

THE POLITICS AND ETHNOGRAPHY OF ENVIRONMENTALISMS IN TANZANIA

DAN BROCKINGTON

ABSTRACT

This article explores the forms of environmentalism flourishing in Tanzanian villages and district and central government. It argues that their apparent unity should be explained by several factors. In central government, there is support for environmentalist policies because they generate revenue. In local government, environmentalism diverts attention away from bureaucratic failure, while simultaneously being the subject of intense politicking among the legislature. In villages, environmentalism reflects realities of environmental change, different ecologies of agricultural activity, competition and jealousy and the manipulation of official discourse. This article highlights the diversity of sources of environmentalist prominence in different sites of political activity.

A TANZANIAN FARMER, walking past farms newly cleared from woodland in the Rukwa Valley in 2000, did not approve of the felled trees. ‘You may start farms now’ he said, ‘but tomorrow you create a waste, a desert’. He told me that around the village where he lived they had many trees. A few miles away they had cut more trees, and it rained less. The rains will cease without the trees.

The connection between trees and rain voiced here is dominant in Tanzania. Trees are thought to cause rain by ‘dragging in’ clouds. The theory is central to widespread notions that irresponsible farming practices are causing degradation. Charcoal burners, and farmers practising slash and burn agriculture, are accused of leaving treeless wastes which generate no rain. Such practices and the degradation resulting are feared to be driving a large-scale migration of people and livestock from the north of the country

Dan Brockington (dan.brockington@geog.ox.ac.uk) is with the School of Environment and Development, University of Manchester, UK. I thank William Moseley for the chance to air these ideas first at a panel of the African Studies Association in Houston, 2001; Kathy Homewood, Mike Sheridan, Phil Burnham, Jim Igoe, Peter Rogers, John Lonsdale, Monique Borgerhoff-Mulder, Jamie Monson, Chris Conte, Bill Adams, Martin Walsh and some anonymous reviewers for their thoughts and comments on the text; William Beinart and David Anderson for some extremely useful ideas at the African Studies seminars in Oxford in 2003; and the British Academy whose post-doctoral research fellowship and small grant made the research possible.

to the south. The wastes are expanding, and people are bringing them by chopping down trees.¹

Environmental ideas are prominent throughout Tanzanian society. They are part of a general concern which holds a remarkable grip on the country. Environmentalist ideas are manifest in all sorts of trivial and mundane, but pervasive, ways. There are advertisements which appear regularly on television showing a rich tropical forest with a stream flowing through it. 'Water is life', reads the caption on the screen, 'The environment is life', 'Conserve the environment'. In 2000, the Regional Commissioner of Dar es Salaam put up large advertisements throughout the city exhorting people to plant fruit trees. Academic literature and policy documents repeat degradation narratives. Newspaper articles repeatedly stress environmental problems and privilege them with separate space on their web site.² Models in beauty contests cite environmental conservation as their hobby or ambition. Nor is this just an urban phenomenon: environmental concerns are frequently voiced in Tanzanian villages. I have heard funeral perorations for deceased village chairmen who are praised for bringing development and conserving the environment.

It is possible that the united concern reflects a common problem — environmental degradation. But I argue that things are simply not that straightforward. A more helpful starting point is to consider that the apparent convergence of central and district government rhetoric with villagers' concerns is unusual. There are tensions within this unity. For example, the discourse currently flourishing in rural villages can be critical of villagers' day-to-day activities, containing elements which clearly derive from Western science and values.³ Given that the transfer of ideas is an integral part of elite scientific discourse,⁴ it is important to ask whether the successful spread of these ideas among Tanzanians in remote rural areas is really the product of environmental change.

1. The word used for 'waste' is translated from the Swahili: '*jangwa*'. It is also translated as 'desert' but can be used in a wide variety of contexts and scales. I have heard it used to describe small patches of land, and it is also the name for the Sahara. It can be used in both arid lowlands and humid mountains [cf. C. Conte, 'The forest becomes a desert: forest use and environmental change in Tanzania's West Usambara mountains', *Land Degradation and Development* 10 (1999), pp. 291–309]. I prefer the term 'waste' because its central notion is lack of productivity, rather than aridity.

2. <<http://www.ippmedia.com>> Accessed on 18 October 2002.

3. Cf. O. B. Rekdal, 'When hypothesis becomes myth: the Iraqi origin of the Iraqw', *Ethnology* 37, 1 (1998), pp. 17–38.

4. R. Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial expansion, tropical island Edens and the origins of environmentalism* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995); J. Fairhead and M. Leach, *Misreading the African Landscape* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996); R. Neumann, *Imposing Wilderness: Struggles over livelihood and nature preservation in Africa* (University of California Press, Berkeley, CA, 1998); D. Brockington, *Fortress Conservation: The preservation of the Mkomazi Game Reserve, Tanzania* (James Currey, Oxford, 2002).

In this article, I will explore the extent to which environmentalism can be explained by the usefulness of environmental ideas and policies to the agendas of the executive and legislatures of central and local government and the needs of villagers. I will show that these agendas are often quite different, but are nonetheless served in their different ways by environmentalist rhetoric. This is thus an instrumentalist analysis, tying the popularity of environmentalism to the extent to which it serves other purposes. This approach makes it possible to place the local environmental knowledges on which environmentalism is based in their social and political context. But it risks denying that environmental concern can itself be a profound motivation. In the conclusion to this article, I question the limits of instrumentalism, underlining the importance of exploring the history of village discourses.

The broader context and local background

Brosius notes that analyses of environmentalism in anthropology have rarely examined their national contexts.⁵ Defining environmentalism as ‘a broad field of discursive constructions of nature and human agency’ (p. 278), he argues that the focus has been on their local manifestations or the transnational connections which make them global phenomena. In contrast, there have been too few studies of the national political cultures which mediate local social movements, transnational NGOs and globalizing processes.

