

California Studies in Critical Human Geography

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Imposing Wilderness

Struggles over Livelihood and
Nature Preservation in Africa

Roderick P. Neumann



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of Togo began to weaken in 1991, rural residents, angered by an historical pattern of repression and dislocation, chased away national park officials and proceeded to reoccupy Keran National Park (Lowry and Donahue 1994).

One of the African governments' responses to these threats has been to step up the level of state violence in the name of conservation. A report from the Botswana Christian Council claimed that "Bushmen" suspected of hunting on their former lands were sadistically tortured by wildlife and parks officers (Kelso 1993).² In Togo, there have been accusations of the park service using helicopters to shoot poachers in Keran National Park (Lowry and Donahue 1994). French soldiers admitted killing wounded poachers brought down by their guns in the Central African Republic (Colchester 1994). As tensions rise, a general trend toward militarizing protected areas is evident. Tanzania's National Park agency has created a "paramilitary" unit "governed by the paramilitary disciplinary code of conduct" (TANAPA 1994, 63) to defend its protected areas against local communities. In some cases, such as Kenya (Peluso 1993) and southern Africa (Ellis 1994), the militarization of conservation has overlapped with state repression of minority ethnic groups and liberation movements.

Antagonisms between African states and rural communities over conservation policies are high, in part, because there is a great deal at stake economically and ecologically. Nature tourism is one of the top foreign exchange earners for several sub-Saharan countries, including Botswana, Zimbabwe, and Kenya. In Tanzania, the system of national parks and protected areas is the key attraction for both foreign investors and international tourists. Tourism was the country's fastest-growing industry in the first half of the 1990s, fueled by a large influx of foreign capital (Neumann 1995a). The government hopes to more than double foreign exchange earnings, from \$205 million in 1995 to \$570 million in 2005 (EIU 1996). National politicians and international financial advisers view revenues from nature tourism as vital to an economy burdened by \$8 billion in external debt. The continued interest of investors is, to an important degree, dependent on the suppression of conflicting claims to land and resources at Tanzania's ecotourism destinations.

In ecological terms, conservationists see national parks as the final sanctuaries for threatened wildlife populations and their habitats. Most visibly, the continent-wide populations of African elephant (*Loxodonta africana*) and black rhino (*Diceros bicornis*) dropped precipitously in

the 1980s (see e.g., Ricciuti 1993). Tanzania is of particular concern to international conservationists, not only because of the status of its elephant and rhino, but for its ecological richness in general. Superlatives dominate their accounts of its flora and fauna. A recent World Wide Fund for Nature document calls Tanzania "one of the most important countries in the world for conservation" (WWF 1990, 3). Its forests are "of great biological importance," its major parks have "outstanding universal value," and its coral reefs are "among the richest in the world" (7-10). Despite the state having set aside extensive areas for protection, conservationists in previous decades witnessed a steep decline in some of Tanzania's wildlife populations. In the mid-1980s, its elephant population dropped by more than 50 percent. Illegal hunting decimated 98 percent of the black rhino population so that only a few hundred remain. In cases where wildlife species are in danger of extirpation or even extinction, some conservationists believe that the only recourse is to essentially declare war on the groups and individuals deemed responsible (Peluso 1993; Bonner 1993).

Contextualizing Protected Area Conflicts

While state violence is pervasive and even escalating in particular locales, there is a growing movement within international conservation organizations and national agencies to implement a "new approach" to conservation in Africa (see Neumann 1997a). Local resistance to the loss of land and resource access has pushed conservationists and state officials to reassess coercive park and wildlife protection policies. During the first two decades of independence, peasants and pastoralists relentlessly confronted the newly trained African conservation officials with challenges to park and wildlife laws. Additionally, writers from a variety of social science disciplines began in the 1980s to sharply criticize the implementation of national park policies for their disregard of local property claims and human rights (see e.g., Marks 1984; Arhem 1985; Collett 1987; Turton 1987). Stung by these criticisms and faced with a hostile and increasingly militant rural populace, conservationist literature began to emphasize the need to reconcile wildlife conservation with the needs of local people (see, e.g., Dasmann 1984; McNeely and Miller 1984; Miller 1984; McNeely and Pitt 1985; Kiss 1990). It has since become de rigueur to emphasize "local participa-

colonial officials identified mixed Maasai-Meru *bomas* in the Ngare Nanyuki area.¹¹

