

Permission to Change:
The Role of Culture and Cultural Tourism in Development
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A Case Study among the Batwa of
Kisoro, Uganda

To Chase, and all the cups of hot chocolate we shared together.

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Abstract

The Batwa are an indigenous people living throughout areas of central equatorial Africa. In Uganda, they constitute a small minority and live in parts of the West and Southwest, primarily in the districts of Bundibugyo, Kabale, Kisoro and Kanungu. This study was conducted in Kisoro District and the data deals primarily with the Batwa that live there. Many of the Batwa's ancestral homelands were declared national parks in 1991. The Batwa were forced to leave and were given no compensation. As a result, many of them are now squatters and have been forced to beg for a living. Several organizations have engaged in resettlement and work on the Batwa's behalf. One form of income-generation for the Batwa today is as performers in cultural tourism. This study sought to explore the concept of cultural tourism and its implications for development. To this end, it examined the ideas of culture and development for the Batwa and the importance of the forests to their livelihood. It also broadly studied the similarities between indigenous peoples worldwide and the role of culture in their development.

Information for this paper was gathered through a variety of methods. Firsthand information was obtained through many informal conversations and formal interviews with staff members of the United Organization for Batwa Development in Uganda (UOBDU) and with Batwa themselves. A great deal of outside reading was also done in order to better understand the plight of indigenous peoples worldwide and the history of the Batwa in Uganda. Several Batwa communities were interviewed, and a number of informal conversations with members of International Gorilla Conservation Programme (IGCP), Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) and tourists in Kisoro took place throughout the research period.

The content of this paper is centred on the concepts of culture and ethics, and the role they play in development. As a result, many of the findings from interviews and field research are presented in a discussion format, and final conclusions are left to the reader. A great deal of information about the history, culture and centrality of the forests in the Batwa culture is presented. Cultural tourism also emerged as a complex issue and this is reflected in its presentation. Many of the people interviewed thought very highly of the concept of cultural tourism, but personal opinion and outside research also allowed

for the presentation of the negative aspects of such a program. A decisive verdict is left in the hands of the individual.

Objectives

This study began as an attempt to explore the land rights of minority groups in Uganda. The Batwa were chosen as a case study of a population evicted from their land in the name of conservation. This led to a closer look at how land rights and territorial integrity are central to the Batwa's rights both to develop and to preserve their culture as they see fit. Objectives of the study therefore included: gaining a better understanding of Batwa history and culture; examining reasons why the Batwa did not benefit from mainstream development; looking at the role of culture in development; and exploring how the Batwa's status as indigenous people affects their process of development.

Justification

There are many lessons to be learned in how a country treats its minorities. Even at its best, democracy may still be considered 'tyranny of the majority.' For a student of development studies, a close examination of the quality of life of a country's minority population—in this case an indigenous minority—can teach a lot about the true state of that nation's development. Thus a case study of the Batwa in Uganda, and the underlying reasons for the poverty they are now living in, provides crucial information about the shortcomings of President Museveni's National Resistance Movement's (NRM) oft-touted development policies.

Methodology

The foundational work for this paper was done by reading Eversole, McNeish and Cimadamore's book *Indigenous Peoples and Poverty*. This provided a wealth of information about issues facing indigenous peoples worldwide and the root causes of their marginalization and disempowerment. From there I was able to examine the case study of the Batwa through a more international lens.

For the duration of my practicum/independent study project I was based in Kisoro, Uganda. Kisoro District is home to the largest number of Batwa in Southwest Uganda and as such provided a prime opportunity to learn about them from all points of view. During my time in Kisoro, I worked with UOBDO and was able to talk to members of UWA, IGCP, Uganda Functional Adult Literacy Training Center, local council officials, tourists, community members and Batwa themselves. Everyone had something to say about the Batwa, and this variety of perspectives enriched the scope of my paper immensely.

In the UOBDO office, I was sometimes able to help with small projects in the areas of finance, report writing and general computer work. For the most part, however, I was free to peruse UOBDO's extensive library and sometimes ride along on field visits. Most of my information was gained through a series of informal and formal interviews with members of the UOBDO staff.

Information was also obtained through interviews and focus group discussions with Batwa communities and community leaders. A major obstacle in this was the language barrier, as I was not able to communicate directly with the Batwa, nor was I able to base the field visits around my schedule. The UOBDO office is very concerned—and deservedly so—with exploitation of the Batwa and therefore trusts only its own staff to translate honestly and accurately. As a result of their busy schedules, however, I was only able to visit the field several times. I also visited one Batwa community with the Red Cross during a process of community assessment.

This visit with the Red Cross helped me to have a more objective opinion in my overall picture of the Batwa. Visits with UOBDO were mostly to communities that had been successfully resettled, and therefore did not present a complete picture of the Batwa in Kisoro District. The community visited with Red Cross was a community of Batwa still squatting on another farmer's land, and the answers they gave me varied greatly from the answers of the happily resettled communities.

All interviews included in this paper were conducted with the express permission of the interviewee, but complete anonymity will be protected due to the sensitive nature of the subject.

Definitions

There are many different groups of Pygmies living throughout central equatorial Africa. Some are known by a name similar to that of the particular forest that they live in or near. The group living in Southwest Uganda is known as the Batwa. One Batwa is called a Mutwa. Many Mutwa, or the people group as a whole, will be referred to as Batwa. The word Pygmy will not be used except for as a matter of convenience when speaking of the many different groups in Africa. The word 'pygmy' when not capitalized is generally understood to be a derogatory term and is only used in the context of a direct quotation.

Do you know what it means, losing your own culture? It's because we have nowhere to practice our own culture. It's because we have no choice. We wouldn't love to lose our culture because our parents used to practice the same culture ... but where can we do it from? ... It's ok to talk about the culture, not forgetting that most of the culture is dying away because of eviction.

-Interview with Mutwa 14/11/07

Introduction

When the Ugandan government, under pressure from international conservation organizations and institutions such as the World Bank, established Mgahinga and Bwindi Impenetrable Forests as national parks in 1991, it took the final step in excluding local communities from accessing the forests and their resources. Farming communities that had been encroaching on the gazetted parks since their initial protection in 1930 by the British colonial administration were compensated for the land lost to conservation. The Batwa, a group of historically nomadic hunter-gatherers who depended upon the forest for their livelihood, had no fields of crops or permanent houses to visibly demonstrate what they were losing. As a result, they were not compensated for the loss of their forest, a loss that ran deeper than a mere piece of land on which to grow food. To the Batwa, the forest is life—and culture. It is where they gather wild yams and honey, hunt animals and gather medicinal herbs. It is the place where their ancestors are buried, and on which their religious practice depends. It is also a source of income-generation, as the Batwa use bamboo from the forest to weave baskets and other handcrafts. For the Batwa, the loss of their traditional culture and the descent into poverty were not inevitabilities of Uganda's development. Rather, they were a direct result of international intervention and prioritization of animal livelihoods over that of peoples', all of which led to extreme poverty and marginalization of the Batwa.

An understanding of the present-day situation of the Batwa—as will be examined here in the case study of Batwa living in Kisoro—is important in analyzing the true picture of development in Uganda. As Damman notes, “one may detect a state's true dedication to Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESCR), including the right to food and to health and social justice, through the way it deals with the indigenous peoples living within its borders” (2005: 70). This paper will briefly explore the Batwa's history and culture in relation to their current situation and their status as an indigenous people. It will then seek to define culture and development and the relationship between the two. Is culture something that must necessarily be lost to development, or is a cultural foundation and alternative method of development necessary for true development to occur? One issue that will be particularly addressed is the concept of cultural tourism as

a source of livelihood for the Batwa and both the problems and benefits that have the potential to arise out of such an arrangement.

Beginnings

The region of Southwest Uganda (also known as Kigezi) is marked by similarities and shared history with its neighbors, Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Even today, the language spoken throughout Kisoro District – Rufumbira – is understood to be virtually the same as Kinyarwanda and Congolese. Languages and family relations transcend international boundaries. As such, the history of the Batwa is inextricably intertwined with that of the Batutsi and Bahutu of present-day Rwanda.

Up until the mid-sixteenth century, the Batwa were the exclusive inhabitants of the Kigezi region. It is estimated that the Batutsi moved into the area around 1550, and the Bahutu arrived (fleeing Batutsi rule in Rwanda) around 1750. The relations between the three groups were more than complicated. The Batutsi initially respected the Batwa's status as owners of the high-altitude forest, referring to the area as 'the domain of the bells,' in reference to the bells worn on the collars of the Batwa's hunting dogs. In return, the Batwa paid tribute to the Tutsi king, often serving as archers in the Batutsi's efforts to retain control of land when Bahutu farmers began encroaching many years later. Relations between the Batwa and Batutsi soured, however, when the Batutsi refused Batwa demands for an inter-marriage between a powerful Mutwa and a Tutsi from the royal family. In the following decades, relations would be less than peaceful between the Batutsi, Bahutu, Batwa and intervening colonial powers such as the Germans, Belgians and eventually—beginning in 1912—the English¹ (Lewis 2000: 19).

