

Transboundary conservation: the politics of ecological integrity in the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park

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Recent years have witnessed the emergence of an ostensibly surprising coalition of interests around the notion of Transboundary Natural Resource Management (TBNRM) in Southern Africa. Deep green ‘bioregionalists’, conservation biologists and neoliberal development advocates have found common cause in espousing the re-establishment of ecological integrity across ‘artificial’ frontiers and administrative boundaries. This concept has impacts far beyond the realms of biodiversity protection and ‘natural resource management’. It is bound up with regional debates on national sovereignty, land reform and poverty alleviation. This paper explores the ideological, political and economic rationales for TBNRM with particular reference to Zimbabwe’s involvement in the flagship Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park initiative spanning Zimbabwe, South Africa and Mozambique. It investigates the competing agendas, potential impacts and points of conflict surrounding the initiative at global, national and local levels, and explores the potential impacts on agrarian livelihoods.

Introduction

‘I know of no political movement, no philosophy, no ideology, which does not agree with the peace parks concept as we see it going into fruition today. It is a concept that can be embraced by all’.

Nelson Mandela¹

In the last five years in Southern Africa what at first sight appear to be a rather surprising coalition of interests have rapidly rallied around the recently emerged concept of Transboundary Natural Resource Management (TBNRM). There has been a massive channelling of funds into TBNRM in the region by a variety of donors. Consultants have been employed, reports produced, workshops and conferences convened and even inter-governmental agreements signed. Within this dynamic situation of many players and perspectives, an unlikely grouping of concepts and philosophies including radical environmentalism, conservation biology, and

¹ From Nelson Mandela’s speech at a ceremony to celebrate the translocation of elephants from Kruger National Park to Mozambique, 12/10/2001 (<http://www.peaceparks.org/content/newsroom/news>).

neoliberal economic agendas, as well as donor and NGO funding prerogatives, are coalescing around the rapid unfolding of transborder conservation initiatives. These initiatives have impacts far beyond the realms of biodiversity protection and ‘natural resource management’. They relate to debates on national sovereignty, land reform and poverty alleviation. In the Zimbabwean context it is perhaps particularly surprising, given the widely reported fast-track resettlement process and ongoing farm invasions, that moves are simultaneously being made to bring more land into the conservation estate.

In this paper I explore the ideological, political and economic rationales for TBNRM with particular reference to Zimbabwe’s involvement in the flagship Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park spanning Zimbabwe, South Africa and Mozambique. I attempt to uncover some of the competing agendas, potential impacts and points of conflict surrounding the initiative at global, national and local levels, and investigate the potential impacts on agrarian livelihoods. Is it indeed ‘a concept that can be embraced by all’ or should we be more circumspect at this stage?

Rationales for TBNRM in Southern Africa

Given the number of competing interests over land in southern Africa it appears somewhat perverse to add a seemingly ‘gratuitous layer of complexity’ by binding states into transboundary conservation agreements.² And yet this is exactly what is now happening with an ever-increasing momentum. In the emerging literature on transboundary conservation much is made of the subtle differences between ‘Peace Parks’, Transfrontier Conservation Areas (TFCAs) and TBNRM but in essence these all refer to situations where conservation initiatives straddle national boundaries.³

This concept is informed by a disparate array of discourses – anarchist, scientific, romantic, managerial and neoliberal – and bound up with an equally disparate range of environmental, economic and political agendas. This diversity is such that the

² A.H. Westing, ‘Establishment and management of transfrontier reserves for conflict prevention and confidence building’, *Environmental Conservation* 25, 2 (1998), pp. 91-95.

³ See: H. van der Linde *et al.*, *Beyond Boundaries: Transboundary Natural Resource Management in Sub-Saharan Africa* (Biodiversity Support Program, Washington, 2001); J. Griffen, *Study on the Development and Management of Transboundary Conservation Areas in Southern Africa* (USAID, Lilongwe, 1999); Y. Katerere, R. Hill and S. Moyo, ‘A critique of Transboundary Natural Resource Management in Southern Africa’, *The IUCN-ROSA Series of Transboundary Natural Resources Management – Paper 1* (IUCN-ROSA, Harare, 2001).

World Bank and the Californian counterculture make unlikely philosophical bedfellows in advocating transboundary conservation. These discourses, agendas and coalitions need to be teased apart if one is to understand the rationales for TBNRM in southern Africa.

Bioregions and ecological integrity

The notion of TBNRM chimes with much thinking espoused under the banner of the contemporary radical environmentalist body of thought known as 'bioregionalism'. Broadly speaking this is a romantic, ecocentric philosophy and social movement with much in common with deep ecology and ecofeminism that has emerged largely from the North American counterculture since the early 1970s.⁴ In essence this philosophy holds that the earth consists of contiguous but discrete 'organic regions' or 'bioregions'. A bioregion is 'a place defined by its life forms, its topography and its biota, rather than by human dictates; a region governed by nature, not legislature'.⁵ These regions are described as self-contained and equilibrating, existing in close and complex organic harmony and having specific animal and human carrying capacities. But bioregionalism goes further, extrapolating this ecological holism to the social and political realms to advocate an explicitly political, and quasi-spiritual, agenda. Bioregionalism's advocates celebrate local and regional cultures and their physical and symbolic rootedness in the landscape, rejecting the homogenising and alienating forces of globalisation in favour of 'living-in-place' and finding spiritual fulfilment in the 'eternal voice of nature'.⁶ These authentic and 'natural' regions, in contrast with 'artificial' administrative or political regions, are seen as the ideal organising units for human activity⁷ – they are potentially 'coherent and empowered social and political

⁴ See P. Berg and R. Dasmann, 'Reinhabiting California', *The Ecologist* 7, 10 (1977), pp. 399-401; K. Sale, *Dwellers in the Land: The Bioregional Vision*. Sierra Club, San Francisco, 1985); D. Alexander, 'Bioregionalism: science or sensibility', *Environmental Ethics* 12, 2 (1990), pp: 161-173; V.M. McGinnis, (ed), *Bioregionalism*, (Routledge, London and New York, 1999).

⁵ Sale, *Dwellers in the Land*, p. 43.

⁶ See, for example, Berg and Dasmann, 'Reinhabiting California' and K. Sale, 'There's no place like home - What is 'bioregionalism', and could it be the answer to the world's problems?', *The Ecologist* 31, 2 (2001), pp. 40-44. A philosophical antecedent of bioregionalism is Heidegger's concept of 'dwelling' in nature (Heidegger 1971). David Harvey ('The nature of the environment: the dialectics of social and environmental change', *The Socialist Register* 1 (1993), pp. 1-51) warns that 'there is more than a hint of authoritarianism, surveillance and confinement in the enforced localism of such decentralised politics.' Indeed Heidegger's theories, as well as Haeckel's theories of *lebensraum* and *volkisch* informed Nazi social Darwinism ('blood and soil'). See A. Bramwell, *Ecology in the Twentieth Century: A History* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1989).

⁷ D. Alexander, 'Bioregionalism: the need for a firmer theoretical foundation', *Trumpeter* 13, 3 (1996).

entities'.⁸ Bioregionalists argue passionately for political autonomy, decentralised governance, grassroots empowerment and self-sufficiency in these 'homelands'.⁹

Bioregionalism has been criticised for its reductionist understanding of natural regions and undifferentiated human societies; its frequently ahistorical analysis, the environmental determinism of its simplistic nature-culture causal linkage;¹⁰ and its romanticised representation of 'traditional' indigenous cultures living in harmony with the environment.¹¹ Yet elements of this bioregionalist philosophy have entered mainstream conservation thinking – particularly in the United States – from where they have been exported to underpin much thinking about TBNRM globally and in Southern Africa specifically. The US-based international conservation organisations which together make up the Biodiversity Support Program (the World Resources Institute, the Nature Conservancy, and WWF-US), for example, all have explicitly bioregion-focused conservation strategies. However most of the contemporary literature on TBNRM eschews the utopian and slightly New Age rhetoric of the radical bioregionalists for a more explicitly scientific and managerial discourse deriving mainly from the recently emerged field of conservation biology.¹²

It is held that the 'ecological integrity' of certain bioregions, such as watersheds, mountains and river basins, (also variously described as biomes, biospheres, heartlands, and eco-zones, -regions or -spaces) is hindered by environmentally arbitrary barriers to biotic fluxes in the form of administrative and national boundaries. Conversely large, contiguous and unfragmented habitats 'support important ecological processes... [and] ...meet the habitat requirements of 'keystone

⁸ Sale, 'There's no place like home'. p. 44.

