

OUR GREAT FRIEND THE MOUNTAIN GORILLA

A STORYTELLING OF GORILLA TOURISM AND
CONSERVATION IN BWINDI IMPENETRABLE NATIONAL
PARK

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"There is a special feeling of elation in finally having reached a destination that has occupied the mind for months, a destination that is completely outside one's experience"

George Schaller, 1964 (p. 14)

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS	3
ABSTRACT	4
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	5
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	6
CHAPTER 1	7
INTRODUCTION	7
BACKGROUND: HOW DID WE COME TO KNOW THE MOUNTAIN GORILLA?.....	7
RESEARCH QUESTION	14
RESEARCH PURPOSE AND RATIONALE	16
CHAPTERS DIVISION	18
CHAPTER 2	21
METHODOLOGY	21
RESEARCH PLANNING AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK.....	21
METHODS	27
LIMITATIONS AND POSITIONALITY	32
DATA OVERVIEW	39
STUDY SITE	40
CHAPTER 3	44
THE POLITICS OF GORILLA CONSERVATION AND TOURISM	44
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND	44
CONSEQUENCES	47
CONTROVERSIES.....	55
CHAPTER 4	62
THE ECONOMY OF GORILLA TOURISM AND CONSERVATION	62
BACKGROUND	62
COSTS.....	67
BENEFITS	72
CHAPTER 5	78
GORILLAS LIKE US: THE ANTHROPOMOPHISED CHARACTER OF THE MOUNTAIN GORILLA	78
BACKGROUND	78
PROTECTING THE MOUNTAIN GORILLAS	79
MOUNTAIN GORILLA AS A CHARISMATIC AND FLAGSHIP SPECIES	83
ANTHROPOMORPHIZATION OF THE MOUNTAIN GORILLA	87
HABITUATION PROCESS AND GORILLA TOURISM	91
CHAPTER 6	97
DISCUSSION	97
CONCLUSION	104
REFERENCES	106

ABSTRACT

This research focuses on people's perception of, and attitudes towards, mountain gorillas in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park (BINP). It is the result of four months of fieldwork in Ruhija, Rubanda County, one of the four appointed areas in Uganda where gorilla tourism is established. This qualitative study aims at understanding how different stakeholders perceive the gorilla as an animal, whether that be a conservation goal or an economic income, or an anthropomorphized species. The analysis will develop by focusing on these three conceptual domains, namely, political, economic and anthropomorphised. Further, in order to understand how different stakeholders have different perceptions and attitudes, the research participants are divided into four groups. The stakeholders groups involve the local community, the entrepreneurs, the conservationists and the tourists. By doing so, the research will present the point of view of local, national and international actors.

The main argument of the thesis revolves around the discourses about mountain gorillas. More specifically, how international actors have imposed western-centred discourses about wildlife conservation in order to ensure gorilla conservation. Along with national actors, who have later adopted the same discourses, to guarantee the development of the tourism industry.

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Finally, I want to express gratitude to the gorillas for letting me stay in their presence and concede me the extraordinary encounter, and the forest of Bwindi for being the most beautiful and extraordinary natural place I have ever been to.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BINP (Bwindi Impenetrable National Park)
DFGFI (Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund International)
DRC (Democratic Republic of Congo)
IGCP (International Gorilla Conservation Programme)
IIED (International Institute of Environmental Development)
IMF (International Monetary Fund)
INGO (International Non-Governmental Organization)
ITFC (Institute of Tropical Forest conservation)
IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature)
MPI (Max Plank Institute)
MUP (Multiple use zones)
NGO (Non-Governmental Organization)
NTFP (Non-Timber Forest Products)
UGX (Ugandan Shillings)
UNP (Union Pacific Corporation)
USD (United States Dollars)
UWA (Ugandan Wildlife Authority)
WWF (World Wildlife Fund)

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND: HOW DID WE COME TO KNOW THE MOUNTAIN GORILLA?

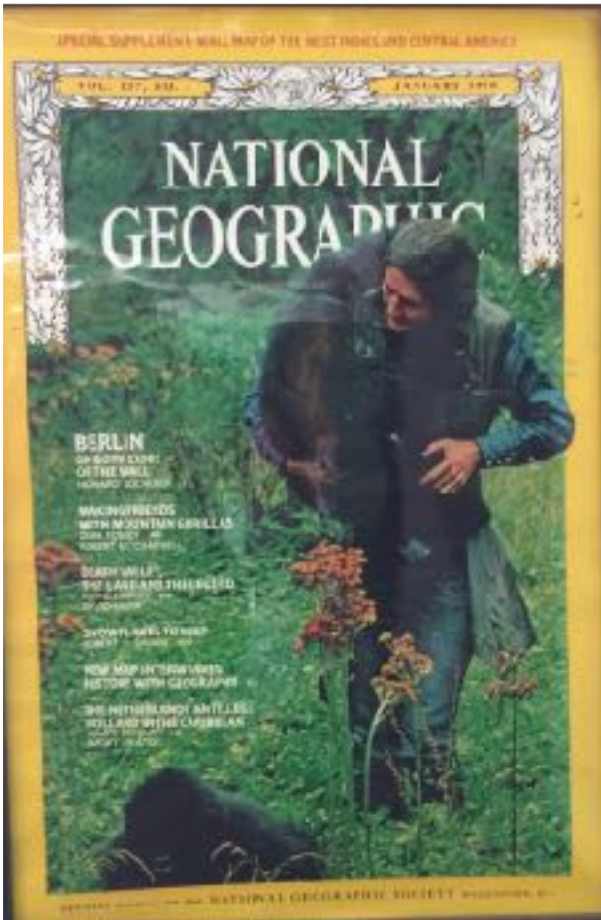


Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund International, Facebook page, published 28th April 2017

The picture above was published on the Facebook page of the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund International, and its description states the following – “Mother's Day is May 14 and time is running out to purchase a mother and infant gorilla "adoption" as a special gift. Get yours today!”¹. This sentence is followed by a link to the official website, where you can pay 50\$ to adopt a gorilla as a mother’s day gift. The adoption money goes into the Fund and helps the protection and study of the mountain gorillas in Rwanda and the DRC.

¹ Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund International. (28 April, 2017) Mother's Day is May 14 and time is running out to purchase a mother and infant gorilla "adoption" as a special gift. Get yours today! <http://dfgi.org/2oFQA1P>
Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/savinggorillas/> (1st May 2017)

But what is important to highlight from this Facebook post is the picture. It is hard not to be mesmerized by this capture of tenderness and love between a mother gorilla and her infant.



Museum of the Karisoke Gorilla Fund International, Musanze, Rwanda. Copyright Isabella Vannucchi 15/11/2016

Gorillas are part of the Hominidae family, which includes the four great apes (gorillas, bonobos, chimpanzees and orangutans) and humans (De Waal, 2005). As such, they are among the species that are closest to us, in terms of genetics and bodily structure, and with which we can easily identify. For this reason, a picture like the one presented above makes the identification process even more immediate, inasmuch as it shows a gentle embrace that a human mother commonly performs with her baby. For the purpose of DFGFI, identification processes alone help to promote awareness and conservation for this endangered species. Indeed the Facebook page followers, by identifying themselves with the image, will feel closer to the animal and its cause, and more prone to help. This

mechanism is significant for the analysis of gorilla conservation and tourism, because as we shall see in the developments of this thesis, human identification with the gorillas represents a crucial motive for its conservation success and worldwide recognition.

Mountain gorillas are still labelled by WWF² and IUCN³ as critically endangered, and their protection is a paramount goal for the governments of their hosting countries. Mountain gorillas (*Gorilla beringei beringei*) are a subspecies of the Gorillas family and live only in the Virunga range on the borders of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Rwanda and Uganda, and in the Bwindi Impenetrable National Park in Uganda (Eckhart and Lanjouw, 2008; Caldecott and Ferris, 2005; Fossey, 1984), the latter being the site of

²http://wwf.panda.org/what_we_do/endangered_species/great_apes/gorillas/mountain_gorilla/

³ <https://www.iucn.org/news/species/201609/four-out-six-great-apes-one-step-away-extinction-%E2%80%93-iucn-red-list>

this research. Mountain gorillas are a major source of income, retrieved through tourism, and for this reason, they are important animals for the countries that host them. Rwanda was the first country to implement gorilla tourism, which came about as a result of the quick decrease in gorilla population in the 70s and 80s and thus the need to increase the funds for their protection. Gorilla tourism became the solution, and in a matter of less than 20 years, it had been established in all the three countries, i.e. 1979 in Rwanda, 1985 in (at the time) Zaire and in 1993 in Uganda (Adams, 2004). The introduction of gorilla tourism represents the major reason behind their safeguard and conservation success, inasmuch as it represents the main source of funds and the reason for the good predisposition towards the primate on behalf of the local population around the Protected Areas. More precisely, as we shall see further on, the development gorilla tourism resulted in the establishment of the national parks and their subsequent restriction for local people to access the protected areas and the natural resources in them. This situation produces dissatisfaction and bad attitudes towards both the parks and the animal. However, in few years the foundation of the tourism system became increasingly entrenched and started generating substantial profits. Thus changing the attitudes and improving local support for the conservation and protection of the mountain gorilla.

Nevertheless, the tangible benefits derived from gorilla tourism are not the only reason behind the success story of gorilla conservation and the worldwide interest for gorilla tourism. Rather, the process of identification above mentioned plays a major role in the sympathy for mountain gorillas, as well as the woman that made them famous – Dian Fossey.

“Between the founding of the Karisoke Research Centre, her book entitled *Gorillas in the Mist*, and the movie of the same name, Fossey and her legacy have done more to raise public awareness than any other person or organization in the world” (*Eckhart and Lanjouw, 2008: p. 34*).

Fossey arrived in East Africa at the end of the 60s, when the population of mountain gorillas was only around 250 individuals between Bwindi and the Virungas. Her passion and love for the animal made her become the ambassador for their protection and conservation. Fossey also enforced one of the longest long-term studies done on an animal species in the world, still on-going on behalf of the researchers at the Karisoke

Research Centre in Rwanda. Indeed, thanks to her efforts and the one of many other international organizations and governmental institutions, the Mountain Gorilla population is now reaching around 900 individuals in total. The success is mainly due to the funding this particular species has acquired. Since the worldwide alert on their endangered situation, mountain gorillas have been subjected to meticulous care and protection.

Mountain Gorillas became particularly famous after a picture of Dian Fossey was published on the cover of January's 1970 National Geographic edition (see the picture on the next page). The picture displayed Fossey with two young orphan gorillas, one walking in front of her and the other one being carried in her arms. Inside the journal, the article displayed pictures of her joyfully playing with the infants, and others of her doing research in the forest, surrounded by a group of wild gorillas. The innocence of the pictures kicked off a wave of curiosity, for at the time, an unknown, and quite feared wild species. Moreover, in 1979, BBC broadcasted the natural documentary series *Life on Earth* with Sir David Attenborough. Specifically, one episode is of notable relevance because it revolves around mountain gorillas in Rwanda, and it features David lying in the middle of a group of gorillas, which are focused on playing with his hair and clothes.

Again, as Fossey's pictures, this episode promoted a human-alike relationship with big, fluffy apes, to which the public was immediately drawn. The curiosity was encouraged by the desire to have the same experience with these primates, and as a consequence, a more eager inclination to protect them. Like David Attenborough explains in the book *The World Atlas of Great Apes and their Conservation*, since the publicity done on behalf of the National Geographic and BBC, many millions of pounds have been raised from all over the world to protect this primate (Caldecott and Miles, 2005). Indeed, the public response to the mountain gorilla cause was very positive, specifically from Western countries, and in a matter of few years, a considerate amount of investment and funding went into the conservation and the protection of the mountain gorilla in the three areas. He also adds that with no doubt, the publicity done to advocate the mountain gorilla plague has been crucial to bringing the safeguard of the species about (Caldecott and Miles, 2005).

However, the international funding appeared not to be sufficient for the protection of the species and its habitat (Eckhart and Lanjouw, 2008). Park staff and equipment needed to be paid and therefore the institutions in charge of the protection of the mountain gorillas

had to provide a solution that could have raised the necessary amount. Consequently, as previously mentioned, the program for gorilla ecotourism was put in place. Groups of tourists would pay money to have the experience they saw on the magazine or the documentary and would have the chance to spend some time with the gorillas in the wild.

Again, on the one hand, this solution resulted in being very positive for the conservationists and the gorillas, but on the other, in some levels, it proved unfavourable for the local populations around the conservation areas. With the introduction of gorilla tourism, the areas containing gorillas turned into national parks, hence becoming inaccessible for the populations living around it. This happened in different moments for the three areas, specifically for BINP it was in 1991 when the park turned from a forest reserve to Bwindi Impenetrable National Park (Bloomley, 2003). Moreover, around the second half of the twentieth centuries, the regions around the 'gorilla' protected areas saw a quick increase in population density around its boundaries (Bloomley, 2003; Namara, 2006), with a consequential increase in the demand of natural resources, yet inaccessible.

Particularly in Uganda around BINP, locals' animosity towards the park authorities gave rise to protests and habitat endangerment, in the form of fires and illegal logging (Namara, 2006). In order to stop the protests and create a more equitable situation, the government of Uganda, together with help of the NGO Care, and the International Gorilla Conservation Programme (IGCP) developed in 1992 a revenue sharing programme and policy. The revenue-sharing programme was established as a mechanism to compensate local populations for their losses and provide them with part of the revenue originated from gorilla tourism (Namara 2006, Kasangaki, et al. 2012, Bitariho, et al. 2016). Rwanda followed the Ugandan example, and in 2005 the revenue-sharing programme was operational around the wildlife conservation areas of the country⁴. This alleviated the spirits of many of the people that were against the presence of the National Parks, yet not impeding the many controversies that surround gorilla conservation and its habitat.

The controversies that gravitate around Mountain Gorillas, as many other problems characterizing our world, concern money. In other words, gorilla tourism now represents a great income capacity for the three countries, and of course as it happens with great quantities of money that need to be redistributed to a correspondingly big group of people, it often converts into a very intricate situation. More specifically indicated by the numbers –

⁴ <http://igcp.org/about/our-work/improving-livelihoods/>



Family in Rewsanziro, Ruhija. Copyright Isabel Vannucchi
23-10-2016



Tourists in the forest. Copyright Isabel
Vannucchi 27-11-2016

Bwindi has around 25 thousand visitors per year and Volcanoes National Park has around 50 thousand, and additionally the gorilla tracking permits are accordingly 650\$ and 1,500\$, per hour with the gorillas⁵.

Because of this substantial amount of revenue and subsequent number of tourists, mountain gorillas have been the subjects of several studies and assessments. Indeed the community-based conservation and the revenue-sharing programs have been the cores of many debates, inasmuch as the subdivision of the revenues coming from gorilla tourism is not always transparent and the various governmental levels are accused of keeping high percentages for themselves and not supply the local communities with what they are entitled to at all. Furthermore, given that they are so profitable, every year more gorilla groups undergo the habituation procedure. The more gorilla groups are available for tourism, the more tourists are allowed to come to Uganda, and consequently the more income. And on the other hand, there is also an on-going debate (Ferriss, Robbins and Williamson; 2005) whether the continuous turn-up of visitors to gorillas groups is, in fact, detrimental, in terms of the animal distress, change in behaviour and disease transmission.

It, therefore, becomes more straightforward to glimpse the controversies around gorilla tourism. On one hand, there are the political issues associated with the designation of the National Park, on the other the economic element, which, in some instances that will

⁵ The price used to be 750\$, but has recently been doubled. <http://www.newtimes.co.rw/section/article/2017-05-07/211969/>

be further analysed, is contributing to the antagonism of the local population towards the National Park. The communities around the park also suffer from crop raiding, and although the revenue-sharing programme entails the compensation of these losses, the affected households are never granted the promised amount. Besides, the average income for the households surrounding the park is around 1\$ a day, therefore we are dealing with families that live on subsistence farming, for which crop raiding means tremendous losses. And finally, opposed to this situation we have international tourists (mainly from Western countries), who pay 650\$ to stay one hour with the gorillas. I believe this gives an idea of the paradoxical situation we're presented with gorilla tourism in Uganda.

Additionally, the last point I will analyse in the development of this thesis is the anthropomorphization of the gorilla. Anthropomorphism is the process by which humans attribute human mental states and features to nonhuman animals, such as thoughts, feelings, motivations, beliefs, bodily shapes and appearance (Serpell, 2002). If we go back to the identification process, anthropomorphism rests at its basis. Us as humans are prone to identify our human features in other beings. As a consequence, we tend to become more familiar or at least we have higher tendency to feel compassion or love for species that are more similar to us. There are species that are more subjected to our anthropomorphization, such as those to which we can identify with and that mostly resemble us, primates are the most notable example. These species are also defined as 'charismatic species' since they display some "aesthetic characteristics of a species' appearance and behaviour, which trigger strong emotional responses in those involved in biodiversity conservation" (Lorimer, 2007; p. 918). The characteristics they usually refer to are encompassed by adjectives such as *cute*, *cuddly*, *fierce*, or *dangerous*.

On the other hand, we have other animals towards which we do not feel any affinity. The example given by Lorimer are insects, which, because of "their radical alterity to humans in terms of size, ecology, physiology, aesthetics, and modes of social organisation, engender popular feelings of antipathy and distrust" (Lorimer, 2007; p. 920). According to this theory, we can assume that gorillas, being primates, being fluffy, very big and also dangerous, are the perfect subjects of this mechanism. This is important because it is the basis of their successful conservation results. Humans around the world identify themselves with mountain gorillas and therefore are more inclined to help and protect them, as well as be able to see them in person, the picture presented is an example.

Yet, gorillas have for long been classified as dangerous species and a threat to humans, the imagery of the famous King Kong is the perfect illustration. It used to be an animal people were mostly scared of and that provoked fear and images of wild ferocity. Nevertheless, since the efforts of Fossey and others before and after her, to change the gorillas' imagery, a growing attraction towards this species has developed. These figures main goal was to demonstrate the vulnerable character of the animal, showing that in fact, mountain gorillas are extremely gentle creatures, with strong familiar bonds and individual characters. Indeed they accomplished their intent since in the matter of few years people started being more interested in these primates and began coming into East Africa and pay money to see them in the wild. Again, the reason rests on those images published in the 70s and 80s, as well as new popular discourses about conservation and wilderness protection, which will be further analysed in the following chapters.

RESEARCH QUESTION

Considering all these aspects of gorilla tourism and conservation, the objective of this research is to combine the three dimensions I discussed in the introduction, i.e. political, economic, and anthropomorphic, in order to understand how international and local groups of stakeholder identify the mountain gorilla in BINP in Uganda, specifically Ruhija Sub-county.

More in detail the research will be explored through the following question:

'How do different local, national and international groups of stakeholders construct and relate to the mountain gorilla as a charismatic species in BINP?'

Through this question, my aim is, first of all, provide a differentiation of local, national and international. Alternatively, I want to investigate whether the local community, specifically the households living around the park, have different attitudes and perceptions of the mountain gorilla, in comparison to national and international stakeholders. This is done with the aim of unfolding possible power relations in the discourses that characterize gorilla conservation and tourism.

Secondly, with the term 'construct', I refer to the theory by which, as humans, we socially construct reality and its features. Or in social constructivist terms, the reality is constructed through human activity and members of a society together invent the

properties of the world (Kim, 2001). As such, I will try to demonstrate that in the past 100 years, people have constructed the identity of the ape, and that its construction has changed through time, culture and location. In other words, I believe that local people have constructed the imagery of the gorilla in a different manner than that of National or international stakeholders, yet this has changed since global assumption about wildlife conservation became more prominent. Furthermore, the difference in the way people identify the mountain gorillas, sequentially alters the way the animal is perceived; and in turn, it influences the manner in which people relate to the animal. Additionally, the manner in which different stakeholders relate to the animal may shield specific interests. The interests behind the mountain gorillas can include political, economic, or conservationist concerns.

Moreover, although I mentioned it, I will not utilize the theory of social constructivism for the analysis of this topic, since this approach focuses on the “importance of culture and context in understanding what occurs in society and constructing knowledge based on this understanding” (Kim, 2001; p. 2). Therefore, it focuses more on societal knowledge production, and reality in a more general manner. While my interest focuses more on the construction of the identity of the mountain gorilla in particular, and more specifically, the process by which certain discourses and perception of mountain gorilla have prevailed over others. That is to say that through the history of the mountain gorilla, certain discourses have acquired more power than others, and successively they have either been imposed or adopted by less influential agents. To explain such concept I will employ World Society Theory, according to which “many features of the contemporary nation-state derive from worldwide models constructed and propagated through global cultural and associational processes” (Meyer et al., 1997; p. 144). Consequently, if we apply this notion to the identity construction of the mountain gorilla, we can conclude that certain ‘global’ ideas and imagery of the charismatic ape have been propagated and attuned with worldwide models, legitimated by certain global actors. As we shall soon see, the current popular image and discourses of the mountain gorilla have been constructed by the prominent figures that worked for and achieved their protection and conservation in the 70s and 80s. Successively, according to my point of view, national actors (of the countries that host this primate) adopted the same discourses to acquire certain economic goals.

Finally, in the question I want to emphasize that the mountain gorilla is a charismatic species, using Lorimer’s definition “popular species that serve as symbols and rallying points to stimulate conservation awareness and action” (2007; p. 923). As I will analyse in

the following chapters, in the last thirty years, gorillas have increased in popularity and as a consequence have become a popular species, which has been utilized by different agencies to invoke the protection of the ecosystems in which they live and the safeguard of other species' habitat (Home et al., 2009).

RESEARCH PURPOSE AND RATIONALE

The main topic of my thesis focuses on the national, local, and international attitudes and perceptions of mountain gorillas. Given the issues evolving around the BINP and the conservation of the gorilla, the intent of this research is to understand the relationships at stake between the various human agencies that are related or affected by ecotourism and conservation and the Mountain Gorilla. Because gorilla conservation has played an important role in the last half century, in terms of history, social fabric, politics, and economics of this region of Eastern Africa, this research aims for a better understanding of the gorilla-human relationship. Or in other words, this research tries to understand how people construct the imagery of the mountain gorillas and what are the different ways in which they relate to the animal, focusing on the stakeholders that are mainly affected by their presence.

The studies done on attitudes and perceptions of wildlife and natural conservation are not an innovation, particularly about conservation and protected areas in the African continent (just to present a few: Gadd, 2005, Mehta et al., 1998; Hussain et al., 2015; Gillingham et al., 2003; Infield, 1988; Black et al.; 2016; Weladji et al., 2003). On top of this, the studies done on mountain gorillas and local communities in Bwindi are numerous (Hamilton, *et al.*, 2000; Williams and Infield, 2003; Adams, 2004; Namara, 2006; Laudati, 2010; Bloomley, 20013; Kasangaki, *et al.*, 2012; Tumusiime, *et al.*, 2014; Bitariho, *et al.*, 2015). However, from my personal experience, I did not find any analysis concerning attitudes towards them or the way the identity of the gorilla is constructed accordingly by different groups or actors. Therefore I believe that what differentiates my research from the others is the distinction of the different perception and attitudes the stakeholders, around gorilla tourism and conservation, have towards the mountain gorillas, and how this may be influenced by the spreading of determined, powerful discourses and imageries of the protected animal.

