

# Transboundary Conservation: The Politics of Ecological Integrity in the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park

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RESEARCH PAPER 4

March 2003

## RESEARCH PAPER SERIES

<http://www.ids.ac.uk/slsa>

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Through work in southern Africa this research programme has explored the challenges of institutional, organisational and policy reform around land, water and wild resources. The case study sites have been in Zambezia Province, Mozambique, the Eastern Cape Wild Coast in South Africa and the lowveld area of southeastern Zimbabwe. Three broad themes have been explored:

- How do poor people gain access to and control over land, water and wild resources and through what institutional mechanisms?
- How do emerging institutional arrangements in the context of decentralisation affect poor people's access to land, water and wild resources? What institutional overlaps, complementarities and conflicts enable or limit access? What new governance arrangements are required to encourage a livelihoods approach?
- How do the livelihood concerns and contexts of poor people get represented in policy processes concerning land, water and wild resources in local, national and international arenas? What are the challenges for participation in the policy process?

The Research Paper series is published by the Sustainable Livelihoods in Southern Africa Programme, Environment Group, Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, Brighton BN1 9RE, United Kingdom.

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The research is funded by the UK Department for International Development's Rural Livelihoods Department Policy Research Programme. The views expressed in this publication are the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the funder or collaborating partners (Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex (UK), Overseas Development Institute (UK), Programme for Land and Agrarian Studies at the University of the Western Cape (South Africa), The World Conservation Union (UICN, Mozambique), and the University of Zimbabwe).

Cited as: Wolmer, W. (2003) 'Transboundary conservation: the politics of ecological integrity in the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park'. *Sustainable Livelihoods in Southern Africa Research Paper no. 4*, Institute of Development Studies, Brighton.

ISBN: 1 85864 440 2

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## Summary

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 arguing for the re-establishing 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, which spans 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 Mandela<sup>1</sup>

**I**n the last five years in Southern Africa, an apparently surprising coalition of interests have rapidly rallied around the recently emerged concept of Transboundary Natural Resource Management (TBNRM). A variety of donors have channeled massive amounts into TBNRM in the region. 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 neoliberal economic agendas, as well as donor and non-governmental organisation (NGO) funding prerogatives – are coalescing around the rapidly unfolding 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 that moves are simultaneously being made to bring more land into the conservation

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\* A version of this paper has appeared in the *Journal of Southern African Studies* 29 (1).

<sup>1</sup> 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>.



estate, given the widely reported fast-track resettlement process and ongoing farm invasions.

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 the Park 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 (Westing 1998). 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 (see, for example, Griffen 1999; Katerere et al. 2001; van der Linde et al. 2001).

The concept of TBNRM 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 World Bank and Californian counterculture – unlikely philosophical bedfellows – have joined together 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 a brand of contemporary radical environmentalism 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 (Berg and Dasmann 1977; Sale 1985; Alexander 1990; McGinnis 1999). 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' (Sale 1985: 43). These regions are

described as self-contained and equilibrated, existing in close and complex organic harmony and having specific carrying capacities for animals and humans. 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' (e.g. Berg and Dasmann 1977; Sale 2001).<sup>2</sup> These purportedly authentic and natural regions, in contrast with 'artificial' administrative or political regions, are seen as the ideal organising units for human activity (Alexander 1996); they are potentially 'coherent and empowered social and political entities' (Sale 2001: 44). Bioregionalists argue passionately for political autonomy, decentralised governance, grassroots empowerment and self-sufficiency in these 'homelands'.<sup>3</sup>

Bioregionalism has been criticised for its reductionist understanding of natural regions and undifferentiated human societies, its frequently ahistorical analysis, the environmental determinism<sup>4</sup> of its simplistic nature-culture causal linkage, and its romanticised representation of 'traditional' indigenous cultures living in harmony with the environment (Alexander 1990; Bookchin 1995; Fenkel 1994). 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. For example, all of the US-based international conservation organisations that together make up the Biodiversity Support Program (the World Resources Institute, the Nature Conservancy, and World Wildlife Fund-US (WWF)) 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.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> A philosophical antecedent of bioregionalism is Heidegger's concept of 'dwelling' in nature (Heidegger 1971). David Harvey (1993) 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 Bramwell 1989).

