

Going Transboundary:
Scale-Making and Exclusion
in Southern-African Conservation

by

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In Southern Africa, conservation has broken loose. In the mid-1990s, governmental wildlife departments, NGOs, and donors began to plan international, cross-border parks and protected areas. Joined by magnates in the tourism and sport-hunting industries, they wish to create vast zones for the enjoyment of Western eco-tourists. In fact, little has changed on the ground. Southern African conservation is maturing faster as discourse than as material practice, and, as a discourse, its currents are complex and contradictory. On the one hand, conservationists indulge in economic boosterism, tauting the capitalist potential of some of Africa's remotest areas. Their language smacks of what Tsing (2000b: 121) calls "global financial conjuring." Statements inflate and expand the range of the possible almost beyond limits. On the other hand, the same planners deflate and shrink the range of the possible with respect to peasants' activities on the landscape. In this sense, the spatial language of conservation draws boundaries of exclusion and enclosure. Indeed, the application of ecology in the late 20th century has spawned a global "new enclosures movement" (Katz 1998: 47; cf. O'Connor 1993: 16; Watts 2000: 44-46). How does Southern African environmentalism achieve these contradictory effects? Conservationist discourse invents geographical scales and applies them unequally, bounding some people and unbounding others. As an exercise in place-making, this form of eco-capitalism makes a big place for tourists and much smaller places for peasants.

The Great Limpopo represents just such a rhetorical complex of explicit and implicit places, scales, and boundaries. Explicitly, the original zone of 1994 centered on the Limpopo River and encompassed South Africa's Kruger National Park, Zimbabwe's less-well known Gonarezhou park, and Mozambique's Coutada 16 hunting reserve.¹ By

2002, the Great Limpopo had extended its tentacles north and east (Figure 1), engulfing the Save Valley Conservancy, Mahenye, and points intermediate.² Well outside the original watershed, boosters established an artificial catchment for tourism and “community-based” wildlife management – described in promotional literature as one of many “African heartlands,” “transfrontier conservation areas,” “transboundary conservation areas,” and “peace parks.”³ A few, maverick conservationists have expressed skepticism. One cautioned me not to “glorify this latest conservationist land grab with the term ‘concept.’”⁴ Partly because of such doubts, Southern African governments have officially recognized only one of 17 potential areas.⁵ Yet, already, the Great Limpopo and other enormous domains have reframed rural development. The Great Limpopo is a discourse, but it may soon grow teeth. A mega-land-use plan is taking shape.

Because of implicit scales, it is taking shape as a fundamentally biased plan. In addition to its own zone, the “Great Limpopo” contains two further geographical notions in polar opposition: “Africa” for tourists; and “community” for peasants. Regarding the first of these, in the late 1990s, South African marketers unveiled what they called the “African dream project,” a vast network for travel and recreation. The marketing ploy makes no reference to race, but travel in Southern Africa is unavoidably coded by race. Few blacks – African-born or otherwise – visit tourist sites in the subcontinent, and many fewer blacks manage hospitality firms (Wels 2000: 233). Since the imperial safaris, whites have sold the panorama of “wild Africa” to other whites (MacKenzie 1988), and they will continue to do so in the Great Limpopo. Proponents of the scheme predict the “free movement of (white) tourists across the boundaries”⁶ and a three-country “uni-

visa.”⁷ Such ambitions imply that the continent, especially its southern lobe, should be reorganized into a “landscape of leisure” (Wilson 1991). The very same ambitions undermine black peasants’ claim to work the landscape within the Great Limpopo’s zone. Through an implicit scale of community, the Great Limpopo notion downsizes rural life.⁸ This discourse neglects peasants’ migratory and expansive practices of resource use – and, in so doing, helps to criminalize those practices. In short, the Great Limpopo figuratively “incarcerates the native” (Appadurai 1988: 37) and liberates the investor. One group gains mobility and another group loses it – a structurally racist outcome. Although neither green nor greasy, the Great Limpopo perpetuates legacies of Kipling’s era.

Planners and plans in post-socialist Southern Africa

In the 1990s, Zimbabwe and Mozambique experienced a geographical revolution. This shift of perspective overturned the “Nation” as the primary locus of analysis and imagination. In its place, once-neglected people and agencies proposed sub- and supra-national units and concepts. District-level state functionaries and park managers directed attention to the local. Meanwhile, social scientists, experts on migratory mammals, and conservationists in general sketched a continental vision. The unintended genius of the Great Limpopo was to combine these varied sectors and ideas into an interest group. (I refer that group as “Great Limpopo planners.”) The geographical revolution unites them and provides the ideological blind spots that prevent their union from dissolving.

In Mozambique, and to a lesser extent in Zimbabwe, this spatial renaissance coincided with the demise of socialism. The original Mozambican socialists, Eduardo

Mondlane and Samora Machel, had seen rural people as a “peasantry” – a single unit of analysis. Their Frelimo party discounted place of birth, regional identity, and geography by and large. With an astonishing drive to homogenize, the 1983 Party Congress heralded “the correct development of the Mozambican personality.”⁹ On the ground, however, war split the peasantry into numerous factions. By the 1992 ceasefire, the state had abandoned socialism and single partyism and was settling the groundwork for decentralization. In Scott’s (1998) terms, the state was casting about for a new terms with which to make the messiness of rural life “legible.” Two years later, the Ministry of State Administration sent an anthropologist, Iraê Baptista Lundin, to previously rebel-held areas. A brief period of fieldwork led to profound conclusions. Lundin wrote: “..The individual .. (only) recognizes himself as a man and thus identifies himself, as a social being, in his territory.”¹⁰ Many state administrators many more conservationists working in and on Mozambique embraced Lundin’s territorial thinking with gusto. *Community* supplanted *peasantry* as a new, much smaller, much more geographical unit of analysis for observing and intervening in rural society. Zimbabwe underwent a similar paradigm shift. In 1989, in the midst of its own, less dramatic transition from nominal socialism to structural adjustment, the government launched a national program of community-based wildlife management, known as CAMPFIRE.¹¹ In quick succession, districts and neighboring countries joined the bandwagon, pledging to devolve control of forests and animals to hastily organized communities of rural residents. Few did devolve, but the administrative mould was cast. Throughout Southern Africa, discourse treated small as beautiful and the national collectivity as a thing of the past.