The areas of Mgahinga, Echuya and Bwindi forests were placed under English colonial protection in the 1930s. This occurred as a reaction to increased destruction of the forests, which was also jeopardizing Batwa livelihoods. Both events forced the Batwa into a position of dependence on neighboring farmers, as they could no longer turn to the forest for land and a plentiful supply of food. Relations between these two

¹ Examples of the complex relations between these groups are still seen today, as in the case of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, during which Bahutu massacred over 800,000 Batutsi. A number of Batwa were also killed or involved in the killing, depending on which ethnic group they were aligned with; former European colonial powers such as France and Belgium also played a role, either as suppliers of arms or as members of the poorly-attempted United Nations peace-keeping mission.

communities deteriorated as the Batwa were forced into a position that would become their ‘cultural legacy’ for decades to come—as squatters and beggars.

Defining Development, Culture

Development’s “ultimate goals are those of existence itself: to provide all humans with the opportunity to live full human lives. Thus understood, development is the ascent of all persons and societies in their total humanity” (Goulet 1995: 7).

Perhaps the most important question in seeking a definition of development is whether or not it allows room for culture; or is it, by definition, a process which disregards, or even actively excludes, the preservation of ancient ways of living? In this very question, the definitions of development and culture become inseparable. If culture is understood as an “ancient way of life,” then it is allowed no room for change. On the other hand, perhaps “traditional value systems and indigenous cultures are not inert deposits of wisdom or ritual, but vital realities that change through time and continue to provide identity and meaning to people conscious of themselves as actors on a shifting historical stage” (137). In this sense, each new generation must choose to reject or internalize the traditions handed down to them by their parents and grandparents (138).

One Mutwa described development as a change from a bad situation to a good situation, adding that many developments have taken place among the Batwa, such as iron-roofed housing and the ability to vote. Another Mutwa said that to her development is living in a better place and being happy.

From an economic perspective, development as a process must be viewed through the lens of tradeoffs. Some things must be lost so that others can be gained. With the ease and convenience of technology comes a standardization of lives and living that dampens the vibrance and individuality of cultures. Certainly as globalization takes place, cultures are changing and adapting to life on an international scale. But, if Goulet’s definition of development as a process of “being more” rather than “having more” is to be believed, then questions arise as to the success of many development models. For example, “How has ‘development’ contributed to poverty and disempowerment in indigenous communities?” (Simon 2005: 53).

Culture may be somewhat harder to define, but a solid understanding of what does and does not qualify as culture is essential to the argument of this paper. As will later be explored, certain practices are often attributed to “Batwa culture” which are actually results of decades of poverty and marginalization. In this way, outsiders’ perceptions and definitions of Batwa culture play a crucial role in the Batwa’s views of their own culture. “An important aspect of our identity, especially for marginalized groups, is how others perceive us” (McCaskill and Rutherford 2005: 150). As Franz Fanon might argue, colonialism—or dominance of one group over another politically, economically and territorially—is not limited to physical violence. It also has a crucial element of psychological domination and violation. Indigenous peoples may also suffer from this type of “identity crisis,” as their very way of life is threatened by the contemporary and national dominant culture. As Goulet writes, “traditional value systems in Third World countries must still wage an uphill fight not only to win recognition from modernizers, but also to protect their own fragile self-esteem. Hence the search for alternative development strategies begins with the restoration of this self-esteem” (138).

According to one United Organization for Batwa Development in Uganda (UOBDU) staff member, culture “preserves a society. It instills morals in society. It can define a society. It can help a society to develop” (interview 13/11/07). It is this aspect of culture—the part related to development—that is of primary concern in this study.

In the case of the Batwa, it might seem that attempts by external forces to contribute to the development of Uganda – and international conservation – have occurred at the cost of the Batwa’s livelihood. Some could argue that this was a necessary cost, or an inevitability of the development process.

Indigenous peoples ... are said to stand in the way of development, which becomes grounds for dispossessing them and destroying their way of life. Their disappearance is then described as inevitable, as such archaic folk cannot be expected to survive in the modern world. The idea that indigenous societies are incapable of change and bound to fade away is wrong... Cultures disappear only when they are overwhelmed by external forces and when conditions imposed upon them render them incapable of adapting. (Davis 1999: 76)

This, for the Batwa, is the issue—land dispossession in the name of conservation and development has forced them into a situation of poverty, as outside forces thereby

impose a policy of assimilation². The question, now that their land is lost, is whether or not the Batwa will be able to preserve—or actively change—the culture that has been theirs for centuries.

Indigenous Peoples, Indigenous Poverty

“Reluctant to address indigenous self-determination, states instead address indigenous poverty. But what if the two are connected? What if self-determination is a necessary element in the struggle against poverty?” (Cornell 2005: 206). The issue of indigenous identity cannot be separated from discussion of development and development processes. According to a 2002 survey, Batwa in the Kigezi region suffer from a 41% child mortality rate, compared to a 17% child mortality rate in neighboring communities of non-Batwa (Rudd 2002). This blatant disparity is not unique to Uganda. Indigenous peoples worldwide suffer from vastly lower standards of living and notably higher rates of poverty than their non-indigenous counterparts. This is not to suggest that poverty and inequality are to be understood as a characteristic or inherent quality of indigenous peoples. Indeed, “vulnerability and marginalization should not automatically be read into the indigenous model” (Working Group on Indigenous Populations 1996). Nevertheless, the fact “that dispossession, marginalization, and discrimination have frequently been part of indigenous peoples’ experience is indisputable” (McNeish and Eversole 2005: 10). This pattern would suggest, rather, that common underlying factors have contributed to higher rates of poverty among indigenous peoples worldwide. And, if this is the case, the same factors may also suggest the need for an alternative plan of development for indigenous peoples. As these patterns are also true for the Batwa of Southwest Uganda, they will be explored here in more depth with the goal of proving that the common factors—importance of land as a resource and cultural identity—which, when violated, contribute to poverty among indigenous peoples, may also be used to contribute positively to development. And, in practice, these same factors create the need

² In this paper assimilation will be defined as forced loss of cultural distinctness for the sake of ‘sameness.’ It could be argued that many governments adopt a policy of assimilation towards indigenous peoples. This is in contrast to a policy of integration, which encourages indigenous peoples to retain their culture while becoming an equal, yet culturally distinct, part of society.

for an alternative plan of development for indigenous peoples—one that gives them ownership of their entry into ‘modernity.’

As McNeish and Eversole point out, defining indigenous populations is problematic, as it is an imposition of an outside definition on many distinct people groups. This is especially a problem in the case of indigenous peoples, who are often already caught up in battles for self-determination within larger nation-states. Nevertheless, a working definition of the existing similarities between indigenous peoples is useful, particularly for understanding the reasons why indigenous peoples worldwide are suffering from poverty and marginalization. Therefore, though it must be understood that the definition is in no way complete or characteristic of every indigenous person, the following similarities will be examined in detail in this paper: “being original inhabitants of a land later colonized by others, and forming distinct, non-dominant sectors of society, with unique ethnic identities and cultural systems. Other commonalities ... include strong ties to land and territory; experiences or threats of dispossession from their ancestral territory; the experience of living under outside, culturally foreign governance and institutional structures; and the threat of assimilation into dominant sectors of society and loss of distinctive identity” (6).

Even with a working definition, qualifying populations as indigenous can be less than straightforward. Many African governments “argue that ‘all Africans are indigenous’, thereby suggesting that there is no legitimate grounds for what they maintain is preferential treatment of a sector of their societies” (African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights 2005: 60). This is the case in Uganda, where the Batwa do not receive recognition as either indigenous or as a “non-dominant sector of society”—indeed Uganda is almost entirely a country of minorities. Others argue that even the Batwa were at one time immigrants to the area they now claim as their ancestral land. Still, the Batwa of Uganda (and the entire central African region) are commonly accepted to be an indigenous people, and their status as such will be an assumption of this paper.

According to the United Nations WGIP, “indigenous peoples worldwide continue by and large to be disadvantaged in every area of life” (McNeish and Eversole 3). The Director-General of the World Health Organization made the following observation in 1999:

Life expectancy at birth is 10 to 20 years less for indigenous peoples than for the rest of the population. Infant mortality is 1.5 to 3 times greater than the national average. Malnutrition and communicable diseases ... continue to affect a large proportion of the indigenous peoples around the world ... Indigenous peoples are over-represented among the world's poor ... are less likely to live in safe or adequate housing, more likely to be denied access to safe water and sanitation, more likely to be malnourished... (Brundtland 1999)

These shared maladies are not inevitabilities of the development process for indigenous peoples and their way of life. Rather, they have common root causes in the worldwide phenomenon of eviction of indigenous peoples from their land and resources and violation of their minority culture, which is so often inextricably intertwined with their ancestral lands. "Poverty is, from an indigenous perspective, the lack of rights to territory, since this is a necessary condition to guarantee autonomous development and to be able to implement policies that fit the conditions and expectations of each indigenous people" (Niño and Montalvo 2005: 194). As is true for the Batwa, indigenous peoples are more likely to suffer from malnutrition after eviction from their land. Because the Batwa were initially given no land in compensation for their losses³, they were forced into living as squatters and farming other peoples' land in return for food. They were also denied their traditional hunter-gatherer diet of wild animals (including pigs, duikers and buffaloes), wild yams, wild fruit and wild honey. Their temporary, nomadic shelters became permanent, inadequate houses. Forced out of the forest, they no longer had reliable water sources. Health degenerated as Batwa's living conditions worsened and they no longer had access to traditional medicinal herbs as remedies, yet could also not afford to go to a hospital to be treated.

