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A History of the Nairobi National Park: From Railroads to National Parks: Transimperialism as an Elevating Historiographical Approach?

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A History of the Nairobi National Park

From Railroads to National Parks: Transimperialism as an Elevating Historiographical Approach?

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Table of Contents:

Introduction -3-

1. Why a Transimperial approach? -4-

Part I – The Institutionalization of National Parks

2. The National Park Concept: An American Idea? -11-

3. National Parks as a Transimperial Design -16-

PART II – National Parks in British East Africa

4. People Shaping Geography: Caravans and Pastoral Kenya -27-

5. Pacification, White Pioneers, and Settlers: The Transformation of Nairobi -35-

PART III – The Nairobi National Park

6. More than a City -40-

7. Urban Life and Wildlife -47-

8. Finding an Equilibrium: The National Park -50-

Conclusion -57-

Bibliography -61-

Introduction

Nairobi is the only capital in the world that contains a National Park adjacent to its city center. On a territory of 117 square kilometers, visitors can view Africa's famed wildlife having a modern skyline in the background. Despite its proximity to millions of urban Kenyans, the park protects a relatively high abundance of large mammals.¹ When in 2016 the government announced it would allow the construction of a standard gauge railway through the park, the decision was met with public outcry. Environmentalists were concerned that the structure would interfere with migratory patterns of ungulates, who can freely enter the park through a small corridor in the south.² A compromise was struck, by having the structure elevated. At first sight, the aesthetically-displeasing feature of the railway can be interpreted as a violation of the core principle of 'untouched wilderness' that is central to our common understanding of National Parks.

The railway symbolizes a much larger development in Africa: the increase in Chinese investment. In an attempt to improve connectivity between the coastal city of Mombasa and East Africa's interior, the People's Republic of China has become the most recent foreign power to involve itself in the region.³ As will be explored in this thesis, the city itself was an unintended consequence of the Uganda Railway (1901), which was constructed on the orders of London, using mostly Indian labor. Railways have therefore always been characteristic of Nairobi's urban development and can be understood as manifestations of imperial grasp. The National Park makes Nairobi unique among capitals, and its existence is inextricably connected to railways.

¹ Gordon Boy and Paula Kahumbu, *Nairobi National Park: The FONNAP Natural History Guide* (Nairobi: Friends of Nairobi National Park FoNNaP, 2012).

² BBC News, "New Railway Threatens Kenyan Wildlife," Accessed 28 April 2022.
<https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-africa-44889659>.

³ On the impact of Chinese investment in Africa see for example Dawn C. Murphy, *China's Rise in the Global South* (Redwood City: Stanford University Press, 2022).

In this thesis, I will focus on the history of the Nairobi National Park (NNP) trying to problematize its existence and putting it in the context of the city – and indeed the country’s – role within a broader network of imperial exchanges that have characterized both the establishment and the development of new relationships between human engineering and the environment of East Africa. The NNP, is thus not just a National Park located in a city; it becomes here something larger, an experience larger than Nairobi itself. What I venture to question is whether a Transimperial approach can elevate our understanding of the history of the NNP, and National Parks more generally?

1. Why a Transimperial approach?

There is no scholarship on the history of the NNP as an independent unit of analysis. The only work singularly dedicated is written by Gordon Boy and Paula Kahumbu *Nairobi National Park: The FONNAP Natural History Guide* (2012) is a small but insightful contribution, serving as a visitor guide. The most elaborate research on the history of National Parks in East Africa has been done by Thomas P. Ofcansky in *Paradise Lost: A History of Game Preservation in East Africa* (2002).⁴ His book was based on his doctoral research and involves extensive archival research in British archives. He provides the most information about the incremental steps taken by the British authorities in the eventual creation of the National Parks in Kenya, as well as Uganda and Tanzania. Academic literature focused on the history of wildlife protection in East Africa, merely mentions the NNP because it can be credited as British East Africa’s first National Park.⁵ The historian Edward I. Steinhart describes how after the proclamation in 1946,

⁴ Thomas P. Ofcansky, *Paradise Lost: A History of Game Preservation in East Africa* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2002).

⁵ See key sources for this thesis David M. Anderson and Richard Grove, *Conservation in Africa: People, Policies, and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987). Thomas P. Ofcansky, *Paradise Lost: A History of Game Preservation in East Africa* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2002). Edward I. Steinhart, *Black Poachers, White Hunters: A Social History of Hunting in Colonial Kenya* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006).

for those who were championing the creation of National Parks to protect wildlife, the NNP was considered merely a ‘small, yet symbolic victory’.⁶ The NNP is mostly mentioned being the precursor to the establishment of much larger Parks such as Tsavo (1948) and the Masai Mara (1961). Even in Ian Parker’s and Stan Bleazar’s *An Impossible Dream: Some of Kenya’s Last Colonial Wardens Recall the Game Department in the British Empire’s Closing Years* (2001), which deals extensively with the history of gamekeepers during the colonial period, there are only a handful mentions of the NNP.⁷

There exists far more scholarly work about the urban history of Nairobi than its National Park.⁸ It is not within the scope of this thesis to provide a full overview of all published material on the city.⁹ Those who have diligently studied historiography on Nairobi’s urbanism stress that more has been written about its post-independence history than its colonial.¹⁰ Notably, what remains contentious are questions about the agency of non-white colonial subjects of Nairobi. Andrew Hake, who serves as an important source in this thesis, is credited for his optimism about the thriving role of African urban Kenyans in shaping their city post-independence.¹¹ Anders Eise and Kristin Eise, two authors who specialized in the impact of the Swahili community on the city development, demonstrate that during the colonial times these and other groups were significant actors despite being subjected to a racially exclusionary colonial

⁶ Steinhart, *Black Poachers, White Hunters*,

⁷ Ian Parker and Stan Bleazard. *An Impossible Dream: Some of Kenya’s Last Colonial Wardens Recall the Game Department in the British Empire’s Closing Years* (London: Librario, 2001).

⁸ Key works for the purpose of this thesis on colonial Nairobi are Andrew Hake, *African Metropolis: Nairobi’s Self-Help City* (London: Chatto and Windus for Sussex University Press, 1977); Steven Steven Salm, Toyin Falola, Corinne Sandwith, Doug T Feremenga, Eric Ross, Fatima Muller-Friedman, Godwin R Murunga, James Genova, Jeremy Rich, and Kefa M Otiso, *African Urban Spaces in Historical Perspective*, (Rochester: Boydell & Brewer, 2005); Anders Eise and Kristin Eise, *The City Makers of Nairobi: An African Urban History* (London: Routledge, 2020). Kobo Edition.

⁹ Examples of noteworthy research on urban Nairobi, put forward by Eise and Eise, are Luise White, *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Claire C. Robertson, *Trouble Showed the Way: Women, Men, and Trade in the Nairobi Area, 1890–1990* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997) David Anderson, *Histories of the Hanged: Britain’s Dirty War in Kenya and the End of the Empire* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2006); Helene Charton-Bigot and Deyssi Rodriguez-Torres, *Nairobi Today: The Paradox of a Fragmented City* (Dar es Salaam: Mkuki na Nyota Publishers, 2010).

¹⁰ Eise and Eise, *City Makers of Nairobi*, Kobo Edition, 18.

¹¹ Andrew Hake, *African Metropolis*.

administration. They claim that Hake is ‘unable to see that this agency also existed under colonial rule.’¹²

What the discussion alludes to is the overall domination of white, and in the case of colonial Kenya, aristocratic perspectives. Because of the relative affluence of the white settler class, there is a lot of non-official work written on the early history of Kenya and Nairobi. Some notable examples are people like Errol Trzebinski, Lord Bertram Francis Gurdon Cransworth, and Elspeth Huxley.¹³ As a side note, the depiction of Danish Baroness Karen Blixen portrayed by American actress Meryl Streep in 1985’s movie “Out of Africa”, has shaped popular imagination about colonialism.¹⁴ What needs to be stressed is that in order to understand the reality of living in Nairobi, their views may be interesting yet not representative. What will be key is that their writing served as a global exchange with other imperial elites, shaping knowledge, ideas, and practices surrounding wildlife protection. Hopefully, it is clear that the author does not intend to privilege their views, and silence others, but that the thesis intends to privilege a Transimperial historiographical approach over a National, Transnational, or International.

The research upon which this thesis is grounded has been mostly a qualitative one and it has privileged secondary sources over a large body of primary documents mostly due to a few structural constraints. Due to coronavirus restrictions, I was forced to cancel my research trip to London last minute. This has unfortunately limited my ability to provide more detailed resource material in the chapter that deals with the more bureaucratic trajectory leading up to the establishment of the NNP. However, the availability of a wide variety of other primary and

¹² Ese and Ese, *City Makers of Nairobi*, Kobo Edition, 21.

¹³ Bertram Francis Gurdon Cranworth, *Kenya Chronicles* (London: Macmillan & Co Ltd., 1939); Elspeth Huxley, *Out in the Midday Sun: My Kenya* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1985); Errol Trzebinski, *The Kenya Pioneers* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1986); Elspeth Huxley, *White Man's Country: Lord Delamere and the Making of Kenya* (London: Macmillan, 1935).

¹⁴ Isak Dinesen and Bernardine Kielty, *Out of Africa* (New York: Random House, 1952).

secondary literature both in Leiden as well as at different digital repositories, allowed me to extensively research the subject matter.

Why would a Transimperial approach to the historiography of Natural Parks be more insightful than a National, Transnational, International, or Inter-Imperial? The merits and validity of the Transimperial approach are best exemplified by the introduction given by historians Kristin L. Hoganson and Jay Sexton in the important scholarly contribution *Crossing Empires, Taking U.S. History into Transimperial Terrain* (2020).¹⁵ They make an argument in favor of this approach using the example of the first Transatlantic cable between Ireland and Newfoundland in 1852. Firstly, a National historiographical approach would already be inappropriate as the cable connects two separate states, thus, to understand its impact one has to look at multiple states. An International historiographical approach would highlight its function to improve diplomatic communications.¹⁶ They use the example of being able to avoid battles after a peace agreement has been signed. As with most scholarship taking an International perspective, questions about interstate war and peace would be central. However, as they point out, although the cable served international diplomatic purposes, it served non-state actor exchanges. Private businesses for example used it to communicate business information. Therefore, in order to understand the full impact of the Cable, International has its limitation. If the Cable would merit a transnational approach, this would entail a departure from state-centered historical narratives looking at transnational exchanges. This approach took off in academia in the early 2000s but already had many precursors.¹⁷ But as the authors point out, the transnational perspective gained ground in academia in 2002 with Thomas Bender's *Rethinking American History in a Global*

¹⁵ Kristin L. Hoganson and Jay Sexton, *Crossing Empires: Taking U.S. History into Transimperial Terrain*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), Kobo Version.

¹⁶ Hoganson and Sexton, *Crossing Empires, Kobo Version*, 11-21.

¹⁷ Some notable examples of Transnationalism are Frank Thistlethwaite, *The Anglo-American Connection in the Early Nineteenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1959); Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995); Nina Glick Schiller and Cristina Szanton Blanc, *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation-States* (Langhorne: Gordon and Breach, 1994).

Age.¹⁸ In this volume, historian Akira Iriye defines the difference between international and transnational. International implies relationships between states whereas these connections had so many more non-state actors, interest groups, ideas spread.¹⁹

Hexton and Hoganson go one step further, claiming the Transnational approach is still lacking in one crucial aspect.²⁰ Continuing with the example of the Transatlantic Cable, the resources necessary to construct the cables were the product of Transimperial extraction and manufacturing.²¹ The materials originated in British India, the Dutch East Indies, French Indochina, and the Spanish (and later American) Philippines.²² The growth of global cable networks intensified resource extraction globally. The improved connectivity through the construction of these linked empires created a self-reinforcing dynamic of imperial expansion. This happened as much as the Cable was there to facilitate Inter-imperial communications concerning peace and war.²³ Transimperiality, cables could be used to provide information to the various metropolises, in order to exert and enhance control over their respective colonial subjects, countering possible challenges to imperial rule. Therefore, in order to do the transformational capacity of the Transatlantic cable justice, rather a Transimperial over a Transnational or an International historiographical approach provides a more elevated understanding of its true impact on global developments.

¹⁸ Thomas Bender, *Rethinking American History in a Global Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

¹⁹ Akira Iriye, "Internationalizing international History," in *Rethinking American History in a Global Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 47-62.

²⁰ Hoganson and Sexton, *Crossing Empires, Kobo Version*, 11-21.

²¹ Examples of the Transimperial approach are Penelope Edmonds, " 'I Followed England round the World': The Rise of Trans-Imperial Anglo-Saxon Exceptionalism and the Spatial Narratives of Nineteenth-Century British Settler Colonies of the Pacific Rim," in *Re-Orienting Whiteness*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Natalie Rothman, *Brokering Empire: Trans-Imperial Subjects between Venice and Istanbul* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012); Ernesto Bassi, *An Aqueous Territory: Sailor Geographies and New Granada's Transimperial Greater Caribbean World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

²² Hoganson and Sexton, *Crossing Empires, Kobo Version*, 11-21.