This form of *Glasnost* answered an unspoken yearning in whites. Particularly in Zimbabwe and South Africa, whites felt marginal to the post-independence, black-ruled Nation. For them, the nation-state failed in its usual role as a “geo-body” or an “imagined community” for identities and aspirations (Thongchai 1994; Anderson 1983). Many have preferred to identify with the continent as whole. “... this is Africa,” wrote Alexandra Fuller (2001: 221), recounting a childhood spent partly in the Great Limpopo, “so hardly anything is normal.” Even whites who supported nationalist movements treat the nation-states as irrelevant in other contexts. “How to write about *Africa?*,” asks the anti-apartheid writer Breyten Breytenbach (emphasis added; Breytenbach 1996: 124-25). To the extent that Southern African post-socialism has been post-nationalist, it has given whites room to imagine a more congenial geography. Conservationist whites have leapt at the occasion. “Political boundaries are the scars of history,” denounced Willem van Riet of the Peace Parks Foundation, one of the most influential voices in trans-boundary conservation.¹² Unexpectedly, some whites have adopted pan-Africanist rhetoric. Of course, the first pan-Africanists *were* white. Echoing Cecil Rhodes, the conservationist Noel de Villiers pleads that “Africa should endeavor to join all of its game parks contiguously from Cape to Cairo.”¹³ In such a fashion, whites have used the post-socialist geographical revolution to articulate a scale in keeping with their history and hopes for the future.

Thus, the Great Limpopo represents an ideological amalgam, concocted by strange bedfellows. Like one of Tsing’s “globalist projects” it contains “contradictory as well as charismatic logics and ... messy as well effective encounters and translations” (Tsing 2000a: 330). To the casual onlooker, the Great Limpopo seems more charismatic

than contradictory and more effective than messy. How does this project stick together so well? “Africa” and “community” seem as true as nature. As one planner informed a workshop, peasants see “the landscape from the snake level ...[policy-makers see] the landscape from the bird’s view.”¹⁴ This language functions as an “anti-politics machine” (Ferguson 1994): it helps to direct attention away from the racial and class politics of mobility and towards narrow, technical concerns of zoning.¹⁵ If this spatial logic leaves gaps, then temporal notions fill them. Ecologists and economists frequently refer to the “potential” of sites in Southern Africa. Even landscapes where neither wild animals nor tourists tread may contain “optimum habitats” and “macro attractors” for leisure.¹⁶ These neologisms conflate today’s biota and markets with those of tomorrow. They impart a false concreteness on the future and logically should render any prediction meaningless. In practice, however, the belief in a potential allows conservationists to bet on best-case scenarios. In their eyes, rhino ranges and tourist meccas are attainable because *they are already there* in dormancy. Therefore, the grandest schemes gain credibility, and modest, “working landscapes” (Wilson 1991) pale in comparison. As in much of development discourse, a futurist, optimistic mentality denigrates the here-and-now of smallholder livelihoods. Ultimately, pro-peasant planners seek to stop peasants from crossing the boundaries that tourists do cross.

Bioregionalism and Afrikatourism

Ecologists feel a particular sense of grievance against boundaries. Surveyors did not consult ecologists when marking their lines. American thinkers first drew attention to such problems in the 1960s and, in an effort to correct it, founded a movement called

bioregionalism (Aberly 1999; Berg and Dasmann 1977). Events in the Kenyan savannah soon proved the bioregionalists right. At the height of the 1970s drought, elephants hemmed into Tsavo National Park, ate the woodland and then starved in enormous numbers.¹⁷ This carnage – the effect of “insularization”¹⁸ - incriminated the entire system of discrete, bounded protected areas. Somehow, farmers and grazers would have to cede some land to migratory mammals. In Zimbabwe, the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management crafted an incentive package to make wildlife more attractive to farmers. In 1975, white ranchers and, in 1989, the first local government units gained the right to profit from wildlife through tourism and sustainable hunting. Down came the fences. White ranchers sold their cattle, restocked with wild ungulates, and amalgamated their parcels as the Save Valley Conservancy and similar new territories (Figure 1) (Wels 2000: 211ff; Wolmer 2001: 165-66). In black communal lands, the CAMPFIRE program expanded wildlife ranges in the 1990s by confining agriculture (Dzingirai 2002; Hughes 2001b; and Moyo 1995: 271). Across Zimbabwe, then, agricultural spaces shrank and opened up new domains for wild fauna and flora. For bioregionalists that was still not enough. In 2000, John Hanks of the Peace Parks Foundation described Southern African conservation as characterized by “fragmented small habitat islands” and “isolated populations” (Hanks 2000: 240). “Borders often split what should be functioning ecological units,” wrote John Griffen in an influential, USAID-funded study (Griffen 1999: 5). For the sake of “ecological integrity,” the architects of the Great Limpopo sought to open national frontiers for hoofed crossing (Wolmer 2003).

Their plea concealed deep contradictions in the nature of “nature.” Or, in Raffles’s (1999: 345) more charitable formulation, their place-making also made nature.

