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**COLONIAL LEGACIES IN
THE ERA OF NEOLIBERAL CONSERVATION.
CASE STUDY: LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND THE PEACE
PARKS MOVEMENT IN SOUTHERN AFRICA.**

Master's Thesis
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ABSTRACT

The global onset of neoliberalism in the latter part of the 20th century greatly influenced the fields of conservation and development in southern Africa, leading to the current neoliberal conservation era. Peace parks, otherwise known as transfrontier conservation areas (TFCAs), are a direct manifestation of this neoliberal conservation era, characterized by promotion of capitalism in conservation and commodification of landscapes, wildlife and people living within and on the peripheries of the parks. Although this system markets itself as the new, modern solution to the world's development and conservation problems, in reality, it bears resemblance to that of the region's colonial past. This continuity is problematic and dangerous, with imminent implications on a global scale. Therefore, employing qualitative methodology, this research aims to explore to what extent neoliberalism has infiltrated and influenced the world of environmental conservation and what it means to say we are living in the neoliberal conservation era.

Key words:

neoliberalism, transfrontier conservation, peace parks, colonial legacies, Southern Africa

HERENCIAS COLONIALES EN LA ÉPOCA DE LA CONSERVACIÓN NEOLIBERAL. ESTUDIO DE CASO: LAS COMUNIDADES LOCALES Y LOS PARQUES DE PAZ AL SUR DE ÁFRICA

RESUMEN

El arranque global del neoliberalismo durante la segunda mitad del siglo XX influyó profundamente a la conservación y el desarrollo en el sur de África, dando origen a la actual época de la conservación neoliberal. Parques de paz, también llamados áreas transfronterizas de conservación (TFCAs), son una manifestación directa de esa época, caracterizada por la promoción del capitalismo en la conservación y la mercantilización de los paisajes, animales, y personas que viven dentro y alrededor de los parques. Aunque este sistema se “vende” como la nueva, moderna solución al problema mundial del desarrollo y conservación, en realidad, se parece a la pasada colonización de la región. Esta continuidad es problemática y peligrosa con implicaciones inminentes de alcance global. Empleando la metodología cualitativa, esta investigación pretende explorar la infiltración e influencia del neoliberalismo en el mundo de la conservación medioambiental, así como el significado de la afirmación “vivimos en la época de la conservación neoliberal”.

Palabras clave:

neoliberalismo, conservación transfronteriza, parques de paz, herencias coloniales, África del sur

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I

INTRODUCTION, OBJECTIVES & MOTIVATION

Between 1780 and 1880 it is thought that close to 20 million wild animals were eliminated amidst the European settlement of southern Africa. This over-utilization of resources was fueled by the rapidly increasing profitability of hunting, made possible by the introduction of technology such as firearms, medicine, fences, railways and markets.¹ Colonial governments eventually recognized the need for action but not before considerable irreversible damage had already been done. The earliest conservation legislation, produced in reaction to fears of soil erosion and deforestation, came out of the Cape Colony in the 1820s and has continued to grow and evolve since then. One of the more notable developments has been that of parks, primarily associated with the period 1930-1970, one of “energetic park building” resulting in the creation of the majority of today’s most globally important parks.² Over the past several decades, through the toppling of colonial empires, the emergence of independent former colonies and eventual establishment of today’s sovereign nations, conservation ideology has experienced continual transformation, always a reflection of the societal priorities of the time. One of the most recent and substantial shifts was brought on by the global advancement of neoliberalism and subsequent onset of community-based conservation during the 1990s.

My research is two-fold: first I will explore to what extent neoliberalism has infiltrated and influenced the world of environmental conservation as well as what it means to say that we are living in the neoliberal conservation era. To accomplish this, I will use the example of the southern African peace parks movement and demonstrate how it is an expression and embodiment of neoliberal conservation, namely in its commodification of life and the promotion of the involvement of capitalism in conservation. Secondly, I will argue that, although neoliberal conservation actors present their agendas as the new, modern answer to the world’s ‘development versus conservation’ problem, it should in fact be more realistically seen as a continuation of colonial practices, as shown through an analysis of colonial discourse and

¹ Child, B. (2009): “Conservation in Transition.” In: Suich, H., Child, B., Spenceley, A. (ed.) *Evolution & Innovation in Wildlife Conservation: Parks and Game Ranches to Transfrontier Conservation Areas*. New York: Earthscan. Ch. 1. p. 5.

² *Ibid.*, p. 3.

governance against neoliberal conservation discourse and governance. I will conclude by discussing the implications of these continuities for the fields of conservation and development, why it is important to recognize the power of the dominant discourse, and how it is possible, while doing so, to push back against the negative aspects of this neoliberal conservation era we must operate within.

The origins of my interest in this topic go back to four years ago when, as an undergraduate student, I spent a month in Namibia visiting various NGOs in the context of a course on environmental issues of southern Africa. After seeing the impacts of conservation initiatives first-hand, I unknowingly wholeheartedly bought into the neoliberal conservation argument and, as a new believer, was determined to somehow dedicate my life to it. For the remaining two years of college I continued to study a degree in history with a focus in colonialism, never imagining any connection. It wasn't until a professor introduced colonialism into class discussion during the first few weeks of this masters that I first considered a relationship between the two. I began this project with the goal of investigating the relevance of the colonial past to modern conservation initiatives, aiming to better understand and conceptualize the consequences of the dominant conservation and development ideologies. Through the many directions that has led me and the many forms this project has taken based on what I discovered in my research, I feel that I have accomplished this goal, learning more than I could have imagined in the process. Rather than criticize the effectiveness or success of peace parks and transfrontier conservation, as does a great deal of writing on the subject, I have focused on analyzing the nature of their organization and practice.

The methodology I followed in the completion of this project was qualitative as I utilized online databases to search scientific journals for the fundamental as well as most current analysis on relevant conservation issues. The journals that proved most useful to me are the *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, *Biological Conservation*, *Biodiversity and Conservation*, and *Political Geography* as well as several books of a similar scientific nature. Additionally, I received guidance from various conservation professionals who provided both direction in the search for appropriate sources as well as constructive criticism in the formulation of my argument. For the research contributing to the topic of colonialism, I returned to many of the books and articles I managed during my undergraduate research and complemented this with new sources providing analysis linking colonialism to conservation. For the more fundamental

concepts relating to colonialism and the best ways to understand colonial systems I decided to rely primarily on the writings of Jean- Paul Sartre and Albert Memmi, the two authors whose ideas and life experiences helped facilitate my understanding of the nature of European colonization many years ago.