In African situations, studies of national political cultures must incorporate Bayart’s thesis of ‘the politics of the belly’ and Chabal and Daloz’s notions of the utility of disorder for political leaders.⁶ Bayart suggested that political actors in Africa have long used their position to employ strategies of extraversion, using links with the outside world to exploit opportunities for private profit. Chabal and Daloz, while objecting to Bayart’s work, argue that analyses of the current political cultures of corruption and dependency must be grounded in their specific patron–client networks and the efforts of political patrons trying to channel state resources to their clients.

But all these writers, as Klopp has shown, fail to countenance the resistance to patron–client or ‘big man’ politics generated by these political cultures.⁷ Klopp analyzed the illicit privatization of public lands and forests in Kenya.

5. J. P. Brosius, ‘Analyses and interventions: Anthropological engagements with environmentalism’, *Current Anthropology* 40, 3 (1999), pp 277–309.

6. J.-F. Bayart, *The State in Africa: The politics of the belly* (Longman, London, 1993); J.-F. Bayart, S. Ellis, and B. Hibou, *The Criminalisation of the State in Africa* (James Currey, Oxford, 1999); P. Chabal and J.-P. Daloz, *Africa Works* (James Currey, Oxford, 1999).

7. J. M. Klopp, ‘Pilfering the public: the problem of land grabbing in contemporary Kenya’, *Africa Today* 47 (2000), pp. 7–28.

She shows how opposition to privatization constructs notions of public good based on the degradation which is feared will result from the destruction of mountain forests.⁸ Her work demonstrates that any attempt to engage with national political cultures of environmentalism must be rooted in contests over power and resources.⁹

However, such national cultures cannot determine local forms of environmentalism. The forces promoting environmentalism in the capital may not account for its visibility in local government and villages. Where varieties of environmentalism in villages and local and central government converge, we need to explain their meeting. There is a strong tradition in anthropology of using 'local knowledge' to rebut 'scientific', 'expert' or 'official' opinions about the environment and question agendas for developing or improving rural livelihoods and environments.¹⁰ But as Leach and Fairhead recognize, we do not understand well the interaction of local and official knowledges, for where they disagree there is rarely open conflict between them.¹¹ Careful ethnographic accounts of their contact are needed to understand how incompatibilities are dealt with, and, equally, how convergences are forged. Accounts of the alliance of local and national environmentalism need to be grounded in concrete processes which link metropolis, local governments and ideas of villagers.

Two bodies of theory will be employed here to explain the convergence between the state and villagers. First, there is the idea of the utility of anti-political discourse. This thesis has been well employed by Ferguson to show how development discourse in Lesotho allowed development agencies and the government to extend the power and reach of local government bureaucracies while at the same time depoliticizing their interventions.¹² Environmentalist discourse may well provide another set of opportunities to governments to extend their influence by depoliticizing change or contest.¹³ The theory can be extended as environmentalism not only offers the possibility of extending bureaucracies' power, it helps to absolve the state of blame for problems for which it is responsible. The disorder and failures of African states may 'work',¹⁴

8. The constituency building reached the British press. Cf. 'Kenya's rulers clear way for drought and disaster by felling forest for votes', *The Independent* (London), 16 January 2002, p. 14.

9. J. M. Klopp, ' "Ethnic clashes" and winning elections: the case of Kenya's electoral despotism', *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 35 (2001), pp. 473–517.

10. P. Richards, *Indigenous Agricultural Revolution: Ecology and food production in West Africa* (Allen and Unwin, Hemel Hempstead, UK, 1985); M. Leach and R. Mearns, *The Lie of the Land: Challenging received wisdom on the African environment* (James Currey, Oxford, 1996).

11. M. Leach and J. Fairhead, 'Fashioned forest pasts, occluded histories? International environmental analysis in West African locales', *Development and Change* 31 (2000), pp. 35–59.

12. J. Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine: 'Development', depoliticisation and bureaucratic state power in Lesotho* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990).

13. Cf. R. A. Schroeder, 'Community, forestry and conditionality in the Gambia', *Africa* 69, 1 (1999), pp. 1–22.

14. Chabal and Daloz, *Africa Works*.

but they also exist within a public domain which is critical of it.¹⁵ Environmental discourse deflects public criticism and relocates blame outside the state.

I also suggest that it is necessary to break down 'the state' and distinguish between the executive and legislature. The former benefits directly from anti-political discourses, but the latter, whether district councillors or members of parliament, is caught up in highly politicized debates. The resources and power environmentalism offers in Tanzania are considerable. Anti-political environmental discourses are therefore accompanied by political battles in which environmental issues are explicitly used.

Second, relations between weak but coercive states and their rural subjects will involve theories of resistance and co-option. There is a rich literature on resistance¹⁶ and a tradition of rural people exploiting their rulers and their rulers' language in Tanzania.¹⁷ However environmentalist discourses benefit elites, rural subjects are likely variously to be defying the policies or exploiting and using their language.

This article is based on insights from Rukwa region in south-west Tanzania. The fieldwork was undertaken in order to study the large-scale immigration of agropastoralists from the north of the country to the south. I was working in the Rukwa Valley where the resident Fipa peoples have experienced an influx of Sukuma agropastoralists since the early 1970s. I was in Tanzania between August 1999 and October 2000 and spent a year living in Mtowisa village, part of a ward and division of the same name, in Sumbawanga district.

Migration in this region is not a new phenomenon.¹⁸ However, this migration is provoking considerable national anxiety and particular concern in the southern regions to which the migrants are moving.¹⁹ It is associated with conflict between farmers and immigrant herders and invokes the spectre of ethnic conflict which Tanzania has prided itself on controlling. It is also thought to be driven by environmental degradation created by bad land use practices. This may be true, but this migration is poorly understood. There are no studies of vegetation change in the source regions; we do not really know why, or how many, people and animals are

15. Klopp, 'Pilfering the public'.

16. E. P. Thompson, *Whigs and Hunters: The origin of the Black Act* (Pantheon Books, New York, NY, 1975); J. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday forms of peasant resistance* (Yale University Press, New Haven, CT, 1985); B. Berman and J. Lonsdale, *Unhappy Valley: Conflict in Kenya and Africa* (James Currey, London, 1992).

