design and management nationally. Whether or not this approach to the management of Lake Mburo National Park results in its re-gazettement as a Protected Landscape, the exposure of the complex and rich interactions between culture and landscape will positively influence the thinking that underpins protected area theory and practice, the experience of visitors to protected areas and the interactions between protected areas and their neighbours.

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## Acronyms

UWA Uganda Wildlife Authority  
LBGR Lake Mburo Game Reserve  
LMNP Lake Mburo National Park

## Glossary

### Bachwezi

Semi-mythical ancestors of the Banyankole people

### Banyankole/Muyankole

People of the Banyankole

### Bahima/Muhima

Pastoralist members of the Banyankole

### Bairu/Muiru

Farming members of the Banyankole

### Bihogo

Name of Ankole cow that refers to its red-brown colour, the most favoured colour

### eka

Household

### enyemebwa

Beautiful cows, more beautiful than others, derived from the verb ok-wema, 'to be mated and bred for beauty'

### ghee

Rancid butter

### Karo Karungi

The Beautiful Land - the original territory of the Banyankole

### Nkore

The expanded kingdom of the Banyankole

### Omugabe

The king of the Banyankole

### Sanga cattle

Cattle breeds derived from crosses between taurine humpless breeds and long-horned indicine or zebu breeds

### Taurine cattle

Cattle originating from *Bos taurus*, humpless cattle

### Indicine cattle

Cattle originating from *Bos indicus* humped or zebu cattle

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