²³ Examples of an Inter-Imperial approach are Nancy Mitchell, *The Danger of Dreams: German and American Imperialism in Latin America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999). Louis A. Pérez Jr., *The War of 1898: The United States and Cuba in History and Historiography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

A key building block for the argument of this thesis is the essay “Crossing the Rift: American Steel and Colonial Labor in Britain’s East Africa Protectorate” by Stephen Tuffnell.²⁴ He uses the Transimperial approach to demonstrate the role of American contracting firms in the construction of the Uganda Railway. Steel innovations deriving from the United States were used in the construction of bridges along the railway. As he writes about: ‘networks of globe-crossing American engineers and experts who transferred ideas, expertise, and technology between empires and who disseminated news of the lucrative industrial opportunities offered by the British Empire to audiences at home.’²⁵ What I will argue in this thesis is that similar points can be made for the many conservationists, hunters and other travelers who would eventually make use of the railways and whose experiences and exchanges would prove important factors in the dissemination of ideas about wildlife protection through the establishment of National Parks. This thesis envisions bridging Transimperial history with environmental history. And by allowing a convergence of the historiography of National Parks with the works of of Hexton, Hoganson and Tufnell, a Transimperial approach could elevate our understanding of the NNP and the role the American empire played in its development.

The thesis is structured in three parts. Part I deals with the Institutionalization of the National Park concept. Chapter 2 will firstly provide a literature review on the historiography of the American National Park concept. Chapter 3 will introduce the idea of National Parks as a Transimperial Design. The first part is intended to provide a broader understanding of developments in the Anglo-American historical development of the concept. Part II and III are intended to shift to Africa, by moving from a mostly analytical framework to the historical trajectory of the development of the NNP, I intend to demonstrate similarities and differences

²⁴ Stephen Tuffnell, “ Crossing the Rift: American Steel and Colonial Labor in Britain’s East Africa Protectorate,” in, *Crossing Empires: Taking U.S. History into Transimperial Terrain*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), Kobo Version. 66-88.

²⁵ Hoganson and Sexton, *Crossing Empires*, Kobo Version, 11-21.

between developments in the American and British-East African Imperial space. By introducing the historical development of Nairobi and the NNP, Transimperial exchanges will become more evident. Part II will take East Africa and Central Kenya from a regional perspective. By looking at the geographical layout of the region we can better understand how the caravans influenced the lands and how pastoral Kenya was organized. The subsequent destruction of pastoral Kenya due to a series of disasters will be dealt with. It heralded the period of ‘pacification’ of central Kenya, which occurred during the construction of the railroad. Chapters 6, 7, and 8 focus mainly on the transformation of what was mostly an empty swamp to what we now know as Nairobi. Chapter 6 looks at the urban development of the city, and how its demographic makeup and political configuration developed in the early phase of the city. Chapter 7 will introduce the issue of wildlife and how it had to be reconciled with development and urbanization in general. When lastly chapter 8 looks at the more bureaucratic trajectory, from the perspective of two important activists for National Parks: Mervyn Cowie, and Arthur Ritchie. Ending with the moment that a bureaucratic official signed the document that legally produced the Nairobi National Park in 1946.

The structure of the thesis is intended to constantly narrow down focus and therefore demonstrate how the American historiography of National Parks through Transimperial exchanges can be seen to have its influences, similarities, and differences when slowly scaling down toward a microlevel analysis. Parts II and III are mostly chronologically structured.

Part I – The Institutionalization of National Parks

2. The National Park Concept: An American Idea?

Early 20th century British Ambassador James Bryce was the first who described the national park concept as ‘America’s best idea’.²⁶ This narrative was later adopted by academics like Roderick Nash, Wallace Stegner, and Alfred Runte. As a result, throughout the 1970’s and 80’s, Western scholarly literature was dominated by an American exceptionalist narrative.²⁷ Nash described it as ‘America’s single most important contribution to the world’.²⁸ These authors generally agreed that these parks served as bastions of so-called ‘untouched wilderness’. Although not always successful in achieving its ambitions, it can be characterized, historically, as the most elaborate attempt to preserve nature.²⁹ Not all protection of nature was done through this concept alone. Three sets of systems have been operating simultaneously: the national park system, the national wilderness system, and the national wildlife refuge system. Although acting synchronously they operate differently. The global dissemination of this allegedly, historically unique concept, and supposed uniform application served as evidence of America’s unrivaled leadership in the global environmental protection movement.³⁰ The US actively shaped the institutionalization of ideas, practices, and policies. The first international conferences were organized in Seattle (1963) and Yellowstone (1972). In the post-1945 era, America has been inviting staff from all over the world and sending its observers overseas to

²⁶ Thomas R. Vale, *The American Wilderness: Reflections on Nature Protection in the United States* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005), 90.

²⁷ James Morton Turner, “Rethinking American Exceptionalism,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Environmental History* (Cary: Oxford University Press, 2014), 284-285, <https://www-oxfordhandbooks-com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195324907.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780195324907>.

²⁸ Roderick Nash, “The American Invention of National Parks,” *American Quarterly* 22, no. 3 (1970): 726.

²⁹ Vale, *American Wilderness*, 91.

³⁰ Turner, “Rethinking American Exceptionalism,” 281.

maintain this process. The US has been the global leader in the creation and dissemination of norms and institutions regarding national park management.³¹

According to Nash, four factors explain the uniqueness of the American model, all of them in tangent being crucially significant. Firstly, there is the post-Columbian process of encountering rugged, untouched wilderness. As a formative experience for Americans, it arguably shaped their frontier mentality, later becoming a cornerstone of their national identity. It enshrined a unique appreciation for nature, defined in opposition to those who inhabited the old world.³² Secondly, there is the organization of national parks through democratic norms, values, and practices. Protected areas in Europe were historically designed for privileged use by the aristocracy, criminalizing entry for lower classes. American national parks were set up by the public, for the public good, governed through democratic principles.³³ Illustratively, Alfred Runte calls them: ‘a unique experiment in landscape-democracy’.³⁴ The third factor was the American availability of vast tracts of empty land. Contrary to the old world there was sufficient space to allow the creation of elaborate bastions of wilderness. This could be achieved without harming the country’s economic development. The last factor was that when the national park system developed in the US, that country had become an affluent society that was in the process of industrialization. Thus, Americans could afford to keep these spaces free from other forms of economic activity.³⁵ A strong middle class was important for the survival of national parks.

The exceptionalist narrative did not remain undisputed. In the late 1980’s the first critiques of this narrative started to arise, both from non-western as well as western scholars. In 1989, Ramachandra Guha published ‘Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness

³¹ Nash, *American Invention*, 736.

³² Ibid, 727-279.

³³ Ibid, 732.

³⁴ Alfred Runte, *National Parks: The American Experience* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2021), 1.

³⁵ Nash, *American Invention*, 735.

Preservation: A Third World Critique'.³⁶ He posits that the imposition of this concept on the non-western world can be viewed as symptomatic of neo-imperialist tendencies, pointing out how local/indigenous peoples around the world and their practices are brushed aside. Others highlight how the role of native populations living in these spaces was largely ignored in the conferences organized in the US.³⁷ In the case of the development of national parks in a colonial context, Christopher Conte describes it in the following way: 'American wilderness ideology, itself a historical product of foreign and homegrown conceptualization of nature, has combined with the biological sciences and the legacy of colonial and postcolonial authoritarian rule to produce landscapes divided by conflict'.³⁸

Scholars started to take aim at the supposed emptiness and wilderness in the American experience. For example, William Cronon in 'The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature' points out that wilderness is a human creation.³⁹ Traditional scholarship holds too overly romanticized views on nature and promulgated the myths surrounding the western frontier. In particular, the presence and historical role of Native Americans in these lands is brushed aside and ignored. Thus, for environmental historians and scientists, being strong advocates of the national park model, there was a comfort in believing the myths of a 'pristine' untouched, empty natural world that predated the advent of Euromericans. As historian Jerry Frank points out the wording of the lands as 'pristine' offers insight into the attitudes of those endeavoring to 'protect' the lands as well as their attitude to native

³⁶ Ramachandra Guha, "Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique", *Environmental Ethics* 11, no. 1 (February 1989): 71–83.

³⁷ Michael L. Lewis, *American Wilderness: a New History*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 206, <https://web-s-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/ehost/detail/detail?vid=0&sid=93e83530-576a-46c2-b21a-31d56e7b7d11%40redis&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#AN=186685&db=e000xww>.

³⁸ Christopher Conte, "Creating Wild Places from Domesticated Landscapes," in *American Wilderness: A New History* ed. Michael Lewis (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 225, <https://web-s-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/ehost/detail/detail?vid=0&sid=93e83530-576a-46c2-b21a-31d56e7b7d11%40redis&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#AN=186685&db=e000xww>.

³⁹ William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," *Environmental History* 1, no. 1 (January 1996): 7–28.

Americans.⁴⁰ Notably, the diseases that had wiped out a considerable portion of the native population after European arrival are important to take into consideration. William Denevan demonstrates: ‘although the native population in the territory of the present-day United States was relatively low in 1750, it had been far more developed in 1492’.⁴¹ About the construction of railways, Manu Karuka demystified the romanticism that surrounded the construction of the Trans-Continental railroad. He challenges the idea that the construction was motivated by the ‘pioneer’ spirit and free-market capitalism. And how for a long-time indigenous presence was ignored and Chinese labor was ‘flexibly racialized’.⁴²

Aside from the predominant point of contention surrounding the ‘emptiness’ of the lands that were converted into parks, there was also the historical denial of the role that native populations had played in the shaping of these environments. The application of periodical forest fires was significant as well as the absence of culling of undesirable wildlife. Long throughout its early history, the Americans Parks Service (APS) maintained policies designed at culling undesirable wildlife or pests as well as putting down all forest fires. Certain species of flora no longer were able to reproduce as they required periodic wildfires. Whenever a fire was not contained, the consequences were of the utmost severity. The culling of wildlife meant that the balance in desirable herbivore populations could no longer be maintained.⁴³ The creation and preservation of popular myths surrounding the supposed ‘untouched virginity’ of lands proved to be hugely consequential and problematic in the management of the parks in the long run. Ignoring the integral role of native Americans had proved to be disastrous in the management of the parks.

⁴⁰ Jerry J. Frank, “Preservation, Parks and Place: Rethinking America’s ‘Best Idea,’” in *A History of Environmentalism*. Ed. Marco Armiero and Lise Sedrez (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2014), 21, <https://web-s-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/ehost/detail/detail?vid=0&sid=a03192d3-e312-4409-9f1a-9fd2f85e4f1f%40redis&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWVhc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#AN=771441&db=e000xww>.

⁴¹ William M. Denevan, “The Pristine Myth: The Landscape of the Americas in 1492,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 82, no. 3 (1992): 369–85.

⁴² Manu Karuka, *Empire’s Tracks* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019).

⁴³ Frank, “Rethinking America’s ‘Best Idea,” 230-231

The APS for a long time did not practice conservancy but only ‘façade management’.⁴⁴ In 1963 the Leopold report was published that provided a series of recommendations done by a Special Advisory Board on Wildlife Management who had studied the problems in national parks. They advised governing the parks with the ‘vignette of primitive America’, ending forest fires, killing predators such as wolves, and feeding others like bears for night spectacles. The report advocated changing course to allow forest fires, transplanting necessary species, and destroying dams to allow the free flow of rivers.⁴⁵

Both the American exceptionalist narrative and the critical perspectives have dominated the historical debate surrounding national parks since the beginning of the 1990’s. But what James Morton Turner points out is that although these differing perspectives do not agree on the value and contribution of the concept to the world, they do share an important presupposition, that there is such a thing as a unitary American (western) concept of nature protection. He makes the argument that worldwide there is a diversity of practices and that only a comparably small size of the protected area would credibly fulfill the criteria of a national park.⁴⁶ There are many contending interpretations of wildlife protection as well as local practices in both the western and non-western world. What Keiter puts forward is that the myriad discussion on what a national park is or should be is contested and discussed and can be analyzed from a range of different perspectives: ‘a wilderness sanctuary, a pleasuring ground, a commercial commodity, ancestral lands, nature’s laboratory, or wildlife conservancies?’⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Robert B. Keiter, *To Conserve Unimpaired : The Evolution of the National Park Idea* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2013), 3, <https://login.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl:2443/login?URL=https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=e000xww&AN=582290&site=ehost-live>.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 4.

⁴⁶ Morton Turner, “Rethinking American Exceptionalism,”.

⁴⁷ Keiter, *To Conserve Unimpaired*.

On a general level, there is consensus about what a national park is not. Human activity in the form of logging, farming and/or mining had no place in national parks.⁴⁸ The 1916 organic act described the purpose of national parks: “is to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wildlife therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations”.⁴⁹ The main point of contention throughout is the degree to which tourism and scientific endeavor should be tolerated within the non-utilitarian notion of parks. The internal contradiction of preserving ‘untouched’ wilderness while simultaneously creating the necessary infrastructure for tourism was already understood by Nash. There are always competing interests. The railway companies had been staunch advocates for the creation of national parks as they saw it would increase passengers.⁵⁰ The introduction of the automobile proved to be another quintessential development of the parks as they increased mobility and changed the relationship visitors could have in relation to the parks. Nevertheless, the dominance of a self-congratulatory attitude with regard to the inherent public good of national parks remained strong in the 1970’s and 1980’s.