The Batwa's dependence on the forest goes beyond its provision of physical resources. Much of their culture depends on the forest and having the ability to access it. This ability is not a privilege that they would enjoy retaining; it is an issue of the right to determine their own future and path of development. It is also an issue of imposition of poverty: "When dominant cultures impose their culture (e.g. market capitalism, sedentary

³ According to Rose Mwebaza's *Lessons from the Batwa Experience in the Conservation and Management of Bwindi Game Park*, "only two Batwa households are on record as having received full compensation" (62).

lifestyles) and destroy aspects of indigenous culture (e.g. access to land, language), poverty tends to increase” (Eversole 2005: 35).

The reason that culture is such an inseparable part of development for the Batwa is that it cannot be genuinely maintained without access to the forests. Other people groups can ‘take their culture with them’—as many colonialists did when they moved to new lands—but for most indigenous peoples, the active practice of their culture depends on the lands that they are losing.

Searching for Development

When development builds on indigenous values, it exacts lower social costs and imposes less human suffering and cultural destruction than when it copies outside models. This is so because indigenous values are the matrix from which people derive meaning in their lives, a sense of identity and cultural integrity, and the experience of continuity with their environment and their past – this even in the midst of change. (Goulet 210)

Advocacy for an alternative model of development does not suggest that indigenous peoples are incapable of developing in the same mode as everyone else; rather, it recognizes that development is a positive force only if it is useful and beneficial in the lives of individuals. As such, development without regard to culture is not useful or beneficial for anyone, including the Batwa. Indeed, it is that very process which has had many negative effects on their livelihood. “The effect of a model that measures success in terms of assimilation and mainstream development has tended to leave the indigenous peoples of Africa in poverty” (ACHPR 60).

Following their complete eviction from the park, only two Batwa households—those that had settled down and begun farming in the forests—are on record as having received compensation. Some Batwa were reportedly given checks so that they could purchase land elsewhere, but these were of absolutely no use to people who had never been taught about the concept of a bank account. A 1999 study found that compensation funds had not reached the Batwa “as a result of their way of life” (Kamugisha-Ruhombe). Models that overlook this way of life as a factor in the development process are doomed

to failure, and have thus so far prevented the material benefits of development from reaching the Batwa⁴.

In reality, Uganda's development has passed the Batwa by as a result of their marginalization by the government and international organizations. With no land of their own, the Batwa are unable to reap the benefits of food production and income-generation. As a result, they have been trapped in a cycle of poverty that has prevented them from accessing services such as education and healthcare—and all the benefits that these entail—and from participating in the political system, a factor that has only served to further marginalize them. According to the 2004 census conducted by UOBDU, 271 Batwa households are still landless⁵; 351 households have been resettled. Yet even if all the Batwa were given land today, the issue of development is not a simple one because land, for the Batwa, is not simple.

The Batwa suffer from the loss of their cultural identity, which is so intimately connected with the forests they call home. Resettlement will never give them back the land in which their ancestors are buried. Resettlement also has a tendency to use whatever land is available. This leads to the break up of communities, which leads to further loss of cultural identity. In addition, the land donated to the Batwa is often some of the least expensive—and therefore least fertile and least accessible—land in the region, thus making their efforts at production futile. And once a Batwa family is resettled, they will likely live there for generations to come—no organization will come to resettle them on better land, and they will almost certainly never have the money or resources to buy better land for themselves.

The infertile land and small plot sizes make providing enough food for the family year-round nearly impossible in most cases, and forces many Batwa—even those resettled on their 'own' land⁶—into a situation of dependency on neighboring farmers or on begging to get enough food to survive.

⁴ “There is clearly a need for all actors to take a step back and reflect on why all their interventions ... have not helped to alleviate the short-term living conditions of the Batwa or the long-term strategic issues of empowerment and inclusion” (Tumushabe and Musiime 2006: 24).

⁵ It is expected that this number has increased slightly since 2004, despite the fact that some Batwa have been resettled since then. As Batwa children grow up and get married, there is nowhere for them to move to and their family cannot give them land.

⁶ In most cases where Batwa are resettled on land purchased by NGOs, the land title is retained by the donor, meaning that even these Batwa have limited land security and personal ownership. UOBDU has

Even under the Ugandan government's system of Universal Primary Education (UPE), in which the government pays tuition fees so that all children can go to primary school, many Batwa (as well as non-Batwa) children do not receive an education. In Kisoro District, only 248 out of 755 Batwa children attended primary or secondary school in 2004 (UOBDU census). Even among those children attending school, absenteeism is a frequent occurrence. One headmaster said that the biggest problem with getting the Batwa children to come to school is food—the children are always hungry and go out to look for food rather than staying at school⁷. Of the children that enter primary school, very few children will make it to the secondary level. The 2004 census recorded only two Batwa students in secondary school in the entire Kisoro District. No Mutwa has ever gone to university in Uganda. Poverty may not be the only reason why Batwa have such low rates of education. Discrimination is still a factor in their daily living and affects children in school. Batwa students may be viewed as less intelligent or dirty by both teachers and fellow students⁸. It must also be recognized that indigenous peoples “are often subjected to curricula designed for other cultural groups which ignore their own history, knowledge and values” (McNeish and Eversole 3).

Batwa consistently mentioned inability to access healthcare as a major problem in their communities. As was previously mentioned, many Batwa are resettled in remote locations, which makes it difficult for them to access public services. Most Batwa are also living in extreme poverty, meaning that visits to the hospital are an unattainable luxury. The combination of poor quality of housing, extremity of conditions⁹, poor sanitation, lack of water and poor nutrition means that Batwa may often have a real need for medical care that they cannot access. In addition, exclusion from the forest—as previously mentioned—prevents the Batwa from readily accessing medicinal herbs. As a

created the Batwa Land Trust and has begun negotiations with donors in hopes of collecting all of the land titles, to be held by the trust—not the individual Batwa—and governed by Batwa representatives.

⁷ The headmaster said that he literally travels around to weddings to gather truant Batwa children because many of them go there looking for food.

⁸ On numerous occasions in informal conversations, the author heard teachers discussing their Batwa students as not as smart as the other children or saying that it would just take time for the Batwa to “catch up” as a people group. In cases where a Batwa child was performing well in school, it always seemed to be a surprise and would be talked about as an abnormality.

⁹ Much of Southwest Uganda, and particularly the areas where the Batwa live, is part of a montaine-rainforest biosphere. As a result of the high altitude and proximity to the forests, the area tends to be cold and receive a great deal of precipitation, including rain and hail.

result, Batwa suffer from high mortality rates—41% among children and 21% among infants—compared to 17% and 5%, respectively, for neighboring non-Batwa communities. One expectant Mutwa mother said, “*If I am lucky and I get a baby, and the baby survives really, at least I will pass to him or her our history and our present now and from there, if the child grows, will also be learning more and probably also the dance shall be passed to others*” (interview 18/11/07). The idea of a successful pregnancy, birth and childhood is obviously not something to be taken for granted¹⁰.

Though Batwa can no longer rely on the forest as a resource from which to gather food, they have not yet been largely successful in the fields of agriculture and livestock. One Mutwa woman cited the infertility of the land and their lack of seeds and other farming resources as the main problems facing her community (interview 18/11/07). As of 2006, no Mutwa was known to own cattle (Tumushabe and Musiime 2006: 10). Several people who work with the Batwa stated that Batwa are often given animals such as goats and chickens, but that they eat them without regard for the sustainability of the resource. This is an example of a situation in which the plan of development must take into account the culture and lifestyle of the people—in this case, nomadic hunter-gatherers not experienced with sustaining animal populations on a small scale. As a result of their limited success in food production, hunger is a driving force behind many of the decisions made by the Batwa.

Batwa are well known by their neighbors to have a strong affinity for alcohol, a problem afflicting many indigenous peoples worldwide and an excuse given by many outside observers for the Batwa’s failure to succeed under the given conditions. In Batwa communities, alcohol is blamed for a variety of problems, including domestic violence and other violent crime, squandering of money and resources, laziness, sexual promiscuity and rape. It is widely understood that if you give money to a Mutwa, he will turn around and spend it on alcohol¹¹. The issue of alcoholism is one that will be very hard to solve long-term, as it is a self-perpetuating cycle. Efforts can only be directed at treating the root causes of the problem. “Alcoholism is both a symptom of

¹⁰ The woman’s baby was born, alive and healthy, the next morning.