17. J. Iliffe, *A Modern History of Tanganyika* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1979).

18. R. Willis, *A State in the Making. Myth: history and social transformation in pre-colonial Ufipa* (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, IN, 1981).

19. See S. Charnley, 'Communal resource use and migration into the Usangu plains, Tanzania' (PhD thesis, Stanford University, California, 1994); P. B. Coppolillo, 'The landscape ecology of pastoral herding: spatial analysis of land use and livestock production in East Africa', *Human Ecology* 28, 4 (2000), pp. 527–60; F. Cleaver, 'Reinventing institutions: bricolage and the social embeddedness of natural resource management', *European Journal of Development Research* 14, 2 (2002).

moving to the south of the country. The movement's origins lie in the recovery of populations after rinderpest, and many factors, such as evasion of cattle culls, government tsetse eradication and loss of pastures to agriculture and land alienation, as well as degradation, are likely to be involved.²⁰

The environmental-conservation complex

The nature of environmentalism in Tanzania has to be understood in the context of the country's political economy and in particular the financial power of environmental concerns. I will argue that we need to recognize the existence of an 'environmental-conservation complex' at work in the country. This deliberately echoes the 'military-industrial complex' which President Eisenhower described in the United States in 1961.²¹ In Tanzania, a similar situation exists where, symbolically and politically, environmental and conservation concerns are dominant.

The first manifestation of the environmental-conservation complex is the volume of land set aside for conservation in the country and its importance for the national economy. Forest reserves, game reserves, conservation area and national parks occupied 29 percent of its terrestrial surface area in 1995.²² New game reserves and extensions to national parks have since added a further 14,000 km² bringing the total proportion of conservation estate to 31 percent of the country's land mass. More expansion is planned.

Table 1 offers a comparative perspective by showing the extent of terrestrial protected area growth since 1959 for Tanzania and other African countries. This underestimates conservation commitments as it does not include forest reserves (which comprise ten percent of Tanzania's land area). Even without these, however, the table summarizes that Tanzania's commitment to conservation, and protected areas in particular, is unusually

20. J. Ford, *The Role of Trypanosomiasis in African Ecology: A study of the tsetse fly problem* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1971); J. Igoe and D. Brockington, 'Pastoral land tenure and community conservation: a case study from north-east Tanzania', Pastoral Land Tenure Series 11 (IIED, London, 1999); J. G. Galaty 'Pastoral and agro-pastoral migration in Tanzania: factors of economy, ecology and demography in cultural perspective', in J. W. Bennett and J. R. Bowen (eds), *Production and Autonomy: Anthropological studies and critiques of development* (University Press of America, Lanham, MD, 1988), pp. 163-83.

21. E. Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes: The short twentieth century 1914-1991* (Abacus, London, 1994), p. 236. In 1961, US military expenditure was 9 percent of gross domestic product (GDP); and although it was to decline (just over 5 percent in the 1970s), it remained a powerful trope for explaining US economy, society and politics. Indeed the military-industrial complex is still important now with the Cold War won and US military expenditure down to less than 4 percent of GDP.

22. Tanzania Wildlife Sector Review Task Force, *A Review of the Wildlife Sector in Tanzania. Volume 1: Assessment of the current situation* (Ministry of Tourism, Natural Resources and the Environment, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, 1995).

Table 1. Terrestrial protected area establishment (IUCN category 1–4) 1959–2003

| <i>Country</i> | <i>Percentage of land area set aside 1959</i> | <i>Growth 1960–2003 as a percentage of land available</i> | <i>Area set aside in 2003 (km²)</i> | <i>Percentage of land area set aside 2003</i> |
|----------------------------------|---|---|--|---|
| Tanzania | 8.61 | 7.55 | 137,065 | 15.51 |
| Democratic Republic of the Congo | 1.22 | 3.96 | 116,178 | 5.12 |
| Chad | 0.09 | 9.05 | 114,940 | 9.13 |
| Botswana | 0.00 | 18.53 | 104,988 | 18.53 |
| Niger | 0.23 | 7.44 | 96,941 | 7.65 |
| Sudan | 1.42 | 2.24 | 86,060 | 3.62 |
| CAR | 9.99 | 1.96 | 73,205 | 11.75 |
| Zambia | 0.00 | 8.56 | 63,661 | 8.56 |
| Ethiopia | 0.50 | 5.04 | 55,175 | 5.52 |
| Angola | 1.82 | 2.44 | 52,610 | 4.22 |
| South Africa | 2.57 | 1.51 | 49,368 | 4.04 |
| Congo | 2.11 | 12.38 | 48,605 | 14.23 |
| Mali | 3.16 | 0.57 | 45,320 | 3.71 |
| Kenya | 4.19 | 2.02 | 34,851 | 6.12 |
| Mozambique | 0.00 | 4.19 | 32,850 | 4.19 |
| Nigeria | 0.05 | 3.50 | 32,357 | 3.55 |
| Cameroon | 2.10 | 4.89 | 32,071 | 6.89 |
| Namibia | 0.00 | 3.84 | 31,594 | 3.84 |
| Burkina Faso | 3.42 | 7.26 | 28,552 | 10.44 |
| Zimbabwe | 4.07 | 3.12 | 27,345 | 7.07 |
| Senegal | 4.74 | 6.20 | 20,497 | 10.65 |
| Côte d'Ivoire | 0.02 | 6.13 | 19,530 | 6.14 |
| Uganda | 3.80 | 5.25 | 17,439 | 8.85 |
| Madagascar | 0.66 | 1.77 | 14,038 | 2.41 |
| Ghana | 0.00 | 4.85 | 11,041 | 4.85 |
| Malawi | 2.80 | 8.69 | 10,585 | 11.25 |
| Benin | 4.54 | 2.61 | 7,775 | 7.03 |
| Eritrea | 4.96 | 0.00 | 5,006 | 4.96 |
| Togo | 7.89 | 0.00 | 4,292 | 7.89 |
| Mauritania | 0.24 | 0.00 | 2,500 | 0.24 |
| Rwanda | 7.87 | 0.00 | 1,941 | 7.87 |
| Burundi | 2.03 | 3.74 | 1,462 | 5.69 |
| Sierra Leone | 0.88 | 1.16 | 1,448 | 2.02 |
| Liberia | 0.00 | 1.34 | 1,292 | 1.34 |
| Gabon | 0.00 | 0.31 | 800 | 0.31 |
| Guinea | 0.05 | 0.16 | 512 | 0.21 |
| Swaziland | 0.00 | 2.05 | 352 | 2.05 |
| Lesotho | 0.00 | 0.22 | 68 | 0.22 |
| Gambia | 0.00 | 0.05 | 5 | 0.05 |