In this thesis, I am going to challenge the idea that national parks are an American concept. Studying the history of the NNP one sees the merit in framing the issue in a trans-imperial context, by focusing on local inputs and adaptations.

3. National Parks as a Transimperial Design

Dating back to ancient times, the Assyrians and Babylonians already maintained enclosed lands where elites could hunt, practicing skills for battle. The first known wildlife sanctuary was created by the ancient Indian ruler Ashoka the Great (268-232 B.C.), whose conversion to

⁴⁸ Morton Turner, ‘Rethinking American Exceptionalism,’ 286.

⁴⁹ Ibid 285.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Buddhism inspired more humane attitudes towards animals.⁵¹ The ancient Greeks, however, can be credited with developing the first publicly accessible spaces that would predate the idea of modern city parks.⁵² During the Middle Ages, Europeans would reintroduce the concept of private parks for the exclusive use of elites. The original meaning of ‘parc’ in Old French or Middle English was: ‘an enclosed piece of ground stocked with beasts of the chase, held by prescription, or the King’s grant.’⁵³ Thus, the development of the first city parks in Europe were originally hunting grounds for the aristocracy like Hyde park and St. James Parks in London later turned into public areas. It is widely acknowledged that the first city parks in the United States were modeled after their European counterparts. Plus, the development of wilderness concepts in the United States all trace their origin to European hunters’ concerns about wildlife.⁵⁴ This chapter will aim to emphasize how national parks are best understood in a context of relations and exchanges, of power, expertise, and ideas, among imperial structures.

It can be argued that it was an endemic American sentiment of (cultural) inferiority towards the old world that heavily influenced the creation of the national parks. The absence of great works of achievement in terms of architecture or the arts prompted Americans to look for other ways to define American identity. Throughout the literature, there is a lot of reference made to identity being juxtaposed against the monumentality of Europe at the time.⁵⁵ Alfred Runte explicitly points out that although a lot of literature may reflect some innate love that Americans have for their landscapes, a lot of it was born out of cultural anxiety. Moreover, European travelers criticized American utilitarian tendencies with respect to how they even managed their natural wonders. Alexis de Tocqueville for example urged his mother to quickly visit Niagara

⁵¹ Runte, *National Parks: The American Experience*, 2.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ John F Reiger, *American Sportsmen and the Origins of Conservation*, (Corvallis: Oregon State University Press, 2001), 138.

⁵⁵ Alfred Runte, *National Parks: The American Experience* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2021), 2.

Falls because he was convinced that the surrounding lands would soon be turned into a sawmill.⁵⁶ More dramatically, as evidenced by Thomas Jefferson who used the dramatic scenery of natural wonders to justify American grandeur when asked by the French why they should support the American war of independence.⁵⁷ America's natural wonders were used to justify American independence itself. Therefore, it was not only a justification for American greatness and independence but that a lack of cultural achievement should not define the merit of a nation.

In the 19th century, the US discovered not to be unbounded and unlimited in its use of land. Americans started taking care of their natural world. Other factors that inspired movements towards environmental protection were the result of the industrial revolution, and urbanization, which in the US created a movement where people were trying to reconcile the changing nature of reality with the allure of a primordial ideal of living in harmony with the natural world. Pressure accumulated within the city, and together with a growing proletariat challenges were mounted against the aristocratic prerogative for exclusive access to parklands.⁵⁸ In the United States, the early 18th century saw an increased movement to establish reserves to protect lands and it was articulated for public use. The parks were however in line with ideals of aesthetic beauty, not wilderness. City parks were never designed for the public to find enjoyment therefore they were an extension of the city. National parks, however, were supposed to predate the city and thus would inevitably be more in line with wilderness.⁵⁹ In the United States, the monumentality of the West was important. Even though the wildlife would later become more important this was their first and foremost objective.

⁵⁶ Ibid

⁵⁷ Ibid, 12.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 2.

⁵⁹ Ibid, 3.

The first known advocate of national parks in America was George Catlin, who in 1832 wrote about the establishment of a ‘magnificent park’ to house “Indians”, buffalo and wilderness, for future generations to enjoy.⁶⁰ John Reiger stresses the influence of the romantic movement on his thoughts and how he and others were hunters by trade, but as they were literate and well educated, they increasingly came to value the aesthetic importance.

George Mash is credited with being America’s first conservationist. He published work highlighting the importance of action in dealing with the negative consequences of human activity. He and others like Henry David Thoreau are credited with being key in the development of the discourse on environmental protection in the United States. The first national parks in America’s West were not established with the intention of protecting wildlife. This was in stark contrast with the first national parks set up in British East Africa where wildlife protection was the main objective. Although the United States had gone through a history of progressively more elaborate wildlife protection schemes due to the rapid decline of species that had followed colonization, westward expansion, and as of the 19th-century industrialization and urbanization. Rather, as discussed earlier the initial impetus was provided to preserve the monumentality of its natural wonders. It was decades later on when some started to realize that certain wildlife that was quickly getting extinct was at risk of predation by locals near the sanctuaries that the national parks provided.⁶¹

The main proponent was famed ‘sportsman’ and later wildlife conservationist George Bird Grinnell. The idea that Yellowstone and other national parks could be used for the protection of wildlife arose later from 1875 onwards. Grinnell visited the site and took notice of the opportunities and risks. He was the one who started to lobby for national parks receiving policing services in order to protect the wildlife. Cavalry officers took supervision over the last

⁶⁰ Reiger, *American Sportsmen*, 126.

⁶¹ Keiter, *To Conserve Unimpaired*, 173.

remaining bison in Yosemite and through imported domesticated bison it was possible to recuperate the nearly extinct species.⁶² Estimates around the size of the herds differ. Recently the most sober estimates of the total bison population in the late eighteenth century was between 24 and 30 million.⁶³ Some estimates were as high as 75 to 80 million. What needs to be considered is that the introduction of horses in the planes already altered the makeup as the native American people such as the Blackfeet, Cheyenne, Comanche, Crow and Sioux who subsisted on the fringes of the great planes dominated them at least until the mid-19th century due to the introduction of horses.⁶⁴ However, although the native Americans did play a substantive role in the destruction of the bison the largest onslaught occurred in particular during the 1870's with a massive influx of Euromerican hunters. In particular new technologies: better rifles, the extension of railroads and the implementation of new chemical methods to turn bison hides into leather resulted in as many as 6 million being slaughtered between 1872 and 1874. Legislation to preserve the bison was considered by Congress but it was deemed a resource for the "wild Indians" and their destruction would open up the introduction of domesticated livestock into the great plains.⁶⁵

Yellowstone was the first official national park signed into law in 1872 by President Ulysses Grant (1822-1885). Popular mythology surrounding this process stresses the significance of a group of travelers who had ventured to this place and around a campfire at night had determined to fight for the survival of the unspoiled beauty of the area so that future generations would be able to benefit from it in the same way they did.⁶⁶ What was for a long time ignored was the fact that Shoshone were living on the lands but were eventually evicted as were others who

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Andrew C. Isenberg, *The Oxford Handbook of Environmental History*. (Cary: Oxford University Press, 2014), 143, <https://www-oxfordhandbooks-com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195324907.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780195324907>.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 143.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 144.

⁶⁶ Morton Turner, "Rethinking American Exceptionalism," 287.

would frequent the area for hunting and fishing. Although it was the first official declaration the first Yosemite was established in 1864 as a wild landscape administered by the state of California. Hot Springs was established as a reservation in 1832.⁶⁷

Grinnell was one of the earliest advocates of turning Yellowstone park into a refuge, advocating in publications such as *Sportsman's Gazetteer and General Guide* and *the Forest and Stream*.⁶⁸ He was fighting attempts by others who wanted to use the land for economic development. He started to argue that if the lands were turned into a sanctuary, it could increase wildlife for the benefit of hunting in surrounding areas.⁶⁹ Preservation was therefore turned into an investment where the benefits would spill over in adjacent depleted territories. This rationale made people like Theodore Roosevelt enthusiastic, who was an avid supporter of the idea to turn national parks into wildlife protection sanctuaries.⁷⁰ The near-extinction of certain species was an experience that was mirrored in other places in Africa. Subsequent interventions by locals to introduce national parks were often explicitly justified by the experience of the American Bison. South Africans for example were motivated to create Kruger National Park, referring to the extinction of the quagga and blue buck in South Africa.⁷¹ Similarly, and more crucial to this thesis people like Lord Cransworth deplored the destruction of Thomson's Cob, Roan antelope or Kenya oribi in the 1930's and advocated the creation of national parks.⁷² Mervyn Cowie, the first Game Warden of the NNP, makes in his book explicit reference to the bison.⁷³

The cultural drives that led Americans to establish the first national parks were shared in the British Empire too. British aristocracy was offering a number of reasons for their actions

⁶⁷ Vale, *American Wilderness*, 91.

⁶⁸ Reiger, *American Sportsmen*, 132-133

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 137.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*.

⁷¹ Isenberg, "Seas of Grass," 134.

⁷² Bertram Francis Gurdon Cranworth, *Kenya Chronicles* (London: Macmillan & Co Ltd., 1939), 122.

⁷³

towards wildlife protection in Africa as well as the reason why so many upper-class individuals left for Africa. They experienced cultural anxiety about maintaining their privileged existence in 19th century Great Britain. In different imperial and local contexts, the wilderness concept was implemented differently but often certain groups ‘claim a moral imperative to define wilderness, pushes for its adjunction, and then seeks to determine how local groups fit into the new landscape’.⁷⁴

In Britain, the process of creating national parks started with “emparkments” in the 18th and 19th centuries where lands were seized and signs of human activity were removed, sometimes entire villages in order to be in line with the aesthetic ideal of ‘naturalized’ private areas. These were private with only fewer than a few thousand aristocrats.⁷⁵ Paintings from this period demonstrate depictions of nature with an absence of rural life, thus embodying the ideal that lands were divided into productive lands that were therefore capitalist enterprise and those lands that were to be maintained from a leisurely unproductive point of view.⁷⁶

Additionally, natural historians identify the mix between romanticism and scientism as the inspiration for the establishment of national parks both in Europe as well as in America.⁷⁷ People like Alexander von Humboldt, Charles Darwin, and Alfred Russel Wallace created the idea that lands outside Europe and North America were places of wild natural beauty and wonder. Romanticism arrived in the United States in the 1830’s where it heavily influenced American transcendentalist writers. They widely studied and discussed European writers but

⁷⁴ Conte, “Creating Wild Places,” 233.

⁷⁵ Neumann, “Dukes, Earls, and Ersatz Edens,” 79.

⁷⁶ Roderick P. Neumann, “Ways of Seeing Africa: Colonial Recasting of African Society and Landscape in Serengeti National Park,” *Ecumene* 2, no. 2 (April 1995): 152, <https://www-cambridge-org.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/core/journals/africa/article/africas-last-wilderness-reordering-space-for-political-and-economic-control-in-colonial-tanzania/B13012A0823A41DF2250A8CB8136E932>.

⁷⁷ Conte, “Creating Wild Places,” 225.

deliberately attempted to distance themselves from British cultural dominance.⁷⁸ Similarly Darwinism influenced this movement. The Origin of Species published in 1959 was read by few academics and religious scholars in the 1960's as the outbreak of the civil war meant that the controversy and struggle his work would have on American intellectual and religious life would take longer to take root. However, publications numbers of journals meant that it took sway later among the broader public where interest in the sciences grew.⁷⁹ Darwinism, with its decentering of the human species, influenced transcendentalist writers whose contributions would lay the scholarly foundations for later American pioneers of nature protection.⁸⁰

According to Conte, it was the meeting of biological science and wilderness protection that provided the rationale to create parks and in combination with colonialism created these spaces controlled by bureaucracies and not the local people who lived within.⁸¹ It was subsequently colonial governments that set aside regions for preservation. But they did so in a bureaucratic manner, such as through forest services, game commissions, veterinary services, pasture research offices, and agricultural services.⁸² It was subsequently the fear of losing the wealth through environmental segregation and thus resources that drove governments to find ecological balance through conservation. The locals were subjected through authoritarian means to restrictions or eliminations of their socio-economic livelihoods.⁸³

⁷⁸ Mike Hawkins, *Social Darwinism in European and American Thought, 1860-1945*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997): 1-16. <https://www-cambridge-org.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/core/books/social-darwinism-in-european-and-american-thought-18601945/53C1FDC71E4988F9359C3A0B7B10BE2B..>

⁷⁹ Johannes Voelz. "Transnational Dimensions of Romanticism." In *Handbook of American Romanticism*, ed. Philipp Löffler, Clemens Spahr and Jan Stievermann (De Gruyter, 2021): 57-62.

⁸⁰ Devin Zuber. "In the Woods We Return to Reason and Faith": American Romanticism, Environmentalism, and Seeker Spirituality." In *Handbook of American Romanticism*, ed. Philipp Löffler, Clemens Spahr and Jan Stievermann (De Gruyter, 2021): 561-574. <https://www-degruyter-com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/document/doi/10.1515/9783110592238/html>.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid, 230.