⁹ There are more than 200 self-proclaimed bioregional movements in North America (Sale, 'There's no place like home'). These have been involved in various activities including the development of local exchange and trading systems (LETS) and establishing permaculture projects.

¹⁰ Environmental determinism is an early 20th century theory that held that the environment determined all aspects of social and economic development. S. Frenkel, 'Old theories in new places? Environmental determinism and bioregionalism', *Association of American Geographers* 46, 3 (1994), pp. 289-295.

¹¹ See Alexander, 'Bioregionalism', Frenkel, 'Old theories in new places', and M. Bookchin, *Re-enchanting Humanity: A Defense of the Human Spirit Against Anti-Humanism, Misanthropy, Mysticism and Primitivism* (Cassell, London and New York, 1995).

¹² Conservation biology is the science of biological scarcity and diversity, and is used in guiding the selection, design and management of protected areas (J.B. Callicott and M.P. Nelson, Introduction, In J.B. Callicott, and M.P. Nelson, *The Great New Wilderness Debate* (Athens, Georgia, 1998)). See, for example, Soule, M. *Conservation Biology: The Science of Scarcity and Biodiversity* (Sunderland, MA, 1987).

and indicator species'.¹³ Essentially they enable more biodiversity to be conserved by maintaining diverse and large gene pools and encompassing the migratory ranges necessary for large mammals.¹⁴ By this logic interventions aimed at 'managing wilderness' and conserving biodiversity are best implemented over a greater ecological scale – bigger is better. This is what IUCN calls an 'ecosystem approach',¹⁵ or the African Wildlife Foundation calls 'landscape level conservation', with bioregions becoming the most appropriate 'conservation units'.¹⁶ To this end transboundary conservation initiatives often involve opening up 'biological corridors' and thereby re-establishing the 'connectivity' of bioregions and restoring 'ecosystem functions'. Other conservation terms and technologies include hotspots, core areas and buffer zones, ecological networks and matrices, regional dispersal strategies, and geographical information systems. Although this technical and managerial discourse shares radical bioregionalism's desire to establish or preserve regional integrity, it has excised or sanitised much of its utopian anarchist sentiment with respect to its social goals. It has substituted the dispassionate and largely depoliticised language of 'stakeholders', 'partnerships', 'participatory planning', and 'capacity building' for the emancipatory rhetoric of 'liberating the self', achieving non-hierarchical citizenship rooted in reciprocity and cooperation, reducing the importance of impersonal market forces and bureaucracies, and even abandoning the nation state.

Conservation biology, by reconceiving protected areas as 'biodiversity reserves', also provides a scientific mandate for their expansion and for conferring conservation priority status on habitats previously ignored by wilderness preservationists because they were not sufficiently aesthetically pleasing.¹⁷ As the Biodiversity Support Program puts it:

¹³ World Resources Institute (<http://www.wri.org>).

¹⁴ Much conservation biology is rooted in the principles of island biogeography which posits stable relationships between species diversity and area. See, for example, MacArthur, R. and Wilson, E. *The Theory of Island Biogeography* (Princeton, 1967).

¹⁵ See J.Y. Pirot, P.J. Meynell, and D. Elder, *Ecosystem Management: Lessons from around the World. A Guide to Development and Conservation Practitioners*. (IUCN, Gland and Cambridge, 2000). The theme of IUCN's World Conservation Congress in Amana, Jordan, 4-11 October 2000 was 'ecospaces'.

¹⁶ D.M Olson, *et al.*, *The Global 200: A Representation Approach to Conserving the Earth's Distinctive Ecoregions* (Conservation Science Program, World Wildlife Fund-US, Washington, 2000).

¹⁷ Callicott and Nelson, 'Introduction'.

It is crucial ... that biodiversity conservation be extended even further, beyond buffer zones and protected areas, to include *all* elements of the African landscape and *all* ecosystems [emphases in original].¹⁸

This logic justifies the expansion of protected areas into new spaces and across national boundaries... and ensures a continued and expanded role for international experts. At its most fundamentalist this philosophy holds that 'Africa should endeavour to join all its game parks contiguously from Cape to Cairo'.¹⁹

Cultural integrity, peace and security

A further rationale sometimes advanced for TBNRM areas by its boosters is that they constitute a means of re-establishing cultural – as well as ecological – integrity, or achieving the 'cultural harmonisation' of divided ethnic groups. Removing the artificial national boundaries dividing ethnic groups, it is hoped, would 're-establish historical links' and 'foster a cultural renaissance'.²⁰ Romantic advocates of this notion encourage us, for example to 'dream of an Africa without fences... of ancient migration trails trodden deep by an instinct that time has never contained'.²¹ This ties in with the Pan-African dream of reuniting the artificially divided Africa that is colonialism's legacy.²²

In a similarly hopeful vein it is often suggested that transfrontier conservation initiatives will foster peace and security through the encouragement of inter-state collaboration and cooperation. The hope is that they will help to ameliorate political and cultural tensions related to disputed borderlands and competition for shared resources. By strengthening or re-establishing good political relations between neighbouring states, they will be warding off the threat of violent conflict 'by giving

¹⁸ Biodiversity Support Program, *African Biodiversity: Foundation for the Future* (World Wildlife Fund, The Nature Conservancy and World Resources Institute with the US Agency for International Development, Washington, 1993), p. 29, cited by R.A. Schroeder, 'Geographies of environmental intervention in Africa'. *Progress in Human Geography* 23, 3 (1999), pp. 359-378.

¹⁹ Noel de Villiers, Open Africa. Presentation to the First Agenda 21 Indaba on Culture Conscious Conservation in transfrontier conservation areas, 18/5/1999. Note the associations with Rhodes' colonial vision.

²⁰ Griffen, *Study on the Development and Management*. Also the technical 'ecosystems approach' is often curiously allied with the bioregionalist argument for integrating indigenous, 'non-scientific', knowledge.

²¹ The Peace Parks Foundation (<http://www.peaceparks.org>).

²² See S.N. Nkiwane, (ed) *Zimbabwe's International Borders: A Study in National and Regional Development in Southern Africa: Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Namibia and Southern Africa* (University of Zimbabwe, Harare, 1997).

governments an agenda for mutual action on issues of common concern'.²³ In the southern African context this has been pitched as an opportunity to heal the wounds of pre and post independence wars of destabilisation.²⁴ This is the logic by which the term 'peace parks' is often used to refer to these initiatives.²⁵

However it appears very unlikely that southern African governments will be willing to cede any power or territory to the ethnic groups spanning their borders and, as we shall see, TBNRM may be as likely to cause inter-state disputes as to assuage them. Yet these conservation initiatives could plausibly be interpreted as strategies for internal state security. In practice, by design or otherwise, they will have the effect of policing previously remote border areas and bringing them further under the arm of state control enabling it to cut down on such nefarious activities as illegal labour migration, poaching and smuggling or rebel activity.²⁶

Regional economic integration

A more concrete, and to many no doubt more persuasive, rationale for TBNRM – which has won it some powerful backers – is the potential it holds for opening up new spaces for private sector investment and feeding into the process of regional economic integration. The way in which the discourses of radical environmentalist bioregionalism and technical conservation biology somewhat surprisingly articulate with an explicitly neoliberal free trade agenda is revealed by the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID) ambitious and well-funded

²³ Melanie Gosling 'Peace Parks urged for conserving ecosystems' *Cape Times* 22/9/1997.