I believe that further discussion and analysis of the true nature of modern conservation, much more rigorous and in depth than what I have accomplished here, is needed due to its far reaching repercussions beyond southern Africa and beyond the fields of development and conservation. The peace parks movement is still relatively new in the world of conservation and has quickly become highly controversial, generating a wide range of criticism, the implications of which are globally relevant today and especially in the near as well as distant future. However, the conversation is alarmingly disjointed as the vast majority of the negative criticism surrounding neoliberal conservation is concentrated in academia while, in the words of Dr. Brian Child, “scholars are ignorant of the knowledge being accumulated by practitioners because it resides in oral learning networks and the grey literature of reports and analyses.”³ I echo his call to “close the gap between practice and scholarship” and to it, add a plea for a more holistic, multidisciplinary and unified approach to solving these problems. In the following pages it must be kept in mind that I am, of course, not a biologist nor a conservation professional, and I am fully aware of the limitations this puts on my ability to analyze certain aspects of this debate. Instead, I am student of international cooperation and development with a background in history and I have taken advantage of this fact, emphasizing the importance of contextualizing conservation and development in the trajectory of history while providing my own humble take on this highly controversial and now fundamental debate.

³ Ibid., p. 4.

II NEOLIBERALISM & THE PEACE PARKS MOVEMENT

To begin the discussion, before focusing on neoliberal conservation we must touch on the concept of neoliberalism, although it is difficult to do so because of the many ways its definition, usage and application has changed over the decades since the term was first coined in 1938 by the German scholar Alexander Rüstow. In most cases, employment of the term refers primarily to the 20th century resurgence of 19th century ideas in favor of *laissez-faire* economic liberalism. Dominant in both thought and practice throughout much of the world since around 1970, in theory neoliberalism is about freer movement of goods, resources and enterprises to maximize profits and efficiency, essentially making trade between nations easier. Understood by David Harvey⁴ as “the doctrine that market exchange is an ethic in itself, capable of acting as a guide for all human action”⁵, it is associated with capitalism and the idea that sustained economic growth and economic globalization is beneficial to everyone involved and the best way to human progress. At the international level this translates to freedom of trade in goods and services, freer circulation of capital and freer ability to invest, with the underlying assumption that free markets are a good thing.⁶

In my discussion, use of the term neoliberalism is in reference to an ideology that aims to subject political, social, and ecological affairs to capitalist market dynamics. Borrowing from the explanation of Büscher et al., rather than consider neoliberalism as “functioning as some universal code behind practices”, I, too, follow Foucault’s understanding of neoliberal ideology to be “accompanied by and made manifest through distinct governmentalities (techniques and technologies for managing people and nature) that are embodied practices in social, material and epistemological realms” and “work as biopower to construct and regulate life and lives in significant ways”.⁷ In the economic sense, neoliberalism embraces capitalism to facilitate the increasing transformation of things and ideas, previously not included in the world capitalist

⁴ David Harvey is Distinguished Professor of Anthropology at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York and has written extensively on the political economy of globalization, urbanization and cultural change.

⁵ Harvey, D. (2007): *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. London: Oxford University Press.

⁶ Global Issues. “A Primer on Neoliberalism.” <http://www.globalissues.org/article/39/a-primer-on-neoliberalism> (last visited August 10, 2016).

⁷ Büscher, B., Sullivan, S., Neves, K., Igoe, J., Brockington, D. (2011): “Towards a Synthesized Critique of Neoliberal Biodiversity Conservation.” *Capitalism Nature Socialism*. Routledge. Vol. 23. Issue 2. p. 2.

economy, into tangible and tradable commodities. In regards to conservation, under the influence of neoliberalism, the nature, landscapes and people of southern Africa are being targeted and pulled into this transformation.

Neoliberal conservation, therefore, can be considered an amalgamation of ideology and techniques informed by the premise that the natural world can only be saved through submission to the capitalist system or, to employ the now classic refrain, that ‘in order to save nature you need to sell it’. To further explain this concept, it is worth quoting Büscher et al. at length,

“So, while conservation conventionally is conveyed as something different, as ‘saving the world’ from the broader excesses of human impacts under capitalism, in actuality it functions to entrain nature to capitalism, while simultaneously creating broader economic possibilities for capitalist expansion. Markets expand as the very resolution of environmental crisis that other market forces have produced. Capitalism may well be *the Enemy of Nature*, as Koval so aptly put it. Conserving nature, paradoxically, seems also to have become *the friend* of capitalism.”⁸

Despite the fact that they appear to be an unlikely pair, conservation and capitalism, guided by the influence of neoliberalism, have become intertwined in a peculiar interdependence, each one ostensibly relying on the other for success and, in some ways, even existence.

The most illustrative example of the manifestation and embodiment of neoliberal conservation can be seen in the peace parks movement of southern Africa. The term *peace park* refers to a *transfrontier conservation area* (TFCA). The precursor to TFCAs is a *transfrontier park* (TFP), a park created by a formal agreement between the governments of two or more relevant countries for the collaborative management of protected conservation areas straddling international boundaries.⁹ A TFCA, on the other hand, takes the concept farther by encompassing on a larger scale, in addition to protected areas such as national parks, multiple resource use areas such as state and private safari and hunting areas, ecological corridors, conservancies and game ranches on freehold land, small-scale agro-pastoral farming areas under communal tenure, large scale commercial irrigation schemes, small irrigation schemes with communal areas and more.¹⁰ Both TFPs and TFCAs are based on the principle of nature or ecosystems not recognizing national borders and are founded with the aim of collaboratively managing shared

⁸ Ibid., p. 4. Emphasis in the original.

⁹ Limpopo Tourism Agency. www.golimpopo.com (last visited August 20, 2016).