⁸³ Ibid.

For the British landed gentry, the transformation of their countryside during industrialization saw their privileged country life disappear which was a motivation for them to act in defense of protecting Africa as the last bastion where the elites could find (and exploit) the joy of wilderness.⁸⁴ As Roderick Neumann describes it: ‘The adaptable aristocrat disappeared from sight; as often as not to Kenya or Rhodesia, where the color of the lower orders’ faces guaranteed another two generations of undisturbed gentlemanly life’.⁸⁵

This sentiment also contributed, in the early 20th century, to the development of a global institutionalized environmental protection movement. The Earl of Onslow was one of these members of an increasingly anxious aristocracy and he became an active lobbyist even though he had never visited sub-Saharan Africa.⁸⁶ These efforts translated into the creation of the International Society for the Preservation of Wild Fauna (SPFE). Founded in 1903, the core membership of the SPFE was made up of privileged people who promoted private parks and hunting. Importantly they were not uniquely hunting organizations, but there was cross-membership.⁸⁷ The SPFE was influencing policymakers around the world many of whom belonged to the networks of the British aristocracy. Perversely in their attempts to protect wildlife, they were, ‘highly imaginatively and relentlessly’ attacking African and white lower-class hunters, such as Afrikaners. Even though in England they subjected themselves to criticism over their hunting practices.⁸⁸ Whenever upper-class whites would venture for massive killing sprees, like US president Roosevelt’s Smithsonian-Roosevelt expedition, killing over 1300 animals, this would go uncriticized. Thus, the SPFE was like many American publications at the time instrumental in transforming sport hunters into the new

⁸⁴ Neumann, “Dukes, Earls, and Ersatz Edens,” 80.

⁸⁵ Roderick P Neumann. “Dukes, Earls, and Ersatz Edens: Aristocratic Nature Preservationists in Colonial Africa,” *Environment and Planning. D, Society & Space* 14, no. 1 (1996): 81.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Extinction 36

⁸⁸ Ibid, 87.

conservationists. This publication and lobbying efforts were instrumental in these global changes. It needs to be acknowledged that there was resistance coming from the colonies about these practices. Local administrators advocated in favor of allowing locals to be able to hunt. And notoriously, that lobbying was not aware of the true situation. Arguing that there was a lack of elephants, they were too numerous.⁸⁹ Their lobbying activities were predicated on the assessment that there was such a thing as proper hunting and the sportsmen, of which the aristocratic way was leading.

Relentless attacks on African ‘poachers’ were characteristic of such a lobbying activity. Of much significance was equally the so-called ‘overgrazing controversy’ that circulated widely across the Atlantic. In the United States, overgrazing has historically been a debated topic both in relation to native Americans as well as Euromericans.⁹⁰ In writings, overuse is assumed as an important driving force to curtail and or remove people from their lands. For example, Kenya pioneer Lord Cransworth explicitly states in his writing that it was the British who brought peace to the Maasai, even though that is not what they really desired. Because they brought peace their herds flourished, and overgrazing was the result. Additionally, cattle was held and raised mainly for currency rather than for consumption reasons, therefore quantity of herds was more important than the average health of livestock.⁹¹ Mervyn Cowie, the first warden of the NNP, used similar justifications in his writings.⁹² It is based on the idea that pastoralists overstock, overgraze and damage their range while wildlife is seen as existing in harmony with nature.⁹³ Overgrazing in East Africa has been explained by assuming different causes. Some

⁸⁹ Ibid, 88.

⁹⁰ See for example: John Kelly, “Air to Navajos Queried: Principial Cause of Their Distress Said to be Overgrazing of Land,” *New York Times*, May 21, 1952, ProQuest Historical Newspapers. The Washington Post, “Roosevelt Urges Study of the Downfall of the Roman Empire,” October 2, 1907, ProQuest Historical Newspapers. The Washington Post, “Aim to Save Forests,” January 4, 1905, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁹¹ Cranworth, *Kenya Chronicles*, 123.

⁹² Mervyn Cowie, *I walk with Lions* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1961): 74.

⁹³ David M. Anderson and Richard Grove, *Conservation in Africa: People, Policies, and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 111.

posit that it mainly stems from traditional patterns of communal land tenure, others highlight external constraints such as the loss of rangelands or the breakdown of internal control due to the imposition of imperial rule.⁹⁴ More recent scholars highlight the introduction of Western veterinary practices and government policies that reduced mortality rates among indigenous communities.⁹⁵ Pacification had put an end to much-supposed ending of internecine warfare and allowed for population growth.⁹⁶ It suffices to say that much like the responsibility for loss of wildlife due to hunting was put at the feet of Africans, overgrazing was similarly blamed on indigenous groups. Organizations such as the SPFE were actively engaged in this process.⁹⁷

The lobby practices of the SPFE were further examples of trans-imperial exchanges, even among European empires. Roderick Neumann points out that beyond lobbying efforts, direct exchanges of delegations as well as the appointment of board members of national parks serve as evidence of how trans-imperial structures operated. This serves as evidence that one ought to take these exchanges into consideration when understanding the creation of national parks. To illustrate, the first national park established in Africa was by King Albert of Belgium in the present-day Democratic Republic of Congo. This happened quickly after the King had personally visited Yellowstone in 1925. Lord Onslow and the Viscount Grey of Fallodon, both important members of the SPFE were named members of the Administrative Commission of the park, being the president and vice-president of the SPFE.⁹⁸ The Kruger Park in South Africa was established in 1926 and the first warden was James Stevenson-Hamilton who was a one-time secretary of the SPFE.⁹⁹ The SPFE inspired the creation of sister organizations: The French

⁹⁴ Ibid, 111.

⁹⁵ Robert L Tignor, *Colonial Transformation of Kenya: The Kamba, Kikuyu, and Maasai from 1900-1939* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2015), 310-330.

⁹⁶ Cranworth, *Kenya Chronicles*, 122.

⁹⁷ Anderson and Grove, *Conservation in Africa*, 111. Cranworth, *Kenya Chronicles*, 122. Cowie, *I Walk with Lions*.

⁹⁸ Neumann, "Dukes, Earls, and Ersatz Edens," 91

⁹⁹ David Fleminger, *Fair Game: A Hidden History of the Kruger National Park* (Johannesburg: DogDog Publishing, 2017), 9.

Commission Permanente pour la Protection de la Fauna Coloniale, the Dutch Nederlandsche Commissie voor Internationale Natuurbescherming Vereeniging tot behoud van de Natuurmonumenten in Nederland, and the Belgian Cercle Zoologique Congolais.¹⁰⁰ Thus, intra-imperial exchanges of ideas, practices, and people concerning environmental and wildlife protection were significant in the understanding of the creation of the first national parks in Africa. Neumann's work clearly demonstrates these exchanges. However, in order to understand the creation of the NNP one has to move regionally and locally understanding how the environments have historically been shaped by imperial powers in order to place these analytical underpinnings in a local story: the creation of the NNP.

PART II – National Parks in British East Africa

4. People Shaping Geography: Caravans and Pastoral Kenya

‘This railroad, the embodiment of the eager, masterful, materialistic civilization of to-day, was pushed through a region in which nature, both as regards wild man and wild beast, did not and does not differ materially from what it was in Europe in the late Pleistocene. The comparison is not fanciful. The teeming multitudes of wild creatures, the stupendous size of some of them, the terrible nature of others, and the low culture of many of the savage tribes, especially of hunting tribes, substantially reproduces the conditions of life in Europe as it was led by our ancestors ages before the dawn of anything that could be called civilization.’¹⁰¹ - Theodore Roosevelt

¹⁰⁰ William M. Adams, *Against Extinction*, (New York: Routledge, 2004), Kobo Edition, 74.

¹⁰¹ Theodore Roosevelt. *African Game Trails* (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1910), 2.

East Africa is constituent of a diverse range of climatic zones that have given the lands a distinct character with respect to biodiversity, as well as the potential for human activity. The latitudinal zone along the global equator is mostly dominated by tropical rainforests. Harsh climatic conditions coupled with the presence of tropical diseases result in ecological circumstances that disfavor human survival. Therefore, in particular, regions far removed from coasts historically precluded denser human populations. However, the decisive geological force that has shaped the uniqueness of this area is the divergent tectonic plates which created the Rift valley. The East African savannah grasslands, that dominate popular perceptions of Africa, are unique along the global equator due to the volcanic activity that has turned large swaths of rainforest into highly fertile pastures. Large herds of grazing ungulates that have historically characterized grasslands around the world are therefore characteristic of this region. Presently, the Serengeti plains which facilitate the yearly migration of millions of wildebeest are the most striking manifestation of this phenomenon. 'The trophic dynamics of grasslands are called a solar economy. A grassland ecosystem is thus pyramidal in structure: extensive grasses support sizeable but smaller biomass of grazers, who in turn support a smaller number of predators. Nonetheless, because the energy of the sun feeds the grasses at the base of the pyramid, theoretically the system is indefinitely renewable, so long as the population of grazing animals does not outstrip the supply.'¹⁰² Contrary to grasslands, dense forests, although rich in biodiversity, are not conducive to the flourishing of large herds.

Central Kenya contains another region that provides a unique, distinct ecosystem: the fertile central highlands. Because of the high altitude, the climate is fairer, and the forests are more temperate. Crucially, there is an absence of tropical diseases such as malaria. The geological forces that shaped the highlands equally produced volcanic mountains like Mount Kenya and Kilimanjaro, whose permanent glaciers impact the hydrology of the region. The two largest

¹⁰² Isenberg, "Seas of Grass," 137.

rivers in Kenya: The Tana and Athi, trace their origins in their shadow and produce freshwater surpluses for (semi)-arid terrain of the western parts of Kenya. Both lack navigability, however. They meander capriciously through the geologically active terrain of the region. The rivers do not produce potential connectivity between the coast and the great lakes. Lake Victoria, the largest inland freshwater basin in the world, is the starting point of the Nile river. And secondly, the coast that connects East Africa to the Indian Ocean. As a result, historically, people living in these areas and the forms of social organization that have ruled upon them, including empires, have ventured to find inventive ways trying to connect these two regions.

Prior to the construction of the railroad in the 1890's, the native peoples of central Kenya only maintained limited connections with the extra-African world. Unlike other colonial spaces where people had already been subjected to centuries of interaction with Europeans and saw a gradual introduction to European norms, concepts, and practices - the cultural clash in this area was more profound. The people were pre-literate, had not had formal systems of money, there was no concept of wage laboring, and there were no traditions of education through long-time schooling along western models.¹⁰³ Most of their exchanges and connections occurred through the notorious trade caravans. For centuries, the imperial centers that extracted resources from this region were located in the Arab world, the Island of Zanzibar being one of the most significant hubs. The Swahili people at the coast, through centuries of naval interaction with the larger imperial powers of the Middle East and South Asia, had been the main actor in setting up larger and more forceful trade caravans that traversed the interior, mostly trading slaves and ivory.¹⁰⁴ The destination of most of the caravans was the territory of the great lakes. Around Lake Victoria, there were larger, more complex polities, such as the kingdom of Bechuanaland with which caravans would engage in more extensive commercial exchanges. Food insecurity

¹⁰³ Tignor, *Colonial Transformation of Kenya*, 4.

¹⁰⁴ Kefa M. Otiso, "Colonial Urbanization and Urban Management in Kenya," in *African Urban Spaces in Historical Perspective* (Rochester: Boydell & Brewer, 2005), 6.

in the interior required the caravans to move with speed, as they were often comprised of thousands of people and would swell in numbers rapidly due to the forceful addition of the enslaved. Historian Andrew Hake suggests that it may have been between 500 and 1000 people per month in present-day Kenya that were forcefully forced out of their homelands.¹⁰⁵ According to historian Paul Lovejoy, only a comparatively minor number of people were sent to the Middle East when reaching the coast.¹⁰⁶ Most enslaved came to work in the plantation economy on the coast which had expanded rapidly in the 1850's and 1860's and reached its peak between 1875 and 1884. It is estimated that in this period there were around forty-five-thousand slaves working on the Kenyan coast that comprised around 44 percent of the population. The main export products along the coast were grain, coconuts, and oil seeds.¹⁰⁷

The complex history of interaction between the caravans and the indigenous people of central Kenya is mixed. Trade opportunities were concomitant with raiding, which was both inflicted upon, as well as perpetrated by societies in central Kenya.¹⁰⁸ Prior to the arrival of the British, raiding was an integral and complicated feature of the socio-political landscape of the region. Caravans could use coercive power to extract resources, but retaliatory and/or opportunistic attacks on the caravans were equally commonplace. Thanks to the caravans' trade, the area of present-day Nairobi soon became a trading center where sweet potatoes, yams, cassava, sugar cane, Indian corn, and millet, were traded for slaves and ivory.¹⁰⁹ In spite of the contacts that trade favored, however, the larger caravans were dominated by Swahili/Arab traders, and the peoples of the interior, who set up their own caravans as well, came to complement rather than

¹⁰⁵ Hake, *African Metropolis*, 19.