The bioregionalists distinguished mundane boundaries from sublime Creation – a distinction that holds up rather well with respect to land forms and forest. When applied to wildlife ranges, however, the categories start to collapse. Animal ranges and migration routes shift, expand, contract, and move - often in response to human intervention. How can one determine – to any lasting degree – whether a political boundary contains or cross-cuts a migration route? Given this flux, the term “habitat” logically requires a temporal frame, and Southern African bioregionalists often neglected to give it one. The late Richard Bell asserted vaguely that the Limpopo Valley contains “species that were formerly numerous in the Southern African lowlands.”¹⁹ In fact, the ivory trade caused local elephant extinctions from the 16th century onwards (Alpers 1975: 70f; Miller 1988: 107-8). Regarding the 20th century, conservationists recognized anthropogenic factors but not their full implications. “Wildlife was eliminated from large- and small-scale farming areas” writes a former director of Zimbabwe’s national parks, “as ... intolerable competition with livestock and crops” (G. Child 1996: 350; cf. Mutwira 1989). Exotic crops, such as tobacco, replaced indigenous flora, and the native biota retreated to protected areas. These zones constituted the actual habitat in the 1990s. Why should they have been bigger? Griffen’s moralizing - that certain areas “*should* be functioning ecological units” – implied a bygone, Edenic Africa, what more critical conservationists call “the myth of wild Africa” (Adams and McShane 1992; cf. Fairhead and Leach 1996; Schroeder 1999b: 361-62). The myth relies upon a selective, composite landscape, composed of each region at the time that trade bypassed it. At any *one time* since 1500, ecological units have reflected what Cronon (1991: 266) calls the “second nature of the market.” Past and present animal ranges began where commodity catchments ended.

When discussing future habitats, Southern African conservationists readily acknowledged this economic fact. Yet, they did not always acknowledge that they were discussing the *future*. Planners' notion of "optimum habitat" bridged the gap between the known present and an imagined future.²⁰ "The optimum black rhino habitats [in Zimbabwe] are in the semi-arid areas," affirms the ecologist Raoul du Toit (1998: 4). When he wrote those lines, the black rhinoceros was extinct everywhere but in private conservancies. In the future, a climate similar to today's could support rhinos there, but only if engineers added water. Planners glossed over this contingency. An economist working for the World Bank in 1994 admitted that, "Land [in Mozambique's Coutada 16 reserve] is so dry that animals are forced to migrate some place else." Not to be deterred, however, she assured in the same document that, "the habitat is perfect for wildlife."²¹ In truth, Coutada 16 *could* be a wildlife range *if* (as the author recommended) someone drills boreholes for water. In the same year, a report of the NGO Zimbabwe Trust treated the water issue in an equally perplexing fashion: "Before any translocation of game [to Mahenye] can take place (and this is where the 'visible' value lies), *water for game is essential.*"²² Why should game be visible and water invisible when neither existed at the site? Climate change, as another hydrological shift, was certainly invisible and more easily ignored. Virtually all Great Limpopo documents ignore the scientific consensus that industrial carbon emissions are warming the atmosphere.²³ Climate models for Zimbabwe predict a shortening and intensification of the rainy season, endangering animals during the longer dry season (Makarau 1999: 14-15; Magadza 2000; Salewicz 1996). Globally, plant communities might migrate towards the poles (Pitelka, et al, 1997). If so, the Great Limpopo's biota would head south and exit the conservation

area. In short, the optimal habitat could be more accurately described as conditional: it depends upon some future events happening with respect to water and other events not happening.

Planners could not afford to acknowledge these hydrological contingencies. Taken to their logical conclusions, the water issues subverted the entire ecological basis of the Great Limpopo. If engineers were going to add a little water for wildlife, surely they could add a little more for agriculture. In 1989, a few years before the Great Limpopo idea, Du Toit himself recommended irrigation as a development strategy for the Save Valley (outside the conservancies) (Campbell, du Toit, and Attwell 1989: 101). In fact, the Jatala canal first made irrigation possible in the 1930s, and it and other water works created the vast sugar estates of the southeast lowveld (Mufema 2002: 61). To the planners of that era, southeastern Zimbabwe presented optimal conditions for dry-season vegetables and sugar cane. In 2003, the government of Zimbabwe returned to this pattern of thinking. Having precipitated a food shortage by seizing white-owned commercial farms, the state proposed irrigation for the low-producing low-veld.²⁴ Environmentalists expressed shock and alarm. They did not recognize irrigation as an extension – too much of a good thing – of their own hydrological desires. Climate change exceeded the grasp of many planners altogether. “To me, it’s not a variable I can deal with, like AIDS,” confessed a social scientist and Great Limpopo planner, “One is trying to think within human management timescales.”²⁵

He meant that Great Limpopo planners dealt with business scenarios rather than ecological ones, regardless of the actual time involved. Indeed, the economic often seemed to substitute for the ecological. Du Toit describes the Great Limpopo as optimal

because wildlife held a “comparative economic advantage” over cattle.²⁶ A seminal 1992 study had established this principle as orthodoxy in Zimbabwe.²⁷ Starting from a very low figure at Independence in 1980, tourism grew by 325% up to 1994²⁸ and continued to grow throughout the 1990s. In 1997, when du Toit analyzed the lowveld, sport-hunting certainly out-performed beef production on a per-hectare basis and on the basis of returns to investment. Yet, the phrase “comparative economic advantage” – like “optimum habitat” – suggested something more permanent. Ecologists and economists treated the post-1980 boom in Zimbabwe’s hospitality industry as normal, and they projected that current market into the future. On the basis of those implicit speculations, they then imagined a more profitable mix of land uses. Finally, they retro-jected that mix of land uses back to the present, as a contemporary potential. The resultant notion of an “optimum habitat” and “comparative economic advantage” reflected not current ecology but an anticipated economy – perhaps a “third nature” of market futures.

This futurism constituted a non-falsifiable belief, a planner’s Nuer religion (Evans-Pritchard 1956). It protected the Great Limpopo from skepticism based on Zimbabwe’s evolving political economy. When, in 2000, para-militaries seized land and otherwise abrogated the rule of law, proponents of the Great Limpopo adopted the phrase “future government” (taking care, however, not to use that term in writing). Even when postponed, the future retained its sense of inevitability. Meeting me in the middle of national strike in 2003, one conservationist referred to the previous three years as a “twilight” leading up to the “Big Bang” of the fall of the government.²⁹ Meanwhile, dictatorship and political violence destroyed the tourist trade (with the exception of sport-hunting). In 2000, I found that a hotel on the northern rim of the Great Limpopo earned

no profit from eco-tourism (Hughes 2001: 588, 592). When I published this datum, Great Limpopo proponents responded by dismissing the present. “Note,” admonished my sponsor, your “...table reports data obtained during the current economic crisis and state of fear. Thus it does not represent normalized findings.”³⁰ In other words, the bust I quantified was *abnormal*. At almost the same time, a leading ecologist dismissed his own findings from an area in the Great Limpopo called Chizvirizvi (Figure 1). Rowan Martin’s digital slide show acknowledges that “the [state-backed] invasion of the [Gonarezhou] national park seriously reduces the wildlife potential and opportunities for Chizvirizvi.” Yet, a later slide asserts, “The potential earnings from wildlife are limited only by marketing skills.”³¹ Such ambivalent conservationist commentary treated Zimbabwe’s ongoing politics as a transient anomaly.