²⁴ E. Koch, 'Nature has the power to heal old wounds': War, peace and changing patterns of conservation in Southern Africa', in D. Simon, (ed), *South Africa in Southern Africa: Reconfiguring the Region* (James Currey, Oxford, 1998).

²⁵ See J. Hanks, 'Protected areas during and after conflict: the objectives and activities of the Peace Park Foundation'. Paper presented to the Parks for Peace: International Conference on Transboundary Protected Areas as a Vehicle for International Co-operation, 16-18 September 1997, Somerset West, South Africa. This does have precedents. As far back as 1924 the establishment of a transfrontier nature reserve was used as a means to solve a boundary dispute between Czechoslovakia and Poland in the wake of the First World War; see Westing, 'Establishment and management of transfrontier reserves'.

²⁶ See R. Duffy, 'The environmental challenge to the nation-state: superparks and national parks policy in Zimbabwe', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 23, 3 (1997), pp. 441-451; and C. Zerner, 'Telling stories about biodiversity', in S. Brush and D. Stabinsky, (eds), *Valuing Local Knowledge: Indigenous People and Intellectual Property rights* (Island Press, Washington DC, 1996), pp. 68-101. Various writers have argued in this vein that the extension of the conservation estate represents the covert penetration of coercive state power into remote and marginal areas. See, for example: J. Murombedzi, 'Decentralisation or Recentralisation? Implementing Campfire in the Omay Communal Lands of Nyaminyami District', CASS Natural Resource Management Working Paper no. 2. (Harare, 1992); K. Hill, 'Zimbabwe's wildlife utilisation programmes: grassroots democracy or an extension of state

Initiative for Southern Africa which has a dual commitment to establishing regional economic integration and promoting ecological integrity (see below). This programme explicitly aims to drive through ‘market-orientated’ reforms to the policy and regulatory environment in the region (such as privatisation and macroeconomic liberalisation), and ‘reduce barriers to broader participation in the regional market’, promoting the free flow of goods, services capital and labour across borders and opening up US export and investment opportunities. TBNRM sits comfortably with this integrationist agenda for cross-border collaboration and its potential for providing widespread tourism venture investment opportunities enables it to be portrayed as an ‘engine to propel economic development’.²⁷

TBNRM is also conceptually compatible another high profile neoliberal initiative in the southern African region with a transboundary component. This is the Spatial Development Initiative (SDI) and development corridor programme launched by the South African government in 1997. Government funds are being used to leverage private sector involvement in the development of certain contiguous areas and to stimulate cross-border trade. There is a particular emphasis on investments in tourism, and public-private and private-community partnerships are encouraged. These are envisaged as potential major employment generators.²⁸

The push for regional economic integration is enshrined in the SADC Treaty of 1992 and reinforced in many of its protocols. The SADC Trade Protocol ratified in 1999, for example, is the foundation for the creation of a free trade area (for which USAID is providing ‘technical assistance’ for the negotiating process). Also the SADC Protocol on Wildlife Conservation and Law Enforcement signed in 1999 specifically promotes ‘regional co-operation in the development of common frameworks for conservation of natural resources, and enforcement of laws governing sustainable use’ including the development and establishment of transfrontier conservation areas.

power?’, *African Studies Review* 39, 1 (1996), pp. 103-122; R.P. Neumann, ‘Primitive ideas: protected area buffer zones and the politics of land in Africa’, *Development and Change* 28 (1997), pp. 559-582.

²⁷ Deputy Minister of Environment and Tourism, Zimbabwe, Dialogue on Transboundary Natural Resource Management, Holiday Inn, Harare 20-21 February 2001.

²⁸ See, for example, C.M. Rogerson, ‘Spatial development initiatives in Southern Africa: the Maputo Development Corridor’, *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie* 92, 3 (2001), pp. 324-346.

TBNRM, in this respect, is the latest in a line of top-down, market-orientated environmental interventions pushed on Africa since the 1980s (such as ecotourism, biosphere reserves, debt-for-nature swaps and green marketing) by international bureaucracies (The World Bank, bilateral donors international conservation organisations) and the private sector. Some have argued that this constitutes a form of green imperialism as former commons are privatised or captured via ‘joint ventures’ and nature is progressively commoditised. TBNRM provides justification for private sector territorial claims across national and administrative boundaries.²⁹ The sentiment that transfrontier conservation areas are no more than a latter day form of imperialism was vividly summed up by one of my more cynical interviewees who put it that: ‘TFCAs are driven by Cecil Rhodes clones – rather than seeing great expanses of red on the map they want to see a great wedge of green as their legacy to Africa!’³⁰

Community development

In a relatively impoverished and highly inequitable part of the world TBNRM processes cannot be justified simply in terms of creating economic opportunities for private investors. Conservation initiatives in the region are typically now framed as much in the language of development (‘decentralisation’, ‘equity’ and ‘sustainable utilisation’ and so forth) as that of biodiversity conservation. Thus TBNRM is increasingly being put forward as a means for the socioeconomic upliftment, and empowerment of previously marginalised communities who will be able to participate in, and derive benefits from, the management and sustainable utilisation of wild resources (principally via the economic incentives of hunting and ecotourism revenues).³¹

This strange alliance of ecocentric, managerial, neoliberal and populist priorities has conspired to encourage a shift in the conservationist agenda from viewing protected areas as inviolate sanctuaries to looking to them increasingly as potential sources of revenue which should be extended across the landscape. Rather than fencing protected

²⁹ See R.A. Schroeder and R.P. Neumann, ‘Manifest ecological destinies: local rights and global environmental agendas’, *Antipode* 27, 4 (1995), pp. 321-324; M. Goldman, *Privatizing Nature: Political Struggles for the Global Commons* (Rutgers University Press, 1998); D.M. Hughes, ‘Rezoned for business: How eco-tourism unlocked black farmland in Eastern Zimbabwe’, *Journal of Agrarian Change* 1, 4 (2001), pp. 576-599.

³⁰ Interview with International Conservation NGO staff member, Harare 19/1/2001.

³¹ See Koch, ‘Nature has the power’.

areas into enclaves they should be opened out across administrative and national boundaries.

TBNRM in Zimbabwe

The acronym 'TBNRM' as opposed to 'TFCA' and other variations, is a specifically Southern African piece of jargon. The term derives from a Biodiversity Support Program/USAID report and is broadly defined as 'any process of co-operation across boundaries that facilitates or improves the management of natural resources'.³² It is rapidly becoming the focus of many new donor-funded natural resource management initiatives in the region. A conjuncture of range of factors has contributed to the emergence and rapidly escalating momentum of this new agenda.

USAID and other donors have been funding Community-Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) initiatives in Southern Africa for 10 years – the flagship programme being the high-profile Campfire project in Zimbabwe. Campfire has been represented as an antidote to the colonial 'fortress conservation' discourse which undermined people's control over their environment and criminalised their use of game.³³ Instead communities are cast as 'partners in conservation'. The central tenets of this scheme, which has become something of an icon among conservation agencies and international NGOs, are that neighbouring communities must receive direct benefits from protected areas and have some say in wildlife management and use if conservation policies are to be effective.³⁴ This implies 'sustainable utilisation', rather than preservation, of wildlife with a portion of hunting or tourism revenues disbursed to local authorities. The Campfire model has achieved the status of conventional wisdom in the Southern African region and internationally, endorsed by a range of generous donors. It has spawned a research industry and has been the subject of countless workshops, conferences and glossy publications.³⁵ However 10 years on the ubiquitous CBNRM seems to have lost some of its cutting-edge, 'of the moment'

³² Griffen, *Study on the Development and Management*, p. 3.

³³ J. Alexander and J. McGregor, 'Wildlife and Politics: CAMPFIRE in Zimbabwe', *Development and Change* 31, 3 (2000), pp. 605-627.