¹¹ “With the rise of tourism in that area, the Batwa have become so money-minded that they charge a fee for everything they do. The money received is often spent on buying alcohol” (Tumushabe and Musiime 10). This was a belief echoed many times throughout conversations with UOBDU staff, tourists and other community members.

marginalization and despondency, as well as a cause of poor health. Many people drink alcohol to deal with hunger” (ACHPR 52). An UOBDU staff member posited that the reason Batwa drink so much is due to boredom and redundancy—once they are occupied with work, they will no longer be able to drink as much (interview 18/11/07).

This is a cycle as well, however. Many people will not hire a Mutwa because of the perception that alcohol will interfere with his or her ability to perform on the job, and the assumption that all the money earned will be spent on alcohol. This discrimination, combined with the problem of illiteracy, has led to extremely high rates of unemployment among the Batwa. According to the most recent figures, 98% of Batwa in Southwest Uganda are unemployed. In 2004, out of the 1,389 Batwa living in Kisoro District, only ten (nine males, one female) were employed—and all of these were employed by the UOBDU office. Only 46 out of the 2,551 Batwa in the entire Kigezi region claimed to have salaried jobs.

Another issue facing the Batwa of today is the spread of HIV/AIDS. Because very few of the Batwa are in school, they have little means of learning about the virus, although community sensitizations are now taking place¹². The rapid change of lifestyle from one of relative isolation to one of extreme marginalization and poverty has created a ripe breeding ground for the disease. Though sexual intercourse between a Mutwa man and a non-Mutwa woman is virtually unheard of, intercourse between a Mutwa woman and a non-Mutwa man is more common, due to a rather widespread myth that having sex with a Mutwa woman can cure someone of HIV/AIDS¹³ (Magara 18/05/07). Batwa’s status of economic and social disempowerment gives them little control over their bodies and exposes them to many kinds of exploitation¹⁴. Prostitution of the young girls to the large population of military soldiers in the region is also a growing problem (interview UOBDU staff member 18/11/07).

¹² UOBDU recently used donations to fund the purchase of a projector and generator for the purpose of showing HIV/AIDS education films.

¹³ It is also believed by some that having sex with a Mutwa can cure a backache.

¹⁴ One UOBDU staff member said that due to Batwa’s marginalized status, they are targeted by non-Batwa for exploitation, ranging from conditions of forced labor and slavery to rape.

The Batwa, the Bazungu and the Gorillas

The Batwa appealed to the Ugandan government to resettle them in May of 2007. They said that they urgently need “farm inputs and seeds to engage in production and stop begging for survival” (Magara 18/05/07). The Batwa also “stressed that they deserved better than the gorillas that replaced them in the forests” (www.unpo.org 11/05/07).

Gorilla tracking accounted for 43% of the Uganda Wildlife Authority’s (UWA) annual income in 2004¹⁵ (Tumushabe and Musiime 21). Yet, despite UWA’s revenue-sharing agreement in which 20% of all park-entry fees are poured back into the local communities, none of the gorilla revenue has, to date, been factored into this arrangement¹⁶.

When the World Bank granted funding to UWA in 1991 for the establishment of Mgahinga and Bwindi Impenetrable Forest as national parks, it stipulated that research should be undertaken to determine the effects of this action on the local communities. Four years later, the Mgahinga and Bwindi Impenetrable Forest Conservation Trust (MBIFCT or Trust) became operational with the purpose of aiding “protection of Mgahinga and Bwindi Forests by providing support for community projects, research and Uganda National Parks” (Zaninka 2001: 176). On average, 20% of the Trust’s budget is allocated for park management, 20% for research and 60% for the funding of small projects in local communities.

A report commissioned in compliance with the World Bank’s policy on indigenous peoples and published in 1996 “recommended redressing the injustice suffered by the Batwa as a result of the creation of the national parks and the Batwa’s exclusion from the forests” (178). It advised resettling the Batwa in the same areas where they live, “thus maintaining and strengthening their existing social, historical and ancestral ties” (178). It also recommended swift action on the issue of access to the forest for Batwa. However, it was not until December of 1999—eight years after complete eviction—that the Trust actually began resettling Batwa. Up until that point,

¹⁵ This was before the price of the gorilla permit was raised from US\$360 to US\$500. It is therefore estimated that this percentage has increased dramatically in the last two years.

¹⁶ UWA has been collecting a levy fee of \$5 from each gorilla permit purchased in the last two years. A meeting will take place in December 2007 to determine the allocation of that money. UOBDU is advocating that at least a portion of it be spent on purchasing land to resettle the remaining landless Batwa.

the money given by the World Bank was used only in enforcing the Batwa's exclusion from the forest, rather than in helping to build a new life for them.

This has been the case with many of the resources poured into the area by the international community—they have benefited the gorillas exclusively, and often even at the expense of the Batwa. “The forest used to be ours but it was closed to us and became a forest for white people” (Mwebaza 60). This feeling was echoed by members of the Batwa community at Biraara, who said that they felt the Uganda government and *Bazungu* (white people) had stolen their land¹⁷ (08/11/07).

Despite prevalent misperceptions¹⁸, there is no known incident of Batwa ever killing a gorilla. In fact, according to Lewis, gorillas were considered by the Batwa to be a taboo animal, and Batwa would refuse to go on gorilla-hunting expeditions, even when offered payment to do so (20).

The present-day relationship between the Batwa and the gorillas is interesting at best¹⁹. Their history of shared territory and present situation of endangered livelihoods, as well as their statuses as tourist attractions in Kisoro, have led to competition for resources and international attention on more than one level—with the Batwa too often on the losing end. As of late, a major financial supporter of the Batwa communities surrounding the national parks is the International Gorilla Conservation Programme (IGCP). The IGCP has a Batwa component as part of its effort to conserve the gorillas through support—and fighting of poverty—of local communities surrounding the parks. The organization sponsors a number of Batwa to attend Functional Adult Literacy Training in the hopes that they will become conservation-friendly community leaders. It also pays for training in handcrafts, materials for handcrafts and—soon to come—a store for Batwa to sell their handcrafts. IGCP has also recently funded the music, drama and dance training of a number of Batwa as part of a newly-created Batwa Tourism Plan

¹⁷ This does not seem to be a far cry from the truth, as most of the conservation agencies pressuring for protection of the parks are from Western—predominantly white—countries; in the same vein, most of the people who now visit the parks are white foreign tourists and researchers.

¹⁸ Most notably in the movie *Gorillas in the Mist*, in which Batwa were portrayed as a threat to gorillas.

¹⁹ The author has heard numerous comparisons made between the Batwa and the gorillas, particularly in connection with tourism.

between itself, UOBDU and UWA. The funding also includes the provision of musical instruments and uniforms for the performers²⁰.

Perceptions

They actually denounce their culture – they no longer want to behave the way they used to behave; the practice, their traditions, they no longer want that... It was ridiculous to behave the way they used to live in their culture. They want to be like other people, and in other communities of course their culture is quite peculiar and different, and that's why they don't want to behave the way they used to behave in their traditions. (Interview with Kamugoyi village 18/11/07)

Indigenous peoples' identity—and others' perceptions of their identity—plays a major role in the development process. In the case of the Batwa, polar issues such as their image as beggars and then their potential as a tourist attraction are all related to how they are perceived by themselves and others.

It is important to understand how the Batwa are perceived by others, and how their status as a marginalized portion of society originated. Throughout Africa, populations of hunter-gatherers are discriminated against by other ethnic groups. One notable example of this is the San (or “bushmen”) who live throughout much of Botswana, Namibia and South Africa. They are considered by most of their neighbors to be “backward” and less than intelligent. It is generally considered an insult to say that someone is related to a bushman²¹. The Batwa of Central Africa also experience discrimination on another level—as forest-dwellers. “The forest-based way of life is considered non-human. Official circles consider the Pygmies to be people who are still at an early stage of cultural development.... They are considered immoral, dirty, deceitful and uncivilized and Batwa children are considered to be good for nothing” (ACHPR 36). According to one Mutwa, the source of this discrimination is the fact that the Batwa used to eat wild pigs, which were considered by the Bahutu and Batutsi to be unclean. People would not eat at the same table as a Mutwa, enter the same house, or even think of entering into a marital relationship with a Mutwa. One elderly Mutwa described how he

²⁰ This information was obtained through attendance at the handing-over ceremony of instruments and uniforms from IGCP to the Batwa performers and UOBDU (16/11/07).

²¹ The author has witnessed this term being used as an insult on several occasions.

was forced to leave school at the age of sixteen or seventeen as a result of severe discrimination:

Even if I would do something good, it would be turned into bad. Even if some children were shouting in class, they would say that I am the one making noise... and even the masters would believe that the Mutwa has done that... if I continue going to school I'll be beaten all the time and then the report will come and say I've done wrong when I didn't even do anything wrong. Then I said now I cannot stay in a community that is totally against me... So I decided instead of being beaten all the time and allegations against me all the time I better leave. (Interview 14/11/07)

It used to not be unusual for healthcare workers to deny treatment to Batwa on the basis of their ethnicity. "We are very sectarian as far as Batwa are concerned. We do not want to share facilities like hospitals, schools or water sources with them. We consider them dirty. This is what is holding them back" (Batwa Tourism Plan 2007: 6).