Investors embraced an equally flawed *anti-chronology*. For them, both the Southern African subcontinent and the investors themselves held potential. As a region, the Great Limpopo watershed contained a natural worth that borders had depressed artificially. The latter exerted what one expert termed “value-sapping effect.”³² Only investors could undo the damage and recuperate the loss. Such logic overlooked the ways in which the borders and black laborers had created wealth. Throughout the 20th century, borders acted as “sifters of labour,” undercutting the wages of illegal Mozambicans and augmenting the profits of South African mines and Zimbabwean plantations (Ranger 1994: 287). The same Mozambican workers repatriated South African currency to their home areas. Based on the borders, functional dualism enriched all three countries, although in a highly skewed fashion. Of course, in the mid-1990s, South Africa closed its borders to migrant labor. The call for new “cross-investment”

both denied this entire earlier trajectory of development and signaled that labor migration would not be reauthorized.³³ Instead, consultants, officials, and journalists cited (mostly white) capitalists as the incipient economic engine for the Great Limpopo. For instance, in 1997, Maputo's leading newspaper interviewed Hans Harri, a South African hotel magnate and president of the Phalaborwa Chamber of Commerce, on what he called a Limpopo "tourism corridor." Warming to the topic, Harri presented a regional manifesto for investor-led growth:

The entrepreneurial dynamic obliges the men who have big business in South Africa to look, in other parts of the globe, for other markets. This is dictated by development, and we are sure that, in addition to satisfying the ambitions of our businessmen, we will contribute so that, in record-time, a strong economy is implanted in your country [Mozambique].³⁴

Although few such businessmen have actually invested in the Great Limpopo, their prophetic, regional thinking has conjured a new, continental scale of economic thinking. No African group has conjured more than an organization founded in Cape Town in 1999 called Open Africa. In that year, the group's president, Noel de Villiers, called for "a revolution in tourism ...[as] the leading catalyst of the African Renaissance." "The best way I can describe the African Dream Project," he continued, "is to ask you to imagine ... route[s] ...stretching in all directions across the continent" and advertised under the brand "Afrikatourism."³⁵ As if the tourist-pilgrims would walk these paths, Open Africa's logo depicts the continent as a footprint. Through an "economy of appearances" (Tsing 2000b), Open Africa is hoping to raise capital for hotels and other amenities throughout the continent. They have not succeeded to any great degree so far. Yet, Open Africa and Afrikatourism are already manufacturing potential. "Africa covers one-quarter of the Earth's land surface ... and [enjoys] only a

2% share of the global tourism market,” notes Open Africa’s publicity (as if per-hectare values were comparable anywhere else in the world). Invoking the “staggering implications of this potential,” Open Africa conveys a moral message: travelers, like animals, *should* march across Africa.³⁶ All in all, the Great Limpopo, will allow tourists and those who make money from tourists to move their assets, move themselves, and move their dreams across national lines.

Communities “in their areas”

While eco-tourism went transboundary in the 1990s, other components of conservation went *in*-boundary. In the 1990s, the bulk of Southern African conservationists and development planners re-committed themselves to the social model of bounded communities of place – just in time to rescue it from obsolescence and disrepute. From the 1960s to the 1980s, state-led development and regulation had promoted various regimes of villagization. Zimbabwe had resettled people into nucleated villages – known colloquially as “lines” - and Mozambique had mandated “communal villages” for an otherwise quite dispersed peasantry.³⁷ These efforts aimed to build socialism and/or use land and other resources more efficiently. If rural people would just invest in one field or pasture – planners believed – they would husband it carefully and even improve it. These efforts at *intensive development* frequently provoked resistance from a peasantry more accustomed to *extensive strategies*. Many villagers farmed, grazed, or hunted outside their allotted zones. By spreading opportunity across space, they balanced the risks of lowland and upland cultivation, sour and sweet grass, and even formal and informal employment.³⁸ In the pejorative lingo of Zimbabwean planners of

the 1980s, peasants tended to “bombshell” chaotically and illegally in all directions.³⁹

The stronger South African state repressed bombshelling by confining black women to Bantustans and black men to workers’ hostels.⁴⁰ In a way that few planners appreciated, all such policies – from the overtly racist to the merely paternalistic - forced smallholders to limit their dreams to their environs.

In the 1990s, the village model attracted Southern African conservationists for a new set of reasons. It fit hand-in-glove with American notions of resource management, particularly with bioregionalism and community theory. In the 1970s, seminal American bioregionalists had recommended that people “live in place”: they should focus their attention on *local* resources (Berg and Dassman 1977: 399). Although Southern African bioregionalism shed much of this romanticism (Wolmer 2003), it still conveyed the implicit message that peasants should act locally and think locally. Explicitly, conservationists embraced Elinor Ostrom’s (1990) formal model of collective action, known as “common pool resource” management. Ostrom argues that, among all human groups, geographically bounded communities are best suited to manage their resources as sustainable commons.⁴¹ Policy-makers can safely entrust such “communities of place” with the control of wildlife, forests, and water. Southern African planners seized upon this prescription and took it a step further. Rather than testing groups for the qualities of “community,” they assumed that rural people lived in communities. Or, they made communities by imposing boundaries on people. In the 1990s, they adopted techniques of “appraisal” and “social assessment” predicated upon community-based living. These studies, then, generated projects in community-based natural resource management, the primary means of engaging black smallholders in the Great Limpopo. Still, the research

and the projects could not completely obscure centrifugal tendencies in residence and resource use. Contrary to the model, peasants moved – or wanted to move - from one locale to another.