This expansive land claim offered certain opportunities for the organization of production because of the ecological diversity it encompassed. Just prior to European conquest in the late nineteenth century, the Meru were farming bananas, maize, sweet potatoes, beans, and millet and grazing their cattle in fallow fields and in the forests and grasslands of the mountain. Settlement was concentrated on the southern midslope of the mountain in the fertile banana zone between 1,220 to 1,830 meters elevation. Akheri, Poli, Mulala, and Nkoaranga were the principal villages in this area. The grounds immediately surrounding individual houses were interplanted with a wide variety of crops, including numerous varieties of banana, the principal staple. The fertile volcanic soils, augmented by a system of manuring and ditch irrigation, produced ample and continuous harvests. Fields of annual maize crops were planted farther from the homestead. Meru farmers took advantage of the extreme variations in elevation and climate on the mountain by planting crops in different areas during different seasons. Rainfall on Mount Meru is determined by the monsoons in combination with local topography. The large majority of the rainfall occurs in the transitional periods between the monsoons when the Intertropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ) moves across the area, resulting in two seasons of rain: the long rains in late March through May and the short rains in December. The southeasterlies bring the long rains, and therefore the southern slopes get substantially more rainfall, increasing with elevation. To assure a constant supply of agricultural produce and to insure against crop failures, the Meru developed a multiple-plot system and staggered agricultural calendar. For example, maize was planted in highland plots in July and August to be harvested in February and March and in lowland plots in February and March to be harvested in July and August.

The variations in climate and elevation also allowed great seasonal flexibility in livestock grazing. Both the arid lowlands and the highland forests and grasslands were an integral part of the established grazing regime. The northern grasslands and salt licks of Ngare Nanyuki were a critical component of the Meru economy, and cattle owners in central Meru would often have their herd in the care of a relative there. "Milk, butter and meat-on-the-hoof, and animals for ceremonial occasions and compensation purposes in the customary settlement of grievances or for marriage contracts between families, all found their way back from

north Meru" (Nelson 1967, 15). They moved their cattle seasonally and the forest and higher elevation grasslands provided grazing for Meru herds, most critically as reserves during the dry season and extended periods of drought. The lowlands down to Mbuguni in the south provided grazing during the wet season for much of Meru.

The basic land designation in their system of permanent agriculture was the *kihamba* (pl. *vihamba*), individually held cultivated plots of land initially cleared from bush and forest. The individual making the initial claim to a piece of land, including land not under cultivation but slated for future expansion, had exclusive rights to cultivate and graze livestock there. The *kihamba* of the pioneer settler would become the site of the clan's ancestral shrine, maintained at that location by successive generations. With each generation the land under cultivation would be expanded as sons established new households outside those of their fathers. Descendants remained joined to the land and to their families through the maintenance of the ancestral shrines. These patrilineal descent groups, herein referred to as clans, were the principal social unit involved in regulating and managing access to land and resources. Clan elders in council settled land disputes and inheritance claims for their clan. Additionally, land use in and around the shrine sites, as mentioned above, was strictly controlled by the clan concerned. An Mbise elder explained that at the Mbise-Nnko shrine site in Mount Meru Crater, "the whole area was off-limits for any use at all, and the Mbise clan were looking after people keeping hives at Njeku or starting fires. They would fine offenders one cow, two sheep, and *pombe*."¹² Land thus embodied a moral order, which linked the living with their ancestors and social identity with a history forged in place.