³⁴ See Zimbabwe Trust, *People, Wildlife and Natural Resources: The CAMPFIRE Approach to Rural Development in Zimbabwe* (Zimbabwe Trust, Harare, 1990); G. Child, *Wildlife and People: the Zimbabwe Success. How the conflict between animals and people became progress for both* (Wisdom Foundation, Harare, 1995).

³⁵ The community conservation discourse entered the mainstream after the 1992 World Congress on National Parks and Protected areas.

flavour, as institutional fatigue has set in. After the initial run away success (in terms of publicity) of Campfire CBNRM debates got more complicated and increasingly focused on its weaknesses rather than strengths. Donors and CBNRM practitioners were looking for a new paradigm.

This was particularly true of the USAID Regional Center for Southern Africa, which in the late 1990s came under pressure to justify its existence – what were the regional development and natural resource management priorities above and beyond the bilateral agreements? The transboundary conservation concept was thus very timely. Much in the same way as USAID’s Initiative for Southern Africa provided a specifically regional mandate to focus on the challenges of economic integration more broadly (see above),³⁶ TBNRM allowed USAID to invoke a ‘regionality’ with regard to natural resource management and provided a further *raison d’être* for its regional office. USAID scaled down involvement in sovereign state natural resource management programmes and concentrated on promoting ‘increased regional cooperation in the management of shared natural resources’ describing TBNRM as an ‘opportunity to apply the lessons learned in CBNRM at a larger scale’.³⁷

Also within Zimbabwe the institutional players in the ‘CBNRM industry’ (such as Zimbabwe Trust, Africa Resources Trust, and IUCN-Regional Office for Southern Africa) were running out of new ideas, and more importantly funding streams, on a CBNRM ticket – and, given the political sensitivities of donors concerning farm invasions and the collapse of the rule of law – were finding it increasingly difficult to source funding for projects in Zimbabwe alone.

These factors are conspiring to favour the judicious pushing of the term ‘TBNRM’ which emphasises the close links to ‘CBNRM’ and hence provides a mandate and potential funding-raising thrust for the CBNRM industry (compromising NGOs, researchers and donors) who are able to portray TBNRM as building on their own experience and thereby write themselves into the story. Also, by definition, *transboundary* initiatives provide a regional rather than national focus and thus allow donors to channel money into the region that they are currently politically unable or

³⁶ USAID: Initiative for Southern Africa (<http://www.usaid.gov/publs/bj2001/afr/isa>).

³⁷ Katerere *et al.*, ‘A critique of TBNRM’ p. 11.

unwilling to give to Zimbabwe alone. So the CBNRM industry is rapidly repositioning around TBNRM as everyone rushes to climb aboard the latest bandwagon.

The Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park

In November 2000 the governments of Zimbabwe, South Africa and Mozambique signed an agreement formally establishing the Gaza-Kruger-Gonarezhou Transfrontier Conservation Area (GKG). This covers an area of 99,800 km² (66,00 km² in Mozambique; 22,000 km² in South Africa; and 12,000 km² in Zimbabwe). The ‘core protected areas’ are Kruger National Park in South Africa, Gonarezhou National Park in Zimbabwe, and Zinave and Banhine National Parks and Coutada 16 Wildlife Utilisation Area in Mozambique, it also encompasses private game reserves and state-owned ‘communal’ agricultural land. In 2001 the core protected areas were given a less cumbersome, and consciously Kipling-esque, name: the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park.³⁸ There was next to no consultation of local communities during this process and the Zimbabwean government and Department of National Parks (DNPWLM) appeared to have a limited idea of what they had committed themselves to.

In the language of bioregionalism (in its more technical manifestation) the three countries had acknowledged that ‘political boundaries were historically drawn with very little regard for their ecological consequences ... very often severing traditional migration routes of animals or otherwise impeding natural processes ... and have recognised the need to promote biodiversity conservation over these internationally shared ecosystems’.³⁹

The Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park is not a new idea, it has deep historical roots. General Jan Christiaan Smuts first introduced the concept of ‘a great fauna and tourist road through Africa’ which would link Kruger and Rhodesia in the 1920s.⁴⁰ Another

³⁸ ‘Pretoria sends elephants home’ *The Guardian* 5/10/2001.

³⁹ South African Ministry of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (<http://www.environment.gov.za>).

⁴⁰ National Archives of Zimbabwe: S 1194/1608/1/1 Minutes of meeting of National Public Relations Advisory Board, Salisbury 14/1/1947 – A.W. Redfern: memorandum on ‘National Parks and Places of Scenic or Other Attractions’. Rather incongruously General Smuts was responsible for developing a theory of ‘holism’ which influenced the emergent field of ecology in South Africa in the early 20th century (J.C. Smuts, *Holism and Evolution*. Macmillan & Co., London, 1926)). Driver tentatively links his theories in this field to colonial development doctrines in South Africa (T. Driver, ‘Smuts, Ecology

early advocate for a transfrontier game reserve came in the unlikely form of the notorious ivory poacher Cecil Barnard. In a romanticised account of his exploits T.V. Bulpin records a letter to Barnard from the Native Commissioner at Chivi, Peter Forestall:

I quite agree with you that the part of the world which you are in would make an excellent game reserve, but I don't think our authorities will move in this direction. All our game is at least legally protected already, although I gather that you don't realise this! I don't agree with you that we should make roads through your animal paradise and connect it up with the game reserve of the Northern Transvaal and invite tourists to see the game. As you say, they would be thousands of visitors and we would require a guard for every visitor.⁴¹

In the 1930s and 1940s the notion was briefly reawakened in Southern Rhodesia with the establishment of Gona-re-Zhou game reserve (which was subsequently degazetted to allow for anti-tsetse fly hunting measures). The Minister for Commerce and Transport, R.P. Gilchrist was very enthusiastic about the proposal on the grounds of its potential for encouraging tourism. Writing in the *Sunday News* newspaper that 'the idea is that the sights of Rhodesia, which are already famed, should be approached through the greatest game sanctuary in the world', he added that 'it is possible to disclose ... that the game sanctuary of Rhodesia may be a continuation of the great Union Reserve, Kruger Park, and that in addition the Portuguese will proclaim a sanctuary alongside the Rhodesian reserve'.⁴²

This never materialised and the idea did not re-emerge until the 1970s when an expatriate conservation biologist in Mozambique wrote a report advocating a Mozambique-South Africa conservation area. This report kindled interest amongst the South African National Parks Board but it was not to be until the 1990s that the board commissioned a feasibility study on the Mozambican side of the border.⁴³ The concept appealed to the South African National Parks Board at this particular stage

and Nationhood' paper presented at a conference on 'Science and Society in Southern Africa' at the Centre for Southern African Studies, University of Sussex, 10-11 September 1998). Equally tentatively one might suggest that this esoteric philosophy influenced Smuts' grand bioregionalist aspirations.

⁴¹ T.V. Bulpin, *The Ivory Trail* (Howard B. Timmins, Cape Town, 1954), pp. 89-90.