Furthermore, when reviewing the several studies done in BINP they all concern the local people's dissatisfactory attitudes towards the park and the system that surrounds it. Therefore, if the problem is that local communities are discontented with the current revenue sharing programme, or with the crop raiding they are subjected to, or with loss of natural resources, then I believe it is necessary to understand what are their attitudes towards the very basic reason for all these issues – the mountain gorilla. What is lacking in present analysis and assessments is the voice of the people directly involved in gorilla tourism and conservation. When facing an issue (i.e. illegal poaching or park encroachment), I believe it is necessary to analyse it by starting from the direct subjects and, of course, the object of the matter – again, local communities and mountain gorillas. Therefore I began the research with the initial aim of understanding what are the general attitudes and perceptions of Mountain gorillas in BINP. And the reason behind this choice is: I believed that by understanding what local people think about the gorillas, I would have grasped in a better way the causes behind the animosity towards gorilla tourism and the gazettement of the park. In order to suggest possible solutions to better protect the animal and its environment.

Moreover, because my assumptions prompted me to think that local's attitudes were different from international ones (i.e. tourists, NGOs, and other international agencies), I considered right the idea of interviewing different groups of stakeholders so to have a more inclusive and uniform idea of a heterogeneous group of participants. The main goal of this second point was to investigate possible power relations among locals and international stakeholders, and their connection with the primate. If power relations were present, then I would have had a stronger argument in favour of local populations losses caused by international pressure to conserve the mountain gorilla. And therefore, contribute to a potential solution to a more inclusive system where the local population can truly benefit from the conservation of the mountain gorilla and be more participant in its protection.

However, the situation I encountered was not as I was expecting. Power relations were present but in another form, and, in my research site, attitudes towards mountain gorillas were positive, among all the different stakeholders. At the moment there are no instances of threats to gorillas or their habitat, and the levels of forest encroachment have been very low. The security in the park is well maintained, and, for what I witnessed, gorillas are extremely secure and well looked after. Therefore, I decided that I would rather

concentrate on how the perceptions and attitudes differ among four groups of stakeholders (local communities, tourists, entrepreneurs, and conservationists), and how these differences influence their relationship with the animal.

But more importantly, the prerequisite for the analysis of this topic is that discourses about mountain gorillas have been constructed and promoted by a number of actors, and according to World Society Theory, these actors have been able to construct globalized and more homogeneous discourses that have been adopted by local actors, in this case, the Uganda government and UWA. And more specifically, as we shall see in the development of the thesis, the homogenization and globalization of discourses and imagery of wildlife conservation and action were promoted by international NGOs and other international associations (Meyer et al., 1997). As indeed was the case of gorilla conservation, advanced by IGCP, Flora & Fauna International, and WWF. Consequently, if I analyse how different stakeholders perceive the animal and how they relate themselves to it, I will also be able to show how different stakeholders socially construct the idea of the gorilla. And in turn, studying this process will highlight the discourses around gorilla conservation and tourism that prevail. As well as possible power relations, presented by the different manners people talk about the mountain gorilla and which can unfold hidden interests towards the animal. My intent is to show how power relations are important in the creation of beliefs about what surrounds us as humans, and how they influence the way we perceive and think. Furthermore, in my opinion, this analysis is relevant because at the bottom of power relations usually there are some interests, and only the interests on behalf of the people that hold power are the ones that will be pleased.

To conclude this section, the aim of this research is to try to demonstrate how Mountain Gorillas in BINP are the subject of a multitude of different interests coming from different stakeholders. And how, although it might sound threatening for the animal wellbeing, it is not the case, being the interest of the ones who hold more power, to keep them safe and thriving.

CHAPTERS DIVISION

The thesis will unfold, after this one, with another five chapters. By doing so I will have the opportunity to focus one chapter for the methodology, another the three chapters

for the three analytical elements – political, economic, and anthropomorphic. And then lastly, a chapter for the discussion and conclusion.

Chapter two will focus on the methodology, therefore I will present all the research decisions I took in order to investigate the topic of my research. I will first explain what research design I choose and the reasons why I find it appropriate. This being a qualitative research, will adopt the corresponding guidelines. Indeed, I will explore the methods used during my time in the field and the methods used to analyse my data. As well as the main theories and concepts employed as lenses in the development of the research question.

Chapter three will explore the section on the politics behind gorilla tourism and conservation. I will analyse how politics performs a relevant role, and how the securitization of the park for the protection of the gorilla, in fact, hides strong power structures and, in some way, an opportunity for land grabbing and appropriation for the Ugandan government. Furthermore, as we shall see in this chapter, gorilla conservation had to be implemented in Uganda because of the international pressure to save the close-to-extinct animal. And for this reason, it becomes an international matter, where different gains are at stake. Although it may seem that because the government of Uganda had to comply with the international community request, it was dispossessed of its rights over the park. In fact, gorilla conservation turned out to be very convenient. Giving the high prices paid by tourists to see the gorillas, the profit has become a great asset for the government, which is now struggling to maintain gorilla tourism thriving. For this reason, the political section gives rise to the economic one.

The fourth chapter revolves around the economic element of gorilla tourism and the BINP. As mentioned, the amount of money international tourists pay to see the gorillas is expensive, on top of which there are the travel expenses, accommodation, and food. For some stakeholders, gorilla tourism has become a business; inasmuch as people in the tourist areas around BINP are launching different enterprises such as lodges, craft shops, bars, small grocery stores and cultural centres. We will see in more detail that tourists, not only are boosting the market of these remote villages, but also are creating employment opportunities and infrastructure development.

Chapter five will focus on the anthropomorphic character of the mountain gorillas, which is the human tendency to identify human features in non-human beings (de Waal, 1996; Lorimer, 2007). As a result, when coming across these species, people tend to have more sympathy towards them, which produces a greater desire to be familiar to and save them. Thanks to this mechanism, mountain gorillas have become a celebrated attraction.

Their population numbers have successfully increased, and the reason stands behind the national and international interest and efforts to protect them. Yet, they do not act only as representative for their own species, but for all the species and plants living in their habitat. Therefore they can also serve as 'umbrella species' "those whose area of occupancy or home range are large enough and whole habitat requirement are wide enough that, if they are given a sufficiently large area for their protection will bring other species under their protection" (Ducarme et al., 2013; p. 2).

Finally, the sixth chapter will focus on the discussion and conclusion. This will be done by combining the three elements of analysis of chapters two, three and four, with the corresponding reliable data (interviews, focus groups and participant observation). By doing so, I will more effectively be able to demonstrate how different stakeholders differently construct and relate to the mountain gorilla, and I will substantiate so by employing in a more extensive manner the World Society Theory. This will be advantageous in unfolding possible power relations among the stakeholder groups. The closure of this chapter will be distinguished by the conclusion, in which I will try to substantiate my argument by illustrating what in my opinion are the various interests behind gorillas, as well as proving that some interests happen to be more significant than other, consequently resulting in the establishment of power relations.

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH PLANNING AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

As we saw in the previous chapter, there are a number of incongruences and interesting nuances around gorilla tourism and conservation that make us question the equality of the system. I believe that the economic aspect of gorilla tourism and conservation - is the aspect that emerges as the most conspicuous, specifically in the different ways gorillas serve as a mean to economic gains. Gorillas are used by governments (of the countries that host them), as a source of revenue through gorilla tourism. While, on the other hand, conservation organizations are advertising the endangerment of the gorillas to increase conservation awareness and, as a consequence, boost the funds for gorillas and habitat conservation. However this aspect is not the only relevant one about gorilla conservation and tourism, and, in fact, there are a number of other features that make the system interesting to analyse and question. Therefore, I will try to introduce all the aspects that are relevant for the argument of this thesis, by focusing on the way different stakeholders shape the imagery of the gorilla.

In order to understand how different stakeholders perceive the animal, and grasp possible differences, I decided to divide the research participants into different groups, called stakeholder groups, which will soon be described in the development of this chapter. Furthermore, because I believe gorillas have become the subjects of different interests, which can be economic, political or conservationist, I decided to also investigate the ways the stakeholders relate to the animal. Therefore, not only how the animal is differently perceived by the stakeholders, but also how the people involved in gorilla tourism and conservation orientate towards the primate. In this way, my intent is to unfold possible power relations between the different groups of stakeholders and highlight the different interests within gorilla tourism and conservation. I will do so by concentrating on the discourses that revolve around mountain gorillas, and I will try to highlight the ones that, in my opinion, are more dominant than others. Again, I will do so in order to call

attention to the discourses that exhibit more power than others, and specifically the ones that, in my opinion, have been put into circulation by the more dominant stakeholders.

Finally, the discourses will also exhibit the way the people involved in conservation and tourism relate to the animal. Consequently, I hope to prove that the way people associate with the gorilla displays different concerns. Hence, in this chapter I will present the method I divided the groups of stakeholders. I will also the aspects I decided to analyse about gorilla tourism and conservation, specifically they will be referred as conceptual domains. Furthermore, I will analyse the theories I ascribed to sustain my argument, as well as the methods I used in the field and the limitations I faced in the evolution of this project.

First of all, I want to point out that this is going to be a qualitative research, therefore, it will attempt to unfold, record and reconcile the complexity, the detail and the context of the reality that surrounds us, in this instance the relationship between humans and mountain gorillas. Temple at al. (2002) point out that qualitative research acknowledges the different ways the social world is seen, and that there is no correct way to describe it. I agree with this concept, for my thesis is the result of my understanding of the four months of fieldwork in Uganda, and a chapter of my life that I want to share in a personal style and approach. This being the case, the thesis will adopt the storytelling method of presenting and interpreting the data. It will emerge as being the result of a process of interpretation of reality rather than representation (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2009). Indeed, I will draw on my own experience and the stories the research participants shared with me to make sense of what I observed, and I will include in the narrative my own thought processes (Mahoney, 2007).

Furthermore, telling a story always requires making sense of observations and the interpretation of facts. Hence, my own ways knowing and of gathering information will be very transparent in the storyline, so as to clearly present the process of knowledge production (Mahoney, 2007). I will make use of an openly subjective manner to narrate this story, yet engaging in reflexive examination and consideration of the data I gathered and the ways it has been collected or presented to me. Reflexive methodology requires an awareness of all the nuances that data collection and data interpretation may include, so as to provide more authority to the knowledge production system. Also, to always keep in mind that fieldwork-research, and particularly qualitative research, is never an apolitical, neutral, ideology-free process, and that interpretation is always a subjective way of

creating knowledge (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2009). More specifically, I will analyse the data by portraying or underlining certain discourses and language-in-use that evolve around mountain gorilla conservation and tourism.

For every group of stakeholders (tourists, local community, entrepreneurs, and conservationists) I will transcribe specific information or stories that I find particularly relevant and I will categorize them into the three different chapters or, as previously defined, conceptual domains – political, economic and anthropomorphised, which will soon be analysed. In every chapter, I will present the discourses that relate to the main topic, that is to say, if a participant expresses some information relating to the economic aspect of gorilla tourism, it will be illustrated in the economic chapter, and so on. In this manner, I will categorize all the data into these three main topics, which are all related, influenced and consequential to each other. In other words, as I will try to demonstrate in the development of this thesis, gorilla tourism and conservation is surrounded by, what I determined being, four groups of stakeholders, who all have different interests.

I will now present the structure I used to present my argument. When I organized my research plan with my field supervisor, during my first weeks in the field, I established different groups of research participants. The stakeholders were initially divided into five groups: local community, tourists, entrepreneurs, conservationist and local government. However the latter proved hard to be complete, because the local government figures (different levels of sub-county and village chiefs or chairmen) were not easily reachable. I tried several times to interview them, but they were often not available or not in their offices. I resolved to eliminate the local government group and instead incorporated the few interviews I had already conducted into the other groups.

The stakeholder groups are divided as follows. With “Local Community”, I mean all the people from the villages or parishes around Rujija, who have been willing to answer to my questions. The participants of this group were chosen randomly. My research assistant and I would decide which stakeholder groups to interview each day and take the corresponding route. We would walk around the villages and make a stop at various households to ask if there was anyone available to be interviewed. When the answer was positive we would stop and interview every available person of the family or household, and then move on to the next one. The “Conservationist” group is comprised of individuals coming from three different organizations, namely ITFC, MPI, and UWA. I interviewed researchers, field assistants, office administrators and the director of ITFC. From the MPI I

interviewed the available researchers and two project managers. From UWA I interviewed the staff that were available each time I went to the Ruhija's UWA Headquarters, such as anti-poaching patrol rangers, tourist rangers, trackers, community rangers and the warden in charge of the sector. Then, for the "Entrepreneurs" group I based the interviews in Ruhija Canteen (specified in the study site section), where all the shop, bars and tourist lodges or camps are located. Therefore, all the people, who own a business or work for a business that is related or is a result of gorilla tourism, are part of this group. These people often are not locals, they often come from different part of Uganda. Particularly the lodges owners usually come from and reside in Kampala, thus I did not have the chance to interview them. Finally, the last group is represented as the "Tourists", whom I have not been able to personally interview but with whom I conducted the focus groups. The tourists were internationals that come from all over the world.

There is one important thing that needs to be acknowledged about the stakeholder groups division, namely the fact that they are not as clear-cut as I just described. I, indeed, decided to divide the research participants into different groups to have a more coherent idea of the different perceptions and attitudes towards the gorilla, but this does not mean that the groups are sharply divided. That is to say, someone from the conservationist group can be also part of the community (since the person can live in, or come from, the area), or that an entrepreneur could also be identified as part of the local community because, again, he or she lives in the area. Indeed, the division is not as straightforward as it seems in the description above. Nevertheless, keeping in mind this characteristic, I employed this system because I believe that to understand the different perceptions and answer my research question, it was necessary to create this division and compare the responses of the different groups.

The above mentioned is the structure I employed in order to gather the data in the field. This structure was characterised by a number of research methods, which will soon be presented in this chapter. But, first I want to introduce the manner in which I decided to analyse the gathered data. The main argument of the thesis is that there are some stakeholders involved in gorilla conservation and tourism that hold more power than others. Specifically, their power is exhibited in the way they have been able to spread or impose certain discourses of gorilla conservation and tourism (mainly Western-centred) over others (mainly local). To support my argument, I will relate to 'World Society Theory'.

This theory, which will function as the overall theoretical umbrella, suggests that there is a world society that follows a set of fundamental principles and models, mainly ontological and cognitive in character, defining the nature and purposes of social actors and action, namely, World Polity. (Boli and Thomas, 1999). What World Society Theory tries to demonstrate is that World Polity is increasingly homogenizing the world society, and that different world actors are dealing with world issues (human rights, environmental changes) in similar manners (Boli and Thomas, 1999). Furthermore, World Society Theory tries to show the importance of International Non-Governmental Organizations in this process. According to World Society Theory, INGOs are creating increasing levels of transnational coalition, and an ever expanding globalised World Society (Tsutsui et al., 2004). This theory helps me to demonstrate the linkages environmental INGOs had with the Ugandan Government for the implementation of gorilla conservation and tourism. And how this implementation has created a more homogenized idea of environmentalism and wildlife conservation among the Ugandan population, hence, the powerful discourses about gorilla conservation and tourism. Indeed Mayer et al. believe that

“An associational system began to develop late in the nineteenth century. Facilitated by the broader world structure, the structure and discourse involved in this associational system clearly led to an expanded wave of intergovernmental treaties and then to an official world intergovernmental environmental system. Only at that point did nation-states begin to formalize environmental issues as central to their internal agenda-setting structures” (Meyer et al., 1997, p. 647).

Thanks to my research, I realised how local people have changed their attitudes and perception of mountain gorillas in BINP and how this change has been influenced by international actors and, later on, from national ones. The ability these actors have had in shaping and spreading these perceptions and imageries of the gorillas brings us back to the subject of power. And here power is not only exercised in the relationship between partners, but it is specifically about the way in which certain actions modify others (Foucault, 1982).

The power, in this case, is represented by discourse. In Foucault's terms “in a society such as ours [Western], but basically in any society, there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterise and constitute the social body, and these relations of

power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse” (Foucault, 1972; p. 93). Following this approach, I believe that the actors, who changed local and international ideas and attitudes towards the mountain gorillas, were able to do so just by spreading certain discourses, specifically Western-centred environmental discourses of wildlife conservation. These discourses were first employed by international actors in order to conserve and protect the animal, and then successively by local ones, who were more interested in the economic income derived from gorilla tourism. Both these approaches brought an ever-increasing protection of the gorilla, particularly by those who wanted to keep pursuing their interest. Namely, I am talking about conservation organization such as IGCP, WWF, FFI, in terms of gorilla safeguard, and the Ugandan Government and UWA in terms of tourism income. I also believe that the success of gorilla conservation and tourism is consequential to the power behind the discourses. In other words, if the discourses were not provided by powerful actors, they would not have had the success that is currently manifested in the amount of international tourists going each year to see the gorilla, and in the success story of their conservation.

In order to demonstrate the process of the homogenization of ideas about wildlife conservation and the globalized approach towards wildlife protection, I resolved to divide the analysis of gorilla tourism and conservation in three different domains. Indeed, I will develop my argument by focusing on three different elements that revolve around mountain gorillas: political, economic and anthropomorphism, discussed in chapters three, four and five respectively. These three chapters will contemporarily conduct the analysis and presentation of the research data.

Chapter three will explore the political component of gorilla tourism and conservation; it will present the data that demonstrate the political nuances behind gorilla tourism and corresponding theories that support my argument. In this chapter I will relate to some theories of Political Ecology, Ecotourism (Peluso, 1993; Neumann, 2011), *Ecolonization* and land grabbing, in contemporary Uganda (Carmody and Taylor, 2016). Chapter four will focus on the economic aspect of gorilla tourism, and demonstrate how gorilla conservation has become a neoliberal machine, where the gorillas have turned into a commodity that different agents use to their advantage (Blomley, 2003; Hatfield, 2004; Namara, 2006; Laudati, 2010; Busher et al., 2012). Finally, chapter five will converge on the anthropomorphization of the mountain gorilla. It will explore the theories of

anthropomorphised animals (De Waal, 1996, 2005; Serpell, 2002; Root-Bernstein et al., 2013). Mountain gorillas are also a flagship or charismatic species, and they are adopted as symbols to stimulate conservation awareness and action (Ducarme et al., 2013; Lorimer, 2007). These three chapters will help me in the analysis progress by conveying all the data I collected, together with supporting my argument of hidden power-relations behind gorilla tourism and conservation, which will be developed in the conclusion. The conclusion section will finally summarize the main argument of the thesis by wrapping up with the World Society Theory and how this theory combines the previous three chapters.

METHODS

This is a qualitative research, and therefore I employed a number of methods in order to gather the necessary data. The three methods I employed during my time in the field have been semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and participant observation. But before delving into the description of the various methods and how they have been utilized, I think it is important to specify that when employing qualitative approaches, one leaves for the field with a number of set ideas on how the research is going to develop and how the data collection process will look like. Indeed, the research proposal has the exact intent of organizing your analytical thoughts and creating a programme on how to proceed. However, what I experienced, and from what I understood from many conversations with other academics that likewise struggled, the process is not really so flawless. My encounter with the field was surely not as planned and therefore needed to be changed accordingly. Although it may sound discomfiting, it is, in fact, a natural part of the research process, and it turned out to be useful for the development of the research. Indeed due to the changes, the research was adjusted in line with the site and the available data to be collected, rendering it more solid and authentic.

The initial research main assumption is an example. I left for the field with the assumption that local people around BINP would have negative attitudes towards the National Park and the mountain gorilla, because of the blocked access to natural resources and land. Yet, as soon as I arrived I realised that the contrary was instead the case, in general the attitudes towards the gorilla in BINP are positive. For this reason, I had to change the research focus and question, as well as what came afterwards as the analysis. The surprise to find a situation that was, in fact, opposite from what I studied and

expected, made me eager to investigate and justify why the condition was rather different from what I initially perceived.

The second example is that I thought I could easily walk around the area of the canteen and the surrounding villages, close to the research centre, and interview the people I found on my way. Indeed, this was a very naïve assumption, which for a first-time-field-researcher I think it can be overlooked. I eventually realised that I needed a permit to carry out any type of research in this area and that speaking English was not enough if I wanted to interview and explain my research to local people. Therefore in order to commence my research, I needed to apply for a research permit, which took around five weeks to be processed and accepted. This helped me get used to the area, understand how gorilla tourism and conservation were carried out from a more internal perspective, get to know people around me and do networking. In terms of the language barrier, I was kindly helped by my research supervisor and the senior administrative assistant of ITFC, who advised me on a research assistant. Having a research assistant from the village, who people in the area consequently knew, not only helped me in terms of translation but also in guiding me through the village and the various households, shops or lodges. Without my research assistant it would have been really hard to find participants, and most importantly, to properly present them my research aims and the reason for me to ask them such questions.

Nonetheless, after rearranging some of the initial research programme, I began the interviews around one month and a half after my arrival in Uganda. In this period of time I was able to do most part of the participant observation, and my location was advantageous in this sense. Living in close contact with both ITFC and MPI staff provided me with some insights I would not have collected otherwise. While waiting for the UWA permit I accessed the ITFC library where I analysed some of their own publications (to cite just a few: Bitariho et al, 2016; Olupot et al, 2009; Babaasa et al, 2015; Twinamatsiko et al, 2014), as well as other publications on gorillas and ecotourism (to cite just a few: Lindberg et al, 1993; Caldecott et al, 2005; Eckhart et al, 2008). This period of time helped me in organizing a more detailed plan of action for my research, and focus my attention on what I found particularly relevant and interesting to investigate about mountain gorilla tourism and conservation.

Once I received the UWA permit I was able to start the interviews. Together with my research assistant and others from ITFC staff, we translated the list of questions into Bakiga, the local language. I needed the help of the research assistant with two groups of

stakeholders, the local community and the entrepreneurs. For the other two, conservationists and tourists, I was able to conduct the interviews or the focus groups by myself in English. The interviews carried out with my research assistant, Levious, were executed as follows. First of all, he would hand to the participant the consent form to be filled and signed. When the participant did not speak English, Levious would translate every point of the consent form and would help in the compilation process. Once the participant would accept the terms of the interview, Levious would start asking the questions in Bakiga, wait for the answer from the participants, translate the answers to me in English, and while I would write down the answer in my notebook, he would move on to the next question. The interviews were around 30-40 minutes long, inasmuch as the question were structured but would change according to some answers or some other interesting topics for discussion. The system helped us being fairly quick and systematic, thus giving us the chance to complete a relatively big number of interviews, which will be specified further on in the result section. Then, with respect to the other two groups, I would conduct the interview myself and write down the answers in the meanwhile the participant was answering. Doing the interviews myself would provide me more chances to scrutinize on particular topics or ask the participant to explain in details notable points, consequently rendering the interviews usually longer than the ones carried out with my research assistant.

Furthermore, the interviews where either previously arranged, or directly carried out, when the participant was immediately available. With the local community, my research assistant would introduce my research and me, and would ask whether the participant had time and was available to be interviewed. In the case the participant was available we would sit down and complete the interview. If the case were the opposite, more often with the entrepreneurs because busy working, we would ask for a more convenient time and arrange a meeting.

On the other hand, for the interviews with the conservationist group, I would arrange a time and a place with the staff of ITFC and MPI because they were often either in the field or engaged in the office. While for the UWA staff I would walk to the Ranger's Post and interview any ranger who was available. A different situation occurred with the groups of the tourist. After having lingered for a while at the rangers post and having observed the habits of the tourists I realised that with them I would not be able to have the necessary time to conduct the interview. The reason behind this is the strict schedule the tourists are subjected to either by their tourist guides or by their own holiday plans. By observing the

usual daily system at the Ranger's Post I noticed how the tourist would rush away as soon as the debriefing moment was done and they would have gathered the energy to stand up



Garden in Katoma, Ruhija. Copyright Isabel Vannucchi
07-10-2016

again. Therefore I needed to find a solution to overcome this time constraint. The gorilla tracking experience is characterized by a meeting time at 8:00 am at the ranger's post, where the tourists are subdivided for each group of gorillas. When the groups are divided the ranger, who is tasked with the tracking, explains the rules, gives information about the gorillas and the habitat, and ensures that all the

tourists are capable and ready to face the hard walk. After this, the groups leave for the track. At their return, there is the debriefing time, where the rangers thank and praise the group on their successful gorilla track and the certificates are delivered to each tourist who completed the expedition. As soon as this is completed, the tourists rush back to where they sojourn, which is either back in Kabale, or Buhoma, or few in Ruhija.