To do their jobs, Great Limpopo planners had to create communities of place. They did so by, as Ferguson writes of the World Bank in Lesotho, “reasoning backward from the necessary conclusions” (Ferguson 1994: 259). For example, in 1994, the World Bank commissioned a number of “social appraisals” in border regions of Mozambique.⁴² As a study soon revealed, residents of Makandezulu in the Coutada 16 hunting reserve (Figure 1) had fled to South and/or sent their cattle far away to emergency pastures.⁴³ The main document of the World Bank’s “Transfrontier Conservation Areas and Institutional Strengthening Project”’s foundational document had to acknowledge this sorry state of affairs, but it did so in a backhanded fashion. “Traditional communities” in and around Makandezulu, found one of the document’s authors, “are difficult to identify following their disruption.”⁴⁴ Based on minimal information regarding pre-war society, the study assumed that a cohesive, sedentary community had existed. Presumably, war had pushed it into dormancy – a state of potential from which it might reappear in peacetime. Indeed, the Great Limpopo project hoped to control conditions so that it *would* reappear. As a solution to “unplanned settlement as a result of returning refugees,” the World Bank suggested community-based wildlife management.⁴⁵ Presumably, such intensive development would dissuade people from herding their cattle outside prescribed zones. Just to be sure, Mozambique’s National Directorate of Forestry and Wildlife converted Coutada 16 into the Limpopo National Park in 2001. With the consequent demarcation of grazing and touristic zones, black smallholders will lose access to huge

emergency grazing tracts, but the project obscures this act of enclosure. In theory, people lose only what they no longer wanted. The compact, self-contained “community” need not use distant resources.⁴⁶

At the other end of the Great Limpopo zone, planning also conjoined enclosure and community theory. Here, ideas of community legitimated previous evictions rather than justifying new ones. During the 1970s war, the Rhodesian government had moved employees in ranches west of the Save River into east-bank irrigation schemes and “protected villages.” At Independence, many would have returned to the ranches, where they had cultivated their own gardens, raised bees, and collected wild plants. Yet, the ranchers denied them access. In the process of converting from cattle to game and founding the Save Valley Conservancy, they marked the river with a high, electrified fence - an early maneuver in the ecological “new enclosures movement.”⁴⁷ “We have been shut in,” lamented a headman’s son from an area known as Manesa (Figure 1).⁴⁸ By the time a Zimbabwean environmental NGO, Safire, visited Manesa in 1999 irredentism was running high.⁴⁹ Could Safire – for whom I was then consulting – avoid such territorial matters? To an assembled crowd of Manesa men and women, the field officer opened the agency’s two-day “participatory rural appraisal” (PRA) by asking, what are “the usable things in your area?”⁵⁰ Standard in such exercises, the caveat “in your area” initially passed without remark. The crowd broke into small groups to fill out a matrix of resources and their locations. They wrote in reeds, baobab fruits and bark, and bee hives, located “across the Save” and “in the private estate.”⁵¹ Orally, one man elaborated, “We are chased away.”⁵² Thus, land claims entered the appraisal – to the dismay of some on-lookers. The district councillor, who was now collaborating with the Conservancy (see

below), insisted, “the resources in *your* area, *please!*”⁵³ Note-takers hastily deleted “across the Save,” sending those matrices in-boundary.

By the afternoon of the first day, Safire staff recognized this process of confinement and expressed unease about its contradictions. They wished to support an *intensive* form of entrepreneurship – earning more money from a fixed land area. Specifically, they wanted to help east bank residents to manage reeds so as to produce baskets and other goods in a sustainable and profitable fashion. Manesa people, however, wanted to retake land in an *extensive* fashion. The agency’s small-is-beautiful belief in efficiency came up against peasants’ conviction that bigger was better -and necessary! At least, Safire allowed people to speak and listened to them. “The land was taken by the game,” recounted a woman. As if continuing her thought, a man later concluded his own remarks with, “Therefore, we will do as border jumpers do.”⁵⁴ Such political insight and bluntness caused difficulties for Safire’s staff. “The problem is they are too much looking behind that fence,” complained one fieldworker. Neither he nor his colleagues wanted to try to solve that problem.⁵⁵ “Effectively, we are part of the system,” confessed one manager to me at a later date, “We are not change agents anymore.”⁵⁶ Later still, the PRA officer’s final report on Manesa reflected this ambivalence and the search for a safer course of action:

The community felt that they should exhaust the issue of the [Save Valley] conservancy despite the fact that of current [currently] they were not realizing the benefits of the concept [the land grievance]. An assurance was provided by the Safire staff on the commitments made [to relay the land grievance to local

government], but ... the enterprise department [of Safire] would determine the direction in which Safire was going to take.⁵⁷

Thus, a branch of Safire not present at the appraisal over-ruled local sentiments. In-boundary basketry would go forward - even in the teeth of known territorial priorities.

Whereas this private agency at least recorded peasants' transboundary ambitions, government in the Great Limpopo sometimes ignored them completely. Within a few months of Safire's appraisal of Manesa, the Chipinge Rural District Council held a workshop involving a nearby locality, Chibuwe (Figure 1). Also on the east bank of the Save, Chibuwe shared Manesa's history of cross-river resource use, confinement, and fencing. Like Manesa, Chibuwe threatened to subvert the agenda of in-boundary development. This time, participants indicated pit sand, reeds, and bee hives west of the Save River. The PRA leader – known as Chipinge's "Campfire officer" - later showed me the original map from Chibuwe (Figure 2) and his adaptation of it for the final report (Figure 3).⁵⁸ Astonishingly, his design deleted all the notations west of the Save and introduced a border around Chibuwe. As he put it, the officer "reproduced the information that was relevant for the workshop."⁵⁹ Presumably in the same spirit, the expert also introduced a "Save River travelers camp." The council and the conservancy – now working together - envisioned a "traditional village" in Chibuwe offering dances and crafts for day-trippers from the Conservancy.⁶⁰ Like baskets, dances constituted intensive development, a means of making more money in the same, bounded zone. In effect, the PRA congruent with tourists' desire to ford the Save dismissed peasants' will to do the same.