⁴² *Sunday Mail* 26 November 1933. The South African Parks Board justified the removal of the Makuleke community from Pafuri in terms of opening up a corridor between South African and Rhodesian game preserves in a 'benevolent empire of game control' (D. Bunn, 'An unnatural state: tourism, water and wildlife photography in the early Kruger National Park', paper presented at the conference African environments: past and present, 5-8 July, St. Anthony's College, Oxford, p. 28).

for variety of reasons. One was that after the political transformations in South Africa the politically-alienated apartheid era, white-National Parks Board and wildlife industry was looking to carve out a constituency in the new South Africa and the TFCA provided a potential cause-célèbre. Secondly at the end of the Mozambican civil war conservationists working for Kruger National Park were worried that war displaced people were moving rapidly into the area of Mozambique bordering the park and were keen to establish a buffer zone before the population on their doorstep was too large.⁴⁴ Thirdly the TFCA was envisaged as a way to accommodate the increasingly vocal international campaign against elephant culls and gain animal-rights kudos – removing the fences would facilitate elephant migrations and reduce their environmental impact and hence the need for culling.⁴⁵

The Great Limpopo initiative has been very much a South African driven process, and much of the momentum was provided by the Peace Parks Foundation. This was launched by Anton Rupert with his own money in 1997 with a mandate ‘to facilitate establishment of TFCAs’. Rupert is a very wealthy South African tobacco magnate whose multiple business ventures include interests in tourism as well as being the former president of WWF-South Africa.⁴⁶ Rupert has been a major player in development of the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park and other TFCAs bordering South Africa. It was Rupert who initiated talks with President Chissano of Mozambique in 1990 concerning the transborder conservation initiative. He was also instrumental in interesting the World Bank in the project and securing financing.⁴⁷ The stated aims of the Peace Parks Foundation include: raising and allocating funds to projects which will further the establishment and management of TFCAs; identifying and purchasing or leasing land for the development of TFCAs; and *promoting their development on a commercial basis*.⁴⁸ The Peace Parks Foundation has secured funding from the private sector and the German Development Bank and has the personal endorsement of Nelson Mandela – it has also garnered a great deal of

⁴³ K.L. Tinley and W.F. van Riet, ‘Conceptual Proposals for Kruger/Banhine: A Transfrontier Natural Resource Area’ (South Africa National Parks, 1991).

⁴⁴ Interview with environmental consultant, Harare 12/2/2001.

⁴⁵ David Simon, *pers. comm.*

⁴⁶ See R. Bonner, *At the Hand of Man: Perils and Hope for Africa's Wildlife* (Vintage, New York, 1993); S. Ellis, ‘Of elephants and men: politics and nature conservation in South Africa’, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 20 (1994), pp. 53-69; R. Duffy, *Killing for Conservation: Wildlife Policy in Zimbabwe* (Oxford, James Currey, Oxford, 2000).

⁴⁷ See Hanks, ‘Protected areas during and after conflict’.

publicity for the scheme.⁴⁹ But as member of an international conservation NGO put it to me the widely held perception – given its provenance – is that the Peace Parks Foundation are ‘in the pocket of big business’.⁵⁰

Other players in South Africa’s tourism and safari industries saw the economic potential of marketing a ‘Kruger-plus’ concept. Kruger National Park was rapidly approaching saturation and the industry was looking for new markets and a label with which to continue increasing Kruger’s pulling power – being part of the largest protected area in Africa would be just such a marketing opportunity. A massive new park would also accommodate many more tourists, provide economies of scale and make for lucrative safari concessions within it and on its fringes. In the optimism surrounding the prospects for tourism in the region with the end of apartheid and the Mozambican civil war Kruger was envisaged as a springboard for increased tourism in the region more broadly.⁵¹

Various major bilateral and multilateral donor funded projects have supported, directly or indirectly, the Great Limpopo initiative. First off the World Bank hosted Global Environmental Facility (GEF) made a US\$5 million grant to Mozambique for a ‘Transfrontier Conservation Areas Pilot and Institutional Strengthening Project’ to assist in establishing and implementing ‘enabling policies, activities and institutional frameworks’ for transfrontier conservation.⁵² This was rationalised as an attempt to ‘test new approaches to exploit the synergies between conservation and community development’ and hence support poverty reduction as well as biodiversity conservation.⁵³ The GEF has also allocated US\$5 million specifically for ‘biodiversity conservation in southeast Zimbabwe’. Key features of this project are described as: ‘the protection of adequate range for mobile wildlife; protection of vegetation from destruction by fire and other impacts created by humans; protection of water resources; re-establishment of migration corridors; protection of wildlife from illegal

⁴⁸ Hanks, ‘Protected areas during and after conflict’ (my emphasis).

⁴⁹ Such as: ‘Elephants parking space’ *Financial Times* 9/4/1988; ‘Game without Frontiers’, *Time* 14/5/2001; ‘Without Borders’, *National Geographic Magazine* September 2001.

⁵⁰ Interview, Harare, 17/1/2001.

⁵¹ South African Ministry of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (<http://www.environment.gov.za>).

⁵² The GEF was established after the 1992 Rio Summit to provide finance for international environmental projects.

⁵³ World Bank, *Mozambique: Transfrontier Conservation Areas Pilot and Institutional Strengthening Project* (The World Bank, 1996), p. 14.

killing; and minimisation of conflict between wildlife and agriculture or other land uses outside the park.’⁵⁴ What this has meant in practice is the provision of vehicles and computers for Gonarezhou National Park, and (as yet unfulfilled) plans for electrification, rehabilitation of the road network, water supplies and staff accommodation, and ‘strengthening park management capacity’.⁵⁵ The GEF has also laid aside (but is yet to disburse) US\$2 million for ‘out-of-park’ projects to ‘support community and development activities that promote conservation and sustainable use of habitat and wildlife’ such as the ‘development of innovative and participatory wildlife utilisation on Communal Lands and on small-scale commercial farms adjacent to the Gonarezhou National Park’ (particularly ecotourism). These schemes would ‘*thus effectively extend the wildlife conservation estate over a broad area*’.⁵⁶

USAID has also funded a ‘Study on the Development and Management of Transboundary Conservation Areas in Southern Africa’ (in association with WWF-US, The Nature Conservancy, and the World Resources Institute under the auspices of the Biodiversity Support Program).⁵⁷ USAID’s regional centre is now planning long-term technical assistance to develop policies to support new transboundary natural resource management areas.

Within Zimbabwe, before 2000, attempts were also starting to be made by the game and tourist industry⁵⁸ to market the southeast lowveld as a destination on an alternative tourist route around Zimbabwe. This ‘southern circuit’, with wildlife and wilderness as the main draws would hope to mop up the overspill of the rapidly overcrowding Victoria Falls vicinity in western Zimbabwe.⁵⁹ At its most ambitious

⁵⁴ *The World Bank Group Press Release 2/6/1998 No. 98/1791/AFR.*

⁵⁵ An EU funded de-mining project was also initiated along the Mozambican border but all donor-funded projects have been put on hold in the current Zimbabwean government-donor political impasse.

⁵⁶ Global Environmental Facility, South-east Lowveld Co-ordinating Committee Project (GEF-SELCC) Project Operational manual – First Draft Dec. 1998 (my emphasis).

⁵⁷ Griffen, *Study on the Development and Management of Transboundary Conservation Areas in Southern Africa.*

⁵⁸ Particularly Zimbabwe Sun (which had lodges in Save Valley Conservancy and at Mahenye) and the Malilangwe Trust which has luxury lodges in a game ranch bordering Gonarezhou National Park.

⁵⁹ H.J. Goodwin, I.J. Kent, K.T. Parker and M.J. Walpole, *Tourism, conservation and sustainable development, Volume IV, the south-east lowveld, Zimbabwe. Final report to the Department for International Development* (Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology, Institute of Mathematics and Statistics, University of Kent, 1997); J.D. Willis, and G.N. Pangeti, *The Limpopo Riverine Tourist Project: Feasibility Study Prepared for WWF Harare* (Geckoconsult – WWF, Harare, 1998). See also *Safari Lodges of Africa News Flash* May 1999: ‘New regional safari circuit unveiled’. This is similar to the South African trend for marketing particular regions or trails as tourism routes such as the Garden or Wine routes.

this logic envisages ‘a major wildlife zone, including commercial, communal and state land [which] will stretch 300km along the Limpopo and then 300km northwards.’⁶⁰ This vision is being pushed by a grouping of private tourist operators under the banner of the Gazaland Tourist Initiative (GTI). This initiative has the objective of promoting tourism in the Zimbabwean lowveld and the coastal resorts of southern Mozambique in a package ‘offering quality wildlife and pristine marine wilderness’. Potential attractions would be easy access for South African self-drive tourists to Zimbabwe’s lowveld; and a surf and turf package where after game-viewing in the lowveld tourists could be whisked away to the sandy beaches of the Mozambican coast. Heavy promotion of the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park as a wildlife and wilderness landscape would be a huge boon to their forays into ecotourism.