¹⁰⁶ Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa* 3rd ed., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) 219, <https://www-cambridge-org.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/core/books/transformations-in-slavery/97658D86435B0A9D2D2AB9126404CADA>.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Hake, *African Metropolis*, 19-20.

¹⁰⁹ Tignor, *Colonial Transformation of Kenya*, 288.

dominate this centuries-long unequal exchange along the region. Central Kenya remained for a long time, in spite of these crossings, at the periphery of the Arab world.

Central Kenya is inhabited by three dominant groups: The Kikuyu, Kamba, and Maasai. The Kikuyu are to this day the dominant ethnic group, comprising seventeen percent of the population. They mainly inhabit the fertile highlands and were at the end of the 19th century a predominantly sedentary people. They made use of the difference in climatic zones to maintain mixed agriculture where farmers would harvest different crops based on long rains and short rains. Differing variations of prime fertility resulted in regional specializations, and the economic surpluses were thereafter generated through exchange over periodical markets.¹¹⁰ They possessed livestock, but in substantially lower numbers and with less socio-economic significance compared to the two other groups. Additionally, higher population density precluded the availability for enough land to support large herds.¹¹¹ The Kamba lived to the east and were a mixed sedentary and pastoralist people. Presently, they comprise around ten percent of the total population. Moving from west to east, dependence on livestock increased due to the increased aridity of the lands. Both Kikuyu and Kamba are a Bantu speaking people.

To the south and west of the highlands lived the Maasai, an almost uniquely pastoral society that had migrated from central Africa in the 17th and 18th centuries and belong to the Nilotic language family. Research has indicated that the history of pastoralism dates back as far as two thousand years. The Maasai though dominating the space built on practices by other peoples.¹¹² Being a nomadic culture, their predominant source of nutrition was meat, milk, and the blood of their livestock.¹¹³ Studies have shown that only around fifteen percent of their diet consisted

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 311.

¹¹² Conte, "Creating Wild Places from Domesticated Landscapes," 236.

¹¹³ Tignor, *Colonial Transformation of Kenya*, 311.

of farm products.¹¹⁴ These additions were predominately obtained through trade. On average, Maasai were five inches taller than their Bantu neighbors, due to the fact that they consumed more protein.¹¹⁵ Livestock was of quintessential importance to Maasai society and served as a marker of status as well as mode of currency. Raiding was an essential part of the culture as it allowed men without cattle to acquire the livestock necessary to allow for upward social mobility. It was a commonly held belief in Maasai culture that all cattle in the world belonged to this culture, which justified raiding.¹¹⁶ The Kikuyu maintained trade with the Maasai and organized trade caravans to exchange products with them. Although hostility was commonplace among the tribes, women were often given safe conduct to allow trade relations to exist.¹¹⁷

Maasai civilization was at the height of its regional domination in the mid-19th century. Although regional differences and rivalries were present, the bedrock of their culture was shared and it was based on an age system, creating a differentiation between the uninitiated young, initiated warriors and elders.¹¹⁸ Traditional institutional knowledge concerning the management of the lands as well as the interaction between groups was maintained through these social relationships. This is particularly important insofar as this social system had also direct repercussions on the ways in which the land was managed. Social norms and practices also concerned land management surrounding, control of fires, grazing practices, and the relationship with wildlife. It is therefore argued that the unique ecosystems of this part of East Africa were given shape by a combination of grazing elephants and the application of Maasai social norms and practices.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁴ Richard Waller, "Emutai: Crisis and Response in Maasailand 1883–1902," in *The Ecology of Survival* (New York: Routledge, 1988).

¹¹⁵ Tignor, *Colonial Transformation of Kenya*, 311.

¹¹⁶ Cranworth, *Kenya Chronicles*, 153.

¹¹⁷ Tignor, *Colonial Transformation of Kenya*, 311 Alan Jacobs, "The Pastoral Masai of Kenya," p. 25.

¹¹⁸ Kokel Melubo, "Why Are Wildlife on the Maasai Doorsteps? Insights from the Maasai of Tanzania," *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples* 16, no. 3 (1 September 2020): 180–92, <https://journals-sagepub-com.ezproxy.leidenuniv.nl/doi/full/10.1177/1177180120947823>.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

The symbiotic relationship of the Maasai with wildlife helped shape the savannahs and underpinned the apogee of Maasai culture in the mid-19th century. The Maasai maintained a complicated system of land management. Incidental fires were created to maintain the health of the grasslands. Factors that would be included in decision-making involved: the age of vegetation, the amount of rainfall in previous years, the amount of standing biomass health, and the presence of insects.¹²⁰ Punishments were enacted when these norms were violated.¹²¹ The fires were essential to kill ticks and tsetse flies and thus were essential for protecting wildlife and cattle against disease. When plagues or droughts created problems, inter-communal deliberations allowed for an institutionalized peaceful resolution of disputes often through the peaceful migration of groups. This was done in order to maintain regional stability.¹²² Therefore the symbiotic relationship the Maasai possessed with the lands, the animals, and each other allowed for wildlife to flourish in carefully managed grazing lands while simultaneously maintaining regional domination as a decentralized tribal configuration. Another way in which the Maasai culture impacted the surrounding environment was the lack of hunting. The absence of large-scale hunting by Maasai even when faced with famine was noted by early travelers such as Thompson who noted how the herds of herbivores exhibited remarkably little fear towards the Maasai.¹²³ This is explained by Kokel Melubo, himself of Maasai descent: ... the reason why Maasai do not eat wild game even in times of severe hunger and food shortages because the game is part of Maasai (they define it as no-resources). Anyone who hunts or kills unnecessarily would be Ol-toroboni (poorer with no livestock and living in the wild gathering fruits and hunting) and a killer is likely to get injured/killed by the same wild species.¹²⁴

¹²⁰ Ramona Butz, "Traditional Fire Management: Historical Fire Regimes and Land Use Change in Pastoral East Africa," *International Journal of Wildland Fire*, vol. 18, (2012).

¹²¹ Melubo, "Why Are Wildlife on the Maasai Doorsteps?," 185.

¹²² Conte, "Creating Wild Places from Domesticated Landscapes," 235-236.

¹²³ Anderson and Grove, *Conservation in Africa*, 137.

¹²⁴ Melubo, "Why Are Wildlife on the Maasai Doorsteps?," 180-92.

Additionally, institutional knowledge transferred by elders is also applied to the management of disease for people and their livestock. Herding practices were enshrined along large distances based on seasons. This had two reasons. One, is the importance of land recovery. Rather than grazing movements being the product of a haphazard approach motivated by short-term maximization of resource extraction, a careful intra-, and inter-tribal balance was applied to ensure stability. Particular grazing grounds were seasonally avoided. But importantly, as livestock grazed alongside wildlife it was important to be careful in certain instances. For example, the seasonal calving of wildebeest would leave the fetal membrane on the grounds. This could easily transmit diseases such as malignant catarrh fever, a disease that entails high mortality for livestock. Just like anthrax, black quarter, rinderpest, and brucellosis, wildlife could infect livestock and thus knowledge transfers were vital to maintaining the prosperity of Maasai society.¹²⁵

Extensive research has indicated that the period of the 1880's and 1890's was a turning point for pastoralism in East Africa, as a myriad of lethal disasters struck that altered the cultural makeup of the region forever. Richard Waller's work serves as a bedrock of research on this topic. He argues that there are two important reasons why this period was significant and very different from other periods.¹²⁶ Firstly, is that the disasters were, initially, not based on drought and/or locusts which nomadic cultures were accustomed to dealing with, but rather they entailed previously unknown diseases. Secondly, it occurred during a pivotal moment in the region's history, as the British and Germans were entering these spaces and establishing their rule. The first diseases to strike was bovine pleuropneumonia, which struck regionally beginning in the early 1880's. It arrived from the Indian Subcontinent.¹²⁷ For the Maasai, the destruction of a significant portion of cattle could largely, still be offset externally through raiding by the Maasai

¹²⁵ Melubo, "Why Are Wildlife on the Maasai Doorsteps?," 186.

¹²⁶ Waller "Emutai: Crisis and Response in Maasailand," 73

¹²⁷ Adams, *Against Extinction*, Kobo Edition, 24.

on its neighbors. The outbreak of rinderpest in the 1890's was more severe and for those groups that were struck, it is estimated that eighty percent of livestock would die as a consequence, in some instances overnight.¹²⁸ Because so much livestock was killed off not just among Maasai but equally among Kamba and other groups, raiding was more difficult and therefore inter-communal raiding and hostility started to occur. The destruction of livestock entailed that certain Maasai started to seek refuge among Kikuyu societies. The subsequent outbreak of smallpox was the most lethal and killed a substantial number of Maasai, Kikuyu, and Kamba. An ever-increasing number of Kamba and Maasai started to move towards Kikuyu lands attempting to find protection from food insecurity. In 1899 a particularly harsh drought-hit East Africa and a large famine struck each of these groups.¹²⁹ Although it is difficult to ascertain what the exact scale of transformation was, among pastoralists in East Africa this period is remembered as a decisive episode in the history of pastoralism. Strong cultural norms against large-scale hunting of wildlife, meant that the absence of food was not offset by large-scale hunting. When the British started their period of incursion and so-called pacification, they encountered lands wrecked by disaster but full of wildlife.

5. Pacification, White Pioneers, and Settlers: The Transformation of Nairobi

British interest in East Africa gained momentum after the completion of the Suez Canal in 1867. By considerably reducing navigation time between the United Kingdom and its crown colony India, ensuring geostrategic control over the (Eastern)-Mediterranean and the Red Sea became a cornerstone of London's foreign policy. As the Nile originates in Lake Victoria, the 'wastelands' of East Africa started to attract interest from the imperial powers of Europe.¹³⁰ At the 1885 Berlin Conference, it was decided that present-day Uganda and Kenya would fall

¹²⁸ Tignor, *Colonial Transformation of Kenya*, 4.

¹²⁹ Waller "Emutai: Crisis and Response in Maasailand," 81-85

¹³⁰ Hake, *African Metropolis*, 20

under British control. And Tanzania, including the island of Zanzibar, would fall under German governance.

The region surrounding Lake Victoria was not navigable from any seacoast and traders had relied on the caravans in order to maintain contact with the people living there. The British therefore decided to construct a railway connection between Mombasa and what would become Port Florence (Kisumu). The British envisioned that the more densely populated polities around Lake Victoria would be able to provide an optimal return on investment to offset the expenses of constructing the railway.¹³¹ The Uganda railway company was tasked to carry it out and they recruited thousands of indentured laborers from India in order to undertake the construction. As a result, Andrew Hake makes the argument that in the early years of British engagement in Kenya, in terms of imperial policy, the colony can best be analyzed as an extension of British India. To substantiate his claims, he refers to the fact that the magistrate applied the Indian Penal Code to offenders as well as the Indian civil code, the Indian evidence act, the Indian contract act, and the Indian post office act. The currency was the Indian rupee, and commerce was dominated by Indian firms and trade networks.¹³² Because construction had to be done in territories mainly outside the highlands, the harshness of East Africa's interior had to be most dramatically endured by Indian indentured laborers. In the infamous book *the Man-eaters of Tsavo*, the horrors of two specialized human killers are elaborately detailed. In an excerpt, the protagonist details how the laborers believed that trying to kill the two lions was futile for they possessed the spirits of two local chiefs who were avenging the construction efforts through their territory. The author writes in the introductory remarks that he knows that President Theodore Roosevelt will be one of the people who will be reading this book.¹³³

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Hake, *African Metropolis*, 25.

¹³³ John Henry Patterson, *The Man-Eaters of Tsavo and Other East African Adventures*, (London: Macmillan, 1907).

Key to the transformation of the city of Nairobi and the surrounding fertile highlands was the realization by the colonial administration that the envisioned profits from the railway would not materialize.¹³⁴ In 1902 Joseph Chamberlain, secretary of state for the colonies, was touring East Africa and discovered that the income generated through the Uganda railway only made up for one-third of the expenditure of the protectorate.¹³⁵ Therefore an alternative approach to the protectorate had to be devised in order to mitigate the losses. At the same time perceptions of the economic potential of the highlands changed. The image of Kenya being a 'sterile region' was replaced by its newly perceived potential as a 'white man's country'.¹³⁶ The attractiveness of the fertile highlands was identified. This gave impetus to promote settlement and economic development. Plantation crops such as tea and coffee were introduced in 1904.¹³⁷ Wanting to make the transformation a success those who had invested heavily in the railway attempted to attract wealthy, affluent white settlers. There was a general desire to avoid poorer and destitute whites. As the Boer wars were ending, there was interest for Afrikaners to settle. The Kenyan highlands initially attracted white settlers mostly from Great Britain, as well as Afrikaners from South Africa. Elspeth Huxley, one of these early pioneers, argues that in terms of the European taking over lands there are a number of misconceptions. Firstly, he stresses the emptiness of the lands. Secondly the fact that the people of Kenya are migrating pastoralists. The Maasai only relatively recently migrated from the Nile to this region. Thirdly he stresses the point that Europeans settle in regions that most resemble the 'cold north' and that hotter, wetter climates were more suitable for Africans.¹³⁸ Many early pioneers deliberately distinguish between settlers and pioneers. In their mythology surrounding the development of early Kenya, it was

¹³⁴ Virginia University Press, 2002), 2.