Gathering materials in the forest was also an important part of Meru economy. As will become clear in subsequent chapters, honey, building materials, fuelwood, and medicines collected in the forest were crucial elements in household production and reproduction strategies. Hunting wild animals was of lesser importance and, especially among the cattle-keeping clans, was probably looked down upon as a food source. Elephant (*Loxodonta africana*), trapped in large pits, were generally only eaten by elders and the young for ceremonial and medicinal purposes respectively. Rhino (*Diceros bicornis*) were for the most part ignored as a meat source. Waterbuck (*Kobus ellipsiprymnus*) and bushbuck (*Tragelaphus scriptus*) were hunted using rope snares, but were relatively unimportant protein sources compared with livestock, except

grazing species, there are no population estimates, though qualitative assessments (Thorsell 1982) and anecdotal information suggest that their numbers, as well as those of eland, have been significantly reduced.²

In fact, drawing any conclusions about the ecological status of the park in general is problematic. No major ecological research has been conducted in the park since the early 1970s when Vesey-FitzGerald was stationed at the park as a government scientist. A study of the dynamics of the park's giraffe population conducted in 1979-80 predicted that the species' numbers were likely to decline (Pratt and Anderson 1982). For rhinoceros, also a major browsing species, only qualitative evidence for their decline exists. For example, seventeen animals were seen congregated in Ngurdoto Crater alone in 1961,³ but there has not been a publicly documented sighting in the entire park since the mid-1980s. The extirpation of rhinoceros is the one conclusion concerning wildlife populations that can be made with any certainty despite the lack of empirical research. The management of the national park is conducted within this informational vacuum.

Park Management and Planning

The fact that much of the park is secondary vegetation presents some tricky management questions concerning what is being protected. The national park ideal is to preserve nature, a concept that implicitly assumes that the area to be protected is "natural," a difficult proposition on Mount Meru considering the long history of human influence on the land. An attempt by Arusha National Park's first and only scientific officer, Vesey-FitzGerald, to clarify the park's overall objectives alludes to the dilemmas and confusion surrounding the protection of nature there: "The objective is the restoration of a state of naturalness, but first of all it is necessary to establish what is a state of naturalness. It is not a pristine condition—no such has existed on this explosive landscape. It is not the man-degraded habitat that Tanzania National Parks acquired. It is a state of harmony between the existing topography and the existing plants and animals. It is an ever-changing state related to the erosion cycle, plant succession and the impact of animals on their environment. It is 'the balance of nature,' if you like, but the balance of nature swings."⁴ This halting attempt to outline park

objectives takes us to the heart of the contradictions presented when romanticized, ill-defined notions such as "harmony between topography, plants, and animals" and "balance of nature" collide with the reality of ecological change and the historical role of human society in shaping "nature."

Regardless of the difficulties in defining the term "natural," it is clear that the ecology of large portions of Arusha National Park was shaped by human activities. The gazetting of the park and the exclusion of humans, then, meant the removal of major ecological influences and subsequent changes in the park's ecology. Changes in vegetation mean changes in wildlife habitat, and some species benefit while others may eventually be excluded. The general strategy has been to "let nature take its course," except in the ironic case of vegetation clearing by the park staff in order to maintain opportunities for tourists to view wildlife.⁵ It is ironic because the park staff is forced to clear brush once held in check with the help of livestock grazing and burning, two of the activities that the park administration has fought hard to exclude. Meru peasants living nearby are hired as casual labor by the park administration to cut and burn the glades that their parents and grandparents once maintained through their livestock-herding practices.