This needs to be understood in the context of the large-scale move by former cattle ranchers in Zimbabwe’s lowveld into game ranching (initially for meat and skins but latterly for safari hunting, ecotourism and live game sales). This has been encouraged by a relative decline in beef prices; the difficulties faced in restocking cattle after the devastating 1991-92 drought; and the collapse of the Zimbabwe dollar. This has also resulted in the development of politically controversial wildlife conservancies – which are amalgamations of, mainly white-owned, game ranches with internal fences removed. Selling this area to tourists and hunting clients has meant that attempts have been made to manufacture a degree of ‘wilderness’ in the landscape and stock it with game.⁶¹ The Great Limpopo initiative obviously fits very well with this agenda, although the business interests of this game and tourism lobby has tended to be shrouded in the language of bioregionalism and conservation biology. Typically Price Waterhouse argue that:

The restoration of some cattle ranching areas to full-scale multi-use wildlife operations potentially *enhances connectivity* between private wildlife areas and state wildlife areas and enhances the conservation of biodiversity. ... The present pattern of land-use in the Lowveld does offer opportunities for an enlightened *ecologically appropriate* zonation of activities ... In particular, there is the

⁶⁰ B.A. Child, Proposal: Beitbridge, Chipinge, Chiredzi and Gonarezhou Joint Committee (DNPWLM, Harare, 1993).

⁶¹ For a detailed study of the manufacturing of wilderness in Zimbabwe’s lowveld see W. Wolmer, ‘Lowveld landscapes: conservation, development and the wilderness vision in south-eastern Zimbabwe, PhD thesis (University of Sussex, 2001).

possibility of joining the Save Valley and Chiredzi River conservancies onto a corridor of commercial wildlife ranches extending to Gonarezhou National Park [and beyond that the TFCA].⁶² [my emphases]

An advisor to Save Valley Conservancy also made the argument that – provided it had been fully stocked with wildlife – the conservancy could act as a wildlife reservoir. It would then be able to sell progeny to restock the transfrontier park.⁶³ Also, and crucially, in the post-2000 context of farm invasions and ‘fast-track’ land reform in Zimbabwe, land-owners in the conservancies saw, in the TFCA, a lifeline and opportunity to enhance their currently precarious tenure security. Being at best inside a transfrontier park, or at least contiguous with one, would provide ‘buy-in’ to an international agreement and a potentially powerful argument against designation of their land for resettlement or for the eviction of farm invaders.

Alongside this process a number of NGOs, some of which were not previously working in the communal areas of Zimbabwe’s southeast likely to be affected by the initiative, are jockeying to position themselves in the potentially lucrative ‘community consultation’ role.⁶⁴ These NGOs, as well as the Save Valley Conservancy and Malilangwe Trust ‘community outreach’ programmes have also talked up the possibility of wildlife and ‘culture-based’ ecotourism development in the communal areas and resettlement areas of the lowveld.

Due to government budgetary cuts the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management (DNPWLM) is being commercialised so it can be financially self-sustaining. In this context the department is also keen to carve out a role in the administration of the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park and source funds through the initiative. Another – more surprising – voice to add to those clamouring for the TFCA was that of some in the cattle industry. The TFCA was seen as an opportunity by the commercial ranchers of the Mwenezi and Chiredzi Cattle Producers Associations to source funding for an improved veterinary fence and to safeguard their cattle from

⁶² Price Waterhouse, *The Lowveld Conservancies: New Opportunities for Productive and Sustainable Landuse* (Save Valley, Bubiana and Chiredzi River Conservancies, 1994), pp. 22-23.

⁶³ Interview with WWF staff member, Harare 6/1999.

⁶⁴ These are: the Italian NGO Cooperazione e Sviluppo (CESVI), the East Africa based African Wildlife Foundation (AWF), the IUCN-World Conservation Union (Regional Office for Southern Africa), and the Zimbabwean NGOs: the Southern Alliance for Indigenous Resources (SAFIRE) and the Africa Resources Trust (ART).

Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD). Alongside this it has been proposed – subject to improved fencing and surveillance – to rezone the lowveld ranches in terms of their FMD status. Instead of having a wildlife zone, vaccinated zone, a buffer zone, and a clear zone this would be streamlined to a wildlife zone, a surveillance zone, and an uninfected zone. The overall impact of this would be to increase the area of the lowveld from which beef exports to the EU were permitted (beef going for export reaches much higher prices). €10 million had been committed to the veterinary fence by the EU, although it was put on hold due to the political instabilities and donor concerns.

The Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park and local communities' livelihoods

The Great Limpopo initiative has potentially very serious implications for the communities living around and *in* it. TBNRM is different in one very important respect from traditional protected areas: it provides a rationale for spreading the conservation estate from these enclaves to impinge on previously separate constituencies – commercial farms and communal areas. Whereas in the past the communal areas of the lowveld have often been represented as a buffer separating commercial ranches from the veterinary disease threat of the wilderness areas, now they are coming to be conceptualised more as the interstitial connective zones, cement, or corridors between wildlife areas.⁶⁵

However whilst the initiative has been getting under way the communities in Matibi II, Sengwe and Chipise communal areas in Zimbabwe which will be directly or indirectly affected by the proposals have been largely sidelined. Given CBNRM's legacy to the region's conservation discourse (consultative processes, participation, benefit sharing etc.) and the consensus on the importance of integrated conservation and development this is perhaps somewhat surprising.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ See Wolmer, 'Lowveld landscapes'. As Hughes has shown Campfire has already contributed to a blurring of previously hard edged boundaries between land use zones in Zimbabwe as white entrepreneurs have been able to penetrate black spaces with safari operations (Hughes, 'Rezoned for business').

⁶⁶ The Peace Parks Foundation makes the sweeping claim that 'full participation of by communities in the establishment of the Transfrontier Park has been reached'. Yet it goes on to explain that in practice this has meant the convening of two workshops at which 'a properly constituted and mandated community representative committee has been elected to represent the approximately five million people living around the Kruger National Park' (www.peaceparks.org/content/newroom/news). It is unclear who elected this committee or where its mandate derives from.

Those that know anything at all about the scheme tend to be suspicious on a variety of grounds. The lack of consultation, and top-down process, has generated fears that the TFCA will involve displacement of people living in the ‘corridor’ between Kruger and Gonarezhou, awaking memories of displacement during the establishment of Gonarezhou National Park in 1950s/1960s and of a broader history of colonial land alienation. Given these, in some cases all too recent, traumatic experiences there is a common perception that the TFCA will constitute another ‘land grab’. These fears are fanned by the very conflicting messages coming from different sources. With some insisting that the scheme will involve no resettlement and others talking of a 100km along and 10-40km wide elephant corridor running from Kruger to Gonarezhou which would affect up to 20,000 residents of Sengwe communal area.⁶⁷

These communities have also had experiences of wildlife management initiatives with the Campfire programme. The financial rewards generated are generally seen as insufficient to compensate for costs (in the form of crop and livestock raiding by wildlife and coercive controls on natural resource use – such as hunting, fishing and pole collection). Campfire committees have also been the loci of much actual or perceived corruption and embezzlement, and have often been politicised leading to jealousy and distrust around the programme and fears that TFCA will lead to further difficulties.⁶⁸

There is also concern that the TFCA will interfere with current informal transborder-livelihood strategies that are crucially important to local livelihoods. As one TFCA study admits, for local communities transfrontier natural resource management is ‘not a new fad but a daily reality’.⁶⁹ Between Zimbabwe, Mozambique and South Africa there is a massive amount of informal trading and labour migration (both legal and illegal), especially by Shangaan-speakers. In particular, illicit labour migration (known as border-jumping) to, and consequent remittances from, South Africa are a – if not the – central component of local livelihood strategies in these communal areas. Other livelihood strategies depend on opportunistic freedom of movement of people

⁶⁷ *Mail and Guardian* 24/11/2000

⁶⁸ See Wolmer, ‘Lowveld landscapes’. While I am aware of the dangers of depicting generalised and undifferentiated ‘community’ fears and concerns, these opinions reflect the tone of extensive interviews I conducted in the course of fieldwork in the communal areas of Zimbabwe’s lowveld between 1999 and 2001.