Source: World Database of Protected Areas 2004 (official area figures).

high within Africa. Tanzania has set aside more than eight percent of ungazetted land since independence and, remarkably, did so despite starting with nearly nine percent of its land area already gazetted. In absolute and relative terms, Tanzania is remarkable for its conservation commitment on the continent.

Tourist revenues are the second pillar of the environmental-conservation complex. Tourism brought in \$740 million in 2000 and represents about 16 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP).²³ A significant proportion of these revenues come from tourists visiting national parks and game reserves. Tanzania sells itself, and is sold by travel agencies, as a natural paradise, a beautiful way of experiencing Africa's majesty. The benefits of national parks and game reserves to the national budget are keenly appreciated by the government. Less prominent are the costs which local people experience when they are evicted from the reserves and parks in order to create the wildernesses. These costs are rarely compensated for and, in some cases, clearly outweigh the financial benefits to the nation which the new protected areas bring.²⁴ This is particularly true in Tanzania where there are a large number of protected areas with poorly developed tourist facilities.

The extended catalogue of gazetted land is analogous to the so-called 'prestige' projects that dominated agricultural developments in West Africa. These expensive schemes were characterized by considerable cost to the peasants involved and marked overall losses on the investment put into them. They were expensive ways of making poor farmers produce little and become indebted in the process. Despite this, they were considered prestigious because of the sums of money and grand vision involved. However, Hart has argued that prestige alone does not explain their popularity to West African governments.²⁵ Rather they offered an otherwise rare chance for the government to gain direct access to revenues from resource use which would otherwise remain in the pockets and economies of the villages. Rice-growing schemes grew little rice, but a high proportion of the revenues and rice from them would be under the control of the state. Similarly, a cattle market may generate much more business and money than a game reserve, but the central government of Tanzania would see none of it. The best way for a state to get rich from its natural resources is to lend their use to wealthy Western tourists. In this light, we should note that donor-supported agricultural and environmental projects in Tanzania in 1999 were worth over \$400

23. The Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism, United Republic of Tanzania, *Tourism Master Plan. Strategy & Actions, April 2002* <<http://www.tzonline.org/pdf/tourismmasterplan.pdf>> Accessed on 9 November 2004.

24. Brockington, *Fortress Conservation*.

25. K. Hart, *The Political Economy of West African Agriculture* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1982).

million.²⁶ Environmental concerns make good vehicles for state officials' strategies of extraversion as they exploit international connections for personal profit and their client networks.

The money available from environmental activity is probably the most powerful proximal explanation for environmentalism's vigour in the central government of Tanzania. Its financial power is also visible in local government and constituency politics. Here the money available for environmentalist causes is both a goal in itself and a lubricant of political process. Environmentalism offers lucrative spoils to Tanzania's elected elite.²⁷ Its rhetoric is adopted in pursuit of votes. Its financial resources can fund election campaigns. Three examples will illustrate this.

The Kaeso Conservation Society, a conservation group based in Sumbawanga, the capital of Rukwa region, is campaigning for the Mbisi Forest Reserve, on the top of the escarpment above Mtowisa, and situated between it and Sumbawanga. Mbisi is a worthy conservation project. It protects the watershed and was set aside under German rule for that purpose. It is an unusual, and threatened, upland forest and home to the rare red colobus monkey.²⁸ Kaeso has raised awareness about the forest's importance in regional and district government and won donor support for its work. It has planted sisal along its borders and has plans to reintroduce buffalo, leopard and lion to the reserve to restore it to its former status. It has gained funding for its work from other conservation organizations.

As part of their awareness-raising campaign, Kaeso members visited Mtowisa in February 2000. Their purpose was to highlight the importance of the forest to the villagers in the valley for their drinking water and to ask them to support the removal of encroaching wheat farmers. But there was another agenda to the meeting. The man who was to address it, the late Mr. Mbegu, was also hoping to be chosen to represent the ruling Chama Cha Mapinduzi (CCM) party for the forthcoming district council elections. Councillors are powerful people locally, earning substantial allowances and various forms of power and patronage. The dual purpose of the meeting was both to raise awareness for the conservation of the forest and to advertize Mr. Mbegu's candidature for the councillorship. The problem the Kaeso group faced, however, was that it was illegal to mount any election campaign at this time.

The meeting was thoroughly enjoyable. Mr. Mbegu was announced to the delegates with a long list of achievements and accolades (his colleagues were merely introduced by name). He led the 80 delegates from five

26. DANIDA, *Overview of Donor Supported Environmental Activities in Tanzania* (Royal Danish Embassy, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, 1999). Spent in 1 year, this would be equivalent to just over 4 percent of the country's GDP.