<sup>3</sup> There are more than 200 self-proclaimed bioregional movements in North America (Sale 2001). These have been involved in various activities including the development of local exchange and trading systems (LETS) and establishing permaculture projects.

<sup>4</sup> Environmental determinism is an early twentieth-century theory that held that the environment determined all aspects of social and economic development.

<sup>5</sup> Conservation biology is the science of biological scarcity and diversity, and is used in guiding the selection, design and management of protected areas (Callicott and Nelson 1998). See, for example, Soule (1987).

It is held that the ‘ecological integrity’ of certain bioregions, such as watersheds, mountains and river basins, (also variously described as biomes, biospheres, heartlands, eco-zones, eco-regions or eco-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 and indicator species.’<sup>6</sup> Essentially they enable more biodiversity to be conserved by maintaining diverse and large gene pools and encompassing the migratory ranges necessary for large mammals.<sup>7</sup> 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’ (Pirrot et al. 2000),<sup>8</sup> or what the African Wildlife Foundation calls ‘landscape level conservation’, with bioregions becoming the most appropriate ‘conservation units’ (Olson et al. 2000). 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 co-operation, 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 expanding such areas and for conferring conservation priority status on habitats previously ignored by wilderness preservationists because they were not sufficiently aesthetically pleasing (Callicott and Nelson 1998). As the Biodiversity Support Program (1993: 29) puts it:

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<sup>6</sup> World Resources Institute (<http://www.wri.org>).

<sup>7</sup> Much conservation biology is rooted in the principles of island biogeography which posits stable relationships between species diversity and area (MacArthur and Wilson 1967).

<sup>8</sup> The theme of IUCN’s World Conservation Congress in Amana, Jordan, 4-11 October 2000 was ‘ecospaces’.

*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].*<sup>9</sup>

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’ (de Villiers 1999).<sup>10</sup>

### **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’ (Griffen 1999).<sup>11</sup> 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’.<sup>12</sup> This ties in with the Pan-African dream of reuniting the artificially divided Africa that is colonialism’s legacy (Nkiwane 1997).

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 co-operation. 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 governments an agenda for mutual action on issues of common concern’.<sup>13</sup> In southern Africa, this has been pitched as an opportunity to heal the wounds of pre- and post-independence wars of destabilisation (Koch 1998). This is the logic by which the term ‘peace parks’ is often used to refer to these initiatives (Hanks 1997).<sup>14</sup>

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

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<sup>9</sup> Cited by Schroeder (1999).

<sup>10</sup> Note the associations with Rhodes’ colonial vision.

<sup>11</sup> Also the technical ‘ecosystems approach’ is often curiously allied with the bioregionalist argument for integrating indigenous, ‘non-scientific’, knowledge.

<sup>12</sup> The Peace Parks Foundation (<http://www.peaceparks.org>).

<sup>13</sup> Melanie Gosling ‘Peace Parks urged for conserving ecosystems’ *Cape Times* 22/9/1997.

<sup>14</sup> 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 (Westing 1998).



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 (Duffy 1997; Zerner 1996).<sup>15</sup>

## Regional economic integration

A more concrete rationale for TBNRM that 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. An initiative by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) exemplifies the ways in which discourses of radical environmentalist bioregionalism and technical conservation biology somewhat surprisingly articulate with an explicitly neoliberal free trade agenda. USAID's ambitious and well-funded Initiative for Southern Africa 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', thereby promoting the free flow of goods, services capital and labour across borders and opening up opportunities for US exports and investment. 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.'<sup>16</sup>

TBNRM is also conceptually compatible another high-profile neoliberal initiative in the southern African region with a transboundary component: 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 (Rogerson 2001).

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<sup>15</sup> 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 (Hill 1996; Murombedzi 1992; Neumann 1997).