One Mutwa was thrown in jail in 2002 when he resisted local government's efforts to steal land that has been in his family since the Batutsi gave it to his grandfather many decades ago. He believes he is targeted because he is a Mutwa. "They believe Batwa cannot own land, they don't have land. They know I am ignorant, that I will not follow up. I am not educated, I don't know which office to go to, so they take that chance to take away the little that I have" (interview 14/11/07).

Though these perceptions are slowly changing—many Batwa mentioned the fact that they can now eat together with non-Batwa, be in the same house and even intermarry—their historical impact on the Batwa's status as a people on the margins of society continues to affect how they are viewed today. Even people who work on the Batwa's behalf used words such as "backward"²² and "ignorant" to describe them, saying that without help and education "the Batwa may take centuries to change" (interviews conducted 13/11/07 through 18/11/07). But these ideas were not limited to non-Batwa. Many Batwa said that they had come from "backwardness," or that they had "come out of

²² It must be taken into account that the term "backward" may have different connotations when used in reference to the Batwa than what might generally be understood by a Western point of view. One Mutwa said that when he used the word "backward," he simply meant ignorance. As an example he used the fact that many Batwa used to run away when they saw a non-Mutwa because his appearance was so foreign to them. One teacher said that when he first met a group of Batwa in 1999, they were terrified of his motorcycle and strange clothing and ran away from him.

ignorance.” This demonstrates the impact that the perceptions of others can have on the way that a people group conceives of itself²³.

One Batwa community, when asked about their culture, responded that they no longer wanted to practice their traditional culture—that it was a culture of begging. “In their tradition, actually even up to now, they solely depend on begging and what he says is that they don’t want to live by begging which is depicted by their culture but they want to work for themselves, and live and depend on themselves, not begging. That’s why they are denouncing their culture” (interview with Kamugoyi village, 18/11/07)²⁴. Furthermore, the community was asked whether they would still pass on the oral history of the culture to their children. The response was: “Of course they are trying to narrate what happened in the past; their history is they were like a caste group; they were not socially accepted in the community, so in their history they are saying that they used to behave in an animal way which has changed today. In their past, they normally beg.”

In reality, begging is not a cultural inheritance of the Batwa; it is a result of loss of livelihood which has led to extreme poverty and marginalization—factors that are now being passed from one generation to the next, as children born into extreme poverty have little chance of an education or way out of the cycle. Begging is not a cultural attribute or practice of the Batwa, nor is it an inherent part of their natural disposition. It is a condition imposed on them as a means of livelihood by their eviction, and lack of compensation, from the forests. It is this action by first the British colonial government, and later the Ugandan government, that has moved many Batwa “from a fairly independent existence to being landless, impoverished squatters, forced to survive by working for local farmers” (Vinding 2003: 387), or by begging.

²³ It should be noted that only a small sample size of Batwa was interviewed, and their views can therefore not necessarily be taken to represent the views or experiences of all Batwa.

²⁴ This community was the only group of Batwa who responded this negatively when questioned about their culture and traditions. They were eager to denounce their traditional religion and medicine in favor of Christianity and modern medicine. They seemed to categorize most of the stereotypical aspects of their culture as negative and were thus eager to distance themselves from those practices. It should be noted, however, that this community of Batwa returned to their status as squatters after being unsuccessfully resettled. They said the reason for this was that they did not want to resettle again, but their action has left those wanting to help them with little option apart from continued hand-outs. In contrast, most Batwa responded very positively when questioned about their culture, saying it is something that they love but are slowly losing due to eviction from the forests.

Kamugoyi village's assertion that begging is a central part of Batwa culture is an example of the importance of outsiders' perceptions in insiders' identity construction. These Batwa have internalized negative stereotypes about their own culture, creating a negative self-image and low self-esteem as a community²⁵. This only furthers cultural degradation and loss of cultural identity. An UOBDU staff member suggested that outsiders' views of Batwa culture as backwards may be a reason it is being lost. "I think really the Batwa feel insecure with the culture they have now. To them it feels as if it's a shame to be Batwa" (interview 13/11/07). For the Batwa, this 'cultural insecurity' has ramifications beyond cultural preservation.

"While poverty may be described by economic measures or health indicators, it is ultimately seated in social relationships" (McNeish and Eversole 292). Fighting poverty in the case of indigenous peoples therefore requires a change in their relation to the rest of society. The assertion of the dominant culture over the culture of indigenous peoples—and the dictating by the dominant culture of the minority culture's identity—gives the members of the dominant culture a position of power over the indigenous peoples²⁶. Until this power relationship is changed, and indigenous peoples begin to assert their own identity—possibly through a process of cultural strengthening or resistance—they will continue to suffer from marginalization and the economic setbacks that come as a result of that²⁷.

"Non-Batwa think the culture of a Batwa is backwardness" (interview UOBDU staff member 19/11/07). One way that this power struggle between cultures is played out is in the practice of cultural labeling, or cultural judgment. This is seen frequently in Western attitudes towards many third-world cultures. An example is the classification of

²⁵ "Many Batwa in Burundi and Rwanda feel so confused about their identity that they cannot conceive of it being possible to escape from the negative image of themselves created by the discrimination, marginalization and severe poverty they suffer. Many want to assimilate into the dominant culture, and accept the negative portrayal of their traditional lifestyles" (Lewis 11).

²⁶ "Identity formation always involves power, the power of one group to establish its way of life as normative. Thus indigenous peoples are faced with the challenge of constructing an identity that balances positive group identification against the onslaught of negative categorization by others" (McCaskill and Rutherford 150).

²⁷ An intentional process of "cultural strengthening" has been credited with alleviating poverty among the Sami communities of Norway, Sweden and Finland. After a period of near-assimilation into the dominant culture, the Sami began a movement to reclaim their indigenous inheritance through creating a standardized Sami cultural identity. Today, Sami enjoy a standard of living nearly equal to that of other citizens in northern Scandinavia (Hicks and Somby 2005: 275).

a culture, or part of a culture, as either inherently ‘bad’ or ‘good.’ This was a common theme throughout interviews conducted with non-Batwa in regards to Batwa culture.

With development ... there are some parts of culture which are shed off, but I look at their culture which will be shed off as the bad part of culture. For example, if they have a culture of begging, then that one will be stopped with development. Dancing is part of their culture, so they can use this part of their culture to make money... So bad parts of their culture shall be shed off, and good culture of theirs will be supported to advance them – that’s how I look at it. (Interview non-Mutwa 19/11/07)

In this scenario, Batwa culture is effectively being shaped by an outside force: ‘bad’ parts are discouraged by those who hold the resources—in this case a teacher—while ‘good’ parts are “supported to advance them.” The example of dancing as a part of culture which will be supported—primarily through the marketing of Batwa performance as a tourist attraction—raises the issue of ‘cultural creation’ through forced conservation of stereotypical aspects of a particular culture. Cultural creation may also occur via inside forces. The idea of cultural resistance, for example, may arise as a movement by indigenous peoples to reclaim their cultural identity. But it is debatable as to whether or not the reinstatement of former cultural practices is not in itself an artificial effort to please outside expectations.

Cultural Resistance

Goulet lays out three conditions for what he calls effective cultural resistance: first of all, the culture must become a “plural culture.” This means that for the Batwa to retain their own culture, they must also internalize the dominant culture around them: they “cannot resist modern technology and its underlying rationality unless they critically understand that technology and that rationality” (148). Secondly, Goulet says that the culture must possess an economic base if resistance is to be successful: “no cultural community can gain mastery over its destiny if it is lacking minimum economical security” (148). This poses a major problem for the Batwa, many of whom struggle to feed their own families. Thirdly, “communities in jeopardy must play some political role” (149). There is currently no Mutwa serving in a local or national government position. “The traditional perception ... that the Batwa are backward and primitive makes it difficult for the Batwa to influence decision-making in any way, as well as to be

elected to positions of responsibility” (Tumushabe and Musiime 13). Furthermore, “the Batwa have a negative perception of the local council administration and view it as an institution that has served to perpetuate their marginalization” (13). Cultural resistance for the Batwa would seem, under these conditions, to be an elusive dream. However, it may still be possible for the Batwa to gain a voice through the empowerment, resources and unifying force of the UOBDO office.

Founded in 2000²⁸ with the support of Forest Peoples Programme (FPP), UOBDO “aims to support Batwa in South West Uganda to address their land problems and to help them to develop sustainable alternative livelihoods” (UOBDO 2004: 7). Located in Kisoro town, UOBDO works with Batwa in the districts of Kisoro, Kabale and Kanungu. The organization’s vision is a Batwa community that is “dignified, educated, recognized and empowered” (interview UOBDO staff member 13/11/07). To this end, UOBDO works with local communities and international donors to better the lives of the Batwa living in these districts. These efforts include projects such as: an Annual General Assembly Meeting (AGAM), during which Batwa are encouraged to come together and voice the issues that are of importance to them; the purchase of forested land in Buhoma with the hopes of giving Batwa access to forest resources and a place to practice their culture; advocacy at the local, national and international level for the rights of Batwa; and conducting the on-the-ground work for projects funded by international donors, including but not limited to: sponsorship of Batwa children in school; purchase of farm inputs for Batwa communities; village-based training²⁹; construction of roof-rainwater harvesting tanks; and general work with the day-to-day issues involving Batwa in these communities³⁰.