From the very outset, such community-based projects impose spatial constraints. Mozambique's National Directorate of Forestry and Wildlife seeks to "empower communities to manage natural resources *within their surrounding environments*."⁶¹ Zimbabwe's "Communal Area Reorganisation Plan" articulates the principle of "planning defined geographical space to be occupied by defined communities." Thus, social action follows from a pre-determined territorial unit – with, as the document assures, "effective and thorough public debate and community participation."⁶² Such double-speak makes a certain sense: community-based development empowers people *in their areas* and nowhere else. "Hence, planners obsess about cartography and, in particular, about boundaries."⁶³ "What is the purpose of a map?" asked a workshop facilitator in 1999. To "show boundaries," responded the leader of Manesa's PRA with alacrity.⁶⁴ Another PRA leader operating in the Great Limpopo instructed me: "To draw a community map, [residents] ... have to highlight the resources ... as well as marking out a boundary, a rough boundary."⁶⁵ Beyond the boundary – in places such as the west bank of the Save – people may stake no claims. The boundary separates empowerment from disempowerment. And it certifies the community as a natural scale for development, as a container for people's ambitions. In 1999, brochures of the Poverty Alleviation Action Programme exhorted Chipinge peasants in English to "Participate in the development of your community." The author, of course, translated this statement, but he or she found no Shona cognate for "community." Resorting to the standard geographical lexicon, the Shona version of the brochure (when back-translated) urges: "Become a member in planning the development of your place."⁶⁶ By implication, only pathological peasants,

such as, squatters and poachers, go transboundary. Proper communities stay where they belong.

In so negating peasant's mobility and extensive dreams, community theory also denied them a future. Families in Manesa and Makandezulu were growing, and they knew it. "We have been forced to live together as in a resettlement scheme – the lines..." "Our children have no place to live," worried informants in Chibuwe.⁶⁷ When I relayed their concerns, a district officer responded, "Land being scarce, we cannot set aside for futures?"⁶⁸ An agricultural extension agent defended his practice with regard to unborn children: "Normally we don't plan for somebody who is not there."⁶⁹ Surely, such planning – based on an assumption of stasis – is no planning at all. It enters the realm of fantasy and conjuring. In this case, planners in the Great Limpopo conjured the small rather than the large, the city rather than the frontier. "As time goes on," mused a high-placed official in Chimanimani, "these villages will become urbanized. You never know."⁷⁰ With greater certainty, the head of a Campfire agency coached me on his architectural strategy for peasants: "OK, let us expand upwards, and, if we can have some five-storey buildings, rather than expanding that way [arms outstretched]."⁷¹ These planners saw tall towns where there were only dispersed huts in the process of dispersing further. Indeed, their bureaucratic vision suffered from a defect inverse to that of the rhino, who cannot see people unless they move. Great Limpopo planners would not recognize people unless they stood still.

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Taken together, bioregionalism and community theory regulate human mobility in a strikingly unequal fashion. Yet, they hide that inequality in double standards and a tangled logic of space and time. Great Limpopo planners imagine a continental space for tourists and investors and village spaces for peasants. At the continental scale, bioregionalists seek to heal the scars of partition and to let game and game viewers run free. They dream the African dream, and they dream of making money. Indeed, bottom-line bioregionalism treats future profits as certain – its conjuring with respect to time. According to this line of thought, the cattle ranges of the Great Limpopo hold the potential for high-value tourism and sport-hunting. These zones are optimum habitat, an anticipated “third nature,” that is treated as real. Thus, bioregionalists see the future while looking at the present. Their African scale affirms growth and denies boundaries. Meanwhile, the village scale denies growth and affirms boundaries. The “appraisers” of peasant societies describe a small-scale, bounded present while signs of an expanded, boundary-busting future are all around them. Above the din of children, planners speak of stable rural populations contained behind electric fences. But the fence, like the children, recedes from view. The Great Limpopo construes the village scale not as a limitation, but as an opportunity for smallholders. Inequality – in the greatest feat of conjuring – becomes parity. After all, each party does according to its liking *within its space*. Through intensive, community-based projects, peasants can cultivate their garden within their boundaries. In doing so, they free up land for extensive bioregions and travel routes. Tourists expand as peasants involute. Big, vibrant (white) bioregions nestle against small, static (black) villages.

What is new about at this sorry state of affairs? In part very little: since the earliest colonial days, outward-bound settlers and capitalists have squeezed Southern African smallholders into smaller zones. For itself, Britain made a global scale, an empire over which the sun never set. For the colonized peoples, British administrators and social scientists crafted a “sedentarist metaphysics” (Malkki 1992) – the dictum that tribes hailed from particular locales and should stay there. The Great Limpopo perpetuates this traditional of structural, spatial racism. Yet, since the British and other European empires ended long ago, Great Limpopo planners have necessarily found new terms for their discourse. In some cases, they appear to have done so almost consciously and strategically. The “Cape to Cairo” conservationist dream smacks of imperial nostalgia. In fact, it recalls the late 19th century *before* formal Empire, when white explorers and visionaries mapped the continent. Unthreatening in an almost pre-political fashion, the “Cape to Cairo” scale now passes without criticism precisely because it bears so little relation to history of the past century. The community scale, on the other hand, stems obviously from the post-socialist politics of the 1980s. In this era of “market triumphalism” (Peet and Watts 1996), NGOs and donors hunt for collectivities outside the regulatory ambit of the state. Small is beautiful, and local is authentic. Now, Great Limpopo planners have set the stage for a conjuncture unprecedented since the age of the explorers: peasants and transnational capitalists confronting each other – greeting, negotiating, misunderstanding – without mediation. In short, the state of affairs is not new *per se*, but it is new in terms of the recent past.