¹⁰ Murphree, M. (2010): “Current and Future Challenges in the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation Area – A Scenario Planning Approach.” Animal & Human Health for the Environment And Development- AHEAD. www.wcs-ahead.org. p. 5.

natural and cultural resources across international boundaries for improved biodiversity conservation and socio-economic development, while fostering regional cooperation, integration, peace and stability.¹¹ An important part of TFP and TFCA strategy is *community-based natural resource management* (CBNRM) which encourages the increase of direct involvement by local communities in the conservation and development process. Transfrontier conservation initiatives and the concept of trans-border protected area cooperation through the establishment of parks has a long history globally dating back to 1926 with the creation of the first bi-national park on the US-Canadian border. By 1988, the Commission on National Parks and Protected areas for the World Conservation Union (IUCN) had identified at least 70 protected areas straddling the national borders of 65 countries.¹² The first TFCA in southern Africa, however, did not become a reality until the creation of the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park in 2000.¹³ Today, spanning over a million square kilometers, peace parks incorporate over half of conservation land in southern Africa, an area that “rival[s] the combined landmass of France and Spain.”¹⁴

TFCAs, or peace parks, are now most commonly associated with the Peace Parks Foundation (PPF), an NGO that has assumed responsibility for the movement, positioning itself as the most powerful actor in the management and promotion of TFCAs.¹⁵ The PPF has been very influential in lobbying global institutions such as the World Bank and national governments to provide financial support, has been active at the regional level in persuading the key national governments to co-operate and take the first steps toward implementation, and also funds research to facilitate the development of transboundary conservation worldwide. The foundation was established in 1997 by well-known figures in the global conservation community, the former directors of WWF-South Africa, Dr. John Hanks and Anton Rupert, which, along with the personal endorsement of Nelson Mandela, has given the PPF strong credibility and a very high international profile.¹⁶

¹¹ Southern African Development Community. www.sadc.int (last visited July 25, 2016).

¹² Peace Parks Foundation. www.peaceparks.org. ‘Thorsell,1990’ is referenced (last visited August 18, 2016).

¹³ Department of International Relations and Cooperation. Republic of South Africa. <http://www.dirco.gov.za/foreign/Multilateral/inter/tfcas.html> (last visited July 15, 2016).

¹⁴ Peace Parks Foundation. www.peaceparks.org (last visited August 18, 2016).

¹⁵ Barrett, G. (2013): “Markets of exceptionalism: peace parks in Southern Africa.” *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*. Vol. 31. Issue 3. p. 128.

¹⁶ Duffy, R. (2006): “The potential pitfalls of global environmental governance: The politics of transfrontier conservation areas in Southern Africa.” *Journal of Political Geography*. pp. 97-98.

To better illustrate the peace parks movement and provide concrete examples, aside from focusing on a specific region, southern Africa, I have chosen one peace park in particular, the Greater Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation Area (GLTFCA). Southern Africa is an excellent case study area from which to examine the implementation of conservation theories and practices as it has consistently proven to be key area for the development of global conservation programs, especially in the form of TFCAs.¹⁷ Among the reasons for choosing the GLTFCA are its size, being the largest and most prominent of the peace parks, and the way in which many of the fundamental issues I aim to deal with have played out within and around its borders. The GLTFCA is relatively new in the world of southern African conservation, still technically not an officially established entity, while its precursor, the Greater Limpopo Transfrontier Park (GLTP), was created by an international treaty signed by Mozambique, South Africa and Zimbabwe just in 2002. The GLTP spans an estimated 35,000km² and incorporates the Kruger National Park and the Makuleke Contractual National Park in South Africa, the Limpopo National Park in Mozambique and Gonarezhou National Park, Manjinji Pan Sanctuary and Malipati Safari Area in Zimbabwe. The communal lands of the Sengwe corridor in Zimbabwe, regarded as an important link between Kruger and Gonarezhou national parks, are also included.¹⁸ The GLTFCA, on the other hand, spans close to 100,000 km² and although it is technically still in the planning phases, practically speaking it is already a functioning entity with incorporated areas far beyond what was considered the GLTP. It adds a great deal of land bordering the GLTP that includes various national parks, protected areas and interlinking regions in Mozambique as well as privately and state-owned conservation areas in South Africa and Zimbabwe.¹⁹ Because of this discrepancy and confusion over whether or not it is now correct to refer to this as the GLTP or the GLTFCA, literature referencing the area still employs both terms. From now on, I will use GLTFCA in reference to the most current, larger area.

The PPF boast the GLTFCA as a prime example of its program and “the world’s greatest animal kingdom”.²⁰ As a result of this influential status, the park plays host to several critical and very telling debates and conflicts— while the PPF uses it as an example of how neoliberal

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 90-91.

¹⁸ Whande, W. & Suich, H. (2009): “Transfrontier Conservation Initiatives in Southern Africa: Observations from the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation Area.” In: Suich, H., Child, B., Spenceley, A. (ed.) *Evolution & Innovation in Wildlife Conservation: Parks and Game Ranches to Transfrontier Conservation Areas*. New York: Earthscan. Ch. 23. p. 376.

¹⁹ Peace Parks Foundation. www.peaceparks.org. “Great Limpopo” (last visited August 18, 2016).

²⁰ Ibid.

conservation works, many others do the same for how it doesn't. Although the effectiveness of peace parks and neoliberal conservation is currently an extensively criticized and highly pertinent controversy, it is not entirely relevant to the current discussion. Instead of focusing on the success, or lack thereof, of this conservation approach, I aim instead to explain its embodiment of the neoliberal conservation era. Attempting to capture a nuanced and complex idea into clear categories for discussion is recognizably problematic albeit necessary. To best illustrate the manifestation of neoliberal conservation ideology in the peace parks movement I have identified two main points: the commodification of nature through the production of spectacle and win-win rhetoric.

When discussing the commodification of nature that occurs in peace parks, nature includes landscapes, wildlife and the local communities that exist within and adjacent to the park. Neoliberal conservation's core axiom is that in order for nature to be saved, the action necessary to save nature must be imbued with profit potential because, if not, there is little incentive for rational actors to pursue it.²¹ Commodification is brought about through the embracing of capitalism necessary to fulfil the peace parks promise of employment opportunities and economic growth. According to Barrett, the peace parks vision "is emblematic of the commodification of life that pervades strategies for environmental governance and conservation in the current neoliberal era."²² This commodification takes place though the rhetoric of the system that makes the interaction with, and even sight of, landscapes, wildlife and people perceived as worth paying money for. Dr. Brian Child, when describing the advantages of "parks as economic engines" in the southern African context, explains the thinking behind the "fundamental change in conservation philosophy" as understanding that "if parks are managed as a form of common property to provide value to society in a multitude of appropriate forms, the likelihood that society will value parks increases" and that "[c]reating this range of values, and ensuring that society is aware of them, becomes the means by which biodiversity is achieved."²³ In a clear use of this rhetoric in an attempt to convince potential visitors of park value, the website for the GLTFCA, under the section titled 'Tourism Activities' boasts that visitors can "enjoy world-class game viewing – including most of Africa's magnificent mammals, reptiles,

²¹ Büscher et al., op. cit., p. 12.

²² Barrett, op. cit., p. 125.