<sup>16</sup> Deputy Minister of Environment and Tourism, Zimbabwe, Dialogue on Transboundary Natural Resource Management, 20-21 February 2001, Holiday Inn, Harare.



The push for regional economic integration is enshrined in the Southern African Development Community (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.

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, and 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 (Schroeder and Neumann 1995; Goldman 1998; Hughes 2001). 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!'<sup>17</sup>

### **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', 'sustainable utilisation', and so forth) as that of biodiversity conservation. Thus TBNRM is increasingly being put forward as a means to raise socioeconomic levels and empower previously marginalised communities so that they 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) (Koch 1998).

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

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<sup>17</sup> Interview with international conservation NGO staff member, Harare 19/1/2001.



across the landscape. Rather than fencing protected 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' (Griffen 1999). 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 increasing 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 – the Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources – 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 (Alexander and McGregor 2000). 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 (Zimbabwe Trust 1990; Child 1995). 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, and is 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.<sup>18</sup> However 10 years on the ubiquitous CBNRM activities seems to have lost some of their cutting-edge, 'of the moment' 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.

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<sup>18</sup> The community conservation discourse entered the mainstream after the 1992 World Congress on National Parks and Protected areas.



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),<sup>19</sup> 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 co-operation in the management of shared natural resources’, describing TBNRM as an ‘opportunity to apply the lessons learned in CBNRM at a larger scale’ (Katere et al. 2001: 11).

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 unwilling to give to Zimbabwe alone. So the CBNRM industry is rapidly repositioning around TBNRM in a rush 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). The conservation area covers 99,800 square kilometres (km<sup>2</sup>) (66,000 km<sup>2</sup> in Mozambique; 22,000 km<sup>2</sup> in South Africa; and 12,000 km<sup>2</sup> 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,

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<sup>19</sup> USAID: Initiative for Southern Africa (<http://www.usaid.gov/publs/bj2001/afr/isa>).

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.<sup>20</sup> 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’.<sup>21</sup>

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’ that would link Kruger Park and Rhodesia in the 1920s.<sup>22</sup> Another early advocate for a transfrontier game reserve was the notorious ivory poacher Cecil Barnard. In a romanticised account of his exploits, T.V. Bulpin (1954: 89-90) records a letter to Barnard from the Native Commissioner at Chivi, Peter Forestell:

*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.*

In the 1930s and 1940s the notion was briefly reawakened in Southern Rhodesia with the establishment of Gonarezhou game reserve (which was subsequently degazetted to allow for anti-tsetse fly hunting measures). The Minister for Commerce and Transport, R.P. Gilchrist was

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<sup>20</sup> ‘Pretoria sends elephants home’ *The Guardian* 5/10/2001.

<sup>21</sup> South African Ministry of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (<http://www.environment.gov.za>).

<sup>22</sup> 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 twentieth century (Smuts 1926). Driver (1998) tentatively links his theories in this field to colonial development doctrines in South Africa. Equally tentatively, one might suggest that this esoteric philosophy influenced Smuts’ grand bioregionalist aspirations.

very enthusiastic about the proposal on the grounds of its potential for encouraging tourism. He wrote in the *Sunday News*, ‘the idea is that the sights of Rhodesia, which are already famed, should be approached through the greatest game sanctuary in the world’, adding 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.’<sup>23</sup>

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 (Tinley and van Riet 1991). The concept appealed to the South African National Parks Board at this particular stage for variety of reasons. Firstly, after the political transformations in South Africa, the white-dominated, apartheid-era, politically-alienated 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 Park staff were keen to establish a buffer zone before the population on their doorstep became too large.<sup>24</sup> 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.<sup>25</sup>

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. The Foundation 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, owns multiple business ventures (including interests in tourism), and formerly served as president of WWF-South Africa (Bonner 1993; Duffy 2000; Ellis 1994;). He 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

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<sup>23</sup> *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’ (Bunn 1999).

<sup>24</sup> Interview with environmental consultant, Harare 12/2/2001.