The Great Limpopo, then, would seem to represent a bizarre sort of capitalism or globalization. The project thrusts a proto-colonial discourse into the post-colonial era of

global capitalism. Or, it thrusts a discourse of capitalism into a proto-colonial situation along the banks of the Save River. Perhaps, such juxtapositions are not unusual after all. People who make scales undertake difficult, sometimes dangerous work. They call upon all the cultural resources at hand, even upon traditions and ideas of dubious repute. Nowhere is this more true than in declining post-colonies, where no model of progress can claim supremacy. The “exhausted nationalism” of Zimbabwe reminds one of Umberto Eco’s “travels in hyper-reality” through California.⁷² Scale-making projects make pastiches of history, invented history, dreams, and imposed dreams. Even if has yet happen on the ground – as in the Great Limpopo – scales may radically alter the range of the possible. In rural Southern Africa, people may now plan to travel – and plan to prevent others from traveling – in ways that are shockingly unequal. Even more shockingly, few observers are shocked. Successful scale-making covers its tracks.

Notes

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¹ Almost immediately, proponents in Maputo included Mozambique's Banhine and Zinave National Parks in the scheme. By 2002, some conservationists planned to link the Great Limpopo with the Chimanimani Transfrontier Conservation straddling the Chimanimani Mountains (Jaidev Singh, pers. com., 21 May 2002).

² In this connection, I refer to the zone for planning and promotion rather than to the much smaller Great Limpopo National Park actually formalized in 2001.

³ Zimmerer (2000) describes such areas as "new conservation territories."

⁴ Personal communication, 17 June 2001.

⁵ Griffen (2001: map 10) locates the 17 zones.

⁶ John Hanks, “Transfrontier conservation areas: their role in socio-economic development, conserving biodiversity and promoting a culture of peace.” Presentation to the “Transboundary protected areas” conference, Yale School of Forestry, New Haven, CT, 30-31 March 2001.

⁷ Wolmer (2003) quotes a USAID official using this phrase.

⁸ See Agrawal and Gibson (1999: 633-34), Schroeder (1999b), and Vandergeest (1996: 298) for similar arguments.

⁹ “Report from the Commission for Economic and Social Directives,” FRELIMO Fourth Party Congress, 1983 (quoted in Isaacman and Isaacman 1983: 196).

¹⁰ “... *indivíduo que (só) se reconhece como homem e assim se identifica, enquanto ser social, dentro do seu território*” (Lundin 1995: 89).

¹¹ CAMPFIRE denotes the Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources.

¹² Quoted in Godwin (2001: 11).

¹³ Noel de Villiers, presentation to the first Agenda 21 “Indaba on culture conscious transfrontier conservation areas,” 18 May 1999; quoted in Wolmer (2003). Even the Zimbabwean author and journalist Peter Godwin endorses this “ecological Cape to Cairo dream” (Godwin 2001: 17).

¹⁴ Remarks during a break-out group of the “Southern Africa technical workshop on communities and conservation,” Centurion, South Africa, 26-28 February 2003.

¹⁵ Meanwhile, the lexicon helps to broaden the reach of state technocrats. Schafer and Bell (2002) Singh (2001: 111) make this argument with respect to the Chimanimani

transboundary conservation area on the Zimbabwe-Mozambique border (cf. Neumann 1997).

¹⁶ For the second phrase: Noel N. de Villiers, speech to the Community Tourism Association of South Africa annual general meeting, 10 September 1999.

¹⁷ Beard (1988: 235ff) provides a compelling pictorial account of the death.

¹⁸ The term derives from the ecological theory of island biogeography, which exerted a strong influence on African conservation (MacArthur and Wilson 1967: 176; cf Western 1994: 42). Some experts, however, still subscribe to a minority view: that stochastic crashes of the elephant population are normal and could be expected even absent humans (Richard Bell, pers. com.).

¹⁹ Richard Bell, “Concept paper for the Zimbabwe component of the Limpopo/Shashe trans-frontier conservation area.” Harare: CESVI, March 2001. p. 5.

²⁰ In Harvey’s (1989: 291) terms, they “discounted [the future] into the present.”

²¹ Paula Agostini. “BTO: the role of Gaza Safari in the Development of TFCA project.” Maputo: the World Bank, 1994. pp. 7, 8.

²² Emphasis in original. Barry Fowlds, “Game water supply – Mahenye.” Harare: Zimbabwe Trust, unpublished report, 13 July 1994, p. 2.

²³ Among conservationists, Cumming (1999: 3) is an exception. He does mention global warming, but the report synthesizing his work and others’ excludes this issue from the relevant section (Griffen, et al 1999: 12).

²⁴ “Irrigation project threatens wildlife sanctuary,” *Financial Gazette* (Harare), 6 March 2003.

²⁵ Harare, 24 April 2003.

²⁶ Ibid. Cf G. Child (1996: 358). This argument contravened the recommendation of an earlier report, co-authored by du Toit, in favor of intensive, irrigated agriculture in the Save Valley (Campbell, du Toit, and Attwell 1989: 101). It also contravened an even earlier discourse which held that the low veld was ideal cattle country (Wolmer 2001: 116). In

²⁷ The study, Jansen, Bond, and Child (1992), articulated the principle with far greater caution than did its later popularizers (as Wels [2000: 234] explains). Bond (2001) has since added important caveats to their conclusions.

²⁸ As measured by the gross number of foreign visitors (Bond 2001: 231).

²⁹ Interview, Harare, 24 April 2003.

³⁰ Personal communication, 7 February 2002.

³¹ Rowan Martin, “Chizvirizvi resettlement area: development of a land use plan.” Presentation in graphic design software, 2002. At almost the same time, conservationists closer to the ground gave a bleaker assessment. Digby Nesbitt, chairman of the Chiredzi Conservancy, predicted “Even if the poaching and invasions stopped tomorrow, it’d take another 10 years to recuperate. I don’t believe this conservancy will last another 6 months.” “Our business is dead!” pronounced Willie Pabst, a ranch-owner in the Save Valley Conservancy (both quoted in Jenny Sharman, “ZANU-PF’s legacy to Zimbabwe,” November 2001, pp. 1, 4).