²³ Child, B. (2009): "Recent Innovations in Conservation." In: Suich, H., Child, B., Spenceley, A. (ed.) *Evolution & Innovation in Wildlife Conservation: Parks and Game Ranches to Transfrontier Conservation Areas*. New York: Earthscan. Ch. 17. p. 283.

birds and plants” as well as interact with local communities through “opportunities to visit the communal areas”.²⁴ This is strongly linked to the rise of tourism, especially ecotourism, where, to successfully commodify and sell the vision of the park, all elements within it are packaged so as to be attractive to visitors and this largely achieved through the production of spectacle.

The PPF has embraced the commodification of nature as the means to success and, in particular, the politics of spectacle because it is this that makes cultural and natural entities commercially desirable.²⁵ Barrett further depicts the need for the creation of spectacle,

“The sensory construction of the peace parks vision is not, however, necessarily sufficient either to sustain consumer and investor attention nor the parks’ legitimacy as an extraordinary but crucial response to the conservation and development challenges for which they were designed. Thus, the vision requires constant articulation and performativity for it to become a marketable and tangible ‘reality’.”²⁶

The production of spectacle remakes and molds what is ‘truly natural’ to adhere to Western tourist fantasies of what Africa ‘should’ look like. This rhetoric stresses the exceptionalism of boundless African landscapes populated by the world’s greatest animal kingdom that is at the same time free of human interference yet still home to happy and thriving local populations—thriving, of course, because of the economic opportunities created through the park. This can be observed, for example, on the GLTFCA website when advertising the “opportunities for developing unique tourism experiences” available in the section of the Gonarezhou National Park, it boasts, along with opportunities to visit the communal areas, the experienced “tranquility of nature” along with a part that “focuses its richness on the magnificence of the Chilojo Cliffs, leading to the Chilo Gorge and its community owned 5-star lodge.”²⁷ In *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, David Harvey summarizes:

“Neoliberal conservation thus appears to have found a specialized and expanding niche for itself in the world economy. Through its productions of spectacle and its visions of ecofunctional and derivative nature, it provides one of the means by which capitalism is able to both expand and secure the conditions of its reproduction. In other words, it does essential work in lending the ideology of neoliberalism the exclusive, and exclusionary, appearance of objective and common sense reality.”²⁸

²⁴ Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park. www.greatlimpopo.org. “Tourism Activities” (last visited August 5, 2016).

²⁵ Barrett, op. cit., p. 129.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 131.

²⁷ Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park. www.greatlimpopo.org. “Tourist Attractions” (last visited August 5, 2016).

²⁸ Harvey, op. cit., p. 27.

An informational video for the GLTFCA on the PPF website captures this when, as typical indigenous African music plays over images of elephants roaming through classic African scenery, a voice-over delivers the line, “The fences separating the Limpopo National Park and the Kruger National Park started coming down in 2003 and will continue to do so in the future until the whole fence has been completely dropped to ensure the natural migration of the animals”.²⁹ This simultaneous romanticizing and disguising of neoliberal ideology in seemingly objective, common sense and ‘natural’ conservation strategies is commonplace not only in the GLTFCA but in other peace parks as well.

The way the PPF frames how capitalism and economic opportunity play out within and adjacent to park borders is what brings us to the next point, that of win-win rhetoric encouraging conservation solutions that simultaneously conserve biodiversity and promote human well-being. Peace parks, in alignment with the ‘sell it to save it’ mantra of neoliberal conservation, continuously promote the success of win-win solutions through community-based conservation initiatives that generate revenue and provide economic development to local communities while achieving conservation goals. This is often associated with one of the hallmarks of the neoliberal conservation era, Community-Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM), described by Dr. Brian Child as understood in the southern African context to be “a multifaceted approach that combines economic, political and institutional goals” to “[reduce] the ecological over-utilization of natural resources while simultaneously increasingly livelihood benefits”³⁰. It is one of the many facets of neoliberal conservation perpetuating the idea that conservation and development go hand in hand.

Recently, in 2015, the Joint Management Board (JMB) of the GLTP and GLTFCA began the process of developing what it calls an ‘Integrated Livelihoods Diversification Strategy’ with the first version finalized in July of this summer (2016). This initiative includes the tagline “Together, planning a resilient future for communities and ecosystems” along with its vision of “Flourishing together in harmony with nature” announced in an article on its website titled

²⁹ Peace Parks Foundation. www.peaceparks.org. Video: “Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park” (last visited August 15, 2016).

³⁰ Child, B. (2009): “Community Conservation in Southern Africa: Rights-Based Natural Resource Management.” In: Suich, H., Child, B., Spenceley, A. (ed.) *Evolution & Innovation in Wildlife Conservation: Parks and Game Ranches to Transfrontier Conservation Areas*. New York: Earthscan. Ch. 12. pp. 188-189.

“Steps laid out to flourish in collaboration with nature”³¹. The strategic objectives include, among others, to “protect and restore the natural resources that support livelihoods”, “enhance the ability of local communities to capture benefits of existing (and new) livelihood opportunities” and “empower people with a wider range of livelihood choices through supporting the development of human, social, productive and financial capital, thus reducing unsustainable dependency on diminishing capital reserves”.³² All of this implies, aside from the involvement and approval of local communities, a seamless integration of conservation and development goals. Initiatives like this one, as McShane et al. explains, stem from “the undesirability – at least from a politicians’ or donors’ point of view – of acknowledging possible downsides and losses” and the pressure on conservationists to “offer optimistic win-win scenarios about the feasibility of addressing multiple agendas”.³³ The pressure is a direct manifestation of the neoliberal integration of capitalism into conservation and this win-win rhetoric has, however ‘undesirable’, become essential in the neoliberal conservation era to ensure the marketability and, therefore, success of conservation and development initiatives, particularly in the case of peace parks.

³¹ Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park. www.greatlimpopo.org. “Steps laid out to flourish in collaboration with nature” (last visited August 12, 2016).

³² Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park. www.greatlimpopo.org. “Livelihoods Strategy for GLTFCA on the Map” (last visited August 12, 2016).

³³ McShane et al. (2011): “Hard choices: Making trade-offs between biodiversity conservation and human well-being.” *Journal of Biological Conservation*. Vol. 144. p. 967.

III COLONIAL LEGACIES

Having established what is meant by the neoliberal conservation era and discussed how the peace parks movement is a manifestation of this era, we must turn now to how this relates to colonialism. Although the peace parks movement, and more specifically the PPF, presents itself and its practices as the new, modern answer to the world's development and conservation problem, in actuality, it bears more resemblance to past colonial discourse and governance. While the rhetoric has advanced over the years and conservation discourse and ideology has indeed evolved, upon taking a closer look at the nature of the system, in reality the practices haven't changed all that much from what conservation initiatives began as under colonial regimes.