<sup>25</sup> David Simon, personal communication.

instrumental in interesting the World Bank in the project and securing financing (Hanks 1997). 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 (Hanks 1997). The Peace Parks Foundation has secured funding from the private sector and the German Development Bank, has the personal endorsement of Nelson Mandela, and has garnered a great deal of publicity for the scheme.<sup>26</sup> 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 is ‘in the pocket of big business.’<sup>27</sup>

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 both apartheid and the Mozambican civil war, Kruger was envisaged as a springboard for increased tourism in the region more broadly.<sup>28</sup>

Various major bilateral and multilateral donor-funded projects have supported, directly or indirectly, the Great Limpopo initiative. First, the World Bank-hosted Global Environmental Facility (GEF) granted US\$ five million 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.<sup>29</sup> 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 (World Bank 1996: 14). The GEF has also allocated US\$ five 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

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<sup>26</sup> Such as: ‘Elephants parking space’ *Financial Times* 9/4/1988; ‘Game without frontiers’, *Time* 14/5/2001; ‘Without borders’, *National Geographic Magazine* September 2001.

<sup>27</sup> Interview, Harare, 17/1/2001.

<sup>28</sup> South African Ministry of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (<http://www.environment.gov.za>).

<sup>29</sup> The GEF was established after the 1992 Rio Summit to provide finance for international environmental projects.

wildlife from illegal killing; and minimisation of conflict between wildlife and agriculture or other land uses outside the park.<sup>30</sup> 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.’<sup>31</sup> The GEF has also laid aside (but is yet to disburse) US\$ two 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’ (Global Environmental Facility 1998).

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) (Griffen 1999). 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 industry<sup>32</sup> 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 (Goodwin et al. 1997; Willis and Pangeti 1998).<sup>33</sup> At its most ambitious this logic envisages ‘a major wildlife zone, including commercial, communal and state land [which] will stretch 300km along the Limpopo and then 300km northwards’ (Child 1993). 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*

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<sup>30</sup> *The World Bank Group Press Release* 2/6/1998 No. 98/1791/AFR.

<sup>31</sup> 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.

<sup>32</sup> 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.

<sup>33</sup> 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.



*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 (Wolmer 2001). The Great Limpopo initiative obviously fits very well with this agenda, although the business interests of this game and tourism lobby have tended to be shrouded in the language of bioregionalism and conservation biology. Typically, Price Waterhouse (1994: 22-23) argues:

*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 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]. [my emphases]*

An advisor to Save Valley Conservancy also argued that the conservancy could act as a wildlife reservoir (provided it had been fully stocked with wildlife). It would then be able to sell progeny to restock the transfrontier park.<sup>34</sup> 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 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 by farm invaders.

Alongside this process a number of NGOs, some of which were not previously working in the communal areas of southeastern Zimbabwe likely to be affected by the initiative, are jockeying to position themselves in the potentially lucrative 'community consultation' role.<sup>35</sup> These NGOs,

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<sup>34</sup> Interview with WWF staff member, Harare, June 1999.

<sup>35</sup> These are: the Italian NGO Cooperazione e Sviluppo (CESVI), the East Africa based African Wildlife Foundation (AWF), the IUCN-World Conservation Union (Regional

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 thereby 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 Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD). Additionally, 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, buffer zone, and clear zone, these 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 European Union (EU) were permitted (beef going for export reaches much higher prices). Ten million euros had been committed to the veterinary fence by the EU, though the project was put on hold due to political instability and donor concerns.

### **GLTP 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 expanding the conservation estate from enclaves to 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 interstitial connective zones, cement, or corridors between wildlife areas (Wolmer 2001).<sup>36</sup>

However, while the initiative has been getting under way the communities in Matibi II, it has largely sidelined the Sengwe and Chipise communal areas in Zimbabwe that will also be directly or indirectly affected by the proposals. This is somewhat surprising, given CBNRM's

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Office for Southern Africa), and the Zimbabwean NGOs: the Southern Alliance for Indigenous Resources (SAFIRE) and the Africa Resources Trust (ART).