¹³⁴ Otiso, "Colonial Urbanization and Urban Management in Kenya," 79.

¹³⁵ Errol Trzebinski, *The Kenya Pioneers*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1986), 84.

¹³⁶ Thomas P. Ofcansky, *Paradise Lost: A History of Game Preservation in East Africa*. (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2002), 2.

¹³⁷ Otiso, "Colonial Urbanization and Urban Management in Kenya," 79.

¹³⁸ Elspeth Huxley, *Out in the Midday Sun: My Kenya*. (London: Chatto & Windus, 1985), 73

the pioneers who had to be tough when enduring Kenya's harshness in their mission to civilize the land. The people who came later were deemed therefore to be immigrants who merely benefited from their hard work.¹³⁹

The period of pacification by the British, made more all-encompassing by the increased white migration, was made easier due to the series of natural disasters that had hit East Africa in this period. In particular, the complete breakdown of pastoralism was of benefit to the new rulers. As mentioned earlier, the aforementioned disasters of the late 19th century resulted in a breakdown of political order in Maasai society and resulted in internecine war.¹⁴⁰ Many Maasai moved to Kikuyu lands and worked as laborers. Maasai even found refuge among the British. The peoples that the British encountered when constructing had lived in relative isolation for a long time and the cultural clash between them and the British was much more profound than in other colonial spaces. Whereas in other places there had been a long, slow interaction and process of adaptation with respect to the acceptance of a more market-based economy. The people of the East African highlands were isolated. Thus, the cultural differences between the British and them were much bigger than in other colonial spaces such as the Swahili coast.¹⁴¹

Violence by the British colonial administrators was employed most excessively during this period of pacification. It was rationalized by the idea that forceful behavior, in the beginning, would allow peace and stability to be established quicker. In the initial phase, punitive expeditions were carried out often by Indian regiments in order to subdue recalcitrant tribes, which entailed the burning of villages and the destruction of livestock.¹⁴² It should be noted that these expeditions were only carried out against Kikuyu and not against Maasai and Kamba. There are likely several reasons for this. As discussed earlier, pastoralist societies were the

¹³⁹ Trzebinski, *The Kenya Pioneers*, 4.

¹⁴⁰ Emutai Waller, "Emutai: Crisis and Response in Maasailand 1883–1902," 77

¹⁴¹ Tignor, *Colonial Transformation of Kenya*, 4.

¹⁴² *Ibid*, 5-6.

hardest hit in this period, and thus the ability to muster resistance against the British would have been more difficult. But more importantly, the focus of British settlement were the Kikuyu-dominated highlands. Whereas the Maasai were able to retain a great deal of independence after accepting colonial rule, the core lands that were appropriated by the British were Kikuyu.

Key agents during the so-called pacification period were a number of Kikuyu chiefs who were instrumental for the colonial administration in having the people accept the burdens of rule. A number of collaborative chiefs were able to enact social control. Contrary to Maasai society, Kikuyu society had a lower stratum of poor families who were attached to the richer more powerful ones, from which the chiefs could draw support and build their administrative and para-military power.¹⁴³ But it was mostly the Kikuyu whose lands were annexed by the British and thus found themselves on estates where they were later employed as laborers. Additionally, they provided the first people to enter the European school system. The Maasai and Kamba did not establish collaborating chiefs. Maasai society endured far more outbursts of violence as a consequence of the colonial administrators' attempts to impose reforms.¹⁴⁴ The Kikuyu were the fastest to accept the economic upheaval and social change imposed by colonial rule. The diminished Maasai were able to retain their independent lives as they lived on lands further from zones of white settlement. The Kikuyu however lost most land and were turned into a proletariat for the white settler population.¹⁴⁵ In 1904, the Maasai had no option but to accept the creation of Northern and Southern Maasai Reserves in the Laikipia Plateau and Southern Kenya. The rinderpest had devastated these lands but the Maasai would become increasingly distrustful toward the British government and more intent on retaining the prime grazing grounds.¹⁴⁶ Additionally, regulations severely curtailed movements of the Maasai and the

¹⁴³ Ibid, 4-6.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, 7.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 4.

¹⁴⁶ Anderson and Grove, *Conservation in Africa*, 152.

large-scale trading of livestock. The supremacy of Maasai pastoralism in these lands had officially ended.

Before European/British colonization, Central Kenya had had relatively little interaction with the extra-African world, their primary link being the trade caravans from the coast. The highlands were inhabited by the sedentary Kikuyu and the surrounding lands were dominated by centuries-old pastoralism, dominated by the Maasai. A series of disasters destroyed pastoralism and created the illusion of a wildlife sanctuary reminiscent of the Pleistocene. When the British arrived in the 1880's building a railroad connecting Lake Victoria to the coast they could easily 'pacify' the region because the lands were wrecked by disasters. The end of African pastoralism shaping these environments was marked by European settlement and the imposition of their norms and institutions concerning wildlife protection.

PART III – The Nairobi National Park

6. More than a City

'Nyrobe was born with the twentieth century and, in its unsuitability as the site of a town, may be looked upon as the illegitimate child of the railway. Sickness dominated its conception. On 30 May 1899 when the Railhead Club, which travelled up the line as construction progressed, reached the plain, many of the coolies were in any case too ill to move.' – Errol Trzebinski ¹⁴⁷

Nairobi is the largest, and arguably, most important metropole in East Africa with a current estimated population of over four million. Interestingly, it is precisely the diversity of ecosystems within the NNP that reflect the city's location in an ecologically transitional zone.

¹⁴⁷ Trzebinski, *The Kenya Pioneers*, 38.

The northeastern districts are located in the more temperate forested highlands. Originally being the Kikuyu homelands, they were turned into ‘white man’s country’. The southern edge is the starting point of the Athi Plains, which comprise vast stretches of grasslands going all the way south to the foothills of Mount Kilimanjaro. To the west are the Ngong hills, where behind the geologically active Rift Valley begins. At its core Nairobi is a generally flat space that is meandered by rivers that turn into seasonal swamplands, providing fertile ground for mosquitos.

Prior to the arrival of the British, the site was not an urban center. It was ill-suited for permanent human settlement. During the dry season, the lands would become incredibly dusty and dry.¹⁴⁸ Locals had to endure an ailment which was known as Nairobi throat.¹⁴⁹ During the rainy season the abundance of freshwater would create an ecosystem called by early travelers the papyrus swamp.¹⁵⁰ But it was a trading site nonetheless as the caravans from the coast traveled along this site due to the presence of fresh water. For herds of animals, be they wild or domesticated, it was a regionally significant location for refreshment. It was therefore that the Maasai called the site ‘Enkare Nyrobe’, which translates to ‘place of cool waters.’¹⁵¹ During the dry season, the streams that have their origins in Mount Kenya would become a vital lifeline. The territory was deemed dangerous however because at night the area would attract predators.¹⁵² As explained in the previous chapter, by the late 1890’s rinderpest had wreaked havoc among the Maasai to the South. In a short period, livestock had depleted, therefore wildlife was able to take advantage of the increased availability of resources. The land that Europeans and Indians encountered are what is understood as dense in the size and diversity of herds. The following accounts date from the time that the railway was still under construction:

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, 39.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 3.

¹⁵⁰ Huxley, *Out in the Midday Sun: My Kenya*, 60.

¹⁵¹ Boy and Kahumbu, *Nairobi National Park*, 8.

¹⁵² Trzebinski, *The Kenya Pioneers*, 41.

Ronald Preston, a railway engineer: ‘A bleak, swampy stretch of soppy landscape, windswept, devoid of any habitation of any sort except thousands of wild animals of every species. The only evidence of the occasional presence of humankind was the old caravan track skirting the bog-like plain.’¹⁵³ In another piece of his writing, Preston commented: ‘To describe what we saw in the way of game, would be put down today as exaggeration, but ... wherever one looked it was nothing but a moving mass of hartebeest, wildebeest, zebra and the smaller antelope. The clang of the rails and steel sleepers would frighten the game within about five hundred yards radius so as to make the number greater and denser at the edge of the circle.’¹⁵⁴

Robert Foran, the first police officer stationed in Nairobi wrote: ‘Ye Gods, what a truly amazing show ... The graceful Grant’s and Thomson’s gazelle, reedbuck, duiker ... were in their uncountable thousands ... Flocks of handsome cock and drab hen ostriches stalked leisurely in springing strides, as if stepping on red-hot cinders, among the feeding animals. A black rhino dozed comfortably beneath a lonely tree...’¹⁵⁵

For African standards, the area surrounding Nairobi appears to have been teeming with an abundance of wildlife that left a distinctive impression on those who witnessed it, the different authors sharing similar observations are evidence of this assertion. As other writers detail about the city of Kenya later on: it was not uncommon to see antelope grazing almost inside the city of Nairobi.¹⁵⁶ Hyenas would become commonplace around areas with large-scale slaughterhouses.¹⁵⁷ The devastation caused by rinderpest had decimated wildlife populations of certain species such as eland, buffalo, and wildebeest.¹⁵⁸ As these sources point out, however, other species took advantage of an increase in resource availability.

¹⁵³ Trzebinski, *The Kenya Pioneers*, 37.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 38.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid*.

¹⁵⁶ Cowie, *I walk with Lions*, 15.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 48.

¹⁵⁸ Adams, *Against Extinction*, Kobo Edition, 24.

In terms of human encounters, the first Europeans describe how the few rocks that cross the Nairobi river were used by both Kikuyu and Maasai to carry goods past each other: grain, flour, vegetables and fruits, and sheep, skins, and hides.¹⁵⁹ The territory was first earmarked as a potential location for the railroad headquarters by Sir George Whitehouse, who had traveled inwards from the coast for exploratory purposes.¹⁶⁰ His assessment was later repudiated by others including doctors, and engineers for all the problems the city would possess in its initial phase. The city was established for the simple reason that it was the last space where trains could shunt before having to traverse the rift valley.¹⁶¹ Dr. Boedeker who became the chief medical officer in Nairobi and had travelled to the site before the settlement later claimed that Nairobi was the ‘worst possible site for a city’ as it was mosquito infested.¹⁶² Although the highlands became a natural ally of the Europeans in their fight against tropical disease the swamp conditions of Nairobi would remain problematic in the early history of the settlement.

Upon establishment, the encampment was governed by the Uganda Railway Company. In the absence of alternatives, the Company had no option but to officially decide to turn the site into its headquarters, which required the need for more serious infrastructure planning. The majority of Indian laborers lived on the wet plains. The rivers were used by everyone for all purposes. Therefore, during the dry season, human waste would cause serious health risks. The officers came to live on the western side of the rail line which was uphill and therefore largely free from drainage problems. In modern Nairobi vernacular ‘living uphill’ still means wealth. The Colonial Administrations’ Headquarters officially moved from Zanzibar to Nairobi in 1901, after which the mostly wooden buildings uphill slowly transformed into stone. As Nairobi became an important administrative center, urbanization rapidly accelerated. Administrators

¹⁵⁹ Hake, *African Metropolis*, 19.

¹⁶⁰ Trzebinski, *The Kenya Pioneers*, 38.

¹⁶¹ Huxley, *Out in the Midday Sun: My Kenya*, 61.

¹⁶² Trzebinski, *The Kenya Pioneers*, 2.

and settlers were followed by traders, businessmen, and sex workers from the coast, creating a demographic mixture of Europeans, Indians, Arabs, Somali, and Swahili who lived alongside the natives of Central Kenya.¹⁶³ A considerable proportion of the Africans living in Nairobi have always been Muslim, as people from more urbanized societies from the coast came to seek fortune.¹⁶⁴ Nairobi slowly became a frontier shantytown. Andrew Hake argues that from 1903 onwards Nairobi started to look less like Bombay and more like South Africa.¹⁶⁵ After the completion of the railway, the majority of laborers returned to India, but not all. Many early white pioneers problematized the presence of those who stayed and blamed the sanitation problems on this particular demographic. Elspeth Huxley, a contemporary, explicitly decries the Indian presence, claiming the government should have insisted on forced repatriation.¹⁶⁶ There were periodic outbreaks of plague for which the Indian bazaar was twice destroyed.¹⁶⁷ Nairobi was hit by plagues in 1901, 1902, 1904, and 1911–1913. The outbreaks of plague and other sanitary problems were subsequently used by the governing elite to justify the implementation of policies designed to promote racial segregation. Not all Indians in Nairobi were indentured laborers however, there were important figures in business and construction. Traders and businessmen who came from the coast often possessed centuries-old established trade contacts across the Indian Ocean.¹⁶⁸ A.M. Jeevanjee, for example, was a rich Parsee shipowner who owned an important contracting firm and stood as the head of a large group of merchants. Jeevanjee constructed houses for many members of the European community and purchased land in Nairobi itself. In 1906 he opened Jeevanjee gardens which included a statue of Queen Victoria. He started the African Standard which was later bought by Europeans.

¹⁶³ Hake, *African Metropolis*, 24.

¹⁶⁴ Ese and Ese, *City Makers of Nairobi*, Kobo Edition, 40-42.