First, it must be made clear what is meant by the term *discourse*. A discourse is essentially a discussion, both written and spoken, that produces a body of knowledge. This body of knowledge has its own language, a distinct style of thought and writing with a specific vocabulary. The power of a discourse is both tremendous and intangible and what makes it so powerful is the fact that it does not exist only in minds but it becomes physical, manifesting itself in supporting institutions, schools of thought, books and scholarly articles that are produced within it. Understanding the idea of a discourse is supplemented by a concept that Antonio Gramsci identified in 1971 as a 'historic bloc'. He describes this as "a moment in which diverse groups who share particular interests come together to form a dominant class, and their ideas come to dominate the ways in which other people consent to see – and are able to talk about – the world." The absolute nature and intangibility of a discourse makes it dangerous. Akin to explaining water to a fish, while existing within a discourse, it is nearly impossible to fully understand the scope and depth of its influence and impact and even those who reject it must operate within it.

To demonstrate the continuities between colonialism and the peace parks movement I will compare how both employ a discourse impelled by constructions of the 'Other' that utilizes western science as a legitimator for separation and exclusion as well as how this allows for centralizing, top-down governance that justifies the use of abusive power relations and the

disciplining of dissent. Discussing colonialism in this way I do not mean to imply that it is homogeneous across history or that there is such thing as a single colonial system for, on the contrary, I understand that each colonial situation is distinct and differs in significant ways from the rest. During a speech in 1956, Jean-Paul Sartre describes his idea of a colonial system:

“It is not an abstract mechanism. The system exists, it functions; the infernal cycle of colonialism is a reality. But this reality is embodied in a million colonists, children and grandchildren of colonists, who have been shaped by colonialism and who think, speak and act according to the very principles of the colonial system.”³⁴

Borrowing from Sartre’s defense of his own generalization of colonial systems, I maintain that colonialism represented a deliberate and systematic form of exploitation and it can be analyzed as such.³⁵

Colonial discourse was created by the colonists, the agents of colonial knowledge, in order to justify colonization along with the violence and exploitation that accompanied it. The discourse functioned to convince both the colonists and their home countries of the necessity of colonization. Through exhaustive studies of every aspect of the lives of local communities including their religions, laws, institutions, social organization and system of government, intricate myths were created and a vast amount of knowledge was produced about how to control the people as well as their land. In the context of neoliberal conservation, those coming together to create the discourse are corporate CEOs, professionals, academics, government officials, bureaucrats, NGO leaders, merchants and the media with the shared goal of offering easy consumption-based solutions to complex socio-ecological problems. The power, and danger, of the neoliberal conservation discourse lies in its ability to effectively “seduce engagement while minimizing reflection”³⁶ on whether or not the dominant order can or should be questioned.

Neither discourse would exist without a fundamental perception by the dominant class of local populations as the Other and inherently different from themselves. In the case of colonial discourse, the basis of this construction was racism. Throughout his writings, Albert Memmi³⁷

³⁴ Sartre, J.-P. (2006): *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*. Paris: Routledge. p. 51.

³⁵ Young, R.J.C. (2006): “Sartre: The ‘African Philosopher’”. Preface to Sartre, J.-P. (2006): *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*. Paris: Routledge. p. xxi.

³⁶ Büscher et al., op. cit., p. 20.

³⁷ A Jewish Tunisian born under French colonial rule in the first half of the 20th century, Albert Memmi’s educational opportunities contributed to a social rise that left him feeling accepted by neither colonized Tunisians nor French colonizers. He went on to write prolifically on the subject of colonization, ranging from the

provides invaluable insight into the relationship between racism and colonialism, painting a picture of racism as both the fuel and the glue of the colonial system and discourse, explaining how the agents of this system, the colonizers, had to constantly employ a racist ideology not only to sustain the system but also to legitimize their own personal positions as usurpers within it. In *Dominated Man*, he explains how racism is used to justify why one group is able to exert control over another:

“If there is oppression it must be because someone is guilty, and if the oppressor himself does not plead guilty—a situation which would soon become intolerable—then it must be the oppressed man who is guilty. *In short, by means of racism, the victim is blamed for the real or imaginary crimes of the racist.*”³⁸

He goes on to describe the way in which racism facilitates the formation of the Other in colonial discourse:

“Broadly speaking, the process is one of gradual dehumanization. The racist ascribes to his victim a series of surprising traits, calling him incomprehensible, impenetrable, mysterious, strange, disturbing, etc. Slowly he makes of his victim a sort of animal, a thing or simply a symbol. As the outcome of this effort to expel him from any human community, the victim is chained once and for all to his destiny of misfortune, derision and guilt. And as a counterpart, the accuser is assured once and for all of keeping his role as rightful judge.”³⁹

These perceptions of colonized society are first created by discourse eventually take hold as fundamental within it, later manifesting in a variety of ways.

Conservation discourse is similarly formed by powerful ideas about the Other and deeply embedded in age-old Western constructions of ‘African populations’ and the places ‘they’ inhabit. Similar to how colonizers both consciously and subconsciously employed racism to inform their construction of the Other, what forms the basis for the same in the context of neoliberal conservation is best illustrated through Roderick P. Neumann’s concept of “ambivalent primitivism”. He argues that Western-initiated conservation initiatives in Africa are “tainted” by stereotypes of the primitive in contrast to the modern, with ideas for indigenous participation “structured by a long history of western notions of the non-Western ‘primitive’”

autobiographical to the philosophical, with the conviction that he understood both sides of the colonial dichotomy precisely because he belonged fully to neither.

³⁸ Memmi, A. (1968): *Dominated Man*. Boston: Beacon Press. p. 202.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

and often infused with the idea of a dichotomy of either the traditional, nature conserving “good native” or the modernized, nature destroying “bad native”.⁴⁰ In order to be in good standing with conservation authorities and have a place in the conceptualization of a conservation area, local populations have the often impossible task of fitting into preconceived and idealized notions of how they should act, dress, speak and in general live their lives. This discourse creates potential contradictions in the conception and implementation of initiatives within a park because in order for a park to be successful it must develop, and therefore modernize, the local populations while at the same time their ‘idealized and primitive’ traditional practices are essential to the spectacle that is at the same time needed for park success.