That being the case, I had to find a way to impede them to hurry and interview them. I decided that the best way was to do focus groups so that I could quickly grasp the most important information and discuss the main topics of the research. I would wait for them to come back from the track, participate in the debriefing moment, where the ranger would kindly introduce me to the group and explain my presence. After that I would offer to the group the chance to stay and participate, who had time (practically all the people to whom I suggested it) remained seated, signed the consent form and participated to the discussion. This system worked out perfectly and in one day I could do up to four focus groups.

Moreover, as previously mentioned, participant observation was a significant part of the research process and, particularly due to my position in ITFC I was able to witness many useful instances and gather relevant information. Indeed living with the researchers and the staff of both ITFC and MPI gave the opportunity to get to know in a faster manner the tourism and conservation system, as well as many other aspects of the National Park. I also had the fortuity to spend time in the field (forest) with both researchers and tourist.

Thanks to this, I was able to achieve one of my initial goals, namely, to observe how different stakeholders behave with the animal and the opposite. With a research like this, I believed it was necessary to witness the relationship between the gorilla and the people involved in their wellbeing and tourism. Also, being the gorilla effectively a big and wild animal, I wanted to personally verify how it feels to be in their presence. The experience in the forest was indeed spectacular. I felt extremely fortunate to have the chance to witness what both gorilla tourism and conservation imply, and I trust it was a necessary means to understand how the gorilla is perceived.

The first time I went into the forest, I decided to follow the first group of trackers with the researchers. The first group leaves the ranger's post early in the morning, at around 7.15 am, it tracks the gorillas and informs the tourist trackers of the location, so that when they come with the tourists they know which route to take and the track results easier. The gorillas are tracked every single day of the year, thus the first group of trackers' first step is to go where the gorillas have been left the day before. They start the proper track from that point, where usually they find the nest the gorillas have built for the night before. From the nest, they follow the trails until the group is found. This happens for all the four habituated groups of gorillas, every day. The fact that I went with the first group meant that I had to follow the rangers while they were tracking, therefore, as it may happen, walking up and down the steep hillsides. A task for which I had been psychologically prepared for, but surely not physically. The hills are so steep that sometimes you have to climb up or let yourself slide down. The vegetation, particularly the vines and thorny plants, is so thick that sometimes you have to crawl on the floor or climb to then jump on the other side. Moreover, the forest floor changes constantly and your walking pattern has to change accordingly. If the vegetation is more of the thicket kind, then you have a bit more grip with your feet, but if the vegetation is characterised by vine-covered vegetation, then you keep slipping and fall into holes, from which you have to find the strength to pull yourself out of. Undoubtedly I remember it as a very tough event, that required a lot of physical strength, yet extremely rewarding and naturally unmatched. The smells, colours, and texture of the habitat are delightful, and spending time and being so close to the gorillas is so fascinating it is even too hard to explain to whom has not experienced it. Certainly, the first time was really hard, I recall a moment during the tracking where one of the rangers turned to me and saw that my face was turning purple and that I was definitely lacking oxygen, and stopped the group to let me recover. Yet, as soon as we arrived at the gorillas I felt a strong gratifying feeling.

I went tracking four times and I had the chance to observe researchers, rangers, porters and tourists with the gorillas, one time I was lucky to stay with the gorillas for five hours. The researchers have to observe the gorillas for four hours, and if the tourists come to the group they have to stop for that hour. During that time, the researchers follow the group wherever they go and keep track of the behaviours. The times I went with the researchers I would follow them, and as soon the tourists would arrive I would follow the tourists with their leading ranger. During the time I spent with the gorillas I learned a lot about their diet and the plants they eat (sometimes trying some of them myself), their daily routine, the group's social structure and their individual characters.

Finally, as a normal research requires, I made use of secondary sources such as books, articles, websites and social networks, to gather information and be inspired to write my thesis. There are three of these that I think are more worthy of note than others. First of all, there is a book, I was able to access in the ITFC library, titled *Mountain Gorillas: Biology, Conservation, and Coexistence* (2008), by Gene Eckhart and Annette Lanjouw. This book was a perfect source to gather the information I needed on gorilla's behaviour, biology, history and conservation. I can say that it is the source I used most for these topics, and for this reason, it is the one that has been cited several times thought the thesis. The other work I majorly relied on is *A Transnational Wildlife Drama: Dian Fossey, Popular Environmentalism, and the Origins of Gorilla Tourism* (2015), by Marguerite S. Shaffer. Shaffer analyses the impactful role Dian Fossey played in the introduction of gorilla tourism and conservation in the same way I perceive it. For this reason, I greatly base my analysis of the anthropomorphic character of the gorilla on her work, and again I cite her several times because she expresses concepts that I believe perfectly argument this thesis. And as the last source, there is the Facebook page of the *Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund International*, which, through their daily updates and pictures, notably inspired me.

LIMITATIONS AND POSITIONALITY

As often happens in fieldwork-research, one has to deal with some challenges and overcome some obstacles. In fact, because I employ a reflexive approach it is necessary and appropriate to classify the features that demonstrate this quality. As we shall see in this section, I experienced some research limitations, which I do not regret and in fact, I feel is a necessary feature of proper fieldwork.

1) Research topic and methods

One of the limitations was indeed the research topic. Before I left for the field and when I decided to concentrate on Mountain Gorillas I knew it would have been difficult to both find a research location and see the gorillas themselves. In fact, I left with the certainty that I would have never been allowed to enter the forest if not by paying normal tourist prices (certainly over my research budget). Nevertheless, I insisted and tried my best to accomplish my intent. The first month and a half, of waiting for my research permit, gave me the opportunity to test the waters and understand how I should have proceeded. For long I did not ask to go and see the gorillas because I understood since the very beginning that it is a very sensitive topic and they do not let you do it just because of networking (unfortunately what I was hoping for). Hence I decided to wait and see what the situation was after I got my research permit. Indeed the situation changed, inasmuch I had to pay a relatively big amount of money just to be able to conduct the research in the surrounding communities. Since I paid the share to conduct the research outside the forest, I just had to add another small amount to be able to conduct research also inside. Once I paid and the warden approved, I was then able to go and see the gorillas. However, before this was agreed, I participated at a meeting in ITFC where some of the most important figures of Bwindi were present, such as ITFC staff, MPI staff (Martha Robbins included) and a number of wardens from the four sectors. The meeting had been organised by Mr Aggrey Rwetsiba (UWA Senior Monitoring and Research Coordinator), third in terms of importance in the whole UWA management staff, indeed a very influential person in the field. The meeting evolved in a very patronizing way on his part, and everyone who participated was evidently distressed. He was particularly harsh towards me because he believed I acted in a negligible manner, as I did not apply for a research permit before arriving. He also took the advantage of the situation to underlie that everything happening inside the National Park was under UWA surveillance and that nothing that was not under UWA regulation had to occur. After which he added that he did not want in any kind of circumstance to find out that I went into the forest without paying the appropriate tourist amount. In other words, he did not want to witness any situation where due to networking and friendship any person was allowed to do something he did not pay or apply for. He undoubtedly thought that because I applied to do research among the

surrounding communities of Ruhija I had no authority to conduct research inside the park. If so I had to pay more or go with the tourist. After this intimidating experience, I had the certainty that I would have never managed to go into the park without paying the respectively tracking permit. Fortunately, later on, I talked to the warden and when he understood my research intent to observe tourists, researchers and UWA staff in the presence of the gorillas, he allowed me to go into the forest four times. Have I not found someone so considerate I would have never managed to gather the information I have now, and my research would have gone in quite a different direction.

Moreover, as I previously explained in the methods section, interviewing the tourists proved much harder than expected. Consequently making me change the research orientation in comparison to the other groups. With the other three groups (local community, entrepreneurs, and conservationists) I had more time to conduct the research, thus gather more information and also more homogenous among the groups, in terms of questions and topics. With the tourists, the time was less and I the discussion developed differently. Therefore the data for the tourist groups cannot be labelled as being the same as for the other groups. But I am confident that I touched upon all the most relevant topics and features, and that I will be able to compare it with the other groups by any means.

2) Age, gender, ethnicity and location

In terms of limitations, there are three features a researcher needs to take into consideration when doing research in another country or another continent: age, gender and ethnicity. None of these elements has been an issue during my time in the field, although they may have influenced part of the data. Again, in order to have a reflexive approach “researchers need to reflect on the ways in which they, as individuals with social identities and particular perspectives, have an impact on the interpersonal relations of fieldwork” (Temple et al, 2002; p. 11). Before starting the research I was afraid that some of the participants would not have taken seriously me and my work because of my age and gender. Instead, I immediately realised that this was not the case. Throughout my time in the field, I mainly witnessed interest and curiosity towards the topic of my research and my work, on behalf of all the different groups of stakeholder. Indeed, I was pleased that the participants were generally enthusiastic about my research topic and happy to share their opinions with me, unconditionally among females or males participants.

On the other hand, I believe my ethnicity had a strong effect on the attitudes people had towards me. Particularly for what regards the group of the local community. For instance, it happened more than once that Levious would enter a household and introduce me before I would enter. Most times the attitude towards my research assistant was not particularly interested, however, it would drastically change as soon as they would see me. They would joyfully invite me inside and offer me a seat, sometimes even food. Some women we interviewed were so excited to have me in their household that they would thank me for my presence and hug me or feel my hands. I believe that in some of these instances it was sincere enjoyment to have a white person in their households, in others instead, the pleasure was more driven by the idea of having something in return. More than once, before accepting to be interviewed, people would ask Levious if they would get money or something else in return for their time. Only twice, after my research assistant let them know that there was nothing to reciprocate, the persons refused to participate. Another example is the Sub-county chairman that, after concluding the interview, he told me to write down a number of requests he had on behalf of his community. The requests were a secondary school, better health facility, better transportation, and acknowledge at an international level that Ruhija, as one of the four sectors, was doing really well in terms of conservation and development. He told me to advertise Ruhija's situation where I come from so that I could find some donors, who could invest in them. It shows that just because of my ethnicity he thought that I could find a way to find some investments for his community.

Finally, still in term of ethnicity, sometimes it was self-evident that some participants gave me answers they expected me to want. In other words, just for the fact that I was white and that I was residing in ITFC (research centre, where all the international researchers stay), they classified me as part of the group that was in Ruhija to promote and supervise gorilla conservation and tourism. Thus it would happen that I would receive extremely positive answers, which sometimes sounded forced. I do not doubt no one's good predisposition towards the gorillas, however, sometimes it sounded somehow exaggerated. For example, some participants would make sure to tell me more than once during the conversation that they did not do anything illegal inside the forest as if they regarded me as being there to control their actions. Then, another feature of my fieldwork that may have influenced the responses was my position, or better, the fact that my residency took place exclusively in ITFC. Staying in ITFC provided me with many insights about the state of the research currently being carried out in Bwindi and with the gorillas,

and facts that were relevant for getting an overall understanding of the dynamics related to gorilla conservation and tourism. However, my position was completely different for the other locations in which I conducted the research, such as the villages, lodges and UWA headquarters. In these instances, my point of view was no longer from within, as it was in ITFC, but it was more external. Hence, the fact that I was based in ITFC over these other sites, though equally relevant for the research, changed the point of view I acquired of Ruhija, as well as the standpoint the research participants had of me. That is to say that if I were to live inside the community I would have most probably gathered different data, than the one I gathered by just going into the village for the interviews.

Therefore, I believe that my age, gender, ethnicity and position in the community influenced some of the answers and the consequent data and that the research participants, because of these four traits about me, have accordingly given me specific answers.

3) Language and translator



Levious carrying out an interview in Rwesanziro, Copyright Isabel Vannucchi 24-10-2016

“Language is an interactive, cultural phenomenon, not a transparent medium to be controlled by the researcher” (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2009; p. 243), as such language, in cross-cultural research may represent a limitation. For my personal case, language was a limitation inasmuch as most of the participants from the local community group did not speak English, and therefore I could not perform the interviews myself. As previously mentioned, this is one of the reasons I needed a local research assistant. Which was a considerable advantage since my research assistant was able to conduct the research by himself, in a quicker manner and with more reliability in terms of translating the information. The participants, not only would feel at ease because they knew him and therefore were more confident, but also made the answer process more straightforward because in their own language. In many instances, it was clear that the interviewees were more confident to converse with my research assistant, than with me. On the one hand, because it happened more than once that the participants, again still from the local community group, were shy and embarrassed to talk to me. In more than one occasion the participant, particularly females, mentioned to Levious that they were afraid of saying the wrong things or that the question were too hard for them to answer. And on the other, they would talk more freely, as they were talking in their own language.

However, for a researcher, it is very important to take into consideration that an interpreter might alter the meaning of some of the answers. The translator, in reflexive-quantitative methodology, has to be acknowledged as a key-informant, rather than just a translator, “Like researchers, interpreters bring their own assumptions and concerns to the interview and the research process. The research thus becomes subject to ‘triple subjectivity’ (the interactions between research participant, researcher and interpreter)” (Temple et al., 2002; p. 11). As an example, in order to be fast in the interview process, it would happen that my research assistant would translate to me only part of the answer, some parts he found more relevant in comparison to the others. In that case, I would sometimes ask him to elaborate the answer and tell me everything the participant said. Another example is given by an occasion when, after I demonstrated to be pleased with one of the answers, my research assistant, in order to please me again, aimed at obtaining the same answers from other participants, influencing the natural answering process. And this is not the only instance, Levious followed this mechanism more than once, indeed I started realising that he would discard some of the information that he did not believe was necessary, without even asking me.

Furthermore, due to this mechanism, the interviews eventually became shorter and shorter because the research assistant was influencing the interview to the point that the answers were all very strict and similar to each other. In a way, I take the responsibility for this because I might have lead Levios to think that this was the approach I wanted him to engage in. Furthermore, I believe it is an interesting feature of the research because my research assistant was not objectively passing the data to the researcher, contrarily he acted as an interpreter himself, giving subjective meaning to the gathered information. Therefore it is fascinating what Levios, not only as my research assistant but also a fundamental part of the community, thought was important for my research. There is no doubt that the interviews I performed have different nuances than the ones Levios carried out. It is inevitable that being the research mine and knowing exactly what kind of information I am looking for will make the interview structure different from another person, in this case, my research assistant, who has his own ideas about the topic and the way the



The road to Ruhija. Copyright Isabel Vannucchi
14-10-2016

questions should be inquired. The length of my interviews was different from Levios ones and the information I gathered was more varied than his. My interview method was more similar to conversation or discussion, where I did follow the research question but I also delved into other information I found relevant, while Levios preferred to strictly adhere to the question list. This resulted in my interviews being more insightful. Doing the interviews myself was better and more challenging, yet, as I already mentioned, in this way I had

the opportunity to discover what Levios, being pivotal in the knowledge-creation process and a key-informant, was mostly interested in.

Finally, still considering the language matter, Levios' position was sometimes a source of embarrassment for the research participants. In other words, it happened, particularly with interviewees of his age, that the reaction was of fear of being laughed at for saying something wrong. Some participants would see Levios' position as the authoritative one because he was working with a white researcher, therefore they would

be more prone to be unsure of what answers to provide. Furthermore, if they decided to engage in the interview in English it would be even worse, inasmuch as the participants would feel ashamed of, not only say the wrong thing but in the wrong manner. In one occasion a young couple insisted on conducting the interview in English with me. Levious was curiously listening and observing. The man in the couple tended to answer first and the woman would follow very shyly repeating her husband's answers. At one point she realised so and decided to give different answers, however, she delved into some information that was delicate. She told me that when she goes in the forest and she sees someone illegally poaching she would inform UWA. Yet it is illegal to even for her to be in the forest. She informed me of something very sensitive. She realised and felt ashamed, continuing the interviews with monosyllabic answers. When we left the couple, I discussed this circumstance with Levious, who confirmed what I believed had been the development of the interview.

DATA OVERVIEW

In the overall time I spent in the field I managed to complete one hundred interviews and thirty participants in focus groups. As previously mentioned, every participant filled in and signed and consent form before proceeding with either the focus group discussions or the interview. The interviews have been carried out in Ruhija Canteen, the villages of Katoma and Gwesanziro, ITFC's facilities and Ruhija's UWA headquarters. The focus groups have all been realized at the tourists' facility at the rangers post.

The questions for this research focus on people's perceptions and attitudes towards the gorillas. Briefly, the questions revolve around personal imagery and experiences with mountain gorillas, as well as the benefits and costs of gorilla tourism and conservation. The results will be further analysed in the three chapters that deal with the economic, political, and anthropomorphism elements. However, in this section, I will present a general overview of the research results, so as to provide a panoramic interpretation before entering the specific sections.

I was surprised to witness the positive attitudes all the different groups had towards the mountain gorillas. I assumed that because of the beginning of gorilla tourism, and the

subsequent block to natural resources, produced animosity among local people, they would have had bad attitudes towards the gorillas. Instead, the majority of the research participants had explicit enthusiastic opinions about gorillas. In few occasions, participants from the local community groups would express unfavourable positions towards the National Park as a system, but never towards the gorillas. Indeed, when it comes to the gorilla as an animal the responses were mostly characterised by interest towards the species, specifically for its similarity to humans. Furthermore, most participants have mentioned the benefits of having gorilla tourism, both from the general point of view of the government and specifically from the point of view of the communities. In all the four different groups, respondents often mentioned the benefit of revenue sharing, and how gorilla tourism is helping local's livelihoods in terms of employment, increased market for local products and development of infrastructures. Another reason for the beneficial attitudes towards the primate is the safeguard of their habitat and the environment as a whole. Particularly for the conservationist group, mountain gorillas represent the bottom cause for the protection of Bwindi as a specific ecosystem, therefore the existing flora and fauna inside the National Park. Indeed the park is now very well protected as a result of gorilla tourism and conservation, and it provides good weather and frequent rainfalls, which in turn are beneficial for the surrounding areas.

To conclude this section, the attitudes and perception of mountain gorillas are positive among all the different stakeholders. Nevertheless, as we shall see in the following chapters, the positive attitudes are a result of the different interests the stakeholders have in relation to the mountain gorilla in BINP.

STUDY SITE

Bwindi Impenetrable National Park (330.8 km²) is situated in Southwest Uganda, close to the border of DRC and Rwanda (Bush and Mwesigwa, 2011; Laudati, 2010). Bwindi is located on the edge of the Albertine (Western) Rift Valley, and it occupies the highest Kigezi Highland region, a region globally famous for its biodiversity thought to result from proximity to a Pleistocene refuge for many species of flora and fauna now endemic to the Rift. Species like the Mountain Gorilla (*Gorilla Beringei Beringei*) are found only here and in another site, namely, the Virunga Volcanoes located 25 km to the South (Olupot, *et al.* 2009). The park lies along the border of the Democratic Republic of Congo, at about 29 km by road to the northwest of Kabale town and 30 km north of Kisoro town.



<http://igcp.org/> Accessed 14-05-2017

Bwindi is located in Rubanda District, Kanungu District, and Kisoro District. Bwindi is separated from Mgahinga, the northern part of the Virunga conservation area that is located in Uganda, by a stretch of cultivated land. Adjacent to the park are 21 parishes. The park boundary coincides with the Uganda-DRC border in the west (Bush and Mwesigwa, 2011). The park is characterized by steep sided-hills, with a boundary that is typically a

very impressive abrupt transition between forest and a matrix of croplands and settlement.

According to Bloomley, Bwindi is one of “the oldest (50 million years), most complex and biologically rich systems on earth” (Bloomley, 2003; p. 233), and it represents an important biodiversity hub within the Albertine Branch, which is listed in the top 20 of the global 200 priority area for biodiversity (Laudati, 2010). It is most well known for harbouring half of the world population of mountain gorillas, approximately 400 individuals⁶, and has many endemic and restricted range species of birds, mammals and amphibians. For this reason, the park was declared a World Heritage site in 1994. BINP has a diverse natural forest area with a continuum of habitats ranging from 1,190 meters to 2,607 meters above sea level (Akampulira, et al 2015). In addition, Bwindi performs a significant regulatory function on local climate and acts as an important water catchment zone (Bloomley, 2003).

More specifically, the area where I stayed for the four months of fieldwork and where I carried out my research is Ruhija sub-county, one of the four tourism sectors in Bwindi. Every sector acts as a hub for tourists and local communities. The centres are characterized by a UWA headquarter for each zone, a trading centre and various tourist facilities. Ruhija sector has been a tourism active zone only since recently, and in a matter of few years has grown in dimensions and number of inhabitants, in terms of people that reside in the area, as well as the number of tourist going each day. The UWA headquarter, also called ranger’s post, is at about 15 minutes walk from the trading centre, so called

⁶ http://www.newvision.co.ug/new_vision/news/1456910/baby-gorillas-born (accessed 11-07-2016)

‘The Canteen’. The canteen offers a variety of shops, bars, small restaurants and the tourist lodges. The canteen hosts a market every Tuesday, and people from the neighbouring villages or sub-counties come to buy or sell their products. UWA headquarters control the gate at the entrance of the park, signing every person that enters or exits the area. From the crossroad to Kabale or Kisoro, the route to Ruhija ranger’s post is a 26 km untarmarcked road, from where you can either stay or continue to the other sector Buhoma. The first time I went to Bwindi it was directly to Buhoma and, sincerely, it seemed as if the forest was endless and that we were never going to arrive at our destination. However, the view seen from the road is stunning. When outside the park borders, the landscape is characterized by geometrical crop patches and sparse mud or brick houses on the steep hillside or in the valleys in-between. The latter being characteristic of the area because hidden by the distinctive mist in the early morning. Contrary to this is the forest, called impenetrable for a very obvious reason – its density. The forest thickness is indescribable and the number of different shades of green you can see is uncountable. Personally, the first sight was breath-taking, although it is so dense and at tract seemingly infinite that is can also be intimidating.



IIED, "Who Wants What?" Published February 2017

Going back to the research site, between the ranger’s post and the canteen there is the Institute of Tropical Forest Conservation, where I, luckily, resided during my time in Ruhija. Using the words from their own website “ITFC is a post-graduate institute established in 1991 under Mbarara University of Science and Technology focused on research, training and monitoring for conservation management”⁷. Indeed the Institute represents the only research centre in Bwindi and is responsible for all the research done in the area. ITFC is partnered and hosts the researchers of the Max Plank Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, whose research topics evolve around “gorillas’ ecology, social behaviour, reproductive strategies, population dynamics, endocrinology, and genetics”⁸.

⁷ <http://itfc.must.ac.ug/> (accessed 28-05-2017)

⁸ <http://www.eva.mpg.de/primat/staff/martha-robbins/index.html> (accessed 28-05-2017)

MPI, with its research leader Martha Robbins, has been in charge of gorilla's behavioural research for nearly twenty years, starting in 1998 with Kyagurilo group, therefore marking the second longest running research project on habituated gorilla in Africa, after the research done on behalf of the Karisoke Research Centre in Rwanda, began by Dian Fossey in 1967. Being in this advantageous location, I had the opportunity to gather many important insights for my research, both from the ITFC and MPI staff. Also, being close to Ruhija's canteen placed me in a profitable position, inasmuch as I was close to all the tourist facilities and I was able to gather much information about the gorilla tourism system.