¹⁶⁵ Hake, *African Metropolis*, 26.

¹⁶⁶ Huxley, *Out in the Midday Sun: My Kenya*, 61.

¹⁶⁷ Boy and Kahumbu, *Nairobi National Park*, 8.

¹⁶⁸ Trzebinski, *The Kenya Pioneers*, 41-42.

Throughout the Colonial period, the British actively attempted to prevent African urbanization as well as migration to the fertile highlands, rationalized by the idea that Africans would be best suited to remain in the traditional rural structures to maintain social control. This was for example explicitly expressed by statements that Africans lacked ‘the mental capacity’ for economic development and Asians would prefer the hotter climate of the coastal regions.¹⁶⁹ This created however the complicated conundrum that colonization was in part justified by the idea of uplifting the African people through education and development, defined as ‘white man’s burden’. Certain groups, such as the Kikuyu would prove to be relatively the most willing to accept these changes. Their willingness for education and participation in the governance of the country was counteracted by the British. This was predominantly motivated by a fear that the development of an African urban class could potentially in the long run challenge the status quo.¹⁷⁰ This was partially attempted to be achieved through the implementation of acts that were designed to maintain racial segregation out of public health reasons. Such as the 1930 Public Health Act and the Vagrancy Acts of 1922 and 1949.¹⁷¹ Much as with respect to the segregation of the Indians in the city, hygiene and therefore the issue of public health were used to justify the denial and later controlled urbanization of non-white people in Nairobi. In 1948 a White Commission was established to deal with issues of public sanitation. In its advisory reports rather than focusing on infrastructure, it formalized the establishment of separate quarters and formal separation.

Africans were not represented in the Nairobi Municipal Council until the 1950’s. Beforehand only Europeans and some Indians held council seats. The Indians however were severely underrepresented and attempted through many actions such as boycotts, civil disobedience, and refusing to pay taxes to salvage this underrepresentation. However, Europeans used this to their

¹⁶⁹ Otiso, “Colonial Urbanization and Urban Management in Kenya,” 79.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. 81.

¹⁷¹ Ibid. 82

advantage.¹⁷² Indians were invited to be present, but the Europeans used all tricks to ensure dominance. Examples of manipulation are: ‘rallying European support, mobilizing missionaries in the cause, cajoling, threatening and even plotting to kidnap a Governor, slanting the report of an Economic Commission to reflect their racial prejudices, lobbying in London, attempting to form an anti-Indian alliance with Kenya’s African’s, bringing pressure to restrict Indian immigration, introducing legislation and municipal by laws which more hardly on the poorer Indian householders or shopkeepers, seeking to secure racial segregation in residential areas... etc.’¹⁷³ The municipal council, which due to the presence of a relatively large number of affluent European settlers possessed a relatively high degree of independence from the British authorities, was however severely underrepresented by the non-white populations of the city. Historians Anders Eise and Kristin Eise in their work ‘The City Makers of Nairobi’ stress that traditional scholarship on the urban history of Nairobi has focused on the idea that Africans both from central Kenya and the Coast were too much subjected to imperial rule. In their work, they make the point that they were just as much ‘makers’ of the city as the white population.¹⁷⁴ Although denied formal representation they were actors in their own right involved in the transformation of the city. Decision-making that emanated from the Municipal bodies lacked direct representation by Kikuyu, Kamba, Maasai, or the mixed urbanized Africans. The Indian community although better represented was circumscribed in their representation. Nairobi developed as a racially segregated city where a divide arose between the white, affluent, politically well-represented ‘uphill’ people and all others who were deliberately excluded from living in the city notwithstanding its governance. Lack of political power ensured that the urban structure of the city and the eventual establishment of a national park was to be the creation of a

¹⁷² Ibid, 90.

¹⁷³ Hake, *African Metropolis*, 38.

¹⁷⁴ Eise and Eise, *City Makers of Nairobi*, Kobo Edition.

small minority. The NNP as a notable feature of the city, would in the future become a racially segregated entity, much like the rest of the city.

7. Urban Life and Wildlife

During the early years of British ‘pacification’ of East Africa’s interior, game laws were enacted to restrict access to westerners, motivated by fears of stirring Maasai or Kamba aggression. Sportsmen were feared to be disruptive. The Imperial British East Africa Company (IBEAC) which governed the country between 1888-1895 was only able to maintain a staff of 117, which limited effective law enforcement. By 1892, sporting regulations opened up and licenses were issued for larger game. In particular, the management of elephants and rhinoceroses would become problematic and contentious. The IBEAC attempted to promote conservation however due to a lack of administrative funds it resorted to levying duties on ivory exports.¹⁷⁵ Responsibility for declining populations was mostly blamed on African hunters and Afrikaners. These statements were picked up by the SPFE, even though the IBEAC itself was notorious for ivory-related corruption itself. Nevertheless, the issue of ivory smuggling became an important motivating factor for organizations like the SPFE to lobby in favor of establishing national parks.¹⁷⁶ Local concerns and realities were often brushed aside. Problems with overpopulation of elephants in certain places were often ignored.

Initially, policies designed to protect wildlife were based on an important distinction between desirable and undesirable wildlife. Dwindling numbers of antelope at key areas such as the site of Enkare Nyrobe served as important yardsticks. Lions, leopards, cheetahs, hyenas, and painted dogs were considered pests. The distinction made in imperial legislature in the African context dates back to the Dutch in the Cape Colony (1684) who protected hippopotamuses and considered lions vermin. In British East Africa, for a long time, the colonial government did

¹⁷⁵ Ofcansky, *Paradise Lost*, 3-4.

¹⁷⁶ Steinhart, *Black Poachers, White Hunters*, 156-158.

not impose any restrictions concerning the killing of lions. During this era there is an almost universal acknowledgment of the terror inflicted by lions, justifying indiscriminate killing.¹⁷⁷

In 1896 British Foreign Secretary Lord Salisbury, a lover of wildlife, was in communication with Sir Arthur Harding, Kenya's Commissioner, discussing what types of regulations should be enacted, including the creation of game reserves, specifying bag limits, or levying a high license fee.¹⁷⁸ New draft legislation was discussed between London and the new colonial government in Zanzibar to turn large territories into a reserve and to increase the licensing fees for hunters. These proposals were however met with resistance from the European community who disliked regulations that favored wealthier hunters.¹⁷⁹ Additionally, there was strong pushback from the settler community who decried the damage done by wildlife on their farms.¹⁸⁰ A strong impetus in favor of wildlife protection was created by 1900 when an International Conference for the Preservation of the Wild Animals, Birds, and Fishes of the African Continent was held in London. The issue of wildlife protection gained momentum. Two major reserves were set up in 1900, roughly the size of England. The Southern Game Reserve was established and banned all forms of hunting within but the Maasai were still allowed to live side by side with the wildlife.¹⁸¹ The northernmost tip, which would eventually become the NNP, came to be known as the Nairobi Commonage as it fell under the Southern Reserve territory. The administration however remained constrained with limited resources to enforce legislation, as the preservation of wild animals was still seen by many as 'eccentric'.¹⁸² These advances were celebrated but as the country was still being 'pacified', the permanent threat of

¹⁷⁷ Roosevelt, *African Game Trails*, 18.

¹⁷⁸ Ofcansky, *Paradise Lost*, 6.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 9.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 11.

¹⁸¹ Anderson and Grove, *Conservation in Africa*, 152.

¹⁸² Ofcansky, *Paradise Lost*, 14.

rebellion or resistance made it expensive and undesirable to invest heavily in an effective wildlife protection law enforcement regime.

Historian Edward Steinhart argues that in the period 1925-1945 the impetus for the creation of national parks is mainly nurtured from the metropole or the capitals of the Anglo-American world. However, according to him, there appeared to be ‘a dialectical process occurring, a give and take between center and periphery’. There was a colonial movement, comprised not of people from the aristocracy and/or elite, who were very active in achieving the creation of national parks. Both the elite and non-elites shared however two important assumptions. Firstly, they both believed that the desire to effectively protect wildlife could only have been achieved working through the institutions of imperial governance and not outside of it. Secondly, both share the belief that: ‘the creation of nature and wildlife sanctuaries had to be modeled on the aristocratic hunting parks of eighteenth-century Britain and their ideological progeny, the new national parks such as Yellowstone in the United States’.¹⁸³ Thus in the case of the NNP, lobbying efforts by the SPFE worked in tandem with action on the ground by people like Mervyn Cowie and Captain Ritchie, whose involvement in the process will be intensively dealt with in the last section of the thesis.

Initially more encompassing than merely the Commonage, lobbying efforts by the SPFE in transforming (sections) of the NNP were already underway. Discussions with the Colonial Office in 1928 about the distinction between a national park and an ordinary reserve were already commonplace, as well as the potential forced removal of Maasai from the Southern Reserve. Recommendations were sent to the Secretary of State for the Colonies to turn the entire Southern Game reserve into a national park. The request was received badly by the head of the

¹⁸³ Steinhart, *Black Poachers, White Hunters*, 174.

colonial office Lord Passfield who was a socialist and was therefore unfavorable to the plight of the aristocracy.¹⁸⁴ The SPFE faced differing sets of challenges in their lobbying activities.

8. Finding an Equilibrium: The National Park

On Christmas Eve 1946 the '*Official Gazette*' of Nairobi announced the official proclamation of the NNP.¹⁸⁵ The northernmost territory of the former Southern Game Reserve was from that point transformed into a protected area under the governance of the Game Department colonial administration and the Nairobi Municipal Council no longer had direct control over this territory.

As expressed by Steinhart 'although the initial impetus had often come from landed aristocrats in Britain, the local Kenya preservationists, while enjoying aristocratic support, were led by commoners like Mervyn Cowie and Captain Archie Ritchie.'¹⁸⁶ The last chapter will focus on the limited source material available about the gradual progression of the establishment of the park on a local level. The viewpoints of Cowie and Ritchie feature centrally. Mervyn Cowie used to live on a farm on the Western edge of the park which is the northwestern highest boundary of the Southern Game Reserve.¹⁸⁷ Mervyn Cowie describes how in the years he was a student in Oxford when coming back he witnessed the disappearance of animals and the increases in urbanization through the construction of homes and the grazing of more cattle.¹⁸⁸ He claims that this motivated his determination. The diminishing sizes of the herds are with him as with many writers' notable signs of, what they perceived as environmental destruction, which prompted them to move into action. The following excerpt from his memoirs demonstrates his vision:

¹⁸⁴ Steinhart, *Black Poachers, White Hunters*, 178.

¹⁸⁵ Cowie, *I walk with Lions*, 149.

¹⁸⁶ Steinhart, *Black Poachers, White Hunters*, 190.

¹⁸⁷ Cowie, *I walk with Lions*, 33

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 55-57.

‘It was a most valuable demonstration of what a national park would mean to Kenya. In spite of war restrictions, important visitors were taken to see the lions. It was something quite unique for the town of Nairobi to have on its doorstep a display of wild animals as exciting and interesting as the scene at Lone Tree. Nowhere in the world could one go to a city and find almost within the shadow of its post office a wild life area in its natural state. On the one side were roads, shops, offices, railways, motorcars, and everything that goes with civilization. On the other side were the open plains, trees, and waving grass and lions. This as clearly a case to the old and the new living side by side, and for the time being- but only for the time being- living at peace’.¹⁸⁹

Another problem that advocates of the NNP faced was the presence of herds of livestock on the territory. There were a number of Somali families living on the grounds of the Nairobi Commonage, who Cowie did not believe had a right to live one. His personal views are of course not relevant, but they merely serve to demonstrate how he was motivated to have them either removed or their herds reduced. The Somali servicemen had served the British Crown under Queen Victoria at the end of the 19th century and claimed to have been given the right to graze their cattle in the commonage for their service. The fact that the Municipal Council had difficulty having them removed proves that their claims were valid. Cowie stressed the problem of overgrazing by natives and the resulting land erosion.¹⁹⁰ Even though it was originally the Maasai who had grazed these lands, for Cowie the attempts to curtail the Somali’s activity would prove to be quintessential to achieving his desired outcomes.

The two World Wars would prove to be significant periods in the development of the park and the city of Nairobi. Between 1914-1918 Nairobi became the staging ground for the campaign against German Tanganyika. The main road in the National Park was originally constructed by

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, 124.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, 76.

prisoners of war. It connects the city of Nairobi with a military depot in a place that is now called Mbagathi. Wildlife populations in the park dwindled as a consequence of the war because they were increasingly used to feed troops and prisoners of war.

In 1925, to the north of the Park, Wilson airport was established. Pilots were always warned that ‘antelopes would wander about the aerodrome occasionally’.¹⁹¹ The newly established airport meant that the area remained significant during the Second World War. Between 1939-1945 the same location was used for a military transport camp.¹⁹² The territory was used to train African transport drivers. There were troops from many countries stationed and Nairobi would house Italian war prisoners from the northern campaign in Abyssinia. Again, wildlife populations plummeted due to the need for rations by troops and prisoners of war. The territory of the commonage was used as a staging ground. Moreover, disruptions of global trade links, as well as swelling of army personnel of Nairobi, increased hunting for food. After the war ended, wildlife populations quickly rebounded.