In the peace parks discourse one of the ways this manifests is in the idea of how the representation of local populations should fit into the image of the park and previously discussed neoliberal spectacle. Sartre speaks to this in the colonial context in the 1954 essay “From One China to Another” when he criticizes the tendency to romanticize local populations and, in reference to the Chinese context, writes: “They seek out a Chinese who looks more Chinese than the others; in the end they find one. They make him adopt a typically Chinese pose and surround him with chinoiseries. What have they captured on film? *One Chinaman*? No... the Idea of what is Chinese.”⁴¹ This idealization to the advantage of the spectacle is observed particularly in promotional material to attract tourists, one of the most tangible components of the discourse. For example, in the central PPF video for the GLTFCA, the narrator describes the various activities available within the park and delivers the line, “For those looking to explore the vast wonderland of the Limpopo National Park, the guided 4X4 eco-trails take you deep into the remote wilderness of the park, travelling past local communities that have been living in the same way for centuries” as images are shown of mud huts, children fetching water and local woman practicing traditional ways of weaving.⁴² The PPF discourse constructs these communities as symbolic of the unity of nature, community and culture and , ironically, in the process celebrate as part of the spectacle the very people who are made to struggle for the right to remain in these spaces.⁴³ Comparing colonial propaganda to conservation propaganda, they

⁴⁰ Neumann, R.P. (2000): “Primitive Ideas: Protected Area Buffer Zones and the Politics of Land in Africa.” In: V. Broch-Due, & R.A. Schroeder (eds.): *Producing nature and poverty in Africa*. Stockholm: Nordic Africa Institute. pp. 221-227.

⁴¹ Sartre, op. cit., pp. 23 – 24.

⁴² Peace Parks Foundation. www.peaceparks.org. “Great Limpopo” (last visited August 18, 2016).

⁴³ Barrett, op. cit., p. 135.

are not so different in their utilization of an idealized image of an area and people to lure in Westerners. While colonial propaganda used an idealized and submissive vision of colonies to attract settlers, neoliberal conservation advertisements do the same except, rather than settle, to visit, take pictures, and hunt.

The language of conservation has evolved over the decades and with onset of neoliberal conservation era, its discourse has created a modified language with new phrases and terminology where, “to meet the needs of new phraseology”, “cumbersome acronyms abound”.⁴⁴ Perhaps the defining characteristic of the language is that it is overwhelmingly economic and has “become common linguistic currency, making it increasingly difficult to conceive of the world in any terms except those of a calculus and demand”.⁴⁵ Büscher et al. argues that this economic language “frames interventions in particular directions – namely towards market and technological innovation – in ways that arguably, and often intentionally, deflect understanding away from systematic causes of ecological (and associated socio-economic) crisis.”⁴⁶

Now we move to the use of science, specifically western science, to legitimize and reinforce the existence of the dominant system and the manner in which it operates to separate and exclude the Other. Both colonial regimes and neoliberal conservation legitimize themselves and their practices through the dominance and superiority of science and scientific discourse to disguise and shift the blame for the origins of the exclusionary nature.⁴⁷ Not only the all-knowing nature of Western science but, in necessary contrast, the lesser and more primitive knowledge of local populations was seen as, although perhaps once perfectly functional, not relevant or efficient anymore in modern times. This is extensively documented and discussed in the colonial context as noted by Neumann that during colonial rule, “the ‘primitive methods’ of ‘backwards’ African farmers were condemned for their ‘inefficient’ and ‘destructive’ agricultural practices” and to correct this, “massive state interventions for soil conservation were called for” while pastoralists “were likewise targeted for ‘development’ and African hunting everywhere was characterized by wildlife conservation advocates as cruel and wasteful slaughter”.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Attwell, C.A.M., & Cotterill, F.P.D. (2000): “Postmodernism and African Conservation Science.” *Journal of Biodiversity and Conservation*. Kluwer Academic Publishers. Vol. 9. p. 562.

⁴⁵ Thrift, N. (2005): *Knowing Capitalism*. London: Sage Publications Ltd. p. 4.

⁴⁶ Büscher et al., op. cit., p. 7.

⁴⁷ Barrett, op. cit., pp. 136 – 137.

⁴⁸ Neumann, op. cit., pp. 228 – 229.

Scientific information, like all forms of knowledge, is embedded in structures of power and this is particularly potent in conservation and development. According to Duffy, “as scientific knowledge becomes incorporated into stories and discourses, it is framed, interpreted and rhetorically communicated” allowing substantial political power to “knowledge brokers” with the ability to frame and interpret this scientific knowledge, especially when it is politically embedded.⁴⁹ Although indigenous descriptors as inflammatory and blatantly racist as those employed in colonial discourses do not appear in the discourse of neoliberal conservation and especially the PPF who publicly promote positive rhetoric about the involvement of local communities in conservation, in reality, many of the underlying assumptions about traditional indigenous relationships with nature persist in the interactions between conservationists and local populations. This often occurs through conflating indigenous knowledge with merely long-lived habits that are no longer sustainable due to globalization and changing environments.⁵⁰ Harnessing scientific knowledge and taking advantage of its “unrivaled status as a universal legitimator”⁵¹, conservation and development authorities are able to provide the necessary studies and assessments to justify the prioritization of actions that might negatively affect local communities.

There are multiple instances of this occurring in the GLTFCA; for example, in Jessica Millgroom and Marja Spierenburg’s article “Induced Volition: Resettlement from the Limpopo National Park, Mozambique” they detail the ‘forced’ relocation of local communities as a result of the need to find dispersal areas for the over-grown elephant population in Kruger National Park.⁵² Local communities under control of peace parks management must adhere to what the park considers sustainable practice, even if that means the restriction or elimination of rituals or traditions. Those subjected to park authority thus bear a tremendous burden to “demonstrate a conservative, even curative, relationship with nature while risking the loss of their land rights should they fail.”⁵³ Barrett argues that the “reductionist interpretation of the complex nexus in human-wildlife relations and associations between culture and landscape helps to delegitimize non-conservation land uses” which in turn “reinforces the colonial logic that local communities

⁴⁹ Duffy, op. cit., p.94.

⁵⁰ Neumann, op. cit., p. 225.

⁵¹ Duffy, op. cit., p. 94.

⁵² Millgroom, J. and Spierenburg, M. (2008): “Induced Volition: Resettlement from the Limpopo National Park, Mozambique.” *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*. Vol. 26. Issue 4. p. 436.

⁵³ Neumann, op. cit., p. 227.

are indifferent to conservation and value the land only as an exploitable resource” resulting in the legitimization of “attempts to ‘relocate’, sometimes violently, communities whose settlements and activities are constructed as threatening to the manifestation of the vision”.⁵⁴ This forced demonstration of stewardship qualities bears striking resemblance to the colonial practice of obligating the colonized to meet criteria in exchange for responsibilities or land.