My data collection and research is specifically focused in Ruhija, but I also had the chance to travel to all the four sectors, where I met various important individuals from each area, and I conducted participant observation. I also travelled to Rwanda where I was very excited to visit the Karisoke Research Centre in Musanze and meet some of the most prominent figures in the field of gorillas.

CHAPTER 3

THE POLITICS OF GORILLA CONSERVATION AND TOURISM

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The history of Bwindi unfolds in various phases. If we go back to thousands of years, the forest of Central Africa stretched from the West Coast to the western wall of the Great Rift Valley (Eckhart and Lanjouw, 2008). Groups of people settled there because of the fertility of the soil, favoured by the volcanic soils of the area. As a result the population grew as well as the demand for natural resources.



View of the Volcanoes from Bwindi. Copyright Isabella Vannucchi, 17-10-2016

In the case of the areas now corresponding to Bwindi and the Virungas Volcanoes, the fertile lands and rich forests represented an optimal site for human settlement and the growth of population. More specifically, if we consider the transition from wilderness areas to forests with human settlement, it is traceable with the passage from an existence as hunter-gatherers to living as farmers (Eckhart and Lanjouw, 2008). Furthermore, this

process was even further secured with the move of the Bantu group from West Africa to the East and South, in the development of their migration paths, entire peoples, species, and habitats were eradicated or displaced, resulting in the flourishing of population, the clearance of land, the formation of settle communities, who started to plant crops, and raise domesticated animals. (Eckhart and Lanjouw, 2008). However, the period that mostly

signed the division of the forest of the Virungas from the one in Bwindi is indicated by the last five hundreds years, with the ever growing increase in population.

Another important historic period was indeed colonialism, during which Europeans acquired control of the land, and consequently its rich natural resources. In order to solidify their economic and political power, European countries boosted the exploitation of natural resources such as timber and minerals, further reducing the dimensions of the forests. According to Eckhart and Lanjouw (2008), in the 1930s with the Great Depression, the economies of the colonial powers were deeply affected, as were consequentially their African colonies. A system was put in place whereby Africans were not allowed to grow food for subsistence anymore but were forced to grow cash crops and deliver other raw materials to be exported to the motherland. On the other hand the products for local consumption had to be imported from Europe. As if this was not unfavourable enough, the price paid for export was cut dramatically, while the cost for the imported goods and colonial taxes remained the same. Thus, for the local people the only possible solution was to produce more in order to generate enough money to feed themselves and pay the taxes to the colonial government, hence even more forest was cleared. This sequence of event demonstrates how the forest in this region of east Africa has for long been the subject of strong pressure for land and resources.

Another phase is represented by the protection of what had remained of the forest. The area now labelled as Bwindi has not been subjected to high levels of encroachment and has for long remained almost of the same size. One of the reasons for this situation are the various efforts put into its protection since the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1932, an important period for the introduction of natural landscapes conservation around the globe, the area was declared a forest reserve. In 1964 it was instead proclaimed an animal sanctuary (Hamilton et al., 2000). During this period the boundaries of the forest started becoming increasingly delineated and exotic trees were planted along the boundaries to outline the limits. Access to the park was still allowed, and the people in the areas around the forest would access to get hold of natural resources, such as bush-meat, medicinal plants and construction materials (Bitariho, et al. 2016). Then in 1991 the Uganda Government gazetted Bwindi as a National Park. (Bloomley, 2003; Namara, 2006; Eckhart et al., 2008; Kasangaki, et al., 2012). From this moment onwards, following the statute of the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature), people were banned from accessing the forest and its resources. National Parks are Category II of the IUCN

Protected Area management, and as such they are “large natural or near natural areas set aside to protect large-scale ecological processes, along with the complement of species and ecosystems characteristic of the area, which also provide a foundation for environmentally and culturally compatible spiritual, scientific, educational, recreational and visitor opportunities” (IUCN⁹).

This top-down political approach of creating a National Park created animosity among the local population, that saw “their land” gradually becoming inaccessible. A relevant characteristic of this structural shift was that “the establishment of the park in 1991 led to the eviction of 1773 people who had been living permanently within this area since about 1970 and of 680 people who were cultivating land but lived elsewhere. This eviction fuelled huge resentment and alienation among the local population” (Bloomley, 2003; p. 238). The resentment and alienation generated conflicts between the local population and the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA), in the form of protests, fires, and park and wildlife endangerment. The protests provoked global concern (international agencies, donors, NGOs and governments) for the safety of the endangered mountain gorillas and the decline of the forest’s bio-diversity. This, in turn induced the design of new approaches to counteract these experiences and mitigate the conflict. In 1994, the Ugandan government and UWA, with the help of the project Development Through Conservation by the NGO Care, the UNP and IGCP, established the Uganda Revenue-Sharing Programme, which has the intent to share some of the park revenue with the local communities and compensate the households along the park boundaries. Furthermore, in 1994 UWA and other partner organizations introduced a programme allowing regulated harvest of NTFPs by locals, together with a Multiple Use Programme (MUP) where selected local people, referred to as “resource users” (herbalists and basket makers), were permitted access to the forest and certain plants, on specified dates, and in designated areas called “multiple use zones” (Bitariho, et al. 2016). Later in 1999 the Uganda Wildlife Policy was formulated, establishing the Community Conservation approach, a system of collaborative management of resources between UWA and local communities (Namara, 2006). It is an approach that tries to link conservation of biological diversity within a protected area to social and economic development outside, and it has been adopted in

⁹ <https://www.iucn.org/theme> (accessed 11-07-2016)

several national parks in other Eastern and Southern African countries since its first employment in the 50s. (Newmark and Hough, 2000).

Another important event about BINP is its designation as a World Heritage Site in 1994. Following the World Heritage Sites criteria Bwindi has been described as “a key site for biodiversity on the continent, (...) the species richness occurring in this site, can be considered as a superlative natural phenomenon” (UNESCO¹⁰). Interestingly, the title as a World Heritage Site is displayed at the entrance gates of the park, however I did not encounter any research participant that has mentioned this aspect. I would guess that it is a characteristic of Bwindi that locally is not underlined as much as the presence of the gorilla, which is the biggest and most obvious attraction in Bwindi.

CONSEQUENCES

Given this institutional history, I will now delve into the analysis and demonstration of how conservation practices and discourses are shaped by socio-political forces. First of all, it is worth to note the importance that the international flurry of ecological awareness and wildlife conservation had performed in the alteration setting of protected areas around the world (Peluso, 1993). In the colonial period African landscapes were the subject of strong conservation efforts by the colonial powers. More and more in Europe it was spreading the notion of nature as a category that appears “timeless, pristine and outside the human world” (Brooks, 2005; p. 2). As a result of this Western idea of ‘naturalness’ many national parks, wildlife and forest reserves started spreading around Africa in the first half of the twentieth century, all characterised by the almost total division of humans from nature. Inasmuch as these areas in order to be protected had to be closed to human presence or access. Indeed, according to Brooks and Neumann, “the control over nature, either for aesthetic consumption or for production , must be recognised as an integral part of the geography and history of empire” (Neumann 1996 cited in Brooks 2005; p. 3).

Afterwards, with the advent of decolonization many African governments decided to keep these areas under their protection and maintain them as the colonial powers left them. Or in other words, the decision was to maintain the rules and practices of protected areas and biodiversity conservation in place. But how some scholars from the discipline of

¹⁰ <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/682> accessed 11-07-2016

political ecology stress, the term biodiversity, although having concrete biophysical referents, it must be seen as a discursive invention of recent origin (Escobar, 1998). The term was used by wealthiest mainstream environmental organizations (e.g., World Conservation Union, World Resources Institute, and World Wildlife Fund) and the World Bank to create a set of strategies to protect the world's biological resources from their most ubiquitous predator – humankind (Peluso, 1993). However the strategy is based on a particular representation of threats to biodiversity, (e.g. habitat loss, species introduction in alien habitat, human population growth), and it offers a set of prescriptions for the conservation and sustainable use of resources, which is imposed at the international, national and local levels (Escobar, 1998). However, this process, being highly imperialistic, disseminates, and in some instances imposes, specific biodiversity conservation discourses and practices that may collide with local ones (Peluso, 1993; Escobar, 1998; Neumann, 2011). This idea resonates with the practices that have been put in place in both the Virungas and Bwindi for the protection of the mountain gorillas, since the first public international figures and organizations (Schaller, Fossey, WWF, Flora & Fauna International, IGCP) denounced their endangerment. Therefore resulting in what has been labelled as 'fortress conservation', where protected areas are characterized by the separation of biodiversity conservation spaces from human settlement and resource use. The separation sometimes is done with fences, like in the South African case (Brooks, 2005), or in less obvious ways like a border made out of exotic species of plants.



View of Ruhija and its hillside patched crop gardens.
Copyright Isabella Vannucchi, 15-10-2016

Similarly, the activities within BINP that were threatening the mountain gorillas brought together the interests of different national, but mostly international stakeholders, which consequently pushed the Ugandan government to turn Bwindi into a national park in order to save the severely endangered species (Namara, 2006). The activities that mostly concerned these actors were the spread of wildfires in the forest and the killings of gorilla individuals, as well as other animal specimens, which characterized the period soon after its declaration as a national

park (Namara, 2006, Laudati, 2008; Tumusiime and Sjaastad, 2014). Gorillas were killed for three main reasons; the first one was a warning or a message on behalf of rebellious groups¹¹, as it happened in 2007, when an entire family of gorilla in DRC was killed and it became a public matter. The second one was to kill silverbacks and sell their head or hands in the black market, respectively as trophies or ashtrays. And the last one was to sell the infants to zoos around the world, which in most cases can only be accomplished after killing the adults in the group who are meant to protect them. So it might happen that in order to capture just one infant, more than five others individuals would be killed (Schaller, 1964; Fossey, 1983; Mukanjari et al., 2013).

Going back to the neo-colonial character of wildlife conservation in Africa, gorilla protection and its habitat became an international concern around the 80s when the species had been publicly denounced as critically endangered. According to Garland, wildlife conservation in Africa is a practice that has been mainly embedded in the global ecological concern of the 'First World' conservationists (2008). Indeed in the case of gorilla conservation the organization mostly concerned with the matter, are of international stamp, such as the International Gorilla Conservation Programme (IGCP), the Great Ape Survival Project and the Agreement on the Conservation of Gorillas and Their Habitats (Convention on Migratory Species of 2008) (Mukanjari et al., 2013). And according Jamal et al. (2006; p. 153), the discourses of wildlife conservation "simultaneously denigrated African land use and natural resource practices, and promoted European forest and wildlife management techniques that relied on the ideologies of 'scientific' resource management". While in the field I could not stop noticing situations and practice that reminded me of this neo-colonial mechanism. Indeed figures from both UWA and ITFC have confirmed to me that they participated to the trainings organized by organizations coming from outside of Uganda. The trainings, according to one interviewee, were organized by the 'whites', who taught them how to bring tourists into the forest and how to behave with the gorillas. Indeed as Garland stresses out "it was as if the project of protecting African wild animals somehow required (neo)colonial power relations to remain in place" (2008; p. 60). Represented by the international organizations working in close contact with the local governments to protect the animal and the habitat. This concept is best expressed by the World Society Theory idea about the role of International Non-Governmental Organization in the rise of

¹¹ The reason behind these action was mainly characterized by rebellious groups aiming at public attention or again groups interested in natural resources inside the protected areas, or simply to against the conservation system that blocked local communities from accessing the park

environmentalism in the twentieth century. Specifically, according to Frank et al. (1999; p. 86) “environment became increasingly magnetic in world culture between 1911 and 1990, inspiring ever more INGOs and attracting ever more widespread adherence”. And more importantly for this thesis “the activities of these organizations vary, but they tend to focus on research, education, and advocacy, namely, identifying and publicizing environmental problems and then promoting their solutions” (Frank et al. 1999; p. 83). This mechanism thus results in the involvement and influence of these INGOs on local governments and protected areas systems, and they can be seen as neo-colonial, inasmuch as these INGOs (World Wild Fund for Nature and Flora and Fauna International) are of western origins and use western discourses and practices of nature and wildlife conservation. Furthermore, going back to the Bwindi case, the attachment to wildlife and nature conservation, mainly promoted by the western-international actors, was not an identity trait of the Ugandan people and again, it can also be seen as a neo-colonial convention used by the government as a land-grabbing force to maintain its power over these territories. The land grabbing system represents a favourable position for the Uganda government, inasmuch as the territories over which they declare their sovereignty are rich of resources and economic gains. Indeed, to mention Carmody and Taylor’s definition “the appropriation or ‘grabbing’ of land and other natural resources that have appreciated in value by powerful international and ‘domestic’ actors [serves as] economic accumulation and state-building purposes” (2016; p. 102). They define this process also as ecolonization, whereby African states are often keen to facilitate land grabbing for their own state building, territorialisation, and economic motives (Carmody and Taylor, 2016). Taking this definition into consideration, we may well define Bwindi as an econolonization machine, where the government is complying with its economic interests gained through ecotourism. Moreover, according to Jamal et al. (2006; p. 154) “in new postcolonial settings like East Africa the seizure of land by the independent state for conservation differs little in practice and symbolic terms from the initial loss of the same lands to European estates”.

The examples of this neo-colonial-like situation are given by two instances that followed the creation of the National Park. First of all, as previously mentioned, considerable numbers of people that lived inside the forest or used its land for cultivation were expelled from the park. Among this group of people we find the Batwa group, also defined as pygmies or forest dwellers. They had been living inside the forest of central Africa for centuries, and in the case of Bwindi, they suddenly had to resettle somewhere else outside. Traditionally they lived inside the forest as nomads, they would not stay in a

settlement for more than a year. They subsisted of the forest natural resources, particularly wild meat, and to supplement their diet, they would go out of the forest to exchange the bush meat for other products, such as sorghum, wheat and other crop products. In 1991 however, they were denied access to their land and had to find a solution to resettle outside the forest (Bloomley, 2003). They also became a matter of international concern (again like the gorillas themselves) and many donors and NGOs moved in order to help them buy land and find jobs.



Batwas in Rushaga. Copyright Isabella Vannucchi 26-11-2016

The problem that subsequently aroused was the clash with other groups that lived around the forests and the incapacity to adapt to the lifestyle outside the forest. The Bakiga people, the biggest ethnic groups around Bwindi, does not see Batwa positively, there has been historical ethnic tension between the two groups, specifically for the Bakiga towards the Batwa. As I witnessed in the field, Batwa people are considered to be uncivilized and unable to live in the society, they are commonly ostracized from the community and most times mistreated (Twinamatsiko et al., 2015). I personally testified

one of the sub county clerks aggressively drive away a group of Batwas from a bar where I was. As well as overhearing Bakiga people openly disregarding and disrespectfully addressing Batwa people. This demonstrates the tense situation in the community, where the Batwa do not feel welcomed and find it extremely hard to find a job and sustain their 'small community inside the community'. Donors and NGOs, which have worked to help them in this harsh situation, have provided them with land, pocket money and clothes. For what regards the land, the international donors where allowed to buy certain plots of land to which the local government agreed upon. These plots of land are at about 15 metres from the forest boundary, subsequently their arduously planted crops are victim of continual crop raiding by forest animals, such as baboons and elephants. It is indeed a very complicated situation, to which I was personally exposed. In Rushaga I saw one of the Batwa community that have been build with the help of various projects, and I can confirm that their situation is really difficult, their living conditions are extremely hard and they are subjected to all sorts of different abuses. As the picture (below) shows the plot that the NGOs, working with the Batwa community, were allowed to buy are at 15 metres from the forest border. The result is that the households are constantly subjected to crop raiding that represents a huge loss for them in terms of both capital loss and nutrition. And also, they live so close to the forest, their 'ancestral home' and they are not allowed to access it. According to me the situation for the Batwa is very controversial and is badly handled by both the government and the project run by the NGOs.



Households from the Batwa community. Copyright Isabella Vannucchi
26-11-2016

Going back to the land-grabbing process, another example is provided by the crop raiding issue that has impacted most of the boundary dwellers, and which represents huge losses for its victims. Before the gazettelement of the park people would hunt the animals that crop-raided or would push them inside the forest so that they would

not be close to the boundary. Yet since the park was created, they are not allowed to enter or hunt any animal, and they are powerless to prevent their crops from being decimated or destroyed. The main resolution took by UWA and the government is to purchase the lands that are more exposed to crop raiding instances or to compensate the attacked household. To buy the land means dispossessing families of their plots, which they may have owned for centuries. Organizations like IGCP see this as an extraordinary success for the park, inasmuch as its boundaries can be extended and can provide more habitat for the gorillas, this is how they described one of the purchases “Nkuringo land purchase. An additional 4.2.km² of land is purchased adjacent to Bwindi Impenetrable National Park. The land is purchased as part of the solution to resolve human gorilla conflicts in the area caused by gorillas ranging outside the park” (IGCP¹²). The money paid for the land is really cheap and does not include enough to buy land somewhere else. One woman from the community group told me that she used to see gorilla often because they used to live close to the park boundary, then at one point “the government made us move, and I did not see gorillas again” (Interview 9; 11-10-2016). And, on the other hand, the compensating system does not work properly, thus households are not compensated for their losses.

Besides, the kind of setting as Bwindi, favoured a situation whereby powerful actors were gaining the benefits by cordon off and protect natural areas from all but the scientific and tourist figures. In this way the local population was consequently alienated from its own land and natural resource. Using Peluso’s words “valuation of resources often disenfranchises local people with long histories of subsistence resource use and some trade” (1993; p.216) and as a result the animosity and revolts quickly arose around Bwindi. And another tool to counteract these instances, mainly used by INGOs, and successively by local actors was “to educate the masses of people in surrounding villages, to teach them that wildlife has an important part to play in the national heritage (Borges et al., 2006; p. 154). Or better in Frank’s et al. (1999, p.87) words “after the United Nation Environment Programme was formed in 1972, efforts expanded to catalyse citizen activism in the lesser developed countries, where popular perceptions have sometimes regarded environmentalism as a luxury from the outside. These efforts drew on an increasingly global normative framework asserting that individuals *should* be environmentalists”. Indeed in Bwindi, joined efforts by UWA and other partner

¹² <http://igcp.org/about/our-work/improving-livelihoods/> (accessed 11-05-2016)

organizations brought to the promulgation of the so-called 'sensitization programmes', which had the intent of promulgating, or rather imposing certain discourses of care for the environment and its wildlife. The Bwindi Ape Conservation Education Partnership (BACEP) is currently the one mostly active around Bwindi, and particularly Ruhija sub-county. Its intent is to "address the need for improving conservation education in the local communities surrounding Bwindi. BACEP is a collaboration among the MPI, the North Carolina Zoo, UNITE for the Environment, and Cleveland Metroparks Zoo. All of these organizations have a strong history of collaboration on conservation and research projects across Africa. BACEP is committed to working together to increase conservation efforts around BINP" (BACEP's flyer).

The programmes these kinds of organizations implement involve film/documentary showing, school lectures and competitions, teacher training and livelihood projects. Through the use of these means the local populations become familiar with typically western discourses on the importance of gorilla conservation and his habitat protection. During the interviews with the local community group, in the case a participant had never seen a gorilla, the BACEP documentary viewing was often mentioned. And when talking about gorillas often the same information about gorilla behaviour and characteristics would be shared by several research participant, and they were the typical discourses told during the BACEP meetings. This, I believe, shows the powerful tool of these programmes to share bound discourses about the gorilla and the conservation of his habitat. And since the BACEP programme has demonstrated to be successful, UWA is also trying to implement his own education programmes with all the parishes around Bwindi. They already started a programme that seeks to increase the involvement of the surrounding communities in gorilla conservation management and tourism related activities.

One example is the HUGO (Human Gorilla Conflict Resolution), formed by a group of community volunteers who participate in animal scaring and gentle chasing. Their role is to chase the gorillas back into the forest, under the supervision of UWA park rangers, in case gorillas come into cultivated or residential land bordering the forest (Bitariho et al., 2013). This demonstrates positive participation on behalf of the locals, yet it contrasts to other instances when the community has openly showed indifferent (might also be diverging) attitudes towards such initiatives. As I was told by some participants of the conservationist group that local chiefs and chairmen had been invited to participate at the opening ceremony of one of the habituated groups. Apparently most of the guests did not attend, exhibiting either lack of interest in the involvement opportunity or openly

dissatisfied opinions about the event, consequence of the dissatisfied attitudes towards the blocked access to the park resources.

CONTROVERSIES

If we go back a few steps, it is important to acknowledge that Bwindi had very low levels of encroachment during the 1970s and 1980s, despite weak governments and civil wars. Since its shift to Forest Reserve in 1932, had been established long enough to gain a significant degree of acceptance. This is to say that local people around the forest do not seem to have deliberately threatened the park at any moment previous to its declaration as a National Park in 1991. The natural resources were harvested and a number of specimens were killed as bush meat, but never to the point of threatening the park's biodiversity equilibrium. Hamilton et al. (2000) demonstrate this by providing us with a particular example of how villagers reacted to the proposal of the establishment of Bwindi as a national Park. They state that of the thousands villagers, who attended the meeting, "not a single voice called for the transfer of the forest to agricultural land" (Hamilton et al., 2000; p. 1723).

What in fact resulted as an issue was the manner in which the park was established, with insufficient consultation on the ways forwards and with many concerns about loss of access to the resources and increased crop-raiding instances by forest animals. It was at this point that the surrounding communities exhibited animosity towards UWA (at the time UNP, Uganda National Parks). As a consequence there was a need to find a solution that could equally benefit the various stakeholders. Before even getting into the resolution of this problem,



Household in Rwesanziro. Copyright Isabella Vannucchi, 30-10-2016

UWA and the Uganda government needed to find a solution to sustain and face the increasing shortage of funds, equipment, and trained staff. In order to maintain Bwindi protected, as well as many other conservation areas, UWA had to follow the Rwandan example and began its own programme of Gorillas Tourism in Bwindi. Gorilla tourism dates back to 1979 and 1984 in Rwanda and the DRC respectively (Mukanjari et al., 2013). Uganda followed the other two countries and decided to implement gorilla tourism in Bwindi in 1994, so as to increase the revenue to finance UWA. I had the confirmation of this by one of the rangers that I interviewed: “The intention was mainly to generate income to run the park. The Government decided to protect the park in order not to extinct the gorillas and tourism was introduced to produce income to maintain the park protected because the government did not have enough budget” (Interview 32; 24-10-2016). However he then added: “If IGCP did not advise the government gorillas won’t even be here and there wouldn’t be any forest. Musevini didn’t even know there were gorillas here! Now instead he knows so well how important they are for revenue that he would rather save a gorilla than 1000 Ugandans” (Interview 32; 24-10-2016). This is a very blunt statement that show the open dissatisfaction towards, in this case, the Government’s only economic interests.

It was indeed a move that the government of Uganda had to undertake if the park was to be maintained protected and the UWA staff was to be paid. On the other hand, the government saw how gorilla tourism was facilitating the economy of Rwanda and decided to invest in the same strategy. Musevini recognized the asset of international tourists and in particular of ecotourism, and wildlife tourism. Indeed, since the beginning of his mandate he opened six new National Parks and restore the tourism sector, which during Idi Amin’s regime had been completely impeded. The regime of Idi Amin (1972-1979) was characterized by many atrocious actions that brought the country to violence and insecurity, among which was the expulsion of all foreigners, which destroyed Uganda’s tourism industry (Lepp and Harris, 2008). Many of the interviewees from various groups of stakeholder, have pointed out this aspect. The ones particularly in favour of Musevini’s party did not lose the occasion of telling me that Musevini is in fact doing a great work in conservation and he truly has nature at heart, and that thanks to his efforts now Uganda has acquired many international partnerships. Others have pointed out how gorilla tourism has “brought a good atmosphere and a good reputation for Uganda” (Interview 29; 24-10-2016) and how it had “put Ruhija on the world map” (Interview 97, 15-12-2016).