UOBDO has three full-time staff members and a satellite office in each district. The office was named and founded at the Batwa’s request, and its goal is that the Batwa

²⁸ Penninah Zaninka and a representative from FPP sat down with Batwa leaders in 2000 and asked them what they wanted. The Batwa came up with the idea of the UOBDO office. It was registered with the Ugandan government as an NGO in 2001 (interview 19/11/07).

²⁹ Under the village-based training model, two leaders—one man and one woman—are selected from each Batwa community to receive education about issues such as health and sanitation; agriculture and livestock production; and general community awareness. These village-based trainers (VBT) are then expected to take the information back to teach other community members.

³⁰ A new housing project recently began, funded by Rainforest Concern, so staff members have now assumed the responsibility of identifying recipients and guidelines for the project.

“feel that they own the office” (UOBDO staff member 29/10/07). The organization is composed of a Management Committee that has ten elected members—one of them the acting chairperson—and a Secretariat made up of Batwa representatives—one man and one woman—from each of the thirty-nine Batwa communities in Southwest Uganda³¹.

The UOBDO office provides a channel for resources to be effectively put to use in Batwa communities, and is a space for them to meet and become organized. There has hitherto been little organized effort either on behalf of the Batwa or by Batwa themselves. This is a result primarily of the prevalent illiteracy and lack of resources among the Batwa, as well as the dispersion of communities over large distances and their lack of a unifying force. The issue of language—Batwa in Southwest Uganda have adopted the languages spoken by their neighbors in the areas where they have been resettled—differences³² has also served to prevent a strong Batwa movement from emerging.

The issues of land and housing, education and adult literacy, income-generation, forest access and conservation benefit-sharing were listed by Batwa at a 2004 meeting as the priority areas they want to see addressed in their communities. Besides working towards these goals—or perhaps in an effort to work towards them—UOBDO is also concerned with preservation of the Batwa culture. This is approached through a variety of methods. One staff member mentioned the idea that “if all the Batwa went to school, then they would be proud to be Batwa” (interview 13/11/07). Thus education is a primary area of concern, not only to better the lives of Batwa, but also with the hope that some day Batwa will assume a larger role in the workings of the organization³³. UOBDO staff members also suggest that Batwa “shouldn’t even inter-marry, because if there is inter-marriage, we think their culture may die within the other peoples’ culture” (interview 19/11/07)³⁴. The forested land in Buhoma, funded by Rainforest Concern,

³¹ Batwa living in Bundibugyo in Western Uganda are not, as of yet, represented by the organization, nor were they included in the 2004 census. An upcoming census is planned for December of 2007 and this will include Batwa living in Bundibugyo.

³² Rutwa, the language formerly spoken by Batwa in this area, has all but died out. Though some knowledge of it still exists, it is rarely spoken and as the older generations pass away, it is likely that knowledge of the language will die with them.

³³ Some Batwa are employed by the office, but generally speaking they are not involved in the day-to-day workings of the organization. Lack of education was cited by a staff member as the reason for this.

³⁴ This is in contrast to the ideas of some Batwa, who suggested that inter-marriage is a source of pride to them, as proof of changing attitudes and lessening discrimination. Also of note is the attitude of Kisoro

was bought “to try and see how they can bring back their culture ... and through that land we believe that the Batwa children will acquire knowledge through the fathers who will be telling the story” (interview UOBDU staff member 19/11/07). UOBDU is also involved in recording the history of the Batwa and supporting researchers with information to do so. Another way in which UOBDU hopes to preserve the culture of the Batwa is through cultural tourism:

...We encourage them to preserve it because if for example they dance, their dance is very expensive, it is selling... So if we preserve it, and people come and see it as a tourist attraction, then that means there is money coming in and people will tend to love it and Batwa will feel very proud to preserve their culture because it is earning them money³⁵. (Interview 19/11/07)

The idea of cultural preservation, however, raises a number of questions of authenticity and ethics. Is the process of breathing life into a dying³⁶—or rather changing—culture really preserving it, or is it forcing the creation of a new one? And who is it exactly that has the power to “save”³⁷ that culture from extinction? Does this not just perpetuate the power relations of one culture—the one doing the saving—over the other? In a way, cultural tourism is the concept that brings all these questions to a head.

Cultural Conservation or Cultural Creation?

Under Goulet’s first condition of cultural resistance, the community must first internalize—or “critically understand”—the dominant culture before they can resist it. However, especially in cases where an indigenous people group has become as marginalized as the Batwa, this is a difficult process to undertake without first losing the practices and appearances of the former culture, becoming empowered through the channels of the dominant culture and then later seeking to regain, or recreate, the

District vice-chairman Joseph SeBatwale, who has encouraged the neighboring Bakiga and Bafumbira communities to marry Batwa and end their marginalization (Buyera 28/10/07).

³⁵ It was also mentioned that non-Batwa view dancing as a form of begging, because they say it cannot earn money.

³⁶ “The culture is completely disappearing, slowly by slowly” (interview UOBDU staff member 19/11/07).

³⁷ “Now if there is a chance of *saving* that culture, the new culture that can be adopted, that can be recognized by the rest, then maybe they will be able to do that” (interview with UOBDU staff member 13/11/07, emphasis added).

‘traditional’ culture. This process of recreation comes with its share of gray areas, however, raising issues such as: who is seeking to recreate—or create—the culture, and what is their motivation for doing it; are the cultural inheritors being allowed free reign to change with the times, or is a situation of cultural stagnation being forced upon them; and—especially in the case of cultural tourism—who is benefiting and what are the process’s potentially harmful effects?

“The culture of the Batwa is no longer the genuine one, or the real one, because of losing their land... They’ve lost the language, the identity, the music has been diluted, they have adopted other peoples’ culture in dancing” (interview UOBDU staff member 19/11/07). Culture will change as development occurs on an international scale—as one UOBDU staff member said, “the environment affects the culture. That’s why in Africa we have lost the culture, because our environment has changed” (interview 13/11/07). The environment of the Batwa has certainly changed—from the ‘domain of the bells’ to the farm plots that they now live on, many right on the outskirts of the forests they still like to call home. With this change, it was perhaps inevitable that their culture would change—at least in practice. Their ties to the forest—from hunting, to gathering medicinal herbs and wild fruits and vegetables, to worshipping their ancestors in the land where they are buried—defined their culture in many ways. Though many are still advocating for forest access for the Batwa—and they themselves are still asking for it—they will never again be able to live in the high-altitude forests that have now become coveted national parks and gorilla sanctuaries, visited by thousands of tourists every year.

As a result, attempts to hold onto Batwa culture are widely theoretical—oral stories told to children and grandchildren. Knowledge about the forests, sacred historical and religious sites, herbal medicines and hunting skills, is gradually being lost as each new generation is further removed from life in the forest. It is already true that men retain more knowledge about the forests than women, because women have been laboring in the fields of other farmers since long before final eviction, during which time men would often still spend a considerable amount of time gathering resources and even sleeping in the forest. “Respect for their rights to maintain their own culture is closely interlinked with rights to remain in their traditional territories” (ACHPR 41). Since that right was violated, it may only follow that much of Batwa cultural practice will be lost—

not as a side-effect of development but as a result of forcible eviction from ancestral territory.

Among many Batwa communities today—particularly those in Kisoro District—dancing has been held onto as one aspect of culture that can still be practiced outside of the forest, and it is being capitalized on in a number of ways. In the districts of Kabale and Kanungu there are not as many Batwa who still know the traditional dance. Rather, they have adopted the music and dance of their Kikiga neighbors (interview UOBDU staff member 19/11/07).

The Batwa dance has been turned into an avenue for cultural tourism in a number of communities. Cultural tourism brings to life many of the issues highlighted in the introduction—who is benefiting from it and what is their motivation? Does encouraging Batwa to relearn and reincorporate their cultural dance for the benefit of outsiders constitute cultural resistance through a process of cultural strengthening, or is it artificial cultural creation for exploitative purposes? One of the inherent dangers of cultural tourism is its “commodification of indigenous lives” (McCaskill and Rutherford 149). Putting a price on a culture’s talent and knowledge has the potential to turn a priceless human heritage into a cheap tourist attraction. At the same time, cultural tourism can bring much-needed money into an impoverished community and provide an invaluable opportunity for participants to celebrate and preserve that heritage. It also has the potential to open the doors to international education about the Batwa’s modern-day marginalization and, perhaps, create a path for them to climb out of it.

A Day at the Zoo

In 1904, a Pygmy named Ota Benga was captured from the forests of the Belgian Congo and brought to the United States, where he was first put on exhibit at the St. Louis World Fair and later at the Bronx Zoo in the New York Zoological Park. He was one of the zoo’s most popular displays, attracting as many as 40,000 visitors every Sunday. Ota Benga was eventually released from the zoo, and committed suicide in 1916 (Tumushabe and Musiime 6).