This point leads us to the centralization, top-down structure and abusive power relations that are facilitated and allowed to exist as a result of this discourse. It is well documented that colonial governments used conservation as a way to increase control and influence and, similarly, many studies indicate that today’s programs attempting to integrate conservation with development serve to extend state power into remote and formerly neglected rural areas and increase authority to monitor and surveil rural communities.⁵⁵ TFCAs, according to Duffy, are often regarded as a means by which “global actors can recentralize control over resources and people from the global level and concentrate power in the hands of a narrow network of international NGOs, international financial institutions, global consultants on tourism/community conservation and bilateral donors.”⁵⁶ The way peace parks are designed, it is the responsibility and prerogative of conservationists to determine whether land uses are compatible with their interests or suitable for the purposes of parks, inevitably including the ancestral lands of local communities in the process. Necessarily this calls for the geographical expansion of park authority to monitor and regulate the daily lives of local community members and to force compliance through systems of rewards and punishments.⁵⁷ According to Neumann, although the rhetoric of international conservation NGOs present this system as “participatory and locally empowering”, the power to propose, design, and enforce the projects “lies far distant from rural Africa communities”.⁵⁸ This creates a system with abusive power relations including lack of consultation and information on pertinent matters, limited involvement and participation in processes,⁵⁹ excessively bureaucratic management with lack of transparency and in an overall sense those in control not being held accountable to those who are impacted by their decisions.⁶⁰

⁵⁴ Barrett, op. cit., p. 137.

⁵⁵ Neumann, op. cit., p. 221. He cites Luke 1994, Hitchcock 1995, Lance 1995 and Hill 1996.

⁵⁶ Duffy, op. cit., p. 101.

⁵⁷ Neumann, op. cit., p. 226.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 226.

⁵⁹ Barrett, op. cit., p. 126.

⁶⁰ McShane et al., op. cit., p. 969.

This can be seen in the case of the GLTFCA where many of the park institutions encourage communication among government officials while similar levels of communication are not visible between government and local resource dependent residents. As Dr. Brian Child explains, “local people were once represented in meetings and workshops for the GLTP but this decision was reversed on the pretext that governments represented their citizens” the result being that “local residents already in marginal areas are experiencing new forms of exclusion from the policy – and decision – making processes that impact on their access to and use of land and natural resources.”⁶¹ Additionally, Duffy, while expounding on the sometimes controversial role of NGOs in the implementation of conservation schemes, touches on several examples of the PPF behaving in this way. She describes the PPF neglecting to discuss with local communities in the establishment of a 50km corridor through the Sengwe communal area to join Gonarezhou National Park with Kruger National Park and the Limpopo National Park as well as failure to consult communities in Sengwe communal land when creating a map whose dimensions included their land.⁶²

Essential to maintaining any dominant order is the disciplining and suppression of dissent in one way or another. In the colonial context this was a very obvious component of the system, most of the time achieved through structural violence with the restriction of social and economic advancement or simply through direct physical violence. In the context of neoliberal conservation, the disciplining of dissent can take a wide variety of forms, some harder to recognize and identify than others. For instance, Büscher et al. argues that “myriad forms of local displacement and everyday structural violence” are “well documented” in neoliberal conservation, “ranging from forced evictions to the constraining of resource access and more subtle erasures of value practices.” These, I believe, are the more easily identified instances that are usually, when identified, more or less universally condemned.

The more dangerous and less obvious disciplining of dissent is in the disciplining of dissenting views.⁶³ Much of work to this respect is taken care of by the mere existence of a dominant discourse as strong and well established as this one because the systems it creates, both the institutions and its followers, either consciously or not, do not allow for the integration or survival of views that might undermine it, either through denial or framing in a particular way as

⁶¹ Child, op. cit., p. 380.

⁶² Duffy, op. cit., p. 103.

⁶³ Büscher et al., op. cit., p. 21.

to disqualify. Still, there are many concrete and clear instances of this happening. For instance, as documented in Igoe and Sullivan 2009, during a workshop in 2008, a number of researchers and activists from varied global contexts shared stories of “sustained harassment, abuse, and threats by protagonists of neoliberal conservation” when they attempted to speak or write of the contradictions and injustices flowing from internationally funded conservation endeavors.⁶⁴ It is worth quoting at length the manner in which Büscher et al. very effectively and poignantly summarizes this point:

“Through these purification strategies, the basic tenets of a profit-oriented, commodifying and privatizing resource system are maintained. They function additionally to sustain a refusal to countenance alternative value practices and organizational forms – particularly those oriented towards commons, reciprocal distribution through multi-way sharing, and animistic conceptions of a sentient, communicative world of diverse embodied perspectives. These attempts to maintain hegemonic purity demonstrate precisely the ideological workings of neoliberal conservation...it is through such struggles that apparently civil hegemonic consensus is unveiled as the structural enforcing of particular elite power interests. The flattening and closing of dissent that pierces the veneer of neoliberal conservation niceties is precisely what reveals its hegemonic ideological *gestalt*.”⁶⁵

It should go without saying that this lamentably intrinsic characteristic of the neoliberal conservation era is, to say the least, deeply troubling and immensely damaging to both the credibility and the success of the fields of conservation and development. The continuities and similarities between colonialism and conservation are, when rigorously analyzed, overwhelming and should raise challenging questions in the minds of anyone wishing to involve themselves.

⁶⁴ Igoe, J. and Sullivan, S. 2009. *Problematizing neoliberal biodiversity conservation: Displaced and disobedient knowledges*. London: International Institute for Environment and Development. Described in Büscher et al., op. cit., p. 22.

⁶⁵ Büscher et al., op. cit., p. 23.

IV CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Taking a closer, more critical look at a recent conservation initiative like the GLTFCA, one formed by and operated under the peace parks movement and, therefore, the neoliberal conservation order, can yield inconvenient realizations about the nature of the system and its subsequent repercussions on everything around it. The problem, and danger, with this system resembling that of the colonial in the ways that we have now discussed it does, is that it can produce adverse effects, also resembling that of the colonial, in the lives of the very people it exists to protect. I stated earlier that evaluating the efficiency of these parks is not the aim of my analysis nor my area of investigation, however here it is crucial to reference the overwhelming amount of criticism from academics and experts in the field. For instance, Dressler & Büscher dedicate essentially an entire paper to this matter, explaining in detail how in the GLTFCA, “political and economic change redirects benefits to support ‘modern’ economies at the expense of rural livelihoods through community-based natural resource management” and that “[n]eoliberal agendas promoted by government and the transfrontier park derail efforts at decentralizing CBNRM initiatives beyond markets and state control.” They continue, arguing that “‘hybrid neoliberal’ CBNRM has arisen in private and public sector delivery of devolved conservation and poverty relief projects as ‘tertiary production’ for regional development” and, as a result, “‘CBNRM’ projects related to and independent of transfrontier conservation support private sector interests rather than the resource base of rural livelihoods.”⁶⁶ Articles such as these are numerous and alarming. If the very system and its organizations meant to improve the lives of local communities and their environments are, even to a small extent, at times more so benefiting capitalism and the larger neoliberal economic order, and on top of that perpetuating a discourse that stifles criticism and change, there is a serious problem.