<sup>36</sup> As Hughes (2001) 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.

legacy to the region's conservation discourse (consultative processes, participation, benefit sharing, etc.) and the consensus on the importance of integrated conservation and development.<sup>37</sup>

Those even vaguely familiar with the scheme tend to be suspicious on a variety of grounds. The top-down process, and lack of consultation, 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 traumatic experiences (some very recent), 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 100 km long by 10-40 km wide elephant corridor running from Kruger to Gonarezhou, which would affect up to 20,000 residents of Sengwe communal area.<sup>38</sup>

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 as well as fears that TFCA will lead to further difficulties (Wolmer 2001).<sup>39</sup>

There is also concern that the TFCA will interfere with current informal, transborder 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' (Griffen 1999: 32). 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

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<sup>37</sup> 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](http://www.peaceparks.org/content/newroom/news)). It is unclear who elected this committee or from where its mandate is derived.

<sup>38</sup> *Mail and Guardian* 24/11/2000

<sup>39</sup> 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.

livelihood strategies in these communal areas. Other livelihood strategies depend on opportunistic freedom of movement of people and livestock (Wolmer 2001). There is also concern that the scheme will interfere with agricultural activities and livestock husbandry by denying people access to grazing areas or river banks on the grounds that they are in wildlife country not farming country,<sup>40</sup> or by leading to further prohibitions on landuse practices such as using 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 (Gordon 1992; Neumann 1997; Ranger 1999). 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 (Wolmer 2001).

## Potential complications

The Great Limpopo juggernaut is still rolling and gathering steam – however certain developments in Zimbabwe might potentially put on the brakes. 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 sovereignty and potentially neo-colonial or imperialist.<sup>41</sup> 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

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<sup>40</sup> 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.

<sup>41</sup> 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.

positioned to profit (Katere et al. 2001).<sup>42</sup> Within DNPWLM, the role of national TBNRM co-ordinator 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 co-operation 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 over the lack of community consultation to date.<sup>43</sup>

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. These invasions are partly 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 transfrontier conservation area is particularly contentious given this political situation.<sup>44</sup> 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.<sup>45</sup> 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.<sup>46</sup> Also donors (such as USAID) and the Mozambican and South African governments are questioning whether Zimbabwe will honour its agreements in the current political context.<sup>47</sup> Mozambique and South Africa now appear to be pursuing a

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<sup>42</sup> And interviews, DNPWLM, Harare, February 2001 and November 2001.

<sup>43</sup> Interviews at SAFIRE, ZERO, ART, Zimbabwe Trust, and the CAMPFIRE Association, Harare, November 2001.

<sup>44</sup> 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.

<sup>45</sup> See, for example, *The Observer* 12/11/2000.

<sup>46</sup> ‘\$3b park hangs in balance’ *Zimbabwe Independent* 12/1/2001; ‘Gonarezhou demarcated for resettlement’ *Zimbabwe Independent* 11/5/2001.

<sup>47</sup> Interview with USAID staff member, Harare 18/1/2001.

more bilateral agenda (with the planned translocation of 1,000 elephants from Kruger to Coutada 16 for example).<sup>48</sup>

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 (Reid 2001).<sup>49</sup>

The risk of veterinary disease is another potential brake on the unfolding of the scheme, especially in the context of EU paranoia in the wake of BSE and the UK, Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) outbreak. Invasions of game farms mean that cattle currently graze alongside buffalo (which carry FMD and, in Kruger National Park, bovine tuberculosis). Notwithstanding the arguments of those advocating the proposed EU-funded veterinary fence (see above) opening up migration corridors for disease carrying game is an anathema to veterinarians and many people in the cattle industry, and continues to be vigorously opposed.<sup>50</sup>

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 (at various stages of conceptual development) in which Zimbabwe is involved.

## Conclusions

The Great Limpopo initiative raises many questions, but it also presents certain opportunities. I want to end by posing some of these questions and exploring some of the 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

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<sup>48</sup> '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).