³² Bell, *op cit.* p. 3.

³³ The phrase derives from a Maputo-based consultant (personal communication, 3 July 2001).

³⁴ “*corredor turístico*” ... “*A dinâmica empresarial obriga os homens que têm grandes negócios na África do Sul a buscarem noutras partes do globo outros mercados. Isto é ditado pelo desenvolvimento, e estamos certos que isso, para além de satisfazer as ambições dos nossos homens de negócios, irá contribuir para que num espaço recorde de tempo se implante no vosso país uma economia forte...*” Quoted in “Investidores sul-africanos de malas aviadas para Gaza.” *Notícias* (Maputo, Mozambique), 13 June 1997, p. 9.

³⁵ Noel N. de Villiers, speech to the Community Tourism Association of South Africa annual general meeting, 10 September 1999.

³⁶ Open Africa, “Open’Africa’s tourism development, job creation and conservation system: optimizing the synergies between tourism, job creation, and conservation.” Presentation in graphic design software, 2001.

³⁷ On Mozambique, see Borges Coelho (1998). Tanzania’s 1970s program of ujamaa socialism is the most celebrated case of forced villagization (von Freyhold 1979).

³⁸ Ferguson (1999) describes this phenomenon as the “full house of rural-urban residential strategies” (cf. Scoones, et al. 1996)

³⁹ As recalled by a former resettlement officer in an interview (Vumba, Zimbabwe, 22 August 1999).

⁴⁰ I follow Mamadani (1996) in considering South Africa an extreme, rather than exceptional case, of colonial spatial politics.

⁴¹ Ostrom lists a number of other conditions relating to the people and the resources that increase the likelihood of sustainable management.

⁴² In 1995, I conducted an appraisal for what became the Chimanimani Transfrontier Conservation Area.

⁴³ Legislation allows Mozambicans to inhabit and grow “subsistence” crops in hunting reserves.

⁴⁴ Environment and Development Group, “GEF transfrontier conservation areas and institution strengthening project: preparation studies.” Oxford, UK: Environment and Development Group, 1994. p. 29.

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 28.

⁴⁶ Mozambicans have already lost access to South Africa, with the closure of its border against labor migrants.

⁴⁷ Wels (2000: 211ff) and Wolmer (2001: 170) detail the history of the Save Valley Conservancy and, in particular, the centrality of fences in conflicts within and involving the Conservancy (Wels 2000: 247ff).

⁴⁸ “*Tavharirwa*” (Manesa, 4 August 1999). Vijfhuizen (2002: 178) provides further testimony on this eviction.

⁴⁹ See Moore (1998) for an account of such spatial politics in a nearby locale of Zimbabwe. Safire is an acronym for Southern Alliance for Indigenous Resources.

⁵⁰ “...*zviwanikwa zviru mudunhu renyu*” (Manesa, 4 August 1999).

⁵¹ “*seri kwaSave;*” “*kupurazi*” (my notes from PRA workshop, Manesa, 4 August 1999).

⁵² “*Tinodzingirwa*” (Manesa, 4 August 1999).

⁵³ “*zviwanikwa zviru muarea yenyu, please!*” (Manesa, 4 August 1999).

⁵⁴ “*Nyika yakatorwa negame.*” “*Saka toita semaborder jumper*” (Manesa, 5 August 1999).

⁵⁵ Interview, Manesa, 4 August 1999.

⁵⁶ Interview, Harare, 23 August 1999. Safire had formed a tight collaboration with the Chipinge Rural District Council, among other councils.

⁵⁷ Manasa Sibanda, “PRA baseline report on the Manesa Ward, Manesa Village workshop” (Harare: Southern Alliance for Indigenous Resources), 1999, p. 3.

⁵⁸ Chipinge Rural District Council. 1999. “Report on natural resources management workshop held at Manesa Training Centre on 26-30 April,” p. 6.

⁵⁹ Interview, Chipinge, 16 August 1999.

⁶⁰ In 1998, the Save Valley Conservancy had erected a similar “traditional village” in the Gudo area, slightly to the south of Chibuwe. Anticipating a land grab, Gudo residents burned down the partially constructed village (Wels 2000: 294-96; cf. Wolmer 2001: 181-83).

⁶¹ Emphasis added; Direcção Nacional de Florestas e Fauna Bravia, TFCA “Annual Progress Report” covering 1998, Maputo: Direcção Nacional de Florestas e Fauna Bravia, 1999. P. 21.

⁶² Agritex, “The communal area reorganisation programme: Agritex approach.” Harare: Agritex, July 1988, pp. 2,1

⁶³ As reflected in the attention devoted to “geomatics” from the 1990s onward (Hodgson and Schroeder 2002; Hughes 2001a; Peluso 1995).

⁶⁴ Workshop on GPS/community mapping, Chipinge, 18 August 1999.

⁶⁵ Interview, Chimanimani, 14 July 2000.

⁶⁶ “PAAP community action project,” brochure in English and Shona. The Shona phrase is “*Iva nhengo yechirongwa chebudiriro yenzvimbo yako.*”

⁶⁷ “*Takagariswa semaresettlement, maline... Vana vedu havana pokugara*” (Chibuwe, 23 July 1999).

⁶⁸ Chipinge, 17 August 1999.

⁶⁹ Manesa, 4 August 1999.

⁷⁰ Interview, Chimanimani, 21 July 1999.

⁷¹ Interview, Harare, 31 March 2000.

⁷² The phrases are from Bond and Manyanya (2002) and Eco (1986).

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Figure 1

The Great Limpopo Transboundary Conservation Area

Figure 2

Resource map draw by Chibuwe residents

Figure 3

Reproduction of Figure 2 in PRA report (source: Chipinge Rural District Council. 1999.

“Report on natural resource management workshop held at Manesa Rural Training

Centre on 26-30April,” p. 6.