27. Leach and Fairhead, 'Fashioned forest pasts', pp. 47-9.

28. W. A. Rodgers, T. T. Struhsaker, and C. C. West, 'Observations on the red colobus (*Colobus badius tephrosceles*) of Mbisi forest, Southwest Tanzania', *African Journal of Ecology* 22 (1984), pp. 187-94.

villages in song before starting his address, which concerned the problems of environmental conservation. He talked about the importance of preventing the destruction of the forest and other environmental problems. All the delegates were treated to a large meal of fish, chicken, beef and goat meat. There were two drums of local beer to be shared out after the meeting and, most usefully of all (for this was the middle of the planting season and there was little money in the village), all of the representatives were treated to TSh3000 cash (a good week's wages) as an attendance fee.

The meeting was a huge success. Concern for the cause of forest conservation was immediate and heartfelt. Kaeso received a strong endorsement for its cause — the meeting unanimously agreed that a committee should be set up to look into the problem of forest encroachment. Immediately after the meeting was formally closed, one of the organizers jumped up and announced that although he was from a different party and would have loved Mr. Mbegu to run for the councillorship under his party ticket, he very much regretted that Mr. Mbegu would be trying for nomination as the CCM's candidate. This, we were told, was a great pity as he was such a great man that he would make a wonderful person for the job.

This means of announcing Mr. Mbegu's candidature was widely admired. Because it was voiced after the meeting had shut, and because it came from a member of an opposing party, it could not be officially classed as campaigning and therefore was not an arrestable offence. Everyone who attended the meeting was delighted with their food, beer and money, and Mr. Mbegu's campaign got off to a flying start.

This is a simple example of conservation funds being useful for political work. It illustrates the well-recognized importance of donor funds for the activity of civil society.²⁹ The funds made an expensive visit to a village possible, they raised awareness for an important cause, and simultaneously the benevolence of the conservationists served a political agenda. Conservation funds oiled the gears of political patronage and fed the patron–client networks which people expect from their politicians. Mr. Mbegu, however, was not elected, and the main reason for that illustrates another way in which environmentalist rhetoric is a political instrument in Tanzania.

The village of Mtowisa was not directly connected to Sumbawanga by road. Although the regional capital was only 30 km away as the crow flies, that route took it straight over an escarpment where no road had been constructed. Instead an 80-km diversion was necessary. Villagers of this part of the valley resented the increased transport costs diminishing the meagre profit margins of their produce. Villagers had twice carved a road down the escarpment using hand hoes in order to make it possible for a

29. J. Igoe, 'Ethnicity, civil society, and the Tanzanian pastoral NGO movement: the continuities and discontinuities of liberalized development' (PhD thesis, Boston University, Boston, MA, 2000).

bulldozer to pass and clear a better road for other vehicles. The first time, in 1985, the labour proved to be in vain because the money set aside to build it disappeared. This was a great cause of bitterness to villagers who felt they were being abused by a corrupt council. Forced communal labour was again called out in 1998, and in 2000 construction was due to start.

The road was thus tremendously important to the villagers. Once the top of the escarpment was reached, it offered a direct route to Sumbawanga, which crossed no bridges and would not get cut off in the rainy season. However, the route it was to take went directly through the Mbisi forest reserve. This was opposed by the Kaeso conservation group who claimed that the presence of the road would facilitate the forest's degradation. They wanted the road to detour the forest, which would make it longer and involve bridging a river, making wet season closure possible. This stance was not popular. Although Mr. Mbegu likened building the road to treading in someone's water pot, his support for the detour proposal contributed to his defeat in the CCM polls.³⁰

But the real reasons behind the opposition to the forest were not straightforward. The planned construction would build no new road through the reserve. There already was a passable road through it. The plan was to regrade this and build a road up the escarpment to meet it. The reason for the opposition lay in another political contest that was brewing, this time the race for the CCM candidacy for the parliamentary seat. Parliamentary seats are lucrative prospects. As well as the opportunity to serve, they offer extensive privileges, high expenses allowances, much power and patronage and numerous benefits (which included in one parliament generous loans for a car, later written off), and generous retirement hand outs. This constituency had long been held by Mr. Mzindakaya. His place was now being challenged by a district councillor named Mr. Malocha, who represented a ward near Mtowisa and who was chairman of the district council.

It was Mr. Malocha's job, as chairman of the district council, to ensure that the road was built using council funds. Mr. Mzindakaya opposed its passage through the forest. The Kaeso Conservation Society, also adamant the road should not pass there, contained powerful allies of Mr. Mzindakaya. In blocking the construction of the road through the forest, villagers alleged that Mr. Mzindakaya's allies were preventing Mr. Malocha from fulfilling his duties in order to threaten his popularity in his home territory. Once again, the conservationists allied to Mr. Mzindakaya, in opposing the road, were simultaneously fulfilling ecological and political objectives. Thus, conservation objectives proved highly instrumental to

30. Mr. Mbegu's stance on the forest, and emphasis of the importance of the red colobus monkey, encouraged villagers to name him Mr. Colobus. His name was unfortunately similar to the Swahili for the black and white colobus.

political ends. Conservation and development goals became pawns in larger power battles played out by the powerful members of local Tanzanian society in their struggle to control the lucrative benefits offered to the elite.

Village and district government discourses

Environmental policies which offer lucrative returns to elected officials are not necessarily so beneficial to civil servants in district governments. The establishment of national parks and game reserves means that land is cleared of people and can no longer generate revenues from agriculture and herding. Cattle taxes could generate up to half of a district's tax revenues.³¹ Yet environmental discourses were still extraordinarily prevalent in opinions of the 51 district and regional officers interviewed during my research. Why has environmentalism proved so popular at lower levels of government?