View of the forest from inside. Copyright Isabella Vannucchi 14-11-2016

Again, it was interesting to notice how many people have mentioned that among the various benefits of gorilla tourism there is the possibility to make friends with whites, like myself. This is in particular for the group of local community and some participants from the entrepreneurs group. Likewise, Lepp and Harris' study on tourism and national identity in Uganda, mentions that they encountered three different concept that underline this idea "i) Uganda is not Idi Amin's country; (ii) Uganda is part of the global community; and (iii) Uganda is secure, politically stable and free" (Lepp and Harris, 2008; p. 530). Of this statement it is important to stress the term 'secure' inasmuch as between the 70's and to some extent part

of the 90s, and particularly during the period of the bush civil war in Uganda (1981-1986), the wilderness was an area the government had little control over, rebel groups, insurgents and other rogue actors would use the forests and the national parks for camps and staging grounds for attacks on civilians (Lepp and Harris, 2008; Eckhart and Lanjouw, 2008). As a result civilians were particularly not prone, or better, afraid to go close to these areas.

An example is the tragic incidence that influenced the stability of tourism in 1999, when a group of *interahamwe* armed militia hiding in the forest, killed one ranger and eight tourists, resulting in a derogatory publicity for Bwindi and Uganda at large (Maekawa et al., 2013). However, a part from this unfortunate event, the security situation changed drastically for Bwindi since the park fell under the government jurisdiction and was under UWA inspection. Research participants, particularly women from the local community group, have also mentioned the increase security that the presence of UWA implies. In addition, in terms of good disposition towards UWA and the National Park, one research participant stressed that the presence of UWA in the area is favourable because it protects the local community, by keeping the gorilla inside the forest and not letting them out to harm the villagers. The security character has been mentioned various times inasmuch as UWA is a semi-autonomous, as well as a paramilitary government agency, and therefore is

allowed to carry (or use) firearms. This might be the reason for the local population to feel secure, or contrary the direct result of the local population to “behave”¹³.

UWA indeed represents the authority the government has towards the protected areas, in the form of military control over the area. The military and wildlife conservation in Africa are generally combined. Stephen Ellis’ study of wildlife conservation in South Africa demonstrates so by saying that “the element of coercion involved in the construction of most game parks made it necessary to use quasi-military methods to police them, [since] game parks all over Africa have been created by expelling people from their ancestral land or forbidding them to engage in tradition hunting pursuits” (Ellis, 1994; p.54). Again related to both the system of military control over large pieces of government land, namely protected areas, and the security mentioned by the research participants, due to UWA’s presence in the area.

In addition, in Bwindi the favourable predisposition towards the park and gorilla tourism grew with time; with the increase of the concrete benefits, different stakeholders began to change their mind about gorilla tourism and the importance of gorilla conservation. During the interviews many have pointed out that the gorillas, up to thirty years ago, were just as any other animal in the forest, and that with the introduction of conservation and tourism they have become a worldwide attraction. Local community participant would add “people come from all over the world to see these animals and we are proud to have them so close” (Interview 7, 11-10-2016). At one point I also wondered whether the importance given to gorillas may turn them into a national symbol. Particularly due to the fact that the gorilla is depicted on the 50.000 UGX note. I asked myself – if it is on the money it must be important for the overall country? However, a participant from the conservationist group soon informed me that the gorilla is relatively too young of an attraction to become a national symbol. People around Bwindi are familiar with its importance and are more involved because of their vicinity to the park, but the rest of the country is too far from it and does not really identify itself with the animal. The participant also added “the gorilla is not a symbol, it is too soon for Ugandans, who sometimes don’t even know how it looks like, it is a symbol for outside Uganda” (Interview 1; 3-10-2016).

On the other hand, in the group of conservationists, many have acknowledged the importance of their job and the consequent income as a direct cause of their good

¹³ Behave in the sense of not encroaching in the park, or conduct other illegal activities in the protected area

predisposition towards the gorilla and the park. Interviewees from UWA stressed that their change of perception corresponded with the more time they spent with the gorillas or at their position. It would be the norm that UWA rangers would answer to the question “why is gorilla conservation important for you?” with “because it provides me with a stable income”. But then as the conversation moved on, and as we shall see in the next chapters, it came up that the more time they spent with the gorillas and the more they learn about them, the more their passion and engagement in their protection grows. The same would be for the ITFC employees, who were proud of their job, and often mentioned that working in a research institution and understanding the biological and well as the economic importance of the animal, made them change their mind-set in relation to its conservation and wellbeing. Some of, both UWA and ITFC staff, have worked with the four groups of gorillas since the beginning of the 90s and were clearly attached to the animal and their role in their preservation. Nonetheless if I had to compare the overall answers of all the four groups, at the question on the importance of the gorilla, the majority answered with the economic income and increased lifestyle welfare.

Contrary to the above described attitude, other interviewees exhibited open opposition to Museveni’s scheme inasmuch as they believe that he is employing tourism just to profit of the income and enrich the Ugandan elites. One participant commented: “Gorillas are like gold for Uganda” (Interview 26; 21-10-2016). It is clear then that the stakeholders have a clear idea of how advantageous the tourism sector is in Uganda. But is this ‘gold’ subdivided among the different stakeholders? Since the creation of the park, UWA, with the help of international organizations like IGCP and UNP, with the project Development Through Conservation, implemented the revenue sharing programme, with the intent of compensating Bwindi’s surrounding communities for their losses, as well as share part of the gorilla tourism revenue. The programme was designated in 1994 and it initially included the allocation of 20% of the entire gorilla tracking permits fees to local communities and parishes around the park. Yet this mandate was soon modified in 1996 in the parliament due to UWA pressure, who asked to add a clause to the 1994 policy, which called for the 20% revenue-sharing to local communities of only the gate fees (Adams and Infield 2003, Laudati 2010, Kasangaki et al. 2012). In 2000 there was an attempt to go back to the ’94 policy, but UWA did not approve because they sustained they could not fund their conventional management costs, let alone increase funding for community (Adams and Infield, 2003). The main dilemma rests on the fact that the current price for

the gorilla tracking fees is up to 650 USD a day for tourists and the park entrance fee is 40 USD a day, this implies that only 2% of the entire gorilla revenue actually goes to local population and communities as part of the 'community resource management programme'. Moreover on top of this latter issue, Uganda is divided into five governmental level systems (district, county, sub-county, parish, village), which makes it, most of the time, very difficult to allocate the gorilla revenue sharing to all the different layers of the governmental levels (Bloomley 2003). The matter rests on the percentage that each governmental level calls for the transaction, leaving the parish with little to share with the villages.

Therefore, one ends up questioning whether the tangible benefits of these programmes are effectively and equally accruing to every applicable member. Few research participants were able to explain this system to me, most interviewees were not aware of how the revenue sharing programmes is pursued, which shows lack of education about policies and laws (Ahebwa et al., 2012). As an example a person from the community group told me about the revenue sharing programme "30% of the 500 USD tourists pay, goes directly into the community". As explained before, the situation is unfortunately not as the person displayed it. The people from the conservationist group were the ones mostly prepared about the revenue sharing system, particularly ITFC researchers, who had studied the policy and were complaining about its poor implementation.

In addition, still in 1994, UWA and other partners organizations put into action a programme that allowed the regulated harvest of non-timber forest products by local people to mitigate the conflict arouse after 1991 (Blomely, 2003). It was coined the Multiple Use Programme (MUP) by which "selected local people referred to as 'resource users' (herbalists and basket makers) were permitted to access certain medicinal and basketry plants on certain dates in designated areas called Multiple Use Zones" (Bitariho et al., 2016; p. 18). Local people, due to the MUP were also permitted to allocate and access their beehives in the forest. Honey production is indeed an important resource for the area, and many households are specialized in its production. As a result of the MUP the local communities could retain a certain amount of income coming from honey and baskets. Unfortunately, the situation has now drastically changed. With the growth of tourism and the increase in number of habituated gorillas more areas of the park are now occupied for tracking. This culminated in the almost shut of all the MUP areas, and as a research participant informed me the MUP programmes is now only available in Mpungu.

This means that only a small part of the local population can profit from the MUP programme and that the tangible benefits of the community-based policies seem to become increasingly scarce.

This chapter, through the presentation of the historical and political events of BINP, seeks to demonstrate how certain discourses of biodiversity conservation have been imposed over others, and how the practices of biodiversity and wildlife conservation have in fact impaired the very actors over whom they have been imposed. The main critic to this system stands, indeed on the external imposition of harmful policies on resource-poor communities, yet by those who do not necessarily understand the implication of losing access to particular resources or getting crop raided. In the next section we shall see the economical nuances of gorilla tourism and conservation. These are directly linked to the imposition of particular biodiversity discourses, inasmuch these discourse are used at the convenience of just a particular set of stakeholders, employed with the main aim of gaining economic benefits.

CHAPTER 4

THE ECONOMY OF GORILLA TOURISM AND CONSERVATION

BACKGROUND

This chapter explores the economic characteristics of gorilla tourism and conservation. It will demonstrate how despite most of its benefits are accruing to only a portion of the stakeholders, it is also improving local people's lifestyle and welfare. Much of the research done on gorilla tourism and revenue sharing in BINP seeks to denounce local communities' lack of involvement and access to benefits (Bloomley, 2003, Laudati 2010, Bitariho et al., 2015, Ahebwa, 2012). For this reason my initial assumption was that I would have encountered mostly negative attitudes towards the gorilla in the local community. However, this was not the case, and in fact attitudes were positive among most of the research participants. For this reason, I wanted to investigate why this was the case and what made them have positive attitudes if the previous accounts showed that the locals were not accruing any of the benefits of gorilla tourism.

First of all, from a theoretical and historical point of view it is important to specify how the revenue sharing practice came into place. It began with the establishment of national parks and protected areas¹⁴ around the world, which was the result of the spreading of western conservationist ideologies. Around the 80s, consequent to the first introduction of theories about climate change and environmental degradation, conservationist and environmentalists started to call for a more ethical approach towards nature and its protection. As a response, in a relative general way, the world undertook two main approaches "(1) establishing parks and other protected areas to protect wild species and natural systems, and (2) promoting restraint in the harvest and consumption of wild species and their products. Both approaches affect local people's access to natural

¹⁴ A protected area is a clearly defined geographical space, recognised, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values. (IUCN Definition 2008) <https://www.iucn.org/theme/protected-areas> (accessed 11-05-2016)

resources, either by denying them the opportunity to use certain areas (as in protected areas), or by reducing their harvest levels” (Robinson, 2011; p. 958). However, these two ways forwards clashed with another ethical matter of worldwide discussion at the time – the defence of Human Rights. Indeed the two approaches meant to save the environment, through the protection of habitats and wildlife, clashed with the local populations’ access “to the lands, territories and resources which they have traditionally owned, occupied, or otherwise used or acquired” (Ibid; p 958). Therefore there was a need to embark in a resolution that could not only ensure the long-term viability of species and ecosystems but was also politically and economically acceptable to local communities and governments. The most employed outcome was Ecotourism, as well as integrated conservation and development projects. I will focus particularly on ecotourism because, of the two alternatives, it represents the one with most economic nuances and it involves the tourists.

Ecotourism primary motive is conservation, yet simultaneous with the generation of economic benefits for local inhabitants of the protected areas (Jamal et al., 2006). Thus, the main aims of ecotourism are to promote conservation by providing economic alternatives to environmentally destructive practices, offsetting the cost of living with wildlife, and create improved attitudes towards conservation, to ultimately (theoretically)



View of the seven volcanoes from Rushaga. Copyright Isabella Vannucchi 25-10-2016

deliver considerable benefits at the community level (Laudati, 2010). The issue remains of whether this approach is truly accomplishing its aims of being fair towards the populations around protected area and wildlife. The BINP case is indeed an example that demonstrates that the system is not delivering the wished results in terms of equality and fairness.

As already mentioned, in 1991 BINP was converted from a Forest Reserve and Animal Sanctuary to a National Park. Successively, the introduction of the ecotourism approach in BINP came to pass with the official beginning of gorilla tourism in 1993. The park was opened for non-gorillas tourism in January 1993, and the first gorilla visits were to the Mubare groups in April of the same year (Eckhart and Lanjouw, 2008). The Mubare group was in Buhoma, the first sector to begin with gorilla tourism. Now there are four tourist-active sectors, Buhoma, Ruhija, Rushaga and Nkuringo. The number of habituated groups grew with quite a speed and now in 2017 there are a total of 14 habituated gorilla groups: three in Buhoma Sector, two in Nkuringo Sector, four in Ruhija Sector and five in Rushaaga Sector (IIED, pro-poor project report¹⁵). Gorilla tourism was a good opportunity for the government and UWA to compensate the local people and share the benefits of tourism with, at the time, a particularly disillusioned surrounding community. The gazettement of the park provoked huge losses for the residents that live around the protected areas (mainly loss of natural resources and increase in crop raiding instances). Therefore UWA with the help of IGCP and CARE implemented the revenue sharing programme. This had the intent to follow the ecotourism theory of mitigating the losses coming from ecosystem conservation, with compensation, substitution and creation of alternative livelihoods (Robinson, 2011).

Specifically, the goal of revenue sharing is to ensure that the people living adjacent to protected areas (PAs) obtain benefits from the existence of these areas in order to gain their support for conservation (Twinamatsiko et al., 2015). The revenue sharing policy began at Bwindi in 1994 as a pilot study for other Protected Areas in Uganda. The policy arrangement proposed in this first implementation was that the Uganda National Parks (UNP, now UWA) was required to give 12% of their total tourist gate revenue collection to the local communities around the park (Ibid.). However, this situation soon changed in 1996, when consequent to a parliamentary decision the revenue sharing plan shifted from 12% of the total revenue, to only 20% of the National Park gate fees. (Bloomley,

¹⁵ <http://pubs.iied.org/G04135/> (accessed 11-08-2016)

2003; Namara, 2006; Laudati, 2010). Considering that the current the price for the gorilla-tracking permit is 600 USD for foreign tourists and the gate fee is 40 USD. The 1996 policy modification was positive for other parks around Uganda, inasmuch as they don't have a



Tourists in the forest tracking gorillas. Copyright Isabella Vannucchi, 16-11-2016

limit of tourist, but unfavourable for BINP, which has a maximum of 8 tourists per day per group. Having 14 habituated gorilla groups, it has a maximum capacity of 112 tourists per day, which means a possible 71.680 USD per day for UWA revenue, and supposedly 1.120 USD for the surrounding communities.

Following this line of argument, as it has already been demonstrated in the political chapter, the revenue sharing programme manifests a number of dilemmas, which ultimately make the system everything but residents-friendly. Indeed, after the open resentment and dissatisfaction towards the programme, alternative solutions were promoted. The first one was Bwindi Mgahinga Conservation Trust (BMCT), opened in 1995 it has funded community and livelihood projects around the park, based on the interest earnings from an initial grant of USD 4 million from the World Bank's Global Environmental Facility (Tumusiime et al., 2013). The second one was the 'gorilla levy' additional percentage of revenue sharing from the gorilla-tracking permit. Since the

disbursement of the revenue sharing proved insufficient, the residents and local NGOs lobbied the government to increase the percentage, adding to the revenue sharing values a 5 USD per permit in 2010, and a further increment in 2015 of 10 USD per permit per tourist (IIED, pro-poor project report¹⁶)

Nevertheless, in the field and through the interviews I gathered that, for the majority of the respondents, the mountain gorilla is an economic tool. Almost all the participants have mentioned the importance of gorillas for their economic potential in terms of both gorilla tourism and the income coming from the tracking permit, as well as the development of the tourism market in the area. For this reason, I believe it is possible to argue that mountain gorillas in BINP have turned into a neoliberal commodity, which emphasises the commodification of nature to promote conservation. Neoliberal conservation ideology assumes that in order for nature to be saved, “the acts of ‘nature saving’ must be imbued with profit potential or else there is little incentive for rational actors to pursue it” (Büscher et al. 2012; p.13). In other words, neoliberal conservation calls for the increase designation of protected areas in order to provide mitigating services to offset the spread of environmentally destructive commercial activities, while simultaneously facilitating the spread of economic benefits from commerce to wider areas (Igoe and Brockington, 2007). The case is the same for gorilla tourism and conservation in BINP since the price paid by the tourist to see the gorilla is very high and has turned the animal into a valuable commodity. And the same goes in terms of conservation, inasmuch as the government, and UWA in particular, are investing large amounts of money in order to protect the gorilla and its habitat, with the bottom goal of keeping tourism as thriving as possible. Indeed, from what I witnessed in the field, most research participants, (particularly from the local community and entrepreneurs groups) were interested in the commodification side of the system of gorilla conservation and tourism, rather than in the conservation one. Just to give an idea, to the question ‘why is gorilla conservation important’ the following response was typical “Gorillas bring tourists, which in turn bring money. Money to UWA and lodges and money to us through community walks. Gorillas are important only for tourists” (Interview 12; 17-10-2016). In order to understand why this is the case, I believe it is important to highlight what are the costs and benefits of gorilla tourism and conservation in BINP.

¹⁶ <http://pubs.iied.org/G04135/> (accessed 11-08-2016)

COSTS

One of the questions of my interview list concerned the costs of gorilla tourism and conservation. Each group of stakeholders had relatively different answers, which depended on their position in the system. As it is possible to gather from the data so far, the communities adjacent to the forest are the ones that had to bear most of the costs after the designation of the BINP as a national park and the introduction of gorilla tourism. As demonstrated by their answers the majority of locals I interviewed mentioned the loss of natural resources as the biggest cost. The natural resources that have been mostly mentioned were papyrus grass, medicinal plants, bush meat, firewood, constructing materials, and land. Specifically, the papyrus grass is used by women to make baskets and mats, employed both for everyday chores and utensils, as well as to sell to tourists. As the participants told me, all these resources were freely accessible before the forest turned into a National Park, and now they are available only for the persons who can afford them. Then, the other main cost for residents is the crop raiding, mainly by baboons and elephants, of their lands and crops. With the occurrence of these instances, the households bordering the forest can lose their entire annual harvest, and subsequent income (Tumusiime and Vedeld, 2012). It is indeed a great loss, which is hardly compensated although the revenue sharing programme includes a compensation plan, which in theory calls for the compensation of the households' losses, but in practice is not being carried out. The closer the households are to the boundary of the National Park the poorer in terms of lifestyle and welfare level (Twinamatsiko et al., 2015), particularly because of crop raiding. One of the interviewees informed me of an instance where a group of gorillas was feeding on the banana plantation of a household close to the border. The UWA tourist guide brought the tourists to observe the gorillas from that spot, where they stayed for the entire tourist hour, resulting in the complete destruction of the banana plantation. The participant referred to me that the owner of the plantation had to defencelessly watch, with tears in his eyes, his crops being destroyed for the pleasure of the tourist.

Another major cost, directly deriving from a presumably likewise benefit, is the revenue sharing programme. As previously examined the current programme calls for 20% of the park entry fees (40 USD per visitor) and the gorilla levy of the gorilla-tracking permit

(10 USD). The amount is not much considering what enters directly in UWA's treasury, but, if well executed, it could be relatively beneficial if we consider the number of tourists coming to BINP each year. In 1993 when gorilla tourism was first put in place in BINP the number of tourist was around 1,300 per annum, now in 2017 we are at around 20,000 per annum (IIED, pro-poor project report¹⁷, UWA¹⁸). The problem however is presented in the redistribution of the revenue in the surrounding communities. One of the responses from the a local community participant was "Gorilla tourism related activities is what makes me thinks about gorillas, however revenue sharing this year has not come yet so I'm wondering whether tourists are still coming" (Interview 18; 20-10-2016). The information given by this participant demonstrates the sporadic nature of the revenue sharing programme, and the disinformation about the structure and operation of the system.

Because of the multi-layered Ugandan governmental system, the money has great difficulties to arrive at the lower levels, because 'transaction expenses' are being deducted at every level. Specifically the system is carried out as follows, all the tourist money from all the parks around Uganda are collected together at the UWA headquarters in Kampala. UWA has then the responsibility to divide it between either the district and the sub-county, who in turn are responsible to distribute them at the lower levels, in the form of disbursement, compensation or selection of projects to be funded under the revenue sharing programme arrangements (Ahebwa et al., 2011). The projects that have been favoured have been goat keeping, potato growing, and tree planting. Elite captures becomes an issue when it comes to the various levels that tend to facilitate their own interests and entourage instead. As noted by Tumusiime et al. "local people cited several incidents of leaders of the committees in charge of distributing revenues using them for their own benefit instead" (2012, p. 21). Again, every governmental level has been accused of seizing some commission on the work they do. The bottom line is that most of the amount of revenue sharing gets lost in the course of actions, and people in the villages end up having none of the benefits they are entitled to.

Furthermore, lack of access to information and institutional education does not help the residents' situation, who tend to respond in what I heard from the participants being two different ways. The first one is to simply wait for the sporadic and little that may come as part of the revenue sharing, and the other is to complain without really moving towards

¹⁷ <http://pubs.iied.org/G04135/> (accessed 11-08-2016)

¹⁸ <http://www.ugandawildlife.org/> (accessed 11-08-2016)

possible changes and solutions. Some research participants have mentioned the benefits of revenue sharing demonstrated by the goat they received, yet when I asked them when they received it some of them even answered – back in 2012, showing the infrequent pattern of the revenue sharing process. According to Tumusiime et al. “this is clearly a rather questionable situation, and is contrary to the story touted to tourists that most of the revenues they bring to Bwindi go to the communities neighbouring the park” (2012, p.19). As I personally witnessed during the briefing moment with the tourists, UWA guides rangers, during the explanation and presentation of the experience, have as part of their speech to mention the revenue sharing. Which has the double-sided aim of justify the amount of money tourists are supposed to pay, and illustrate the positive ends for which it is employed. The situation is undeniably problematic and if considering the amount of revenue UWA earns each year for gorilla tourism, it is unfair that so little is accruing to the local communities, whom in fact are the ones loosing the most.

The other cost, or better disadvantage, the local community is subjected to, is the organization of the tourism industry in the tourism areas. In the case of this thesis I am specific of Ruhija, where tourism is relatively new, since the first group of habituated gorillas opened in 2008. The tourism sector in Ruhija is heavily controlled by the tourism agencies, of the countries from where the tourist come from, which are directly in connection to the tourism company in Kampala, capital of Uganda and main arrival location for international tourists. This entails that these two mediation institutions comprehensively organize the tourists’ trips, activities and plans. I asked to the tourists participating to the focus groups why they decided for BINP instead of the Virungas in Rwanda, and apart from few people who told me that it was because of the lower price, most of them said that they did not have a say in the trip planning and that the tourist agency decided everything for them. Moreover, I was surprised that most of the focus group participants did not sojourn in Ruhija’s lodges but they would be booked somewhere else, usually in more established or fancy lodges in Buhoma or back in Kabale in Lake Bunyonyi. The result is, due to friendships or networking among the tourist guides or drivers and the lodge managers, particular lodges or activities are preferred over others. On top of this, I was told that rich entrepreneurs from Kampala own most of the lodges in Ruhija, and they employ their own family or otherwise trained staff from Kampala. The reason for this approach, again I was told, is that local personnel is not trained and has no tourism skills, therefore cannot be employed in high-ranking businesses as the lodges in

Ruhija. This results in the almost complete exclusion of local people from being employed in local businesses and being integrated in the tourism market.