In 1933 a Royal Commission which dealt with the use of land came to conclude in favor of supporting the idea of converting the Nairobi Commonage into a national park.¹⁹³ The idea was spearheaded by Kenya’s Game Warden, Captain Archie Ritchie. He was a British officer originally recruited from Australia with a strong military background. He would end up being game warden for two decades. His military background allowed the flourishing of a more marshal tradition in the department. Significantly, he put an increased focus on game control to make the relationship of the department more symbiotic with the agricultural community.¹⁹⁴ In 1933 Great Britain signed an International Convention committing the colonies to establish

¹⁹¹ Hake, *African Metropolis*, 29.

¹⁹² Cowie, *I walk with Lions*, 116.

¹⁹³ Ibid, 57.

¹⁹⁴ Steinhart, *Black Poachers, White Hunters*, 160-161.

national parks.¹⁹⁵ A New York-based Committee sponsored by Kermit Roosevelt was monitoring abuses of game laws by US game hunters in East Africa and was providing information on US and Canadian Game protection laws. The actions of people like Cowie and Ritchie were complemented by international lobby activities emanating from Great Britain as well as the United States.

Cowie expressed no opposition to the game laws and how they were being administered but understood that the fauna stood no chance against the disappearance of space due to economic development. He desired therefore to establish parks to be maintained with the idea of permanence rather than the flexibility and impermanence.¹⁹⁶ The Secretary of State for the Colonies had issued a directive in which he believed that national parks should remain places where shooting would be allowed and that they should not be developed to attract tourists and visitors. This was met by people like Cowie and Ritchie as a blow to their efforts. Development was always prioritized.¹⁹⁷ The territory of the Nairobi commonage was attractive because it housed a wide variety of wildlife, yet the lands were not suitable for agriculture. The only active people were the Somali.¹⁹⁸

In 1937 Cowie was appointed honorary game warden. He became more vocal in criticizing the Colonial Government's wildlife protection policy. On May 21st, 1938 he managed to persuade the Nairobi's Municipal Council to have the Somalis living on the Commonage have their cattle reduced to eight hundred.¹⁹⁹ However, the council did not have the resources to enforce the ruling. Cowie started to act more boldly to muster support for his cause. The most prominent endeavor was to feed a group of lions near the so-called Kisserian valley. He named the mother

¹⁹⁵ Cowie, *I walk with Lions*, 57.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 59-60.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 73-75.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 75-76.

¹⁹⁹ Ofcansky, *Paradise Lost*, 87.

lioness Lulu, who together with her cubs became important tools in Cowie's lobbying efforts. He started to take notable opponents of the national park to visit Lulu and her cubs, including important dignitaries such as Sir Robert Brooke-Popham who was governor between 1937-1940.²⁰⁰ He details the enthusiasm he was able to gather in his memoirs, yet government inaction remained. He resorted to more extreme tactics to create the necessary momentum in favor of establishing a national park. In 1939 Cowie wrote a letter to the *East African Standard* under the pseudonym 'Old Settler'. In which he advocated the wholesale destruction of wildlife.

201

'How can any progress be made in a new farming country unless the danger and damage by game is removed? What was the object of keeping thousands of useless creatures merely to eat all the grass that cattle should have, or to spoil crops or kill livestock. Better to rid the land of all this nonsense. Put the army on to destroying them with machine guns; it would be good training practice. Destroy the females so that they could breed no more. Put down poison for all the predators.'²⁰²

The letter was met with a public outcry among the affluent of the Nairobi community. More people became favorable of the idea of establishing a permanent park. The momentum Cowie had created was however negatively impacted by the realities of the outbreak of World War II. The Game Policy Committee ceased its activities because its constituent members had to serve in the military. The promising situation of 1939 was therefore delayed until the end of the war.²⁰³

During the Second World War, the territory was once again used for military purposes. Yet the lions were visited by the Nairobi population more than ever. Public opinion however swayed

²⁰⁰ Ibid, 88.

²⁰¹ Cowie, *I walk with Lions*, 79.

²⁰² Ibid, 79-80.

²⁰³ Steinhart, *Black Poachers, White Hunters*, 186.

against the establishment of a park so close to an urban center because of a few incidents with lions. The remains of an Askari soldier were found near the lion's den. Resentment towards the lions near Nairobi quickly grew. People could not accept such a dangerous area being next to a suburb.²⁰⁴ The lions in the end were killed. They had become comfortable with motorized vehicles and accustomed to being fed by animals. People walking outside their cars had become a problem. The belief was that wildlife could better be protected as they would grow accustomed to vehicles. The significance of motor vehicles and their relatively high density in Nairobi should be stressed. The first had arrived in the early 1900's but only by the 1920's they would become dominant in the development of the city and would be used by ordinary citizens. Nairobi had the reputation of being the most motor-ridden town in the world proportionately to its white population, the ratio being somewhere of one motor car to every two Europeans.²⁰⁵ The affluence of the citizenry allowed for a relatively swift adaptation of the citizens to visit the park and other areas by car, this could be interpreted as an important factor in the relative ease with which the populace could be persuaded into transforming the Commonage into a Park.

In 1946 Cowie was appointed Executive of the Kenya National Parks as well as a member of the Board of Trustees. But there were not yet any official national parks nor was there any money. The Trustees received 100,000 pounds for the "development, maintenance, and management of the Kenya National Parks, for all time,"²⁰⁶ In August 1946 Ken Beaton was appointed Warden of the NNP, which did not exist yet.²⁰⁷ Cowie claims, that despite the official declaration that a park would be founded, government officials deliberately attempted to delay progress. Official reasons were invented of every conceivable kind to hold up progress.

²⁰⁴ Cowie, *I walk with Lions*, 125.

²⁰⁵ Hake, *African Metropolis*, 27.

²⁰⁶ Cowie, *I walk with Lions*, 144.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 164.

“Provision must be made for cattle coming into Nairobi for slaughter,” they said. “A means must be found for accommodating the Somali families who live on the commonage.” “The police rifle range must retain a danger zone well over the proposed National Park.” “A public road runs through the Park, and an alternative route must first be found.” “The remnants of the military war camps must be removed...”²⁰⁸ The ultimate impediments to achieving his goals were created by a senior officer in the Land Office who had to provide approval for the official boundary demarcation. A junior surveyor had already approved the figures. Cowie claims that it was his eagerness that may have proven to be problematic as it was bureaucratic rules that were challenged by a young upstart. He did not know the exact reason but expected that officials involved with establishing the first national park would not want to be blamed if anything went wrong. Cowie waited outside and an angry official quickly signed a half-torn-off document which he threw at him. He quickly drove to the offices of the Official Gazette which published the proclamation on Christmas Eve 1946.²⁰⁹ In 1947 the NNP had become a reality as British East Africa’s first National Park.

For the newly established National Park, a set of rules and regulations was set up to govern the behavior of visitors. Visitors could only enter by automobile not by foot or on horseback. This was met with resistance, as the freedom that people had to do what they wanted in reserves was curtailed. The reasoning was that lions and other mammals had to get accustomed to no longer fearing automobiles. It was thought that this could ‘theoretically’ prevent the animals from moving into the Nairobi suburbs.²¹⁰

After pressuring the government, officers started to pressure the Somali to reduce their cattle.²¹¹

In response to these attempts, Cowie received death threats. His main objective was to have all

²⁰⁸ Ibid, 146.

²⁰⁹ Ibid, 147-149.

²¹⁰ Ibid, 151.

²¹¹ Ibid, 156.

livestock removed in order to counter overgrazing, but this was not possible. The Somali were afforded these rights as a pension by the British crown, thus in order to achieve its goals he had to compromise with the Municipal Council. It was agreed that there would be a de-stock to reduce the cattle in order to make the overgrazing problem go away. The Somali remained in the park for a while but with reduced numbers of livestock. Cowie notes however there were remarkably few incidents of cattle being eaten by lions.²¹²

The Western portion of the park had originally been a forest reserve that was enjoyed by riders. Cowie and the Trustees were petitioned by the elite to keep allowing them to enter the park. The management of the Park was however strongly in favor of keeping riders out.²¹³ A rider who protested led Cowie to the Governor's office, demanding her 'rights' were to be protected. She even petitioned the Queen. The prohibition against riding in the park was motivated by the advice of the visiting Game Warden of the Kruger National Park in South Africa. The warden had himself been attacked by a lion while riding and therefore cautioned Cowie to limit the potential for conflict with the animals.²¹⁴ In the face of the new reality of the NNP, the Nairobi elite had some of its privileges curtailed in favor of wildlife in the newly created park.

Conclusion

American insecurities surrounding their cultural and political identity were important motivating factors in their commitment to protecting 'untouched' pristine wildernesses their ancestors had ventured and conquered. A historical unwillingness to self-identify as an imperial power but rather a democratic nation would prove central to the development of the historiography of the National Park concept. The idea spread throughout the world and it got implemented in many places. American scholars lauded it as America's best idea. From the

²¹² Ibid, 161.

²¹³ Ibid, 152.

²¹⁴ Ibid, 145, 152.

1990's sharp criticism of the concept started to mount. The supposed emptiness and pristine of the lands that were turned into the park were questioned. The complete erasure and removal of Native American presence were largely ignored and proved to be problematic in the long run, as park services made mistakes in managing the lands, failing to learn from those who managed before them.

For wildlife conservationists, the idea that national parks could serve as wildlife sanctuaries was first taken by elite hunters. The near-extinct bison was given refuge in Yosemite and thus inspired others around the world that took part in these knowledge networks. In other imperial spaces, elites took notice of American developments. The British aristocracy motivated by its status anxieties ventured into Africa. The pressures of industrialization, urbanization, and democratization resulted in anxiety about the loss of centuries-old privileges and livelihoods. Aristocrats moved to places like Kenya but equally people organized through organizations like the SPFE. Losing their privileges at home they attacked African natives and non-elite settlers like Afrikaners for being responsible for wildlife destruction in East Africa. The network of aristocrats became globally influential in lobbying its networks trying to get lands set aside in colonial spaces for the protection of wildlife where the exclusive hunting traditions of the British upper classes would serve as the leading principle.

When the British in the 1880's constructed the Uganda railway they encountered vast herds of wildlife in a place that was called Enkare Nyrobo. Many believed it to be the last remnants of a Pleistocene long lost in the rest of the world. The reality was that they encountered the remains of what had not that long ago been the regional civilizational supremacy of Maasai pastoralism. A succession of disasters had annihilated populations and made British so-called pacification easier. The lands were teeming with wildlife in part because livestock had disappeared. The swampy cool waters of the area became the unfortunate site of a city which, being an ill-planned encampment for the continuation of the railway was marred by disease. However, the lack of

financial gains as a consequence of the railway opened up the motivation for the promotion of white settlement in particular by white upper-class individuals. Turning the ‘barren wasteland’ into a White settler’s paradise. Nairobi became a socially stratified city where the large Indian population as well as Swahili, Somali, Kikuyu, Kamba, Maasai, and others were kept strictly aside from the white affluent people. African urbanization was long-time kept at bay for fears of developing a conscious class that could challenge British supremacy. Decisions regarding urban development of the city were therefore long-time dominated by a small minority.

Nairobi became therefore a city with a relatively small affluent imperial elite. Many of them sportsmen, who enjoyed the privileges and wished to preserve them. At the same time, the rapidly dwindling wildlife was all too apparent. The synthesis of the aristocratic settler class were the visiting hunting parties including from the US like Roosevelt, as well as the lobbying efforts of members of the SPFE. All represented elite efforts in the creation of the national parks based on the American model but with British administrative practices. Whereas American Parks were initially intended to protect the grandeur of their scenery, African Parks were modeled to protect wildlife. Though Transimperial exchanges occurred creating the space necessary for the creation of the park, the actions of individuals such as Mervyn Cowie and Arthur Ritchie cannot be ignored. They were interested in hunting and shared a love for wildlife beyond hunting. What was shared, however, with the Transimperial elite was a general lack of respect for native practices, be it grazing or hunting. Blaming the disappearance of species mostly on locals. Their efforts culminated in the eventual declaration of the Nairobi National Park in December 1946.

The transformational experience of the local environment of Enkare Nyrobe into what we now know as Metropolitan Nairobi needs not only to be understood through local realities and adaptations. A traditional archival historiographical approach that would detail the incremental steps taken by the British administration would overlook the significance of Transimperial

exchanges. Stephen Tuffnell's essay arguing in favor of a Transimperial approach to the Uganda Railway demonstrates how the American empire functioned in interplay with the British. And what has long been understood as a 'peripheral region in Africa' to American interest during the age of European Great power competition, America role needs to be re-evaluated by adopting a Transimperial perspective. American innovative engineering was influential in the creation of the railway that transformed East Africa and ushered in the creation of Nairobi and eventually the NNP. Ideas about wildlife protection through National Parks are equally spread through these Transimperial designs. I, therefore, argue in favor of allowing Transimperialism to enter into the realm of environmental history. The extension of the NNP as a conduit of the railway, therefore, bears proof of the validity of this approach. The recently Chinese-built, elevated railway cutting through the Park serves as proof that Kenya's history as the centerground for Transimperial design has never ended.

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