The immigration of people and herds into southern Tanzania from the north generates much friction. There is a considerable amount of conflict between farmers and herders over farm invasion. Ultimately, these problems reflect weaknesses in local government, which is failing to plan land use, to monitor stock movements and to mediate justly in disputes. Put simply, herders have the wealth to bribe officials. Evidence of this is notoriously hard to collect, but all the available material suggests severe local government failure.³² The national context, as revealed in the Warioba Report, is of severe high-level failings.³³ Locally, tales of bribes paid to swing court cases or to gain entry to the village were particularly common. There was a well-known case of one agricultural extension officer who had been publicly upbraided by the regional commissioner for demanding payment to view alleged crop damage, and there was also a remarkable case of local government corruption and collusion in stock theft in the 1980s that required the intervention of Julius Nyerere to resolve.³⁴ Then there were locally notorious incident of failed accountability surrounding the construction of a local secondary school and a head master's house, the distribution of famine relief, development aid, the allocation of market stalls and, as we have seen, the road. There was complete agreement on the failure of local government amongst villagers of all persuasions.

31. D. Brockington, 'Communal property and degradation narratives: debating the Sukuma immigration into Rukwa Region, Tanzania', *Cahiers d'Afrique* 20 (2001), pp. 1–22.

32. *Ibid.*

33. Presidential Commission of Inquiry Against Corruption, *Report on the Commission of Corruption* (Dar es Salaam, United Republic of Tanzania, Tanzania, 1996).

34. Brockington, 'Communal property'; D. Brockington, 'Local government, taxation and natural resource management: corruption, accountability and democratic performance in Tanzania', *Development and Change*, forthcoming.

The environmentalist discourse offers a technical solution to the frictions of the migration which ignores these state weaknesses. It envisages a migration driven by poor farming practices which are causing environmental degradation. Conflict between herders and farmers reflects the same problem. Farmers are not investing sufficiently in their lands to protect them from herds. Herders are keeping too many stock to manage them intensively. The solution is to educate people; better farming practices will ease social tension. It is the duty of the smallholder and herder, not the state, to change.

Environmentalism frames problems in ways which create a role for the state to reform farmers' and herders' practices. It empowers it to act and intervene; it makes possible all sorts of donor inputs into such interventions. But it does so without raising thorny questions about what to do about endemic corruption or state weakness. It ignores the culpability of state employees who all too frequently either fail to make rules, or fail to implement them and who are too easily bribed to dispense just solutions to local conflict.

This became most clear as I listened to local complaints about crop damage on smallholders' farms. Repeatedly the same refrain came out. There was no justice, no recompense for this damage. And there was no justice because the herders had the means to bribe the officials who were meant to be guarding villagers' rights. Herders could afford to bribe the agricultural officer who came to assess the damage, bribe the elders' meeting which might arbitrate the dispute, bribe the police dealing with a case, or the judge if it went to the primary court, and the district court judge if it went to appeal. They could bribe the village chairman and village government to allow them to bring their animals onto village land. Herders' wealth allowed them to cope with the failures of the Tanzanian state (while contributing to that failure at the same time). And it allowed them to do so while trampling over the rights of their neighbours. If you have money here, I was told, you have rights. The poor are nothing.

Yet this story, painfully prominent in the villages, was remarkably absent in the district governments. Environmentalism offered a convenient technical fix which glosses over messy government failings. This recalls Ferguson's theory of anti-political discourse, suggesting that while environmentalism may be politicized with respect to the legislature, it is anti-political with respect to the executive arm of the state.³⁵

But the convenience of environmentalisms to Tanzania's elites cannot explain their prominence in villages. Residents of the Rukwa Valley said that stock-owning immigrants were causing environmental problems. Specifically they were accused of bringing invasive weeds, causing soil erosion and reducing the soil's fertility. Their presence meant that getting a

35. Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine*.

living from the land was now harder work. How well rooted is this local concern in the material realities of environmental change? Why have official and local narratives converged so neatly? I argue that the connection between local expression of environmental concern and environmental insult is not straightforward. In part, it reflects contested interpretations of environmental change which different farm ecologies will promote, but it also reflects jealousy of cattle-owners' wealth, and possibly co-option of the environmentalist language of government by villagers.

Villagers took the opportunity to present local problems to the district and regional government in environmental terms. In Rukwa, this followed the arrival of a new regional commissioner in 1998. He had expected the region to be well forested but was appalled to find instead that many places were treeless and that people were cutting down trees and burning grass. These concerns were announced in a large public meeting shortly after he had taken office, and tree planting and burning control campaigns were instigated.

Shortly after that meeting, the regional commissioner received separate delegations from agropastoralists and farmers from the valley. Each asked him to look into the problems of environmental degradation which each accused the other of causing. In part, this may simply reflect the fact that villagers chose to frame their problems to the regional commissioner in terms that they knew he cared about. They were using the language of the rulers to invoke attention when they need it, in the age-old traditions of the ruled — the weak using the language of the strong.³⁶

But these two delegations also point to a vibrant domain of contestation at the village level between villagers. Environmentalisms are many here. They reflect basic differences in farm ecologies. Small farmers without herds relied upon fallowing to restore their farms. They felt that cattle grazing delayed the recovery of fallowed land.³⁷ In the valley, with its fertile soils, recovery normally took three to five years. I was shown fallowed land which was said to be regularly grazed and not yet recovered after ten years. Similarly, they resented the herds consuming crop residues after the harvest, because this also denied the soil potential nutrients. Another farmer, fresh from a physical fight with a herder encroaching on his land, insisted that cattle trampling discouraged earthworm activity which was essential for healthy soils. Finally cattle dung was also recognized to spread a grass

36. I was unable to discuss the purpose of the visit and its cause with the representatives. However, the circumstances and language do suggest that villagers were exploiting government rhetoric. This explanation was favoured by people in the valley with whom I discussed the case. The result of their complaints was a large public meeting which unearthed many of the problems of governance underlying the grievances. See Brockington, 'Communal property'.

37. With good reason — the concentrating of dung in kraals is sometimes referred to as 'nutrient stripping' and forms an important part of the patch dynamics of semi-arid rangelands.

locally called *kasangani* (*Cynodon dactylon*) that was hard to weed. Small segments of it easily take root again and spread. Farms would have to be repeatedly weeded to produce a decent harvest.