The same goes for the products sold in the tourism facilities (food and crafts). Indeed, according to an assessment done on behalf of IIED, the products sold in the lodges or craft shops, rarely appeared to be locally produced, instead it was demonstrated that the products bought for the lodges hail from Kampala, Rwanda or Kenya. And again the matter rests on the presumed poor quality of the local product that cannot be sold or presented to the tourist (IIED, 2017). Again, according to Bitariho et al. “only few households have chances of formal employment in park related jobs, which require formal education. Most households around Bwindi therefore have few opportunities for diversifying incomes since they are limited to trade in agriculture and NTFPs” (2016; p. 26). I witnessed this unfavourable market system myself at various occasions. I participated in a meeting organized by IIED with IGCP, ITFC and some local community leaders from Buhoma and Ruhija, for the ‘pro-poor’ gorilla tourism project. The project has the aim of boosting the capacity of the local market and products to create a more independent and eco-friendly tourism sector around Bwindi, as well as a more equitable redistribution of the tourism benefits and capacity among the various stakeholders around gorilla tourism.

But, during the time I spent in Ruhija and when I travelled to the other sectors I did notice that the products came from outside the area, and when talking to the shop owners or employees they confirmed to me that the reason rests on the poor quality of the local ones. I particularly refer to the crafts (sculptures, backrests, clothes).

The example that mostly impressed me is the honey, which I used to buy from a street vender and it was contained in an old-reused Waragi (local gin) bottles. The honey is exquisite and unique, for it comes directly from inside the tropical forest. However it is impossible to be sold to tourist, who at the sight of the packaging and levels of sanitation, tend not to buy it. It is indeed an extraordinary good product that does not have a proper presentation. Business people coming from Kampala see these limitations and avoid them by buying the finished products elsewhere, and not invest in local products. Yet, while I was there, one of the business women (from Kampala) running a project that works with the community in Ruhija, overcame this lack by providing a proper packaging for the honey produced by a group of local men that uses the MUP. The end result is that the product is local and thorough, and it sustains the local market. This is the demonstration that things are moving in the area, but there is a strong obligation to involve more the local community

in the tourism business around BINP and give them more opportunities to share part of the profits of gorilla tourism.

Finally, still about the local community, the presence of tourism in the area represents a cost for the development of the infrastructure. That is to say, due to two main factors about gorilla tourism, the areas around Bwindi are not 'allowed' to improve their infrastructure, specifically in terms of roads. The main factor is the presence of gorillas. If the roads inside and at the borders of the park were to be tarmacked, there would be a quick increase in the traffic levels, which would be detrimental for the gorillas and the habitat in general. For this reason, organizations such as IGCP are arguing that there should be no road development and are discussing with the local governments about how to stop the innovations. To this day, the road has not yet been tarmacked.

Furthermore there is an imagery of naturalness and pristine involved in wildlife tourism, which I think is well expressed by this statement "I like to think that this system is relatively low key, and that there's not a big centre. If it was turned into a massive touristy complex it would ruin it a little bit because these are wild animals in their natural environment so that would spoil it". However, this totally contrasts with the local attitude that instead longs for development and better infrastructure. For the wildlife point of view this is indeed very much beneficial, because it maintains intact their habitat. But, on the other hand, it is not for the local people, who might aspire for better conditions and life styles (Laudati, 2010). Local actors, who are in favour of tourists and want to please the 'customer desires', also reinforce these ideologies of primitive spaces. Like one said from the entrepreneurs group "No need for tarmacked road because tourists want and need to see something different" (Interview 82, 5-12-2016). Contrarily, a participant from the local community stated "People have been denied of their rights because of gorillas [tarmacked road], the government promised it and IGCP got involved and now there is no road.

In this section I did not mention any of the other stakeholder groups because of their opinion about the costs of gorilla conservation and tourism. For the ideas of the majority of the people from the other groups (conservationists, tourists, and entrepreneurs) was that gorilla tourism and conservation do not entail any form of costs. The only costs that has been mentioned, mainly from the conservationist group, is the continual daily visit of the tourist to the gorillas, which can increase the level of distress of the group and expose them to disease transmission (Caldecott and Miles, 2005). In addition, the habituation process can provoke stress among the group or it can habituate the gorilla to the point that they become too familiar with humans. This latter, increases risks to the gorilla from

poachers or rebel groups, to whom they can come across in the forest and not escape from (Mukanjari et al., 2012).

Finally, the research participants from the tourist group did mention the costs of gorilla tourism and conservation, although not in regards to themselves but to the communities around the park who lost access to resources. This shows awareness on behalf of the tourists of the situation around the park, and many have acknowledged the importance of increasing the number of tourist so as to increase the profit and the revenue sharing. They would define themselves as advocates of the experience who will go back to their countries and suggest friends in doing the same. While others have mentioned that the price of wildlife tourism “is awfully expensive but if it helps to keep the gorillas we are willing to pay” (Focus group 5, 15-12-2016) or “we paid a lot of money to come here, so we hope it will be spent for a good cause” (Focus group 1, 27-10-2016) or again “it’s good that there is a system that protects them (gorillas), so we are happy to come here and pay for it, so that they can keep doing the job of protecting these animals” (Focus group 2, 28-10-2016). This shows that the tourists I encountered were not coming from the group of elite, high-ranking tourism, unconditionally willing to pay whatever price for the experience. Some of them actually informed me that they did many sacrifices in order to gather the necessary money to come. Therefore it demonstrates that they are conscious of the price but at the same they feel they are spending it for a good cause.

BENEFITS

At the same time, there are the various benefits that gorilla tourism and conservation represent for its stakeholders. The benefits, however, are not equally divided and are different according to the stakeholder groups. The first benefit I want to examine has been mentioned by the majority of the stakeholders, although one would think that it concerns only the entrepreneurs. Namely I am referring to the job opportunities that the introduction of gorilla tourism and conservation has brought. One of the most common responses to one of my interview question was – ‘gorillas are important because if it wasn’t for them I wouldn’t be here’. Almost all entrepreneurs have mentioned this aspect, but surprisingly also most of the conservationist interviewees, particularly the ones from UWA and ITFC. Indeed the introduction of gorilla tourism and conservation, has not only increased the tourism business for tourist entrepreneurs, but has also demanded more security and

research to be carried out. Each year UWA is increasing its expenditure in gorilla protection by employing more staff and better equipment. This of course contributes to job openings and employment opportunities, of in fact a well-paid and stable job. Similarly, ITFC received a relative good amount of money for research and has therefore the opportunity to employ more staff, usually coming from the area. As one of the researchers of ITFC told me, mountain gorillas, being such a charismatic species, receive worldwide attention, and as a consequence it is a perfect beneficiary of research funds. Indeed, conservation organizations have received their funding from private sources, like concerned individuals and philanthropic organizations (Eckhart and Lanjouw, 2008).

Furthermore, for what regards people from the community group, although, as we saw, they bear the biggest losses from the introduction of gorilla conservation, they are also indirect beneficiaries of gorilla tourism. Local communities are the main recipients of development funds, as Eckhart et al. (2008) explain, multilateral organizations like the European Union; UNDP, IMF, World Bank, United State Agency for International Development and the UK department for International Development, provide funding for various types of development project largely centred around poverty alleviation and economic growth strategies. Thus, with indirect I mean that they may not be the recipients of the revenue sharing programme but they are of many other projects. The project I saw being most active and notorious are the women empowerment project, the former poachers honey producers project, school and education projects, orphanage project and Batwa project. The women's project tries to empower Ruhija's women by teaching them practical skills (basket weaving and tailoring) to earn an income, to be independent from their husband and help to sustain their family. The former poachers are a group of men that utilize the MUP area for the production of honey. The school project invites tourists to attend the kid's dance and sing performances, and then they are asked to help the schools with sponsorships for students in more need or support donations, the same goes for the orphanage. The Batwa projects instead is more focused on the so called 'cultural' or 'community walks', where tourist are brought around the community and they show them particular cultural traditions and habits. Among the local community group many have acknowledged the benefits coming from the project, particularly, the main one mentioned was the sponsorship to the students, which is a considerable help for many households that want to send their children to school.

Furthermore the presence of tourism or international researchers, who may reside for sometime in the area, implies the growth of the local market and local products demand. Which is visible from the expansion of Ruhija since it became a tourism hub in 2008. One interviewee told me that when he first arrived in the area in 2008, Ruhija comprised four grocery shops, and now it has around 8 lodges and just as many shops, bars and restaurants, “The exponential rate with which Ruhija has grown since the introduction of tourism is astonishing, people are much wealthier, they have something to go on, and the rate of economic growth is really fast” (Interview 3; 6-10-2016). I was informed that people from Kabale and Kisoro, mainly university educated, come to Ruhija to find work. I also interviewed a woman that recently opened a bar and she explained “My husband was earning a good amount of money to sustain the family, but I was tired of constantly having to ask him for money, so, with his help, I took over a bar to sustain myself on my own” (Interview 34; 24-10-2016). This demonstrates that if the capital is available among the residents it is also possible to invest it and increase it.

But the money given directly by the tourists is probably the most meaningful form of indirect benefits the local community is accruing. And this occurs in various ways, the first one has been mentioned already, and it is represented by the sponsorship tourists provide to students when visiting the schools or the orphanages in Ruhija. The community walks, one of the tourist attractions aside from gorilla tourism in Ruhija, always involves a visit to the schools (there are three in Ruhija) and the orphanages (there are two in Ruhija). The other main form of fund on behalf of the tourists is through the so-called porters. The porters represent the only proper, direct involvement residents can account for in the gorilla tourism experience. Indeed the porters’ role is to accompany the tourists in the gorilla tracking, and carry their bags. Sometimes they help the tourists in the difficult paths inside the forest, the walk to the gorilla is particularly hard, very steep and sometimes very slippery, therefore porters often function as a support. In the morning briefing with the tourists, after all the rules for the tracking have been explained, UWA guides highly recommend to the tourists to make use of a porter and insist on two main points – the difficult terrain and high chance that the tourists would not be able to make it by themselves, and the great opportunity this represents for the people from the community. Indeed the tourists are told that the minimum amount is 20 USD per each porter per tracking experience, but I saw tourists usually give more. Thus being a porter becomes a direct benefit inasmuch as the money is directly delivered to the porter himself, for whom 20USD per day is a considerable amount.

Additionally, there are some other unfortunate instances in which the tourists find it so hard to complete the track that the so-called 'helicopter' has to be requested. The helicopter is another term to define the stretcher, which will lift the tourist all the way out of the forest, depending on the weight of the needy visitor a number between six to sixteen porter-stretcher are called. To call the helicopter it costs 350USD, which are directly divided for the number of porters carrying the stretcher. If we consider that the people from the local community live on an average of 1USD per day, working as a porter can represent a huge improvement for their families and households, "Gorillas are good, they bring welfare, particularly for porters, who can earn a living out of" (Interview 5; 11-10-2016). However, not all the porters that turn up at the UWA headquarters every morning are chosen, but at least they do it in turns and make sure that each one of them has the opportunity to go at least once a week. Indeed, this does not account for everyone, I saw only a couple of women working as porters, but it is just to show that the local community is not a homogenous entity, only suffering from gorilla tourism and conservation.

Moreover, a number of interviewees also confirmed me that Ruhija is turning into an urban area and it is increasing its levels of education and literacy, and all because of the market growth. The local market is mainly characterised by agricultural products and crafts (baskets, beads, wood carves, traditional textiles), one interviewee said "Tourist help me by buying my crafts, so that I can produce an income for my family" (Interview 17; 17-10-2016). Indeed, this is one of the reasons why the households close to the boundary are the poorest, inasmuch as, not only they are affected by crop raining, but also they are far from the trading centre and less capable of becoming involved in the local market.

Additionally, there is the aspect of the money paid by the tourist, which is being invested throughout the country for infrastructure development, schools and hospital construction. Indeed part of UWA revenue, being a parastatal institution, goes to the government budget, which is consequently invested in the development of the country at large. And also the money comes from the NGOs that work in the area, and provide funding through the investments in community projects. The other major actor in Ruhija for investments and funds is USAID (United State Agency for International Development), whose work in Uganda is described with these words "Today, our wide-ranging work supports U.S. policy objectives in peace and security, democracy and governance, health

and education, economic growth, and humanitarian assistance”¹⁹. Indeed in Ruhija it was common to see the sign of USAID, specifically beside a school and a clinic.

Many interviewees, at the question about gorillas importance, have answered– ‘because gorilla bring us money and income, as well as revenue for the country at large’. And this was characteristic of people coming from all the four stakeholder groups. Many have also showed interested in increasing the number of habituated gorilla groups so to gain more tourists and subsequent tourism revenue “We need to protect Bwindi more, so that it can also bring more revenue” (Interview 7-11-2016). The current annual revenue for UWA is unknown, I cannot find any document that specifies it, and no one of the interviewees could precisely tell me how much it is, but I was told that in the last four years, tourism has become the first foreign revenue for Uganda (Lepp et al., 2008), therefore very important for the county. The population and the people in charge understood the potential of wildlife tourism and invested a lot of efforts in its development and now that the earnings are increasing each year, people have responsively changed their attitudes. In other words people used to see gorillas as any other animal, but as soon as they saw the benefits deriving from it they began being more supportive and more caring. In the community many participants have told me that if it were not for tourism, the gorillas would not even be alive. And this resonates with the ecotourism idea that tourism can play an important role in job creation and supporting the rural economy, as well as preserving the ecology of the area (Jamal et al., 2006). Furthermore, gorilla tourism has now become a source of competition between Rwanda and Uganda, who both have employed a mix of strategies combining pricing and market focus, international outreach, and tourism sector reform (Maekawa et al., 2013). Both these countries have focused on the high-end market and have exponentially increased the prices of gorilla tracking permit since its first introduction. In Uganda it was 175 USD in 1998 and is now 600 USD. Rwanda however is the one that mostly increased the price passing from 375 USD in 2004 to 1.500 USD since January 2017²⁰. What Rwanda is trying to do is to create an ever-increased high-ranking tourism so to earn more by managing fewer tourists and lower the levels of human-animal contact that may result negatively in the health of the gorillas. Additionally, “mountain gorillas are an ideal subject for nature-based tourism, as they are relatively scarce, require visitors to exercise caution, and are difficult to access” (Maekawa

¹⁹ <https://www.usaid.gov/uganda> (accessed, 14-07-2017)

²⁰ <https://volcanoessafaris.com/2017/05/announcement-on-immediate-increase-in-price-of-gorilla-permits-by-rwanda-development-board/> (accessed 15-06-2017)

et al., 2013; p. 4) this is why the high-end market is more profitable for this kind of wildlife tourism.

Finally another major benefit deriving from gorilla tourism and conservation is undoubtedly the conservation of Bwindi as an ecosystem. The consequences of its preservation are low levels of erosion, rainfall, water catchment and increase in oxygen and good air. Also, the direct conservation of the gorillas is the indirect conservation of the forest and its other wildlife. This latter point has been mentioned by many of the conservationists and researchers who value Bwindi in its overall and are proud to know that is so well protected, most of them have mentioned it as the primary benefits of gorillas conservation. One UWA rangers stated as follows “we talk about money and what what but there is something really important about nature. The importance of this forest is not only about money, it is also about climate and well being of the surrounding community. If the forest wasn’t here the erosion would be catastrophic” (Interview 79, 01-12-2016). Showing that the intrinsic value of nature is present, and not all the stakeholders are interested in only the economic benefits. Yet in the overall, the economic aspect of gorilla tourism was the one that has undoubtedly been mentioned the most. The next section will investigate the anthropomorphic aspect of the mountain gorillas, to try to demonstrate why it has gained so much national and international attention and value.

CHAPTER 5

GORILLAS LIKE US: THE ANTHROPOMOPHISED CHARACTER OF THE MOUNTAIN GORILLA

BACKGROUND

As we saw in the previous chapter, since its employment as a tourist attraction, mountain gorillas have become as economic tool. However, there are two declinations relating to the manner in which gorillas represent an economic source. The first one is exhibited by the income generated from the industry of gorilla tourism. Therefore, for UWA, in terms of tourism revenue, for the local population, for the benefits that they indirectly receive from gorilla tourism in the area and for the entrepreneurs for whose businesses are thriving due to gorilla tourism. For these particular stakeholders gorilla are an economic opportunity, a chance for life improvement and better living conditions. Besides, the other manner is the conservationist one, which considers the economic potential of the gorillas the very reason for their survival and the conservation of their habitat. Namely I am referring to the group of conservationists, who make use of the worldwide attention the gorilla has acquired as a charismatic species, to attract more funds and investment to conserve them, as well as many other species in their habitat. Yet the question remains: why are they so important? What makes them so special to be conserved and in turn conserve an entire ecosystem?

These questions arose when I tried to understand why these animals have become famous worldwide, and what induces people to travel all the way to East Africa to pay money and see them. And since the beginning of this study, I believed that the answer to these questions represents the glue to the political and economic aspects of mountain gorillas. This is to say that the relevance given to this particular animal, in comparison to any other in Bwindi, is the very cause for all the economic and political nuances around its tourism system and conservation. And more precisely I am talking about the anthropomorphized character of the mountain gorilla. Indeed I believe that the interest and curiosity reserved for this primate is especially originated by the animal anthropomorphic

nature, which in turn is the motivation for its success as a tourism attraction and for the triumphant result in terms of conservation. In this chapter, I will also try to demonstrate that mountain gorillas have become a flagship species because of their similarity and closeness to humans, and furthermore that certain western discourses of the anthropomorphization of the gorilla have overshadowed different local ones. As we shall see, the spread of anthropomorphised discourses about the gorilla, have been put in place particularly by international conservation organization and environmental institution in order to highlight their vulnerability and promote their conservation and protection.

Throughout this chapter I will use Serpell's definition of anthropomorphism – "attribution of human mental states (thoughts, feelings, motivations and beliefs) to nonhuman animals" (2002, p. 438). This process becomes even more straightforward with primates, for their being so close to us as humans, or even better "the anthropological relationship with great apes has become not about what makes them great apes—not-humans—but just how much like us they are, [...] just how much like us we can construct them to be" (King 2001; p.1; cited in Mullin 2002; p. 391).

PROTECTING THE MOUNTAIN GORILLAS

If we go back to the discovery and history of the mountain gorilla we find a number of relevant figures that publicly exposed themselves for the safety of this particular species. First of all there is, Captain von Beringe, a German officer who in 1902 was the first to see, kill and capture a mountain gorilla. Specifically the first European to discover a different species of gorilla, in his recognition the mountain gorilla was called *Gorilla Beringei Berigei*. Then there is Carl Akley, who due to his particular appreciation for this species and its habitat, in 1925 convinced the Belgian King Albert to institute the first National Park in Africa – *Park National Albert* (Schaller, 1964; Fossey, 1983; Adams, 2004), now turned into the *Parc National de Virunga*. In terms of research we find two historically important figures that first began the long-term study of the mountain gorillas, namely George Schaller and Dian Fossey. Schaller was not the first to commence fieldwork with mountain gorillas, but the first one to provide us with a long-term study and accounts of gorilla behaviour, ecology and social characteristics (Schaller, 1964). Schaller left New York to study mountain gorillas in 1959, and Fossey followed him soon after in 1967, to do her research in the same spot where Schaller was based during his fieldwork,



Tourists in the forest. Copyright Isabella Vannucchi, 27-11-2016

namely in the Kabara meadow in the Virunga Mountains (Shaffer, 2015).

Because of the National Geographic article about her story with the gorillas, her book *Gorillas in the Mist* and the film that took the same name, she acquired worldwide

recognition for her work and for her battle to save the endangered mountain gorillas, actually she is the one that mostly had an impact in the protection and study of this animal. I also heard it back from various research participants who have acknowledged her role in gorilla conservation “Gorilla increased in importance because of Dian Fossey” (interview n. 1, 3-10-16) “Dian fossey and people like that are the one that put light on gorillas” (interview n. 32, 24-10). Or for the people who have admitted to come to do the experience with the mountain gorillas because of her “I read the book *Gorillas in the Mist*, the book touched me and I wanted to have that experience personally. I heard about the poachers and their story and I wanted to come here and see and maybe help” (focus group 1, 27-10-2017), “It was incredible and yes they did seem comfortable with our presence there, and I read *Gorillas in the Mist* so I think that helped me to appreciate what was going on and how they interact with each other. It also helped me not be afraid of them, so I recommend that reading for anyone that needs to come” (focus group 5, 15-12-2017).

The popular representation of Fossey’s work, on top on making her and the mountain gorillas famous, helped in replacing the stereotype of the gorilla as a savage beast, or as Schaller says “a ferocious and bloodthirsty beat with an amazing array of human and super human traits, all basically treacherous” (Schaller, 1964, p. 2). Instead what both of them tried to do was to reshape the image of the mountain gorillas as a

vulnerable species, shy, curious, threatened and closely related to us animals in need of protection (Shaffer, 2015).

Fossey's role fitted well with the period in which she worked, namely between 1967 to 1985, inasmuch as the second half of the twentieth century was the peak for the creation of conservation initiatives and organizations all around the world. Indeed the twentieth century signs the century when most of the institutionalization of national and international conservation action materialized, specifically on behalf of the United States and European countries such as Great Britain, France, The Netherlands, Switzerland and Sweden (Adams, 2004). It was in this period that the wave of environmental ethos induced these countries to implement new forms of wildlife conservation first, and then successively for forests and other wilderness habitats.

Going back of a few decades, according to Mulling in her study of human-animal relationship, the British Empire was the first to establish animal conservation in its colonies, specifically by enclosing the concerned animals and landscapes into fenced area. However she points out that it did so not only in response to the love for nature and the desire to protect the animals, but also it was employed as a colonial machine to control the number of games available for hunting and the ones available for the subsistence of the local populations. Therefore, as the British realised that the game was become scarcer, they began a policy of husband and manage, by protecting and exploiting (Mullin, 1999)²¹. Anyhow, as a consequence to the 'protect and exploit' rule, animal reserves and sanctuaries started to proliferate in the British African colonies. Particularly, it was preferred the African pristine natural spaces, the result of a socially constructed image of 'sublime nature', characterized by "awe-inspiring vastness and grandeur" (Neumann, 1998; p, 16). This 'sublime nature' was influenced by the eighteen-century British aristocratic estate parks, as well as the romantic concept of 'aesthetic value of nature', often represented by picturesque scenes, where the observer is placed outside of the landscape (Neumann, 1998). The British specifically constructed the idea of African nature as opposed to culture and society (Mullin, 1999), whereby people had to be separated from these untouched and wild areas. Colonial powers resolved by setting aside huge tracts of (in their view) 'unspoiled' land as game reserves or national parks, where nostalgic Europeans, increasingly contaminated by industrialization and modernization, could visit and spend some leisure time (Brooks, 2005). These became 'primitive' spaces

²¹ I am now concentrating on the British colonies for Uganda was a colony under the British Empire and has been subjected to similar conservation policies as other African countries under the British rule.

to which rich colonials could escape on holiday, either to hunt with a gun or with a camera, depending on their desires. These spaces became untouchable for the local populations as they were seen as a possible threat to the endangered species and games. For this reason it is referred to as fortress conservation, where the 'wild' is kept aside from humans and humans are therefore kept apart from land and resources, and only a limited number of people are allowed to benefit from it, as in a fortress. Fortress conservation was a typical trait of colonialism practices and it is not as common in Uganda anymore, but is the basis from which the neo-colonial or neoliberal conservation approaches, which I addressed in previous chapters, have been inspired.