It is the responsibility of actors such as NGOs, and especially of the ones most intimately involved in these matters, such as the PPF, to critically and honestly evaluate the consequences and implications of their work in these contexts. However, if and when problems and

⁶⁶ Dressler, W. & Büscher, B. (2008): “Market triumphalism and the CBNRM ‘crises’ at the South African section of the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park.” *Geoforum*. Vol. 39. p. 452.

inconsistencies are found, attempting to push back against any dominant order, let alone a discourse as deeply entrenched in the modern era as neoliberal conservation is, is challenging to say the least. The first step is, as always, to admit there is a problem and to start the right conversations and dialogue about what can be done about it. One of the first changes necessary in the culture of conservation is for those who lead it to stop perpetuating unrealistic win-win solutions that give the illusion of flawless, simple solutions to complicated problems— this rhetoric is undermining the potential for success. There is a need for more honest and realistic approaches to solutions for conservation and development problems. Although some experts assert that there is no such thing as a truly win-win solution, that “each choice – even the best or ‘optimal one’ – involves loss in some way”⁶⁷, I do not agree. It is not the answer to stop striving for win-win solutions, but the sooner we begin to realistically frame the dialogue surrounding conservation and development initiatives, the sooner we can break the cycle of optimism and disappointment that they create. Thinking and communicating in terms of trade-offs, rather than win-win, will result in better designed, more resilient, and more sustainable initiatives.⁶⁸

For this to happen, however, NGOs and those designing projects must find a way to rid the process of the kind of donor and political pressure that insists on receiving all-encompassing, quick-fix solutions. Recently, a consultant for the Mozambican side of the GLTFCA expressed concerns that the “whole project has been jeopardized by pressures from implementing agencies” and because of the “millions of dollars” the PPF raised from donors, these donors “now expect to see an instant park”. Additionally, he suggested that “in the zeal to create the park, it was being rushed through without adequate consultation with communities.”⁶⁹ Rather than be forced to design and cater proposals to donors, conservationists should be able to answer first to the local communities and the environment. Equally detrimental is the pressure to constantly update and reinvent language and strategies to come up with new, fresh and exciting techniques, regardless of real need.⁷⁰ So much of the problem lies in the demand to twist reality and proposals to fit the ideas of people who have never set foot on the ground in question. One of the ways to improve this is to involve locals as more than just partners or recipients, facilitating more leadership and meaningful participation with the process.

⁶⁷ McShane et al., op. cit., p. 968.

⁶⁸ Ibid., pp. 968 – 969.

⁶⁹ Duffy, op. cit., p. 101.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

Additionally, there is a need for more nuanced strategies formulated as less top-down and more bottom-up, catered to individual situations rather than attempting blanket application of a strategy. Pre-existing or dominant assumptions about the correct approach to conservation will often obscure the difference between power and understanding, and can hinder success. It must be kept in mind that any model or analytical tool for understanding conservation and development issues will necessarily engage in some form of simplification of complexity and, as McShane et al. reminds us, there “are no panaceas or one-size fits all solutions, nor are there necessarily solutions with long-term staying power: decisions and strategies will have to be revisited as new knowledge emerges, and as the social, political, economic, and ecological contexts change.”⁷¹

Debate over the degree to which colonization contributed to the environmental crisis of today is as contentious as it is futile. Colonial intervention should never be seen as something that can be corrected or reversed because its effects alter the progress of a nation or area, shifting its course permanently from the first moment forever into the future. While its effects and influence on the path of a nation or people will never be erased, it is unacceptable to, decades after independence and the supposed end of colonization, have continuities and remnants of colonial practices inflicting harm on the same places and in the same way, let alone through the very institutions that are in theory a force for good. It is time for conservation and development actors operating in this era of neoliberal conservation to live up to their discourse and truly break from the past rather than perpetuate it. It is impossible to overstate just how much is at stake in the fields of conservation and development and just how much has been, is now and will be affected by these issues. The path to a fairer, more efficient and sustainable way of doing things may not be clear but what is certain is we need to break from the current practices because continuing to feed this cycle benefits neither nature nor people. This is bigger than the GLTFCA, the PPF, and southern Africa— it is global. In a world increasingly shaped by globalization, the relationship between development and conservation will only grow exponentially more intertwined. The world is now, and has been for some while, one vast social-ecological system and we need to treat it that way. The changes that need to be made will be in no way clear, quick or easy but they will be, and already are, crucial.

⁷¹ McShane et al., *op. cit.*, pp. 969 – 970. The article cites Funtowicz and Ravetz, 1994, Holling, 2001, Brechin et al., 2003, Levin, 2005.

I want to be very clear that, although part of the aim of my research was to expose areas of concern within the neoliberal conservation era and the peace parks movement, I recognize that organizations such as the PPF are overwhelmingly more a force of good than bad in the world and I still believe wholeheartedly in their mission. As stated earlier, these are incredibly nuanced topics and, in addition, much more is gray area than black and white. It is easy to criticize in front of a computer screen and, without being on the ground living these situations, it is undoubtedly difficult to decipher when a problem stems from self-serving intentions disguised as well-meaning, noble intentions gone wrong, a mixture of the two, or something else entirely. Just as blanket solutions are never appropriate or accurate, neither are blanket criticisms. What I believe is appropriate, what I have intended to do on a minor scale here in this paper, is criticize when necessary but, above all, call for awareness and contribute to the effort to unpack the discourse and all that comes with it to understand the true nature of the system we are operating within, how we have arrived at this point, what the implications are for fixing what is broken in order to move forward in the most rational, fair, and sustainable manner. I hope that by demonstrating the modern persistence of colonial discourse and practices in the neoliberal conservation era I have shown how this can shape conservation and development initiatives such as the peace parks movement as well as why it is worth our attention. Four years after that month in Namibia I still consider myself a believer in neoliberal conservation but not in the state I believe it to be in today, rather in what I know it can be in the future.

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