In contrast, owners of large herds need not fallow their land, they just moved their kraal onto tired soil, replenishing it with the nutrients stripped from surrounding pasture. They had ready supplies of dung to spread on any tired farm patches and work into the ground. While dung could bring invasion by *kasangani*, it was less of a problem for herders because they had the means to plough their farms repeatedly to eradicate the weeds. A well-established crop of maize with an undercrop of squash would cast a dense shade which *kasangani* could not tolerate. Cattle owners also had a different moral economy with respect to crop damage. The rule among herders was that if crop damage occurred, then no case should be brought. For no herder who pursued such a course could ever tell when his own herd would inflict damage, perhaps on the person he had just sought damages from. They lived in glass houses and would not throw stones.³⁸

The different farming techniques and technologies have to be appreciated within the history of changing livelihoods and agricultural practice in the valley. From the long-term residents' point of view, there have been momentous changes in crops grown, with rice and sunflowers coming in as a cash crop within the last 20 years, and maize replacing finger millet as the dominant staple only in the mid-1980s. Ploughing with oxen was introduced in the 1960s, but has only become predominant with its widespread use by cattle keepers.

The general trend has been one of intensification. Higher population densities have forced the use of less-productive lands (especially so given the expansion of Lake Rukwa over people's farms). The new crops and the importance of cash crops are raising productivity per unit area, but require more labour, and are probably reducing productivity per person. Large weeding parties paid for by beer are being replaced by smaller groups working to the rhythm of a drum.³⁹ The extra labour required, combined with the vigilance and conflict, which large cattle herds bring, is simply resented by smaller farmers.

Cattle owners however dismiss protests against themselves in several ways. They claim that the farmers are simply wrong about the alleged decline in farmland that cattle cause. Herders repeatedly showed me cattle grazing on herders' own farmland as evidence that one had nothing to fear from cattle on farms. They also claimed that smaller farmers were lazy good-for-nothings and shoddy farmers. They complained that they had to pay out far more compensation for crop damage than the crops were actually

38. One of the most lively contests in the village while I was there was between two herders who had broken that agreement.

39. This is a Sukuma innovation. Weeding parties I observed contained mixtures of residents and immigrants.

worth and that some farmers might even encourage livestock encroachment as it might yield more than their honest efforts would.

They also dismissed smaller farmers as being simply jealous of their wealth. It is important to situate environmentalisms within the highly uneven distribution of wealth of village society. Some cattle owners hold thousands of stock and run large farms of eight to 20 acres. Poorer families, without stock, farm a few acres by hand. Not all wealthy stock owners are Sukuma immigrants, nor are the poorer families all Fipa residents. There are many families of immigrants and residents who each hold a handful of stock and who are trying to build up their herds. However, the strong perception is that there are many immigrants who own too many stock to be put to productive use for themselves or for the community.

Jealousy of the wealthy by the poor enhances the popularity of environmentalism in villages. Cattle can bring immense wealth in Tanzania. The wealthiest cattle owners would fly to northern Tanzania to buy disease-resistant cattle called Tarime,⁴⁰ which they could herd southwards and sell for a profit. More commonly oxen enable large farms to be cultivated. When mature, they can be sold at considerable profit for sale to butchers in towns. Cows provide daily milk supplies and new stock. Livestock allow their owners to purchase all manner of goods as well as procuring health, educational or veterinary services. Stock also provide liquidity. They can be sold to buy houses, motorbikes or cars. They can be exchanged in marriage. In short, they make the day-to-day business of farming much easier, they ease the material anxieties involved in dealing with misfortune, they make investments in businesses (guest houses, bars, transport) possible and they provide social status.

Poorer farmers in the Rukwa Valley had good reason to be jealous of the comfortable lives the wealthy agropastoral immigrants enjoyed. Wealthy farmers faced far less hard physical grind because they could easily buy in labour. Wealthy families' homes could be built of brick, sometimes painted, with fine aluminium roofs, whereas poorer farmers had ruder thatched huts. The wealthy had motorbikes, whereas most families were fortunate to have a bicycle. In the bars, most people drank locally brewed beer sold in buckets and jars, whereas the cattle wealthy consumed factory-made bottled beer. The latter was many times more expensive than the former, but it was quite common for a wealthy man to spend enough to satisfy 20 thirsty farmers, and then weave off into the night on his motorcycle. The conspicuous, easy consumption of the wealthy made their neighbours' poverty harder for these neighbours to bear.

40. Nicknamed *Chuma* (steel) because it was so tough.

But it was not only jealousy of juxtaposed inequality. Cattle owners' behaviour added injury to the perceived insult. The power of the wealthy was malevolently displayed by what their cattle did to farms and crops. Crop damage of smallholders' farms by large herds was sufficiently common to be a worrying threat to farmers' livelihoods. Farms were not fenced or hedged, and many families did not live near them, preferring the society villages offered. These farmers could not be sure that their hard work would lead to a harvest. Crop damage could mean hunger or simply less money and chance of improving their lives. I constantly met resentment at the metaphorical trampling of the poor by the wealthy. It was more than infuriating to find one's own hard work making someone else's cow fatter.

Village environmental discourses were thus remarkably dichotomized between advocates and critics of cattle. This was easily merged into an ethnically charged discourse about the dangers of immigration. The realities of interaction between farmers and herd owners were more complex than these dichotomies suggest. Many local youths had good friendships with cattle-owning patrons. There was intermarriage between the two ethnic groups, and they co-operated in drumming parties. Furthermore many of the herd boys, who were immediately responsible for preventing crop damage, were local youths who worked for herders to earn money and the means to marry. This could make the confrontations between herd boys and farmers more violent. If stock were caught on a farm, the herd boys might desperately try and drive the stock away, with the farmer trying to seize them. For should the cattle be caught the compensation costs owed to the farmer could be taken from, and entirely consume, the herd boys' wages.⁴¹

But representations of interaction are rarely about such nuts and bolts. They can be cast in heroic terms. Many elders felt that before the immigration life had been easier, there had been less crop damage, the soil had been more fertile and farming less work. An environmentalist discourse matched the feelings of Fipa residents. It was not hard to graft national discourses of degradation onto Fipa anxieties about crop damage and jealousies of Sukuma wealth.