By the second half of the twentieth century new modes and discourses of conservation focused on an idea of nature as a fragile web of animals and habitat, which needed human help to be protected (Shaffer, 2015). After all, it was actually humans who through development, modernization, rising population and consequent resource demand, industrialization and conquering, put nature in danger in the first place. Indeed, by this period, increased pressure on popular sensitization took hold in the Western world, where television programmes and documentaries were trying to galvanize their public by representing vulnerable bodies (Shaffer, 2015).

Around the sixties and seventies, in particular the United States were at the forefront in this regard, and they acted as the most devoted by introducing a profusion of legislation to preserve wilderness and protect wildlife²² (Shaffer, 2015). This legal infrastructure of environmental protection "promoted the regulation and restoration of the ecosystems upon which endangered species and threatened species depended" (Shaffer, 2015; p. 337). However it still followed the Western and Romantic idea of nature as wild, Eden-alike spaces that are set apart from human presence. It was no longer colonial fortress conservation, but it still followed the same principles. Environmental NGOs were the ones, which mostly urged to pressure African countries to follow the same environmental friendly steps, and introduce programmes, which could protect the African wilderness. And if we combine this process to the Bwindi case it is possible to notice that the history of the park evolved in a similar way, being a forest reserve under the British empire, an animal sanctuary soon after the country's independence, and at the end a

²² "The Wilderness Act (1964), the Land and Water Conservation Act (1964), the Endangered Species Preservation Act (1966), the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (1968), the Endangered Species Conservation Act (1969), the Marine Mammal Protection Act (1972), and the Endangered Species Act (1973)". (Shaffer, 2015; p. 337)

National Park, after the involvement of the NGO's working with the protection of the mountain gorillas. This mechanism at the same time, gradually blocked any human access if not for tourism or scientific reasons, again linked to the western discourses of Nature as a product of human-untouched spaces.

MOUNTAIN GORILLA AS A CHARISMATIC AND FLAGSHIP SPECIES

The sixties and seventies were relevant years for the denouncing of primate extinction and there were several men and women that have been linked with primates and their popular work in conservation. Namely I am referring to the paleoanthropologists Luis and Mary Leaky, whose interest focused on human evolution, and trying to demonstrate that human life began in Africa. Luis is famous for his interest in apes and their relation to human evolution, indeed he is known for having creating three famous figures in primates studies, the so called Trimates. Namely Jane Goodall, famous for her



Tourist before starting the track. Copyright Isabella Vannucchi
5-12-2016

long-term study of chimpanzees in Tanzania and her life-long endeavour for issues such as primates and forests conservation, climate change, nonhuman rights and animal welfare; Dian Fossey and her already extensively analysed work on mountain gorillas; and finally Biruté Galdikas and her long-term study of orangutans in Borneo. All these three famous women started

conducting their study in the same period; Goodall and Galdikas are still prominent in the field, while Dian was murdered in Rwanda in 1985. However, their work and their innovative study methods, which entailed close contact with the animals, disclosed the issue of the threatening situation for the three species and stimulated worldwide public interest.

In the case of the mountain gorilla the depiction of vulnerable bodies to awake the public sympathetic response was carried out as we previously saw by figures such as Fossey and Attenborough. It was thanks to these personalities that the mountain gorilla acquired worldwide interest and began to be so well protected, and a number of research participants confirmed so by mentioning their names. The National Geographic journal and the photographer Robert Campbell, who was in charge of the article about Fossey in the 1970, especially helped her in the intent of spreading the word about the situation of the endangered mountain gorillas. Campbell's pictures particularly touched the public because of the way he portrayed the naturalness of Fossey's relationship with the gorillas, which she was thoroughly studying and profoundly loving. Her story and the images created an enthusiastic public who started to be interested in the same experience as they saw in the pictures of Fossey with the gorillas.

According to Shaffer, Fossey was pivotal in the revision of the image of the gorilla, inasmuch as she not only interacted and played with them, as demonstrated in the pictures, but she also anthropomorphized them (2015). Fossey does so in her book by giving them names and characters, as well as human-alike personalities, which in turn shows her closeness to the animals and brings the public to a more familiar context. In Shaffer's words Fossey's role was to promote "the romanticized possibilities of a human-gorilla encounter in the wild" (2015; p. 328). Her relationship with the mountain gorillas to which she dedicated her life, became more prominent when her favourite and beloved gorilla, Digit, was brutally murdered (as in fact later similarly happened to her) and left decapitated and with no hands. It was allegedly done on behalf of the poachers, however it is believed that the act was also the result of a political statement on behalf of a local groups that wanted to send a message to Fossey, who at the time was acquiring, or rather imposing, a lot of influence in the area in order to protect "her" gorillas. Digit's death in a way signed the actual beginning of the international cooperation for the protection of the mountain gorillas. It was indeed an "international wildlife tragedy that affected scientists, conservationists, politicians, environmentalists, and wildlife lovers from the United States to Great Britain and beyond" (Shaffer, 2015; p. 336). The battle for the protection of the gorillas strongly reshaped the value and importance of the mountain gorillas.

The people that work with the gorillas now portray the same kind of love for the animal, as Fossey had for her habituated groups. One participant from the conservationist group mentioned the love for the animal in these terms "I love gorillas because I feel lucky

to see them, they are named, they are individuals and my friends, I really love them and I'm proud to be one of the reasons why they are protected. It is important to love them if you want to protect them" (Interview 65, 9-10-2016). The participant's point of view clearly demonstrates a sense of care for a familiar being. Indeed, many participants have acknowledged that their love for the animal increased with the time spent in their company.

However, the value given to the mountain gorilla in this thesis can be seen in a double way. The first one refers to the willingness to pay, carried out particularly by tourists, who decide to pay money to visit them. Or in other words "The value of specific conservation actions can be measured through the economics of individual consumption, and the supposition is that biological, social and cultural values can be captured by consumer preferences measured by individuals' 'willingness to pay'" (Robinson, 2011; p. 960). As previously mentioned, mountain gorillas are now a tourist attraction, as such they have been turned into a commodity to which a monetary value can be assigned. Again, Rwanda and Uganda are both investing in this commodity and are studying the market in order to arrive at the perfect price that can make them earn the most. This is the reason behind the recent increase in price for gorilla tracking in Rwanda to 1500\$, where the government decided that elitist tourism would be more profitable and sustainable for the gorillas wellbeing. To which the UWA has promptly answered by keeping its price at the same level (600\$), which show the market competition and demonstrated the commoditized character of the primate. This type of value is then represented by the willingness of the tourists to pay these amounts. The other type of value is the one acquired as a species in need of protection, therefore again the economic value given to the species to be conserved. This includes the funding that the species acquires respectively for being conserved and gain support. In this context value can also be transplanted to the level of charisma the animals has acquired internationally. As a result the more charismatic is a species the more probability it has to become the subject of protection, funding and attention.

As Walpole et al. (2002) argue, a flagship species performs a strategic socio-economic role rather than an ecological one. Indeed, flagship species are "popular charismatic species that serve as symbols and rallying point to stimulate conservation awareness and action" (Ducarme et al., 2013; p.2). In doing so these particular species attract interest and funds for their protection, and most time for the protection of entire ecosystems, as in the case of the mountain gorillas and their habitat. Furthermore, in

Lorimer's study of non-human charisma, charismatic species are said to be "generally encompassed by adjective such as 'cute', 'cuddly', 'fierce', or 'dangerous'" (2007; p. 918). In my point of view, all these adjectives can recall the popular imagery of the mountain gorillas and are surely terms that I have personally heard when talking about the animal with other people, and that have been part of my personal imagination of the mountain gorilla, before and after seeing them.

However, going back to the charismatic or flagship species, the gorilla has played the same role in its conservation success and the one of both the Virungas and Bwindi. Again, due to Fossey's images and role in their conservation, mountain gorillas acquired charisma and consequently attracted the interest of international donors for their protection, and tourists that wanted to see them. Also, being a charismatic species, the gorilla has consequently become a marketing tool, which needs to be sold to the public, or in Walpole and Leader-Williams words "[flagship] species have the ability to capture the imagination of the public and induce people to support conservation action and/or to donate funds. The public in developed countries identifies with high profile, charismatic species, examples of which include tigers, dolphins, rhinos, elephants and gorillas" (2002; p. 544). One research participant confirmed "the term endangered animal has a picture of a gorillas usually beside it" (interview 4; 8-10-2016) in order to highlight the potential of this animal as a flagship species.

The advertising of the mountain gorilla is again linked with Fossey and her images in National Geographic. Attenborough also did it, in the BBC programme *Life on Earth*, with dramatic tones and touching documentary scenes (himself rolling in the middle of a gorilla group in the Virungas), induced the public to become more attuned to the mountain gorilla cause. The same is occurring on behalf of the organizations working with or for gorillas, who with the use of anthropomorphised discourses about the primate and 'cuddly' images (like the one in p. 1), are persuading the public to come and see the animal, and invest in its conservation. Also Kagame, the president of Rwanda and Museveni, the president of Uganda, praise the gorilla in their public speeches. As previously stated, many research participants have mentioned Museveni's known interest in keeping the gorilla protected, and similarly Kagame participated in the Kwita Izina, the name-giving event, in 2015. Which is a "uniquely Rwandan event, which was introduced in 2005 with the aim of creating awareness of the conservation efforts for the endangered mountain gorilla"²³,

²³ http://www.rdb.rw/kwitizina/?page_id=16 (last visited 2-09-2017)

where he stated that gorillas are a resource from which the country has to fetch a lot from. Indeed the gorilla performance as a charismatic species has been constructed and shaped according to the interests of whom employs it, and as we saw in previous chapters the interests can be economic, political or conservationist. The charisma therefore becomes a useful tool in order to gain these various interests, but it is important to underline that if it were not for the ecological and aesthetical characteristic of the animals the final ends would not be as positive and successful as they currently are. Or in Lorimer's terms "charisma can certainly be magnified through marketing and is open to a degree of construction by conservationists, but this is constrained by the ecological characteristics and particular agencies of the species themselves" (2007; p. 927).

ANTHROPOMORPHIZATION OF THE MOUNTAIN GORILLA

The anthropomorphization of the mountain gorilla plays a relevant role in the classification of the animal as a charismatic species. Lorimer in the study of non-human charisma specifies that humans are generally attracted and more prone to appreciate species that perform anthropomorphized characters. He mentions the concept of 'cuddly charisma', which is drawn by species that have faces similar to humans, "nonhumans in possession of the characteristics of a human face will trigger [more] concern" (Lorimer, 2007; p. 919). The gorilla has indeed a very human-alike face, as well as his hands and many other characteristics, notable to anyone who has seen them. Many of the people I interviewed have mentioned the anthropomorphic nature of the gorilla. The typical reactions I received during the interviews about the gorilla were "they are fascinating species, so similar to humans and so interesting" (interview 4, 8-10-2016) or "they are a charismatic species because they are so huge and because they are primates, and they are similar to us" (interview 57; 7-11-2017) or more "you realise that they are individuals with different characters and personalities, so sometimes you forget they are wild animals" (interview 64; 8-11-2017), or from the tourist group "you look at them and we see ourselves" (focus group 1, 27-10-2016), and finally "it looks nearly like human, especially the fingers, same kind. It was really going to my heart, because they are so similar to us" (focus group 2; 28-10-2016).

All these testimonies however come from the conservationist or tourist groups, who mostly employed westernized discourses about mountain gorillas, mainly referring to the

social anthropomorphic character of the gorillas. In contrast, the local population for example, provided me with accounts of scary encounters or perceptions. Many have mentioned that they are scared of gorillas because they fear of being eaten by them, or at the question 'what are the changes you witnessed after the introduction of gorilla conservation?' more than one participant announced that gorilla used to be herbivorous, but now they started eating humans. I soon understood that this attitude of fear was linked to two different incidents that happened in the area. One was in Katoma, one of the parishes where I conducted the interviews, where there was a man famous for having lost a finger at the hand of a gorilla when he worked in the forest for ITFC. The other one was once more related to one of ITFC researchers, who, soon after my arrival in Ruhija, had been severely beaten on the leg by one of the silverbacks of one of his research groups. This news quickly spread in Ruhija and people began to spread the idea that gorillas were turning carnivorous. This is not the case, inasmuch as gorilla are herbivorous primates, but instances like this help remind everyone that gorillas are indeed habituated and 'cute', but they still remain wild and powerful animals. The sense of fear however, seemed to be more common among the people who have either never seen one or do not regularly work with them. Other accounts from the local community group, turned around the physical similarities gorillas have with humans. As a matter of fact in the area there is a say, repeated to me several times that 'gorillas are not edible for they have five fingers like humans'. Bakiga are said not to eat any being with five fingers and because they are too similar to humans. Additional versions added that gorilla are our cousins that live in the forest, specifically one said "they are like humans, but god casted them and they didn't become fully humans, females gorillas are like humans because they cover their breasts" (interview 12, 17-10-2016). Another participant said "since I was little I was told that they were animals in the forest that resemble humans" (interview 9, 11-10-2016). Local discourses of mountain gorillas centre on the physical anthropomorphisation of the animal, rather than, like in the case of westernized discourses of anthropomorphization, in the social anthropomorphic character of the gorilla. But it is worth of note that a number of research participants have never seen a live gorilla, and their imagery of the animal is constructed by the aid of pictures (common around Ruhija) or the videos shown during the community sensitisation programmes, which are basically documentaries about gorillas. Therefore the interventions about the appearance of the gorillas mostly gathered around their human-alike body features and behaviours, such as hands, breasts, the way they

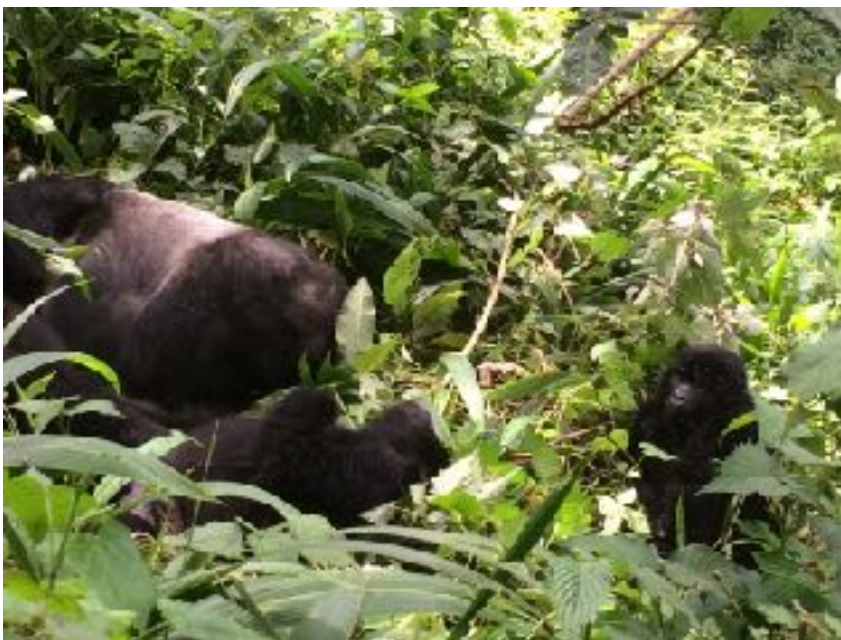
stand, the way they breastfeed or carry the infants, which again they observed in pictures or videos.

Going back to the bite incident, it is interesting that when I went to interact with the person that had been bitten in the leg, the account of the dramatic incident was particularly relevant in terms of the anthropomorphized analysis of the mountain gorilla. I visited the man soon after it happened, and during our informal conversation he was in deep pain, because the gorilla punctured tendon behind his ankle. But what impressed me was the way in which the man described the incident. He was obviously sorry for the event, but was especially curious to understand why it happened especially to him. He informed me that he had been working with Mukiza (the silverback who bit him) for 8 years, and he could not come to terms with the fact that Mukiza acted in this way particularly with him. I recalled the man saying “he is my friend, I know he is sorry, I know that he did a mistake and that he realized it, but I don’t understand why with me? What did I do wrong?” (Informal interview, 20-10-2016). This reaction shows great empathy towards the gorilla and a strong relationship between the two, which are directly related to the anthropomorphization process of the animal. This type of anthropomorphisation was particularly common with the people that work with gorillas, the researcher or UWA staff. Being in constant contact with the animals, learning and observing their behaviour and their ecological features makes the anthropomorphisation process easier to arise. Another similar instance to the one of Mukiza is the death of Rukina, the silverback of the first research group in Bwindi. It was an important event for Ruhija, inasmuch as the group under Rukina’s direction was composed of 20 individuals, making it quite a large group. When Rukina died the group split into two different groups headed by two of the young silverbacks previously under Rukina’s command. This was a big improvement for Ruhija tourism efficiency, as with two groups it was possible to double the tourist capacity.

Therefore around March 2016, the habituated gorilla groups shifted from three to four, with an increase of eight tourists per day for the overall Ruhija sector. However, what is relevant is the account of one interviewee from the conservationist group, who narrated to me the story of Rukina’s death and the tragic day that followed. The participant explained that Rukina died at the hands of a lightning, which struck the tree where the silverback was lying during a stormy night. The next morning when the first group of trackers found him laying dead a number of different figures were called to the site, such as the Wardens, Gorilla Doctors, and researchers. It was then added that the staff stayed

in the location of the death until late that night to carry out the autopsy and confirm the causes of the death, and what particularly struck the participant was the behaviour of the rest of the group who seemed lost and scared, they remained to feed ferly close to the location the entire day. And apparently, Mukiza, who later became a leading silverback of his own, kept coming back to check on Rukina, he would ran towards the crowd, fearlessly stand in the middle close to Rukina, check on the dead body and leave (c.f. King, 2013²⁴). According to the informant this happened several times during the day, a heart-breaking experience for who had to witness it. Rukina was commemorated with these words “he was a beautiful silverback and a great leader, it was a really sad moment for us” (interview 74, 11-11-2016). It was for me a very interesting account to understand what close relationship the people working with gorillas have with the animal, indeed they are the gorillas with which they interact everyday and which they know by name.

Further there was another participant, again one belonging to the conservationist group and who works with the gorillas, who told me another funny, but interesting, story



Five-year-old infant looking at other members of the group resting.
Copyright Isabella Vannucchi 27-11-2016

about one of the individuals of the group he/she was studying. Namely, it is about a five-year-old female juvenile, who had been abandoned early by the mother, who for no understood reason migrated to another group. Migration among female individuals is a recurring instance to reduce feeding competition, improve male protection and reproduce outside the natal

group (Robbins et al., 2007). However what was not common, in the example I was told by the informant, is the early stage in the infant development for it to be left independent. Indeed the female juvenile was left independent at three years old, and usually the dependency period for an offspring goes up to six years, the year that signs the passage

²⁴In her book *How Animals Grieve*, King talks about animal's emotions and suffering

from a juvenile to a sub-adult (Caldecott and Ferris, 2005). The juvenile was, unexpectedly, taken under the protection of the leading silverback, which took good care of her. However, according to the informant “she always looks angry, and she seems to be constantly eating to suppress the sadness of being left as an orphan, that is why she is so chubby” (informal interview, 20-10-2016). This is very much an anthropomorphised image of the gorilla, which again in this case represents common human feeling and behaviours.

To conclude this section, the anthropomorphisation of the gorilla has been done by the majority of the research participants, however the closeness to the animal in terms of knowledge and time spent in contact with the animal, highly influences the level of anthropomorphisation. In other words, people that do not work with them have mentioned obvious and physical anthropomorphised characteristics of the gorillas, such as the human-alike hands, breastfeeding habits, posture, and so on; while the people that work with the primates and see them nearly everyday where more prone to provide me with stories and imagery that relate to the social anthropomorphisation of the gorilla. For example, the conservationist group participants had a closer relationship with the animal, well expressed by one account that states “they became like friends, the more time and years spent with them, the more you know and love them” (interview 32, 24-10-2016).

HABITUATION PROCESS AND GORILLA TOURISM

If we connect the two concepts of flagship or charismatic species with the anthropomorphization of the mountain gorillas we end up to the growing interest to study, observe and be with the animal. The use of the gorilla as a flagship species and the advertisement done on behalf of important figures to protect and conserve them undoubtedly casted a light on the species, which increased the interest of a wider public for this species.

This, combined with the fact that the gorilla is an easily anthropomorphised and aesthetically appreciated species, makes it an excellent tourism attraction, as well as a great subject for conservation funding and aid. Or more precisely in Shaffer’s terms “Fossey’s direct action conservation, which focused on training, provisioning, and deploying a vigilante anti-poaching guard to patrol and protect the last remaining vestiges of pristine colonial African wilderness and wildlife, was dislodged by a postcolonial approach to wildlife conservation that saved the gorillas by offering them up as ‘a

spectacle for sale in the world's largest single industry—tourism” (2015; p. 318). To demonstrate so, during the focus groups with the tourists these have been some of the reactions at the question ‘why did you come and see the mountain gorilla?’ “Gorillas are a unique experience, people come to Uganda to see gorillas in particular, we went to China to see pandas. So it becomes special because these animals are unique and endemic to Uganda” (Focus group 1; 27-10-2016) or “you see them on television, famous David Attenborough, you see how they are so similar to us and special” (Focus group 3; 28-10-2016), or “when I was a little boy I saw a gorilla on TV and I thought to my self ‘wow one day I was to go and see one’” (Focus group 3; 28-10-2016). These accounts highlight the importance of the discourses surrounding gorilla conservation and the construction of them in the public arena, which in turn captivated the interest of particularly people from Western countries.

Gorillas tourism was made possible by the habituation process put in place firstly in The Virungas in the 1980s and successively in Bwindi at the beginning of the 1990s. Fossey, with a the vast unit of researchers and other staff team working on gorilla research and anti-poaching programmes, understood that the only viable solution to raise funds to conserve gorillas was to put in place gorilla tourism. Fossey was the one who first introduced the habituation process as it is now recognized and employed for gorilla tourism. Schaller before her, preferred a more distant and hidden position from the research subject as his research tool, while Fossey on the other hand, opted for a more intrusive manner of building relationships with the gorillas. She was indeed the first one to introduce the, at the time unorthodox, approach to habituation that fundamentally transformed the human-gorilla encounter up to now, that is to say that she embraced subjectivity and intimacy by trying her best to be accepted by the gorillas. She did so by copying their behaviours, she crawled on her hands and kneed to approach them, she pretended to feed on the same vegetation and imitate their vocalizations (Fossey, 1983; Williamson et al. 2003; Shaffer, 2015). What is relevant to know however, is that her approach to study mountain gorillas inaugurated an unprecedented new kind of human-animal encounter, which became the basis for what became the possibility for ‘everyone’ to approach and engage with mountain gorillas in the wild at close range (Shaffer, 2015).

Indeed her system was taken as the basis for the habituation process done on the groups that become habituated for both tourism and research. The habituation process involves the gorillas’ loss of fear to humans (Mukanjari et al., 2012). It includes a daily visit

to the gorilla group, by researcher and UWA staff, and the period before the group is open to tourism is two years.