⁶⁹ Griffen, *Study on the Development and Management*, p. 32

and livestock.⁷⁰ There is also concern that the scheme will interfere with agricultural activities and livestock husbandry – denying people access to grazing areas, or river banks on the grounds that this is wildlife country not farming country⁷¹ or leading to further proscriptions on landuse practices such as banning the use of bricks in houses.

Proposals to develop ecotourism in the region increasingly have an ‘ethnotourism’ component. Indigenous communities – rather than being viewed as anathema to a ‘wilderness experience’ and being removed from protected areas; are being reconceptualised as a useful ‘cultural’ adjunct to wildlife as long as they are visually pleasing. Community-based tourism has, in this sense, involved becoming the objects of tourism.⁷² A further concern of mine – but not one I have yet heard expressed by anyone in those communities – is that cultural tourism initiatives with the Shangaan-speaking communities of Zimbabwe around the park will focus only on a marketable exotic, traditional and ‘primitive’ version of Shangaan identity to ‘add value to the tourism product’, rather than emphasising their history as dynamic players in an international economy. However, Shangaan people are not necessarily dismissive of, or offended by this kind of caricatured identity. Indeed, many people have not been averse to taking on the stereotypical Shangaan identities deliberately to suit certain ends.⁷³

Potential complications

The Great Limpopo juggernaut is still rolling and gathering steam – however certain developments in Zimbabwe might potentially put the brakes on. One issue is the (largely correct) perception in Zimbabwe, particularly in government, that the process is driven by the top-down, ‘external agenda’ of foreign donors, international NGOs and the South African state. In the current political climate this chimes with the governing ZANU(PF)’s antipathy to all things seen as interfering with national

⁷⁰ See Wolmer, ‘Lowveld landscapes’.

⁷¹ There is a long history of landuse proscriptions and prescriptions in Zimbabwe’s lowveld based on an inflexible system of land use zoning that holds that given its aridity it is automatically unsuited to dryland agriculture; See Wolmer ‘Lowveld landscapes’.

⁷² See R. Gordon, *The Bushman Myth: the Making of a Namibian Underclass* (Westview Press, Boulder, 1992); Neumann, ‘Primitive ideas’; T. Ranger, *Voices from the Rocks: Nature, Culture and History in the Matopos Hills of Zimbabwe* (James Currey, Oxford, 1999).

⁷³ See Wolmer, ‘Lowveld landscapes’.

sovereignty and potentially neo-colonial or imperialist.⁷⁴ Zimbabwean politicians and technocrats (such as DNPWLM staff) are particularly resentful at the pace with which South Africans have hurried along signing of inter-governmental agreement on the TFCA. There is a concern that the economic benefits of the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park may not be distributed equitably and that South Africa is better positioned to profit.⁷⁵ Within DNPWLM the national TBNRM co-ordination role seems to be viewed as something of a poisoned chalice and there has been a fast turnover of staff in this post. All of this potentially confounds the 'peace park' thesis – as these initiatives appear as likely to continue increasing tensions as to usher in an era of cooperation and symbiosis.

Zimbabwe's wildlife lobby is strongly wedded to a sustainable-utilisation model of wildlife management incorporating hunting. Some in this lobby suspect that TBNRM donors (or prospective donors) could potentially have 'strong strings attached' (i.e. an anti-hunting agenda). There is also concern amongst Zimbabwean CBNRM practitioners at the lack of community consultation to date.⁷⁶

Perhaps the most serious obstacle to the Great Limpopo park is the currently highly volatile and politically charged 'land question' in Zimbabwe which came to the world's attention in 2000-2001. In the run up to the 2000 general election various coalitions of actors gathered under the banner of 'war veterans' stepped up a previously low level campaign of occupying commercial farms and some state owned land. ZANU(PF), quick to capitalise on deep seated grievances on the emotive land issue fought the election under the slogan 'Land is the economy and the economy is land'. Farm invasions and a 'fast-track' land reform process picked up in momentum after the election. This is underpinned by a policy emphasis on the importance of small-scale peasant agriculture at the expense of white-dominated commercial agriculture in general, and the wildlife industry in particular. The idea of bringing Save Valley Conservancy and other privately owned game ranches into an expanded

⁷⁴ A further complication is that the Minister for Environment and Tourism, who is responsible for pushing through the TFCA programme, has suffered from credibility problems within the cabinet because of his relatively outspoken criticism of farm invasions in the Save Valley Conservancy. See, for example, *The Daily News* 21/5/2001.

⁷⁵ Interviews, DNPWLM, Harare, 2/2001 and 11/2001; Katerere *et al.*, 'critique of TBNRM'.

⁷⁶ Interviews at SAFIRE, ZERO, ART, Zimbabwe Trust, and the Campfire Association, Harare 11/2001.

transfrontier conservation area is a particularly contentious can of worms given this political situation.⁷⁷ In fact the conservancies have been the target of highly publicised farm invasions, accompanied by widespread poaching, burning, tree-felling and ploughing up of land.⁷⁸ A portion of Gonarezhou National Park itself has also been invaded and formally resettled at the same time as the government has been signing up to the transfrontier agreement.⁷⁹ Also donors (such as USAID) and the Mozambican and South African governments are finding it highly questionable that Zimbabwe will honour its agreements in the current political context.⁸⁰ Mozambique and South Africa now appear to be pursuing a more bilateral agenda (with the planned translocation of 1000 elephants from Kruger to Coutada 16 for example).⁸¹

The utter collapse of Zimbabwe's tourist industry triggered by the political crisis casts doubt on the economic rationale of the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park for Zimbabwe. However the tourism industry had never taken off in the lowveld. Attempts to set up a scheduled air service to the southeast of the country had been unsuccessful and Zimbabwe Sun's operations at Save Valley and Mahenye were making massive losses even before the national collapse. Even the massively popular Kruger National Park is heavily in the red and many of the private safari camps surrounding it often struggle to make a profit.⁸²

The risk of veterinary disease is another potential brake on the unfolding of the scheme, especially in the context of EU paranoia post-BSE and the UK Foot and Mouth disease (FMD) outbreak and with game farm invasions meaning cattle and buffalo are currently grazing alongside each other. Notwithstanding the arguments of those advocating the proposed EU funded veterinary fence (above) opening up migration corridors for disease carrying game – particularly buffalo which carry FMD

⁷⁷ Although conversely, as we have seen, many conservancy landowners perceive inclusion in a transfrontier conservation area as a means to make their status less controversial and more secure.

⁷⁸ See, for example, *The Observer* 12/11/2000.

⁷⁹ '\$3b park hangs in balance' *Zimbabwe Independent* 12/1/2001; 'Gonarezhou demarcated for resettlement' *Zimbabwe Independent* 11/5/2001.

⁸⁰ Interview with USAID staff member, Harare 18/1/2001.

⁸¹ 'Pretoria sends elephants home' *The Guardian* 5/10/2001. With a fanfare of media hype, and a speech by Nelson Mandela (see above) about 25 Kruger elephants were released in Mozambique in October, 2001 (on Anton Rupert's birthday).

⁸² *Mail and Guardian* 2/3/2001; H. Reid, 'Contractual National Parks and the Makuleke Community', *Human Ecology* 29, 2 (2001), pp. 135-155.

and (in Kruger National Park) bovine tuberculosis – is anathema to veterinarians and many in the cattle industry and continues to be vigorously opposed.⁸³

Notwithstanding all these seemingly major obstacles the World Bank, USAID, the German Development Bank (KfW) and other donors are still pouring money into the TBNRM concept and the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park is one of six TBNRM initiatives that Zimbabwe is involved in at which are at varying stages of conceptual development.