Beyond the sporadic effort to keep back the brush, the government has taken little direct action in ecological monitoring or management of the park. For most of its existence the park has been administered without a management plan, and day-to-day operations are guided by broad national park policies and the inclinations of individual wardens, who even into the early 1980s had not been trained at CAWM. Since TANAPA policy is to frequently rotate the assignments of its park wardens, park management strategy has been less than stable. Furthermore, management difficulties were compounded throughout the 1980s by a perennial fiscal crisis in the agency set against the backdrop of overall decline in the Tanzanian economy. The infrastructure of the park deteriorated and staffing was inadequate. The Arusha National Park warden's monthly report of October 1986 complained that most guard posts had only one ranger (the guard post at Nasula was not staffed at all for most of the year)⁶ and therefore effective patrols could not be mounted.⁷ The inadequate support for natural resource law enforcement meant that "the poachers are getting away," the warden wrote.⁸ Without sufficient funds from the central government, the park was often left without a vehicle for lack of petrol or spare parts, and payrolls for what staff there were were not met.⁹ A survey conducted at the park

in the early 1980s found that "salary payments to park staff have been irregular with delays of up to three months experienced. Uniforms were seen on only two members of the staff. Morale and discipline problems have increased" (Thorsell 1982).

Since the mid-1980s, administrative conditions at the park have vastly improved. The budget for TANAPA has been increased considerably in recent years, and by 1990 Arusha had by far the highest expenditure per square kilometer in the eleven- (now twelve-) park system, nearly double that of the next highest. The size of the park staff has been increased and their level of training improved. During the period of my research, fifty-four rangers were on the payroll, and both the chief park warden and one of the assistant wardens had graduated from the program at CAWM.

Crimes against Nature

Not surprisingly, given the management situation, the late 1970s to the mid-1980s witnessed a dramatic decline in elephant numbers and the loss of rhinoceros to illegal trophy hunters. The Arusha National Park ranger and warden reports throughout the late 1970s describe finding shot rhino,¹⁰ but usually after the horn was long gone, and rarely were there arrests associated with commercial poaching. In fact, the two times that the reports even mentioned suspects in the rhino cases, the blame was directed toward the forest guards and game scouts,¹¹ as in this account: "Also one rhino was lost near the rest house. It was believed that this rhino was shot by the game scout from Oldonyo Sambu[,] who was pretending that he had come to look after the villagers' maize crop."¹² Arusha National Park differs significantly from the more famous East African protected areas like Selous Game Reserve and Serengeti National Park in that it has not experienced the sort of large-scale organized poaching operations for rhino horn and ivory found in those areas. This is due primarily to the small numbers of these two species on Mount Meru relative to the populations of larger parks in savanna habitat. In any event, it is widely acknowledged (Thorsell 1982; IUCN 1987, 825) that most of the commercial poaching for horn and tusks was conducted largely by people from outside the area (i.e., non-Meru).

While the loss of these species is a significant threat to the park, the

most persistent and widespread management problems relate more to the production and reproduction demands of surrounding Meru households. What little commercial poaching for horn and ivory there was at Arusha largely disappeared along with the elephants and rhinos. The natural-resource crimes that now plague the park administration are characteristic of the historical struggle over access to subsistence resources between Meru peasants and the state. The essence of the present situation is well represented in this 1979 log entry from the Rydon Farm Guard Post:

17/1: U. M.'s 35 goats were apprehended in the park. He was fined a total of 100 Tsh.

19/1: S. J. was found with four snares for trapping bushbuck. He was fined a total of 100 Tsh.

February: calm

1/3: S. S.'s 14 cattle, 11 goats and 10 sheep were caught in the park at 5:45 pm. He was fined a total of 50 Tsh.

11/3: four dogs shot dead in Ngongongare area.

1/4: M. A.'s 31 goats were caught in the park. He was fined a total of 50 Tsh on 2/4.

18/4: M. N. was apprehended cutting grass in the park. He was fined a total of 50 Tsh. One dog shot dead.

25/4: N. N. was apprehended grazing his livestock in the park. He was fined a total of 50 Tsh on 27/4.¹³

Though the situation varies from month to month and year to year, this passage is fairly characteristic of the types of natural-resource crimes that occur most frequently. The crimes—fuelwood collection, trapping for meat, grazing trespass, and cutting grass for livestock fodder or roofing—are essentially attempts by Meru peasant farmers to obtain from the park some basic resources critical to household production and reproduction strategies.