One of the research participants confirmed this while explaining to me how the habituation is carried out. The informant participated in most of the habituation periods of



Gorilla looking straight into the camera. Copyright Isabella Vannucchi 27-11-2016

Ruhija's groups and explained that the process lasts two years, and it is characterised by daily encounters by the staff and the group involved. At the beginning the silverbacks usually keep charging the researchers and staff, and then, gradually with time and persistence they, as the rest of the group, become less alarmed and more willing to accept the human presence. In the participant's terms "you sit close to them until they stop being scared and turn curious, so gradually they come closer and closer, until they completely accept you" (Interview 92; 8-12-2016). After the two years of daily encounters, the group is declared habituated and open to the tourists. The gorilla tracking experience, as I previously explained, allows

the tourists to stay with the gorillas for one hour. Tourists are escorted by UWA guides and rangers, who kindly explain and elucidate the tourists with all sorts of information about the forest, its vegetation, gorilla information and curiosities. From what I personally witnessed, tourist are very much focused in their cameras and taking pictures of the gorillas, therefore as a research informant suggested "they observe the gorillas through the lenses of their cameras" (Interview 4, 3-10-2016). Anyhow, it is important to note is that is no longer as Fossey used to behave with the gorillas, in fact there is no contact with the gorillas and the tourists are compelled to maintain seven metres distance from the gorillas²⁵.

In any case, the majority of the tourists I talked to, described it as an incredible experience. Some of the tourists' accounts states as follow "to see them in their natural environment so relaxed, easy-going, peaceful. Playing around, they are the same as

²⁵ Sometimes the vegetation makes it very hard for this to be accomplished, and the distance gets reduce to permit visibility of the animals.

human and they interact with each other. What is special is that you are a guest to them in their environment” (Focus group 2, 28-10-2017), “it is amazing to get to be so close to them, one thing is to see them in the zoo, you are at one meter from them and they can attack you if they want” (Focus group 4, 7-12-2016). From my personal experience I believe the most striking aspect of gorilla tourism is that they are certainly wild animals, very big and powerful, yet they let you stay with and observe them in peace, they do not seem to feel threatened and they act carelessly of the people’s presence around them. Furthermore they are one of the few big wild species that can be seen in the wild with no aid of cars or other instrument to protect yourself, and for this reason the tracking offers a unique, quasi-primordial experience. Finally in this regard, in my point of view and also of other research participants, the gorillas openly show when they are irritated by human presence and they do not hold themselves to demonstrate you so. There was one instance in particular that made me understand this, namely I was following one of the researchers, who in turn was following one of the silverbacks to carry out the behavioural observation. The silverback was visibly distressed and was not appreciating our presence and our act of following him. He charged and pig-grunting at us, his way of telling us to ‘back-off’, we waited for few minutes and started following him again, but he turned back and did the same, showing great determination and power in declaring who has the right to do what. At the second charge the researcher stopped following him. Allegedly, a similar situation occurred with the field-assistant who was bitten, who seemed to not have followed the silverback desires because too confident, and was punished for not following the leader’s rules. Additionally, some tourists have expressed the concern of intruding into the gorilla’s habitat and disturbing them with their presence, “you never know if we are disturbing them. It was great but at the same time it was a little bit ehm...” (Focus group 3, 28-10-2016) or “particularly with the mum and the baby, it looked like we were disrupting them, and she kind wanted to be left alone so she tried hiding” (Focus group 4; 7-12-2017) or finally “it feels like we were disturbing but at the same time they seem to accept it as normal routine, after a while they looked pretty bored, like ‘go home now’” (Focus group 4; 7-12-2017). Therefore showing that gorillas have agency, which is strong and very clear-cut, and express their feeling and desires, perceptible to even the tourist that stay with them for just on hour. Interestingly, the tourists that visited more that one group were able to distinguish which group according to them was more relaxed with the human presence.

Anyhow what is important to highlight is that gorillas are majestic, big wild animals that let you be in their presence, but at the same time they have strong agency in the

equation of gorilla tourism, inasmuch as they are the ones who decide the limits and the conditions. And with agency I refer to the ability of a being to be aware of a self “(that can pursue intentions, be motivated or make choices)” and secondly to have some awareness of the social, which emerges with the interaction of with other selves “(in order to recognize one’s self, it must be distinguishable from the selves of others)” (Carter and Charles, 2013;



Two gorillas chilling on a tree and enjoying the view of the forest. Copyright Isabella Vannucchi 28-11-2016

p. 324). Indeed gorillas are very sociable animals because they live in groups, and are very much verbal and clear in their relations with others ‘selves’ (both humans and other gorillas) (Schaller, 1964, Fossey, 1972, Fossey, 1983). One research participant from the conservationist group explained his relationship with the gorillas with these words “if you treat an animal well he then realises how good you are to them, so they become good to us, you learn the same with dogs” (Interview 79, 1-12-2016), and another from the same group “they have a lot of things going on in their mind, looking at them make you realize they actually think, strong family bonds, particularly intelligent, they are perceptive, when something is wrong you can tell” (Interview 64; 8-11-2016).

To conclude, as I tried to demonstrate in this chapter, I believe that the anthropomorphic character of the mountain gorilla is the primary reason for gorilla tourism to be in place, and thus for all the economic and political nuances, before analysed, to be typical of gorilla tourism and conservation. Or better, I believe that the closeness to this animal is the very motive for the popular love for the species. Starting from the great figures that first studied and worked to protect them, mountain gorillas are now a worldwide famous species, a flagship species, utilized by different stakeholders to promote wildlife and habitat conservation, as well as local and national economic development. The gorillas being so special, so powerful, so wild and so majestic stimulates public attraction, which consequently inspires curiosity (to go and see it and have the wild experience), desire to protect and a sense of caring (which brings to international agreements for their protection and funding for their conservation), and economic and political interests, which are the direct consequences for the former two points. Nevertheless, on the other hand, in the next chapter we will see that the Western construction of the imagery of the mountain gorillas was very much imposed over the local one (Neumann, 1998), and that the success of its conservation is not only due to the animal charisma but also to the power behind certain conservation discourses.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

The argument of this thesis is that mountain gorillas in BINP are the subjects of international, national and local interests. Each actor has a different interest that revolves around economic or conservationist gains. Further, the actors involved have shaped and spread a number of discourses in order to guarantee their interests. These discourses have now been adopted at the local and international level, and their currently common application is, in my opinion, the reason for the conservation success and protection of the mountain gorilla BINP.

Since its initial designation as a forest reserve, by the British colonial government in 1932, Bwindi has gradually been transformed and reshaped into a delimited area that has the sole purpose of conservation. The consequence is that the area allocated for the aim of conserving was thereafter blocked to the local population, whose interest revolved around the access to natural resources. Moreover, we saw that this process was the direct consequence of a number of Western-centred discourses about wildlife and habitat conservation. According to Neumann, these discourses relate to the “popular and scientific understandings of landscape [which] are deeply embedded in European colonial representations of wilderness and savagery” (Neumann, 2011; p. 847). These discourses were the grounding theories for the initiation of the fortress conservation ideology, according to which humans must be separated from nature if nature is to be conserved.

However, after the decolonization in Uganda, these Western discourses of nature began to be employed by powerful local actors, whose primary goal was to maintain the control over these vast natural areas. Indeed, in the last twenty years, the control over these regions resulted to be of significant economic advantage, since they became the product of a neoliberal conservation approach. Which, “seeks to extend and police profitable commodification processes based on artificial and arbitrary separations of human society from biodiverse-rich (non-human) natures” (Büsher et al. 2012; p. 23). This approach supports the ecotourism ideology, according to which “in order for natures to be ‘saved’, acts of ‘nature saving’ must be imbued with profit potential or else there is little incentive for rational actors to pursue it” (Büsher et al. 2012; p. 13). Therefore, as it

happened for the mountain gorillas, if it were not for the tourists and the income they bring, the animals would not be safe and protected.

Furthermore, I analysed the discourses of the anthropomorphised character of the gorillas, which are now playing the same role as the Western discourses of nature conservation used in the first half of the 20th century. Especially, I tried to demonstrate that because gorillas are so easily anthropomorphised (they are so similar to us), they have become a charismatic species. In turn, being a charismatic species, their image serves as a tool to spread conservation awareness, to an ever increasing international public, susceptible to wildlife conservation. This mechanism is mainly conveyed by INGOs who work for the protection of the primate and want to raise funds for their preservation, either through tourism or investments. As well as national actors that want to maintain the control over the park and achieve the economic gains that this generates.

Therefore, although ecotourism had increased exponentially in Bwindi since the beginning of gorilla tourism in 1991, it is not the sole reason for the survival of the animal. If gorillas had not become or had not been constructed as a charismatic, internationally appreciated species, they would not be under the protection they currently are. In other words, I believe that a number of powerful actors were particularly successful and influential in constructing the image of the gorilla as an anthropomorphised being that, because he is so similar to us, needs care and protection. I refer to the environmental INGOs in regards to the ones that are interested in the conservation of the animal and its habitat. While, I refer to the Ugandan Government and UWA, for the actors that are more interested in the economic aspects and profits of gorilla tourism.

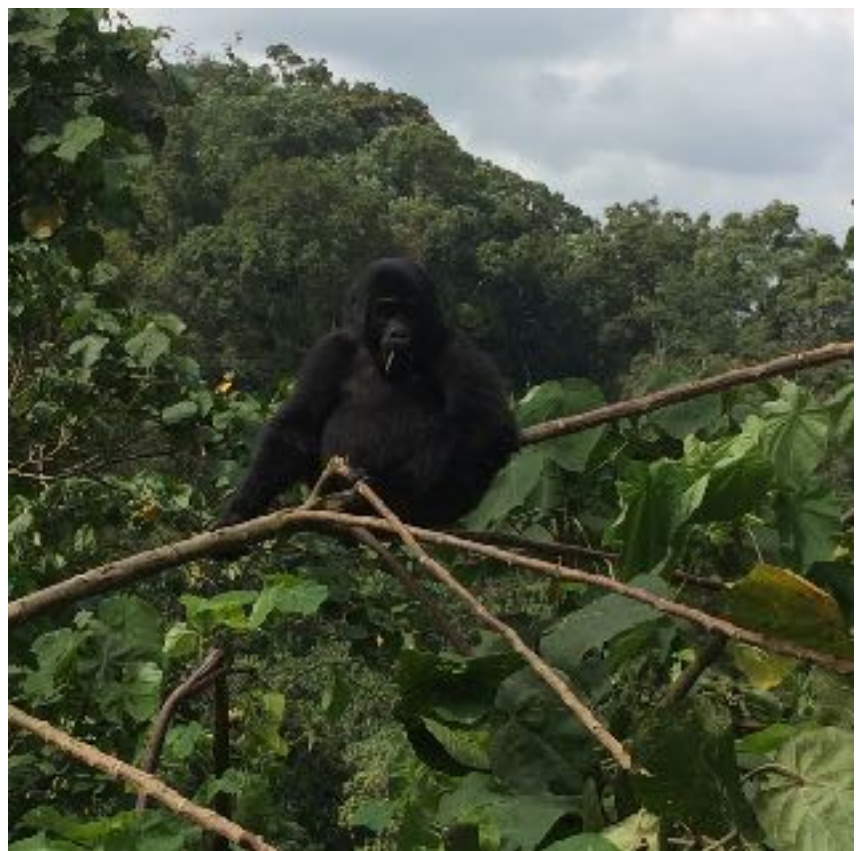
More specifically, there are two ways of spreading these images. In the international arena, the gorilla acquired the role of a charismatic species at the hands of the media. Dian Fossey and her pictures on the cover of the National Geographic played the role of attracting the public to the plight of the gorillas. The magazine readers, who for the sole fact of reading national geographic already had an interest in nature, became more attuned to the gorilla cause. Furthermore, the images of Fossey playing with the gorillas generated the readers' drive to pursue the same experience with the primates. It was particularly thanks to this mechanism that the establishment of gorilla tourism came about. In this sense, these images promoted a specific imagery of the mountain gorillas, an animal that, by this point, sharply drifted apart from the first representation, like the one in

King Kong²⁶. The imagery was instead of a gentle creature, with a strong personality and a great sense of self. Also reinforced in Fossey's accounts, where she talks about them like they are her relatives²⁷.

Therefore, due to the circulation of this imagery of the animal, the public started to fantasise to have the same experience with the gorillas, and they began to travel from around the world all the way to East Africa to bring about this encounter.

However, if at the beginning of gorilla tourism this process took hold just for the sake of the experience, now it is embedded into the ideological responsibility for conservation, "I think as tourist we have an important role because we're helping to fund conservation, to support all of the people that

are doing the good stuff for them" (Focus Group 4, 7-12-2016). More specifically, now the tourists, not all but for the most part according to the focus groups I carried out in Ruhija, are not only interested in the experience in itself but also they are now motivated by the greater good (i.e. conservation) they can achieve. It is constantly repeated to the tourists that they have a significant role in conservation, and that



Infant gorilla on a tree. Copyright Isabella Vannucchi 28-11-2016

thanks to their money they can help in the protection of the animal, as well as in the development of the communities around the park. For this reason, gorilla tourism is associated with the ecotourism label. Ecotourism tries to be a sustainable tourism activity and is characterized by "purposeful travel to natural areas to understand the culture and

²⁶ 1933 is the year of the first King Kong movie, directed by Merian C. Cooper and Ernest B. Schoedsack

²⁷ Fossey called some of the individuals she was studying with names of her own relatives, because the gorillas behavior reminded her of familiar characters (Fossey, 1984)

natural history of the environment, taking care not to alter the integrity of the ecosystem while producing economic opportunities that make the conservation of natural resources beneficial to local people” (Jamal et al. 2006).

This kind of discourse about ecotourism was adopted by the actors who had the interest to stimulate the public to come and visit the gorillas and invest in their conservation. The actors are organisations such as the WWF, IGCP, The Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund International, FFI and the magazine National Geographic. Moreover, in order to transfer these discourses to their public, these actors use tools that can have a broad reach. The tools mostly revolve around the media, hence, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, as well as magazines, documentaries or movies. Using these platforms, these actors are spreading a number of discourses in order to support gorilla tourism, and in turn conservation. Just as an example, on the Instagram page of the National Geographic, among their last published pictures, there are two captures about mountain gorillas that say:

“All gorilla populations are under threat. We encourage you to support those who are doing what they can to ensure our next of kin survive in the wild— and we encourage you to visit the gorillas, if you have the opportunity. Money earned through gorilla tourism provides funds for conservation projects and brings jobs and other benefits to local communities”²⁸

“Revenue from tourism is ultimately what saved the mountain gorilla and the fabulous land they inhabit.”²⁹

A similar process is the one presented at the beginning of the thesis (p. 7), where through the use of Facebook and again a beautiful picture of gorillas, the Dian Fossey Gorilla Fund International, invites the public to donate in order to help in their survival. Additionally, another example is depicted in the movie-documentary *Virunga*³⁰, in which the gorillas are represented as extremely vulnerable bodies that need international help in

²⁸ <https://www.instagram.com/p/BV0G1Prjuyq/?taken-by=natgeo> accessed 19-07-2017

²⁹ <https://www.instagram.com/p/BV5ZBgnFYVK/?taken-by=natgeo> accessed 19-07-2017

³⁰ Produced by Orlando von Einsiedel and released in 2014

order to be protected. The documentary was made available on Netflix, and it had an extensive reach, bringing about more global concern, as well as funds.

Hence, through the use of these discourses and images, the international public gets lured into the conservation system, where ecotourism or funds become the main answer to the endangerment of mountain gorillas.

On the other hand, there are other actors that used the spreading of discourses to create a certain imagery of the mountain gorilla. Namely, I am referring to the national and local actors working in Bwindi, therefore the Ugandan Government, UWA, tourism companies, MPI, ITFC and again IGCP (which is not only an international organisation, but it also works on the ground in Bwindi). What these actors are trying to promote among the local population is both the protection of the gorilla and the consolidation of gorilla tourism. In this case, the actors need to specifically reinforce the benefits of gorilla tourism if they want to achieve their gains. Since, they need to alter the dissatisfied widespread reaction consequent to the designation of the Bwindi as a National Park.

As we saw in the previous chapters, the local communities around Bwindi are the ones that had to sustain the biggest losses. The blocked access to the park involved the loss of natural resources and the subsequent frustrated attitudes of the local population towards the National Park. In order to counteract these approaches, the local government first increased the level of security by assigning more UWA staff to Bwindi. Then, the second method was to change the attitudes of the local population by showing them the benefits and profits of gorilla tourism, as an example, one of the participants stated "They try to change people's attitudes giving them tokens, to make them realize that gorillas are good for the country" (Interview 10, 11-10-2016). This happened, at the hand of all the actors above mentioned, and specifically by using community sensitization programmes and again spreading distinct discourses about gorillas and ecotourism. While in the field, the most common example was the education programme carried out by MPI, but UWA is showing interest in MPI's action and is in the process of establishing their own in all the communities adjacent to Bwindi.

As previously mentioned, the aim of MPI is to sensitise the local community by showing them documentaries and videos about gorillas, as well as teaching about the gorillas in the schools around the park. One participant stated, "The most important role in conservation is played by the education programme in the schools, which help change the

new generation's attitudes". Specifically, the participants of the conservationist group have been the ones that have mentioned most the importance of educating the new generations, in order to create a population, according to them, that has the conservation of the gorilla at heart. MPI is also working with the teachers and helps them establishing the lessons on gorillas' behaviour, ecology and tourism. Yet, some instances show that the teachers seem to be more interested in focusing on educating the children on the economic aspect of gorilla tourism, one said: "We teach the children that gorillas are good for all the profits and the 'whites' they bring".



Gorilla family, father on the left, mother and four-day-old baby (in her arms) of the right. Copyright Isabella Vannucchi 29-11-2016

On the other hand, in the interviews, I encountered many participants that, although they have never seen a gorilla, they would mention what they saw in the videos or what the children would share about the lessons in school. The information would usually revolve around gorilla behaviour and appearance. However, the information they would provide me about gorillas sometimes sounded constrained, like "Gorillas are vital to us, and we need to take care of them because they resemble us and the look like us", to

which it was then added "I have never seen a gorilla" (Interview 69, 10-11-2016). In my opinion, this kind of account is entrenched in the gorilla conservation rhetoric of 'we need to protect gorillas because they are good', disseminated among the local population by the powerful actors.

Indeed, during the interview with the local community, I sensed that the participants were often repeating a sort of script when talking about the gorillas. They would often repeat the same features or give me very similar answers to my research questions. This, I believe, is the demonstration of the particular influence discourses have. The new discourses about conserving gorillas have, in fact, discharged others. This is to say, before the outset of gorilla conservation and tourism, other identification discourses were circulating around Ruhija about gorillas, and the primary example is the Bakiga name for 'gorilla'. I was told that once the gorilla was referred to as Ebishamba, which in Bakiga language means bad luck (Interview 65, 9-11-2016). Another participant informed me that "Engagi in Bakiga means food that has gone bad" (Interview 74, 11-11-2016). These two connotations are linked to a Bakiga creed. According to the creed, gorillas are a bad omen, and there are a number of different versions that I encountered during the interviews "If you cultivate land and they pass over it, it will not produce" (Interview 23, 21-10-2016); "If you take the grass from the nest of a gorilla and you put it in the house of someone those people have to migrate" (Interview 43, 27-10-2016); "When a woman is pregnant, and she sees a gorilla and laughs she will produce a baby that looks like the gorilla" (Interview 49, 27-10-2016); "If you have an argument with your husband, and you leave the house but when you are going to meet a gorilla, you have to go back to your house" (Interview 62, 8-11-2016).

Therefore, I believe it is clear-cut that new discourses about mountain gorillas have overpowered others. Also, the new discourses about gorillas mainly revolve around the economic potentials of providing better conditions for the local community and how to better ensure the protection the park. The majority of the stakeholders analysed in this thesis employed these discourses. Which, I believe, shows that the most influential actors were able to spread and impose them. Indeed, even the people from the local community have adopted the same discourses. Despite, as we saw in the previous chapters, the economic benefits of gorilla tourism do not seem to be truly accessible for the residents around Bwindi.

CONCLUSION

To begin the conclusion, I want to cite the account that I believe best sustains the main argument of this thesis: "Gorillas are an economic animal for the government, and they bring happiness to the whites" (Interview 18, 20-10-2016). This is a response to my question 'Why are gorillas important?' of a member of the local community. I believe this correctly suggests that around gorilla tourism and conservation there other stakeholders that are stronger than others.

Gorilla tourism is a product of the worldwide adopted ecotourism approach to nature and wildlife conservation. As such, it becomes an intrinsically capitalistic process, where a set of powerful actors, in this case, the Uganda Government and UWA, seek to continually extend and police profitable natural spaces and attractions, by arbitrarily separate them from the society around. Besides, it becomes a conservation strategy, characterised by the creation and global circulation of idealised discourses and images of a 'Nature' that needs to be saved. The conservationist actors, by promoting these discourses and suggesting an intimate contact with the idealised nature, encourage the global public to bring about the encounter and carry out their role in conservation. These two processes, I believe, best explains why discourse has played a significant role in gorilla conservation and tourism. Moreover, I believe that these discourses are specifically exploited by these actors to gain particular interests, as we saw, they are either economic or conservationist.

Therefore, if I relate this mechanism to the analysis of the different stakeholder's groups, I believe that each group manifests interests in regards to the mountain gorillas in BINP. The Entrepreneurs are interested in tourism industry, and they are eager to maintain it thriving, in order to achieve the economic profit involved in gorilla tourism. Subsequently, they are positive about gorilla conservation and keeping the gorillas protected. Then, the Tourists are interested in the experience, for which they pay a relatively significant amount of money. Yet, the Tourists are willing to pay this price not only for the sake of the experience but also because they are driven by the awareness of contributing to conservation. Undoubtedly their attitudes towards the gorillas are positive. The Conservationists, as we saw, are mainly interested in the preservation of the gorilla, consequently employing all possible means to succeed in their protection. Lastly, the Local Community, which is the one that finds it most hard to accrue the benefits involved in gorilla conservation. However, as we saw in the analysis, the local community is the

beneficiary of a number of indirect benefits resulted from gorilla tourism and conservation. Previous assessments have often of gorilla tourism in BINP have often overlooked these indirect benefits. I believe this is the reason behind my initial assumption of local community having bad attitudes towards the mountain gorilla. In fact, the local community is increasingly exploiting gorilla tourism to their advantage. Specifically, they do not regularly profit from the benefits the Revenue Sharing Programme calls for, but they are increasingly finding more methods to benefit from the presence of gorilla tourism in the area. This, together with the imposition of conservation discourses on behalf of UWA and the Government, ultimately results in the local population positive attitudes towards the mountain gorilla. Finally, the gorillas in all this system cannot benefit better, since, eventually everyone is working towards ensuring their thorough protection.

Considering the entire current situation around gorilla tourism, and my understanding of the system in place in Ruhija, my personal opinion is divided into two. On the one side, I am enthusiastic about the great work that has been done, and it keeps being accomplished for gorilla conservation and protection. Gorillas are extraordinarily beautiful creatures that have the same right as us to live on this planet. Therefore I believe it is important to protect them and secure their conservation in any possible way. On the other, however, I consider the unfair position of the local community to be a significant disadvantage of the overall system of gorilla conservation. That is to say, the local population should be more involved and active participant in the system, they should not only be the indirect subjects of the benefits. More importantly, they should have the chance to be more informed about gorillas, their conservation and tourism.

I believe that the ultimate issue about the disadvantaged situation of the local community is directly relatable to the lack of education and active participation. I find it unfair that most of the member of the local community informed me that they never saw a gorilla. Because gorillas are so important in the area and the cause of all the changes that took place in the last twenty years around Bwindi, I think it should be provided with an opportunity for the local population to experience gorilla tourism, so to understand it correctly. By doing so, I believe, there is a chance to truly create positive attitudes towards the mountain gorilla, rather than a society that repeats what they have been told about the animal.

To conclude, I want to stress that I share the idea that mountain gorillas are the result of a conservation success and that their protection is being remarkably carried out in BINP.

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