Conclusion

Local knowledges and local environmentalisms are often fragmented and partial.⁴² They are rarely coherent, co-ordinated bodies of knowledge,

41. The importance of herd boy skill was underlined by the lament of a (Fipa) herd owner whose herd boy was going to leave his employment and who had remarkably managed to guard his cattle for 3 years without causing any case of crop damage.

42. E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft Oracles and Magic Among the Azande* (OUP, Oxford, 1937), p. 82, 540; C. Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further essays in interpretive anthropology* (Basic Books, New York, NY, 1983), p. 75.

theoretically elaborate and coherent.⁴³ It is therefore important to ask under what conditions they become systematized, and how organized and coherent have they become. This makes it possible to investigate the political utility of environmentalist ideas. It also highlights the importance of the new sites of reproduction of environmental awareness, such as radio.⁴⁴

Exploring the systematization of knowledge provides a framework to account for conflict, its absence and positive alliances of interest. Current writing on conflicting local and official knowledges may yet deal with very little actual conflict between quite contradictory ideas. Leach and Fairhead, for example, found that the remarkable thing about the ethnography of forest history and policy is how little conflict actually results from apparently incompatible stances.⁴⁵ If we consider the local knowledges on which environmentalism is based to be disparate ideas rather than organized systems at loggerheads, then our expectations of conflict change.

But accounts of systematized knowledges, and environmentalisms, tend to be instrumental analyses. By this, I mean that they explain popularity according to concordance with other interests. I have placed environmentalisms in their social and political context, tracing the network of alliances and interests in which they thrive. I have shown that the rise of environmentalism in Tanzania is not a straightforward indication of widespread experience of environmental deterioration. We cannot assume that debate in higher levels of government reflects problems on the ground and we must be wary of discourses in government which appear to reflect the peasants' real problems. There is no necessary reason why truth should have any influence on politics. Where politics reflects the concerns of the people, we would still have to explain why it was useful for politicians to be so representative. Conversely, we must be aware how necessary it will be for villagers to use the language of government.

However, there are problems with a solely instrumental analysis. It assumes that there are profounder reasons other than environmental concern which are driving environmental discourses. It risks reducing environmental concern to its political convenience. This is not appropriate where, as in Rukwa, different farm ecologies mean that the presence of cattle is costly to smaller farmers.

43. 'Local knowledges' here could cover a vast array of understandings and beliefs in all parts of the world. It has proven particularly productive to consider the incoherence, incompleteness and lack of co-ordination of Western knowledges and certain areas of supposed expertise (R. Grove-White, 'New wine, old bottles? Personal reflections on the new Biotechnology Commissions', *Political Quarterly* 72 (2001), pp. 466–72).

44. J. Fairhead and M. Leach, *Science, Society and Power: Environmental knowledge and policy in West Africa and the Caribbean* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003).

45. Leach and Fairhead 'Fashioned forest pasts', p. 35.

Environmentalism is an immensely complex phenomenon. Its roots are hard to trace even after decades of close observation and in-depth ethnographic research. Milton's rich study of environmentalist sentiment in the UK suggests that this is simply not something which can be reduced to the utility of environmental agendas for its protagonists' 'real' motives.⁴⁶

To reflect the complexity of environmentalism, more historical data are needed on the evolution of environmentalist discourse. We need to know when environmentalism became so popular, whether there have been environmental elements in previous rural discourses and whether environmentalist discourse has displaced others over time.⁴⁷ In short, we need to see how durable and variable environmental concerns have been in order to see what they derive from. This was not an easy task during a year's fieldwork and is particularly hard when dealing with rural discourses which are not written down and recoverable.

It would also be informative to observe what happens when environmentalism conflicts with other dominant discourses, such as that of modernization or development. It is hard to exaggerate the importance of development as a goal for the Tanzanian state. Modern towns, hospitals, schools and agriculture have been the ultimate aim of government policy for decades. Development is a metaphor which still permeates everyday thinking and conversation.⁴⁸ People who do well at school and get a good job are said to have progressed and developed.

The prominence of environmentalism in part reflects its compatibility with the modernizing development agenda. For example, it is not modern or developed to live in the bush and herd livestock or hunt wildlife.⁴⁹ Policies which seek to conserve these areas by evicting people and forcing them to live in modern villages are self-evidently both good for the environment and for development. But what will happen when environmentalist measures are seen to conflict with development priorities? How strong, for example, is the environmentalism which surrounds the mining operations near Lake Victoria, where there is concern about the activity of small miners, and the use of poisons by large international companies?

Environmentalism in Tanzania is thus multilayered. It is a response to local problems, to real and perceived changes in environmental quality. But whatever its roots in people's experiences and livelihoods, it is powerfully combined with rural people's need to speak the language of environmentalism

46. K. Milton, *Loving Nature: Towards an ecology of emotion* (Routledge, London, 2002).

47. I am grateful to Dr. John Lonsdale for this point.

48. It is indicative of the importance of environmental concerns in Tanzania that its value can be equated with that of development. I have heard a funeral peroration for a village chairman which concluded with the praise that he had tried hard to bring development and conserve the environment.

49. As the manager of the Mkomazi Game Reserve of northern Tanzania told me in 1994, when justifying the eviction of herders from the reserve — we cannot have these people living out there like animals, they must develop.

to government and donors. They show a canny manipulation of language and agendas that has long characterized the dealings of the weak with the strong. We are therefore likely to see few contradictions between local priorities and the environmental agendas of central governments. The discourse at this level works not through contradiction and opposition but through co-option, manipulation and subversion.