At present the management's problems with illegal hunting are centered on the trapping and shooting of wildlife for meat, often for local sale rather than direct consumption. In 1980 the warden reported, "Poaching is increasing day after day. This includes the hunting of warthogs and buffalo for meat to be sold in the villages." A market for game meat has developed in the communities surrounding the park,



Figure 10. The cultivation plots of Seneto Village abut the park boundary in the left foreground. (R. P. Neumann.)

[to collect fuelwood]. I used to allow people twice a month only; just the logs lying in the forest rotting. This was stopped in 1968, after Vesey-FitzGerald left. I just got a letter in 1968 from the park administration not to allow any person to enter the park to collect fuelwood.³⁹

As strongly as villagers assert that the government does not answer to the problems caused by the park, the park authorities accuse the villagers of not upholding the law. Government officials view the villagers' lack of enthusiasm for park policies as a demonstration of their ignorance of the value of wildlife conservation. Much like their colonial predecessors, state authorities present an implied and often explicit image of villagers as either backward peasants or as criminals. Officials blame the villagers for the decline in wildlife populations, either directly as poachers or indirectly for failing to report the activities of poachers coming from outside the area.

Peasant farmers living near the park have formulated their own discourse, elements of which are expressed above, which contests that of the state. When talking of the park's policies, villagers have strongly

held and readily expressed counter-notions of legality and justice. For example, a former ten-cell leader I spoke with was adamant that the park had no legal authority to prohibit access to the right-of-way through the park: "If the closure is legal, why was there no notice from the government? Why didn't they post any closure signs where the path enters the park?"⁴⁰

Residents often claimed that it was the park guards and game scouts who were responsible for the loss of commercially valuable wildlife. They pointed out that there had been an abundance of rhino in the area prior to the establishment of the park. They countered that it was the soldiers and police hired as rangers from outside the area who brought knowledge of how to profit from commercial poaching. As one villager observed dryly, "The rangers are the ones with the guns."⁴¹ An elder from Nasula explained, "Before the park started we used to graze our cattle with rhino. Then when the park was established, instead of taking care of rhinos, the rangers were the first ones to kill them. The park staff were involved in the loss of the rhinos and not the villagers. Even the park wardens who were transferred to this area were involved in poaching."⁴² Another villager claimed that the rangers do most of the poaching in cooperation with outsiders (*wageni*). He had watched them come and go from his plot on the boundary and claimed to know their routes and methods.⁴³ Finally, the village chairman of Seneto, arguing the irrationality (in terms of wildlife protection) of the right-of-way closure, declared that there were rhino before it was closed and that they disappeared afterward. "If the Wameru were responsible for killing the rhino, there wouldn't have been any for the park to protect in the first place. The animals started disappearing after the park."⁴⁴ Regardless of who is to "blame" for the disappearance of rhino, there is an inherent truth to these statements. Ironically, the park lands were much more intensively used four decades ago, both by European settlers and surrounding Meru peasant communities, than they are now. Yet at that time, the area boasted one of the highest population densities of rhino in East Africa.

Embedded in villagers' counter-discourse is an historically rooted mixture of bitterness and belligerence toward the state and its conservation efforts. To elaborate, much of Meru peasant understanding of the conflicts between themselves and the park is derived from their historical experiences with the colonial state. Throughout Meru, it was not uncommon for my conversations with villagers to turn spontaneously to the topic of the forced eviction from Ngare Nanyuki. The eviction and the way Meru leaders organized a response of passive resistance were