One hundred years later, a news article run on the British Broadcasting Corporation’s website described the tourism experience of visiting the Batwa in

Southwest Uganda as disappointing, stating that “if the Uganda tourism board wants fully-satisfied ... tourists, they’d better make sure the pygmies conform to some specific height requirements” (Ross 03/06/04). A tourist who recently came through Kisoro to see the gorillas had an extra day in town, and so decided to pay a visit to a “pygmy village.” One of his first impressions was, “Are we in the wrong village?” He said that the people were too tall to be pygmies and that out of a village of sixty to seventy people, only five to ten of them were real pygmies³⁸. He mentioned feeling uncomfortable and cheated by the experience, saying that if he had known what he was getting into, he never would have gone. The tour group brought food as payment for their time in the community as they were told not to give money to the Batwa, who would only spend it on alcohol. The tourist said that the whole episode was something resembling a “monkey show.” He was also very struck by the extreme poverty in which the community was living. He mentioned that “their life depends on money that comes from tourism, but it doesn’t make it any better ... (it was) probably what destroyed them in the first place” (interview 19/11/07)³⁹.

It is ironic that today one of the major income-generating activities being promoted for the Batwa is tourism—the driving force behind their eviction from the park. Batwa are now dancing and singing for the same audience that comes to see the gorillas, or to climb a mountain in the national park. But the Batwa will never have that kind of access to the park—in fact, the only capacity in which they are now allowed into Mgahinga Gorilla National Park (MGNP) is through work as guides⁴⁰, porters, or dancers. UWA, IGCP and UOBDU recently signed into action a new Batwa Tourism Plan that allows Batwa performers access to the park as a tourist attraction—in other words, the only terms under which the Batwa may enter their ancestral homeland is if another party (i.e. the Ugandan government) is profiting financially from it.

³⁸ Inter-marriage among the Batwa and neighboring non-Batwa communities, as well as dramatic changes in their lifestyle over the last one hundred years, has contributed to a change in the stereotypical short stature of Batwa Pygmies. Though Batwa are in general shorter than the average person, being short is not necessarily a requirement for being Batwa.

³⁹ It should be noted that this type of tourism is not advocated by UOBDU, who instead recommends that tourists wanting to visit the Batwa should go through the Batwa office to do it.

⁴⁰ As of 2006, three Batwa were employed by UWA as guides in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park. UWA cited illiteracy as a major obstacle to their employment, as well as the fact that other guides often do not want to work with Batwa (Tumushabe and Musiime 10).

Visitors expect to visit and be told about the Batwa traditions and culture while in a forest environment. It is essential that the plan permits the Batwa to access the forest for this purpose. It is essential that the Batwa story presented to visitors is an honest one. It should present the full picture premised along a continuum of forest habituation and dependence At the same time, it is counterproductive to dwell on the negative aspects of the situation. It is important to look for positive components, at least where UWA is concerned. (The Batwa Tourism Plan 12)

The plan does go on to state that “the tourism experience should not be limited to traditional practices in the forest but should also make visitors aware of the Batwa’s current plight” (12). As far as economic exploitation is concerned, the plan acknowledges that the Batwa have so far not benefited greatly from tourism, but claims that this is because “whatever the amount of money the Batwa receive, they tend to spend it immediately (often on alcohol) rather than saving it for a beneficial purpose” (11). In a somewhat patronizing tone it notes that this habit “might be consistent with their traditional hunter-gathering lifestyle but does nothing to improve the reduced circumstances imposed on them since their eviction from the forest.”

The tourism plan, expounded by IGCP and signed by all stake-holding parties⁴¹, elaborates on the details of the guided tour to and through the cave, and the Batwa performance that will follow. It gives great consideration to the experience the tourists will have while in the park:

Following their eviction ... the Batwa have been obliged to exist in a farmland setting totally alien to their traditional lifestyle and culture. This relocation is unsuited to tourism seeking to explore the Batwa’s traditional forest-based culture and lifestyle. Certainly, tourists will expect their visit to the Batwa to take place in a forest environment... From the visitor perspective, the forest should also be (or appear to be) reasonably intact; evidence of the Batwa’s sustainable practices which have preserved rather than destroyed their sustaining environment. (8)

The notion of indigenous peoples as sustainers of their environment is a stereotype which is played to as a matter of convenience throughout the world. As Alcaròn-Chàires writes, “the task is to recover and reinforce indigenous peoples’ culture of sustainability towards nature, and for knowledge of this to be disseminated” (2005:

⁴¹ The document was also signed by the Batwa chairperson. Though he was never able to read it—as the entire document is in English—the author was assured that it had been translated and explained to him before he signed.

255). The practice of sustainability towards nature, and passing this knowledge along to the next generation, is certainly not a bad thing. But the issue remains that modernization and the removal of indigenous peoples from their inherited environments has changed this aspect of their lifestyles. The idea of “recovering” this culture and teaching sustainability practices to peoples simply because they are inheritors of the indigenous label has the potential to become a problematic placement of stereotypes and forced ways of living.

The Batwa Tourism Plan also explores the idea of constructing a ‘traditional’ Batwa house or even village, but dismisses the notion on the basis of its artificiality. First of all, traditional Batwa housing was designed as a nomadic shelter and is thus unsuitable for long-term use, especially in the oftentimes cold and wet weather conditions of Southwest Uganda. The purchase of land to construct the village would allow for more permanent, adequate housing to be built and would thus be non-traditional. In addition, the fact remains that “there is no such thing as a ‘Batwa village.’ As squatters, the Batwa are no longer able to live in their traditional nucleated settlements. Instead their homes are scattered across the farmland outside the national park, occupying land whose owners tolerate their presence” (10). So the idea of purchasing land with the possibility of constructing adequate housing and the opportunity for Batwa to live as a community was dismissed because it might not paint the right picture for tourists.

The plan does, however, make efforts at sharing information about the Batwa’s current situation with the tourists. It recognizes that “any form of tourism that is centered on a visit to people living in such absolute poverty is entirely unacceptable being mutually degrading, both to the Batwa and to the tourists” (10). Goulet states that “partners to cultural exchanges must come together as equals having a common purpose” (143). The question, then, is whether or not cultural tourism—in this form—promotes such an exchange.

One important factor in the tourism plan is the necessity of having a translator who can accurately and honestly communicate between the Batwa and the tourists. The Batwa express much of their history, including the loss of their homeland and the way

they miss it today, through singing, dance and drama⁴². An accurate translation of this is vital to the visitors' understanding of the Batwa and their present livelihoods.

It must also be certain that the Batwa are the primary, if not sole, beneficiaries of the program. As of now, a small portion of the revenue will go towards the administrative costs of UOBDU to hire another staff member, who will deal exclusively with the Tourism Plan. Another portion of the revenue will be used to pay the Batwa performers, and another portion will be placed in a separate account to be saved and used at the discretion of UOBDU to promote the general welfare of all Batwa communities. However a large portion of the revenue generated by the plan will be retained by UWA as park-entry fees.

From the Batwa perspective, cultural tourism—when conducted in an appropriate manner⁴³—seems overall to be a good thing. It generates income that can provide for the livelihood of the Batwa, as well as providing incentive for Batwa to pass on their cultural knowledge to future generations. And, provided that the Batwa are given the proper voice through accurate translation, it gives them an unprecedented opportunity to express themselves and their current situation to groups of international observers.

A good home is a home that is visited, frequented by so many different people. So tourists coming, that means they are interested in seeing us, so that means we have a good home. So if they come they learn from us and we learn from them, so that one will not change our culture. It will in fact strengthen our culture, but if someone is interested in seeing your culture, that means your culture is good, so you should maintain it for people to keep on coming and visit that home which is the Batwa community so tourism cannot change anything. Whether they bring money or not, we can use that money and that money can help us to do some development but will not make us lose our culture. (Interview with Mutwa 14/11/07)

⁴² “No matter how scattered they are, they’ve managed still to preserve (their culture) in a way that helps them to demonstrate their own feelings through that theater, that type of work, they can tell by dancing or even by singing... To me a culture that can define your ways of life without even talking but by doing acts, it means quite a lot... Like when they act a play, they always show you the way they used to live within the forest itself and what they missed presently now today. So to me, I think the culture is good and it has been preserved though they are not in one place where they can really preserve it at its maximum. So I think these guys are good—no matter how the situation is, they can still show you who they are” (interview UOBDU staff member 19/11/07).

⁴³ Both Batwa and UOBDU staff mentioned that certain people like to take tourists to Batwa communities for exploitative purposes, pocketing the money and not giving the communities their due share. Tourism conducted through the office, though, did not seem to raise any concerns among the Batwa and was generally viewed as a very positive income-generating activity as well as a method for preserving Batwa culture.