Conclusions

The Great Limpopo initiative raises a lot of questions but it also suggests certain opportunities. I want to end by posing some these questions and exploring some of these opportunities. To my mind the fundamental – and as yet unanswered – question is: will TBNRM initiatives have the effect of improving or impairing the livelihoods of those living in and around them? The case for TBNRM helping to alleviate poverty is far from a rigorous one. Is there a contradiction between the promises of TFCAs of economic renaissance based on selling ‘Walt Disney’ African wildlife experiences to tourists and the socio-economic development of communities?

Further important questions include: is it ecologically or economically necessary to have large contiguous protected areas trans-boundaries?⁸⁴ Why not just have roads linking up existing protected area enclaves? Do elephants and other animals actually migrate in large numbers across these boundaries and is it either environmentally or economically advantageous for them to do so? Is the biodiversity of the park either threatened or unique compared to other areas in the region? Do you need a large chunk of wilderness to make money, or can a landscape can be unfamiliar and a ‘wilderness’ without being big?⁸⁵

⁸³ Interviews, Department of Veterinary Services, Harare, 14/2/2001. With the current farm invasion situation many in the wildlife industry are taking the risky strategy of talking up the danger of FMD outbreaks to encourage the government to act on controlling the invasions (the risk being that the government will instead advocate the removal of game – particularly buffalo).

⁸⁴ Some ecological research suggests that large protected areas are not necessarily more effective at conserving biodiversity than smaller ones. See for example P. Zuidema, J.A. Sayer and W. Dijkman, ‘Forest fragmentation and biodiversity: the case for intermediate-sized conservation areas’, *Environment and Conservation* 23, 4 (1996), pp. 290-297.

⁸⁵ ‘In [Zimbabwe’s] southeast lowveld what is the attraction? There’s not enough wildlife. There are plenty of empty wilderness spaces – you don’t need to come to GKG [Great Limpopo Transfrontier

Given its near ubiquitous nature in all other public debate in Zimbabwe an issue conspicuous by its absence in discussions of the Great Limpopo initiative is the question of land reform. TBNRM potentially offers opportunities for radical land reform where formerly National Park or commercial farmland could be restituted to communities to manage. The experience of the Makuleke community in Kruger National Park in South Africa has set a regional precedent for the expansion of ‘tribal land’ onto the wildlife estate (both state and private owned), rather than *vice versa*.⁸⁶ Land claims against national parks have been particularly successful as state land is easier to return to the dispossessed than private land; and handbacks have usually not threatened the conservation status or economic utilisation of the land because it is often leased back to the state.⁸⁷ Yet this type of land reform could go beyond the emerging South African model for ‘contractual national parks’⁸⁸ where communities have gained title to land, but with highly restricted use rights that ensure that they are still kept separate from ‘their’ newly restituted land and natural resources (despite notionally controlling them). Instead it might embrace the notion of multiple land uses in the former ‘parks estate’ and allow alternative land uses to tourism such as commercial hunting and the collection of natural resources (ilala palm, mopane worms, quelea birds, thatching grass and such-like); or, for that matter, some agriculture and livestock-based livelihood strategies. Indeed *de facto* some form of negotiated restitution appears to be what is now happening in southeastern Zimbabwe with the horse-trading following the fall out from the land occupations in Save Valley Conservancy and Gonarezhou National Park.⁸⁹

However it is important to remember that no land reform programme can provide a panacea to the problems faced by people in the communal areas of the lowveld. Land and natural resources are not the only factors important to livelihoods, nor are they

Park] – with its high transaction costs. It’s not viable as a tourist destination.’ Interview with WWF staff member, Harare, 19/1/2001

⁸⁶ C. Steenkamp and J. Uhr, *The Makuleke land claim: power relations and community-based natural resource management* (London, International Institute for Environment and Development, 2000); M.F. Ramutsindela, ‘The perfect way to ending a painful past? Makuleke land deal in South Africa’, *Geoforum* 22 (2002), pp. 15-24.

⁸⁷ J. Carruthers, ‘Past and future landscape ideology. The Kalahari Gemsbok National Park and Uluru - Kata Tjuta National Park compared’, paper presented at the conference African environments: past and present, 5-8 July 1999, St. Anthony’s College, Oxford.

⁸⁸ Reid, ‘Contractual National Parks’.

⁸⁹ Wolmer, ‘Lowveld landscapes’.

always the most important ones. Particularly in the context of Zimbabwe's current economic collapse, labour migration, remittances and transborder trade are mainstays of livelihood systems for many in the area neighbouring Gonarezhou National Park, and are often more important than the natural resources (from wildlife to ilala palm) so beloved of donor and NGO programmes. Policies to support cross-border movements of goods and people would have the potential to improve livelihoods dramatically. The irony is that despite all the talk of opening up borders to migration of elephants and buffalo, and even to movement of tourists, these kind of policies remain unlikely.⁹⁰ Notwithstanding the bioregionalist and neoliberal free-trade rhetoric, SADC protocols, and even talk of creating a 'uni-visa',⁹¹ uncontrolled human migration is often characterised as a problem alongside 'squatting' which 'effective and efficient' transborder natural resource management will somehow solve.⁹² Concerns are also expressed by the respective governments about preventing smuggling and other criminal activities in TBNRM areas.⁹³ As the Great Limpopo plans stand there is a danger that it might do more to threaten than encourage the mobile livelihood strategies of the people living in and around it.

Almost everyone agrees that the degree of community consultation and participation in the implementation of the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park has, to date, been inadequate. Although, as is now *de rigueur*, lip-service is paid to the need for participation and benefit-sharing there are no mechanisms in place for decentralising TBNRM. Indeed because of its bilateral nature (or in this case tri-lateral) – involving formal collaborative agreements between governments at the highest level – TBNRM could potentially undo the meagre gains of CBNRM and recentralise natural resource management, further concentrating power in the hands of the state. The way the scheme has been shaping up so far runs directly counter to the dreams of the radical

⁹⁰ Indeed in October 2001 the South African government was making moves to expel Zimbabwean migrant workers, UN Integrated Regional Information Network 10/10/2001.

⁹¹ Oliver Chapeyema, USAID Regional Center for Southern Africa. See Africa Wildlife Foundation, 'Report on the heartlands conservation planning for Limpopo-Lowveld Transfrontier Conservation Area, Malilangwe Training Centre, Chiredzi, Zimbabwe, 13-15 June 2000', Africa Wildlife Foundation, CESVI, SELCC, 2000).

⁹² C. Mbizvo and E. Guveya, (eds), *Proceedings of the Transborder Natural Resources Management Workshop* (IUCN-ROSA, Harare, 1999).

⁹³ G. Linington, 'Zimbabwe-South Africa border relations', in S. N. Nkiwane, (ed), *Zimbabwe's International Borders: A Study in National and Regional Development in Southern Africa: Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Namibia and Southern Africa. Volume 1*. (University of Zimbabwe, Harare, 1997). There is a particular concern about the smuggling of stolen cars from South Africa to Mozambique and the movement of illegal weapons.

bioregionalists. Those planning TBNRM processes in Southern Africa would do well to revisit these ideals. A more nuanced bioregionalism might go beyond the simplistic utopianism and reductionism of place-bound environmental identities and yet take the 'bioregional plunge'⁹⁴ towards encouraging true local self-determination.

To end on a more positive note the Great Limpopo initiative has at least had the impact of bringing the hitherto physically and developmentally marginalised and largely forgotten communities of the communal areas of Zimbabwe's southeast lowveld to the centre stage. They have moved from the margins of the country to the centre of a TFCA. The challenge now is to have the improvement of the quality of their livelihoods and fostering of self-governance, rather than the nebulous concepts of ecological and cultural integrity, peace promotion or economic integration, as the key objectives of any further transboundary developments.

⁹⁴ T.T. Ankersen, 'Addressing the conservation conundrum in Mesoamerica: A bioregional case study' in V. M. McGinnis, (ed), *Bioregionalism* (Routledge, London and New York, 1999).