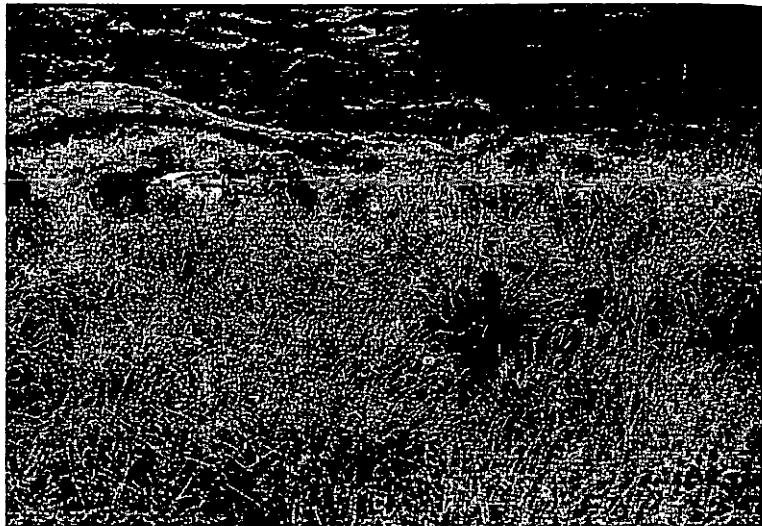


Figure 12. Two young girls herd their family's cattle along the boundary of the park (background) and Nasula Kitongoji. (R. P. Neumann.)

rotation of personnel, reducing the possibility for ties of friendship to develop. Second, park guards are not hired from the local population. Personnel are brought from outside the area to circumvent the problem of trying to sever ethnic or familial loyalties. As an example of what the government seeks to eliminate, one Meru farmer who worked as a guard in Arusha National Park in the early years told me that people in the villages "loved" him because he used to allow them to bring their livestock into the park.⁵² Finally, when hiring park rangers, the government does not necessarily look for strong conservation ideology, but rather selects people trained in the use of violence. Guards and rangers are recruited from the National Defense Force, the police, and prison guards.

Even though the social lives of the villagers and park staff are intertwined in numerous ways, and the guards are at times in a position of dependency in relation to the villagers, the villagers have not been successful in engaging them completely in a reciprocal relationship. This is due partly to the guards' dualistic social life as both community mem-

bers and enforcement agents for the state. Just as important, however, are the government's efforts to limit the possibilities for a relationship to develop, with one consequence being that park guards act inconsistently, sometimes operating according to the obligations of a "moral" relationship, at other times according to the formal and impersonal rules of modern bureaucracy. The result for the villagers is summed up clearly by a farmer who explained to me, "The rangers depend on the villagers for their livelihood. They come to us for milk, beans, and maize. But if there is any trouble with the park, they act like they don't know us."⁵³ The tension between the groups here is not over the exclusion of "outsiders" from the local "moral community," but over the outsiders' refusal to become fully integrated community members.

Within these shifting relationships of cooperation and animosity, dependence and autonomy, the Meru villagers make informal and illegal arrangements to gain access to resources. But these arrangements are risky and unreliable, because there are penalties if one is caught, and because villagers cannot depend upon the guards to hold up their end of the bargain. The new forms of land and resource allocation and control that emerged when the state entered the picture are unstable and unpredictable. Wardens and rangers are shifted frequently between posts. Sometimes villagers and staff are enemies, sometimes friends. Some villagers have the means to bargain for access, others do not. Unlike customary controls over access, there are no reliable rules or patterns of social behavior that would allow a household to plan for and depend upon the use of resources inside the park. In addition to the elements of instability and unpredictability, the moral economy is in a sense inverted. Where the moral economy operates to assure a minimum level of subsistence to even the poorest members of the community by providing access to communal lands and resources, in this case only those well off enough to have something to bargain with can gain access to park land and resources.