An UOBDU staff member noted that cultural tourism is not an end in itself as far as preserving Batwa culture is concerned, but is rather only a starting point (interview 13/11/07). It allows Batwa to earn an income from the skills that they already possess while celebrating their cultural heritage. The question remains, however, as to whether these Batwa performers—and Batwa in general—are being given the freedom to change their culture at will, or whether outside forces are in fact attempting to hold them in a perpetual state of cultural stagnation in order to satisfy tourists. “The issue is whether ancient cultures will be free to change on their own terms, adopting beneficial aspects of the modern world while rejecting intrusions that can only harm their spirit and heritage” (Davis 1999: 65), or whether the terms of change—perhaps under the guise of cultural ‘preservation’—will be dictated to them by the more powerful cultures in society. Ideally, cultural tourism will provide a means for social, economic and cultural empowerment of the Batwa while giving them ownership and the power to create their own development process. However, if intentions are misguided or actions not seriously scrutinized, cultural tourism runs the risk of increasing Batwa marginalization and disempowerment by setting them up as a dehumanized tourist attraction or a mere relic of the past stranded in the twenty-first century.

Being Batwa

“So, what will happen to the Batwa culture? It will go, it will go with time” (interview UOBDU staff member 13/11/07).

Indigenous peoples are typically caught up in a rapid acculturation, or rather deculturation, process, often accelerated by the confiscation of indigenous land.... Besides potentially harmful dietary and lifestyle changes, indigenous communities are also prone to poverty, and all it implies for living conditions: joblessness, high rates of suicide, substance abuse, violence, and social and cultural disintegration. (Damman 70-71)

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She lost her baby the day after it was born. Pneumonia, she says. The child she now holds is probably much older than he looks—she is not sure how old—suffering from malnutrition and already nearly half as big as his mother. As squatters on another farmer’s land, her family does not have the resources or the land security to construct any permanent housing. Instead, they live inside a tiny grass shelter, though the word shelter

does little to describe it. Without adequate clothing and bedding, and no insulation, the cold Kisoro night seeps right through to where they sleep.

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Beginning in the 1930s, the Batwa have increasingly become ‘men without a country,’ landless and impoverished, robbed even of the intangible identity of cultural distinctness. “Since we were expelled from our lands, death is following us. The village is becoming empty. We are heading towards extinction. Now the old people have died. Our culture is dying too” (Mwebaza 62-63). Many Batwa expressed feelings of hopelessness and disconnectedness from their past and future. “Most of us have suffered, including our children up till now... Even if we go to our beds, we keep on thinking, what shall our children eat? What is the future of our children? What is our future? ... We are very sad, we are isolated. We find we don’t belong anywhere” (interview 19/11/07). The sentiment of not belonging was echoed by the Mutwa who is still battling government in order to keep his land. “It’s a question of where would I go after that because I cannot go either to Rwanda, neither can I go to Congo... Neither can I go back to the forest, like my grandparents used to do, and I feel disappointed, very uncomfortable... I’m just in the middle, not knowing what to do after” (interview 14/11/07).

The separation between the coming generations is also growing increasingly wider—a gulf that encompasses technological and lifestyle change, as well as loss of cultural identity and religious communication with the ancestors. One Mutwa voiced the concern that the Batwa’s failure to practice their religion may be one of the reasons why the number of Batwa is decreasing. “I believe that ... these spirits of the grandmother, grandparents, mother, they come and attack you and ask why you are not performing the culture they left you with. So you have to make sure you are steady and alert to practice it so the family does not all perish and die” (interview 14/11/07). Batwa believe that they were given the position of guardians of the forest at the time of creation, and being in the forest is thus an essential part of their religious worship. They also believe that after a person dies, his or her spirit remains on earth and plays an integral part in the well-being of the Batwa. Keeping the spirits happy is thus an essential part of Batwa livelihood, and worship works best if it is done at particular sites, such as burial grounds—all of which

are in the forests. Some Batwa continue to enter the forest illegally to conduct their worship, knowing that if they are discovered they face prosecution and imprisonment (interview UOBDU staff member 19/11/07). Others have continued to practice their religion, to the extent possible, in private. One reason for this is landlords' and neighbors' disapproval of the Batwa religion. "They say even their way of worshipping is Satanic, they don't believe it's godly ... and the Batwa say our culture is very important because when we worship these ancestors we get peace ... when we pray to our gods, the spirits don't haunt us ... our children in fact get better and healthier" (interview UOBDU staff member 19/11/07).

Many Batwa have converted to the more culturally dominant religions of Christianity and Islam⁴⁴. The community at Kamugoyi said that they no longer worship their ancestors; instead they now read the Bible and go to church every Sunday—"they are modern" (interview 18/11/07). But one Mutwa insisted that even the Batwa who have now converted to Christianity or Islam may still be worshipping their ancestors in private.

The practice of passing down culture has been affected by its loss of practicality as well as the changing daily lifestyles of its participants. "The children can now go to school, so the habit of inheriting some old culture from their parents is almost dying away. Children have no time to sit with their parents" (interview Mutwa 14/11/07). An UOBDU staff member insisted that education will not cause the Batwa to lose their culture; they will still be able to know "the history and background of the Batwa by head" (interview 19/11/07), but even that implies that the practice of the culture will be lost—it may only be maintained as historical knowledge, passed from one generation to the next. And, without access to the forests, this may be all that is possible. "It's the duty of the adults to help the child maintain their culture. Much as it is good to send children to school, much also you should struggle to pass what you have as knowledge of your culture to your children" (interview Mutwa 14/11/07).

⁴⁴ Though there are many reasons for this, one of them may be as a matter of convenience—churches have been responsible for much of the aid given to Batwa communities. As a result, Batwa may "move from one denomination to another depending on which Christian organization 'treats them best'" (Tumushabe and Musiime 19).

Conclusion

Being a Batwa is, in many ways, to be caught between two worlds—the push to ‘develop’ and ‘catch up’ with the rest of society, and the push to hold on to those cultural attributes which define them as Batwa. The role of outsiders in this equation is somewhat unclear. As one UOBDU staff member said, “One thing is to give them ... their right to let them live the way they want to live. We should not westernize them, or give them the way we think is development, when in fact it is un-developmental” (interview 19/11/07). Culture is an essential aspect of any society and for the Batwa it is intimately connected with their “right to develop” (McNeish 232).

In addition to letting the Batwa live and develop on their own terms, outsiders “can provide valuable resources and support” to indigenous peoples, as long as the Batwa “retain control of the processes that affect them” (Eversole, Ridgeway and Mercer 2005: 260). During the last AGAM, Batwa members voted to allow non-Batwa partners and organizations to join UOBDU as corporate members, provided that their authority in the organization is limited.

A major role that outside individuals and organizations can play is in advocacy.

For indigenous peoples, poverty is not merely a problem to be solved by development agencies or NGOs.... Since the root of indigenous poverty is loss of land to colonial domination, that reality must be addressed as the foundation of economic development in indigenous communities. If it is to be real, empowerment in ... indigenous communities around the world must begin with either the return of indigenous lands or full compensation for their loss. Anything less will be a mere stopgap measure with little chance of success (Simon 64).

The Ugandan government finalized the eviction of the Batwa from their ancestral homeland under international pressure from advocates working to save the gorillas. If a fraction of that energy was focused on advocacy on behalf of the Batwa, the government would undoubtedly respond. With international attention focused on Uganda during the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in 2007, authorities used government land to resettle the nomadic Basangora, who had returned to their former homeland in Queen Elizabeth National Park. If they were able to quickly and fully

resettle this people group, then there is no excuse for their inaction in the case of the Batwa⁴⁵.

It is this failure by government and international agencies—who lobbied on behalf of conservation without regard to the consequences for the people who had practiced sustainable living on the land for centuries—that has contributed to the extreme poverty and marginalization of the Batwa today. And it is this disempowerment and lack of control over their own livelihoods that is threatening Batwa culture and identity. The perseverance and determination evidenced in the Batwa’s fight to maintain their way of life is a tribute to their spirit alone. And, though the culture must change with the development process, it must not necessarily be lost.

As one Mutwa believes, “Batwa cannot completely lose their culture—whether you drive or are a pilot of a plane, Mutwa will never forget his culture” (interview 14/11/07).

⁴⁵ No land, to date, has been bought for the Batwa by the government. Land has been purchased by NGOs and private donors, as well as by the Trust, which is funded by a combination of World Bank money and international aid.

Recommendations for Further Study

This study was limited by a number of logistical factors including: language barrier, lack of available transportation, limited time in which to conduct the study and limited availability of staff at the UOBDO office. Though they were always ready and available to answer questions, the staff members were often busy with other projects or visitors and were unable to accommodate for much time in the field. This severely limited the sample size and diversity of opinions represented in this paper.

Recommendations for further study therefore include a broader and more in-depth study of cultural tourism among the Batwa and its potential role in their development or under-development. Further study could also include research of the Batwa living in Bundibugyo District and the path that their cultural change has taken, perhaps in relation to the smaller number of tourists that frequent their former home of Semliki National Park.

The Batwa and other Pygmy groups living throughout central Africa have a rich, though often tragic, history and have been the subject of numerous studies. Their lives and knowledge of the forests can provide a nearly unlimited amount of information for any researcher and attempts should be made to record as much of it as possible for the wealth of future generations.

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