<sup>49</sup> And see *Mail and Guardian* 2/3/2001.

<sup>50</sup> 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).

around them? The argument that TBNRM can help alleviate poverty is far from rigorous. Is there a contradiction between the socio-economic development of poor communities and TFCA's promises of economic renaissance based on selling 'Walt Disney' African wildlife experiences to tourists?

Other important questions include: Is it ecologically or economically necessary to have large contiguous protected areas across boundaries?<sup>51</sup> 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? Is a large area of wilderness necessary to make money, or can a landscape can be unfamiliar and a 'wilderness' without being big?<sup>52</sup>

The question of land reform is conspicuous by its absence in discussions of the Great Limpopo initiative, given near ubiquity of land issues in all other public debate in Zimbabwe. TBNRM potentially offers opportunities for radical land reform where formerly National Park or commercial farmland could be returned 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* (Steenkamp and Uhr 2001; Ramutsindela 2002). Land claims against national parks have been particularly successful since state land is easier to return to the dispossessed than private land. Handbacks have usually not threatened the conservation status or economic utilisation of the land because it is often leased back to the state (Carruthers 1999). Yet this type of land reform could go beyond the emerging South African model for 'contractual national parks' (Reid 2001), in which communities have gained title to land, but with highly restricted use rights that ensure that they remain separate from 'their' newly restituted land and natural resources (despite notionally controlling them). Instead, handbacks 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 even some agriculture and livestock-based livelihood strategies. Indeed, some form of negotiated restitution appears to be happening *de facto* in southeastern Zimbabwe as

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<sup>51</sup> Some ecological research suggests that large protected areas are not necessarily more effective at conserving biodiversity than smaller ones. See for example Zuidema et al (1996).

<sup>52</sup> '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 Park] – with its high transaction costs. It's not viable as a tourist destination.' Interview with WWF staff member, Harare, 19/1/2001.

a consequence of the land occupations in Save Valley Conservancy and Gonarezhou National Park (Wolmer et al. 2003).

However it is important to remember that no land reform programme can alone 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 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 people in the areas neighbouring Gonarezhou National Park, and are often more important than the natural resources (from wildlife to ilala palm) so beloved by donor and NGO programmes. Policies to support cross-border movements of goods and people could 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.<sup>53</sup> Notwithstanding the bioregionalist and neoliberal free-trade rhetoric, SADC protocols, and even talk of creating a 'uni-visa',<sup>54</sup> uncontrolled human migration is often characterised as a problem alongside 'squatting' which 'effective and efficient' transborder natural resource management will somehow solve (Mbizvo and Guveya 1999). The respective governments also express concerns about preventing smuggling and other criminal activities in TBNRM areas (Linington 1999).<sup>55</sup> In their current form, the Great Limpopo plans carry the danger that they might do more to threaten than encourage the mobile livelihood strategies of people living in and around the park.

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. As is now *de rigueur*, lip service is paid to the need for participation and benefit sharing, but there are still 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 radical bioregionalists. Those people planning TBNRM processes in Southern Africa would do well to revisit these ideals. A more nuanced bioregionalism might go beyond the simplistic

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<sup>53</sup> Indeed in October 2001 the South African government was making moves to expel Zimbabwean migrant workers, UN Integrated Regional Information Network 10/10/2001.

<sup>54</sup> Oliver Chapeyema, USAID Regional Center for Southern Africa, quoted in Africa Wildlife Foundation (2000).

<sup>55</sup> There is a particular concern about the smuggling of stolen cars from South Africa to Mozambique and the movement of illegal weapons.





utopianism and reductionism of place-bound environmental identities and yet take the 'bioregional plunge' (Ankerson 1999) 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 symbolically from the margins of the country to the centre of a TFCA. The challenge now is to make improving the quality of their livelihoods and fostering self-governance – rather than the nebulous concepts of ecological and cultural integrity, peace promotion, or economic integration – the key objectives of any further transboundary developments.

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