The nature of the relations between the park and surrounding villages does not bode well for wildlife. Although there is no ecological monitoring program within the park and almost no data exists on fluctuations in wildlife populations, some conclusions can be drawn concerning the state of wildlife conservation. The clearest conclusion is that the park has basically failed to protect populations of large mammals. This is especially true for commercially valuable species, such as elephants, whose numbers have fallen dramatically, and black rhinoceros, which

have been extirpated. Though commercial poaching for horn and tusks was apparently conducted mainly by people from outside the area, it would be difficult for it to take place without the knowledge of local villagers, if not their complicity. In fact several villagers made clear to me that they knew who the poachers were and how they operated. Since villagers find that the park is of no benefit to the village, and is often harmful, they have little interest in cooperating with state agencies in wildlife conservation efforts. Despite conservation authorities' claims to the contrary, residents believe that the government places the rights of animals above those of humans. Policies would seem to support this interpretation. The ramifications for community support are illustrated by a villager who told me: "If I heard a gunshot, or even if I saw someone shoot an animal right in front of me, I wouldn't tell them anything. The national park doesn't care about wild animals eating my crops; why should I care about their problems?"⁵⁴

Colonialism and the accompanying land alienations for European estates has interpenetrated another wave of meaning into the landscape of the park that deeply influences the Meru's interpretation of the struggle today. For the Meru living near the park and dependent upon its resources, the seizure of land by the independent state for conservation differs little in practical and symbolic terms from the initial loss of the same land to European estates. The Western bourgeois sensibility of "nature appreciation" is not a universal value, and the ideals of "Eden" supposedly embodied by Arusha National Park are, as yet, not a part of local consciousness in Meru.

For many Meru peasants, the loss of access to the land and resources inside the park is part of the larger historical process in Tanzania of the replacement of local, customary authority by centralized, state authority. The implementation of state wildlife conservation laws introduced not only a new set of social structures and institutions for controlling access to natural resources, it initiated a new dynamic within social relations that works against the interests of Meru peasants. It also imposed a new set of meanings on the land, a landscape of nature consumption, devoid of human history, that clashed with locally constructed meanings.

From the perspective of state officials, the villagers' activities are cause for alarm since they threaten park management goals. For park administrators, the root causes of these "threats" to the park include criminal intent, population growth, and a lack of understanding about

conservation by local residents. Administrators also see themselves lacking sufficient management capacity for responding to the challenges to authority. A recent Tanzania National Parks report cautions that there is also "an even more relentless threat, and that is the growth in the number of people inhabiting villages on the periphery of the national parks."⁵⁵

One solution is "to educate the masses of people in surrounding villages, to teach them that wildlife has an important part to play in the national heritage."⁵⁶ If park management were able to solidify its position by, for example, clearly marking its boundaries, then "[t]he present conflicts, caused when people enter the park for grazing or other illegal activities on the pretext of either not knowing the boundary or denying the passage of boundary lines because there are no clear markings, will be alleviated."⁵⁷

If the above passages imply that authorities view local residents with a mixture of suspicion and frustration, then the reports from the field confirm these sentiments. As revealed by the park reports, one need only step over the boundary line to be transformed into a "poacher": "Another poacher was arrested at the same area for entering the park without permission."⁵⁸ Lack of sympathy for the park's management problems is interpreted as a sign of local guilt: "This silence by the village leaders has led us to think that they are cooperating with poachers."⁵⁹ According to officials, the villagers' unwillingness to cooperate boils down to the fact that "few people are aware of the national park's importance."⁶⁰ The obvious solution is to help them see the light. "At this time action taken to reduce poaching was to visit and educate the ten cell leaders on the importance of conserving the environment by preventing livestock from getting in the park and destroying it."⁶¹ What conservation officials recognize as a lack of awareness and education is more profitably interpreted as a defense of customary rights of access and a struggle over the meaning and representation of the mountain's landscape.

The park administration sees Meru peasants "encroaching" on the national park. By viewing the situation from the "bottom up" (Blaikie 1985; Blaikie and Brookfield 1987), however, and within the historical context of state-mandated changes in land and resource use, it is the park that is seen to be encroaching on the Meru villages. For Meru peasants living near the park, the expanding park boundaries and legislated restrictions on movement and access to essential resources are the