

# **New Agrarian Contracts in Zimbabwe**

## **Innovations in Production and Leisure**

Proceedings of Workshop Hosted by the  
Department of Economic History, University of Zimbabwe  
Harare, 13 September 2002



The workshop and research have been sponsored by  
USAID, in collaboration with the Land Tenure Center (University of Wisconsin, USA)  
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## Preface

Zimbabwe's longstanding partition between commercial land, communal land, and natural areas is fast collapsing. As a consequence new forms of agrarian production and trade are emerging: chiefly, out-grower schemes, share-cropping, community-based tourism, and small-scale game conservancies. This volume explores the social dimensions of these arrangements and, in particular, the ways in which they represent contracts between stronger and weaker parties. To what extent do those contracts exploit weaker parties, such as, out-growers? To what extent do they confer economic security on those same parties? Finally, how do these contracts – in the midst of economic crisis – reshape development, conservation, and land-use writ-large in rural Zimbabwe? This volume includes all the papers presented at the workshop, as well as an one additional piece each by Joseph Mtisi and David McDermott Hughes.

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# When Tourists Cross Boundaries and Peasants Don't: Inequality and Regional Metaphors in the Great Limpopo Conservation Area<sup>1</sup>

by

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## **Abstract**

Southern African conservation restricts the mobility of black peasants and enhances the mobility of white tourists. Nowhere is this inequality more evident than in plans for a vast, transboundary conservation area known as the Great Limpopo. The scheme would open borders for animals and visitors while confining smallholders to small locales. How have well-meaning conservationists come to promote such a biased, structurally racist set of ideas? Disguising this bias, the Great Limpopo relies upon convoluted assumptions regarding space and time. For space, supporters of the Great Limpopo have elaborated two scales for planning and social intervention. The scheme conjures a Cape-to-Cairo bioregion and landscape of leisure, the African scale for tourists. For peasants, the same planners – especially in Zimbabwe – have crafted an intensive, place-based model of development. White tourists will expand across the African continent whereas black smallholders should involute in “communities.” Yet, *within its geographical scale*, each group will gain in freedom and power. This false sense of equality extends from space to time. Southern African bioregional thinking looks to the future, imagining wildlife ranges and profitable hotels where neither currently exists. In anticipation of unseen growth, policy-makers open borders for the tourist trade. Meanwhile, the same planners ignore the obvious peasant future of growing populations. Assuming stasis, planners close boundaries and enclose the landscape. Such untenable notions have already been overtaken by events,

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<sup>1</sup> Funding for this study was provided by the United States Agency for International Development (through the BASIS program of the Land Tenure Center, University of Wisconsin), by Rutgers University, and by the Social Science Research Council (through a MacArthur Foundation-funded NGO summer fellowship). The Southern Alliance for Indigenous Resources and the University of Zimbabwe's Department of Economic History arranged the logistics without which no work could have been done. I am indebted to Melanie Hughes McDermott, Frank Popper, Richard Schroeder, Jaidev Singh, and Harry Wels for critical comments. Thanks to Karl Zimmerer for inviting me to present the paper at the Environment and Development Advanced Research Circle, University of Wisconsin, Madison on 19 April 2002. Mike Siegel finalized the maps. I, the author, bear all responsibility for the data and conclusions herein.

especially in Zimbabwe, where tourists are now afraid to travel and para-military bands destroy fences. It is time to rethink transboundary conservation in the Great Limpopo and elsewhere.

Southern African conservation relies upon “regional metaphors.” Regional metaphors – as Deborah and Frank Popper (1999) explain – capture public imagination and build consensus for new forms of environmental planning. The Poppers’ notion “buffalo commons” has done just that in the American prairie states. Elsewhere, such discourse plays a central role in Tsing’s notion of “globalist financial conjuring” and Zimmerer’s “new conservation territories” (Tsing 2000: 121; Zimmerer 2000; cf. Schroeder 1999b). At root, the spatial language of conservation draws new boundaries of exclusion. Ecological concepts of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century have spawned a global “new enclosures movement” (Katz 1998: 47; cf. O’Connor 1993: 16; Watts 2000: 44-46). But the same concepts also open boundaries, facilitating greater mobility and access. How does Southern African environmentalism achieve these contradictory effects? Regional metaphors of conservation invent geographical scales and apply them unequally, bounding some people and unbounding others.

As Southern Africa’s largest conservation area, the Great Limpopo represents just such a rhetorical complex of explicit and implicit 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.<sup>2</sup> By 2002, the Great Limpopo had extended its tentacles north and east (Map 1).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> 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).

<sup>3</sup> 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.

development discourse, a futurist, optimistic mentality denigrates the here-and-now of smallholder livelihoods. Ultimately, pro-peasant planners prevent peasants from crossing the boundaries that tourists do cross. Fortunately, it is not too late for them to rethink the Great Limpopo regional metaphor. Squatters are already making a new metaphor.

#### Afrikatourism “beyond boundaries”<sup>13</sup>

In the 1990s, Southern African conservation “went transboundary.” (Griffin 2001: xii). This expansion relied upon a confluence of political and intellectual currents. In the political realm, South Africa abolished apartheid and, in 1994, came under a black government. Also in 1994, Mozambique’s long-running war officially ended with free elections. Thus, boundaries meant to seal off malevolence, danger, and instability no longer served that purpose. Intellectually, conservationists revolted against these lines and against the notion of *national* parks. In 1994, the World Bank announced three “transfrontier conservation areas.” These zones – including what became the Great Limpopo – jumped Mozambique’s borders along rivers, mountain ranges, and wildlife migration corridors. Soon thereafter, a South African magnate (Anton Rupert) established the Peace Parks Foundation as the most vocal exponent of transboundary conservation.<sup>14</sup> This organization identified national lines and, by implication, nation-states as anathema to the subcontinent’s new tranquility and internationalism. Positive publicity mounted as investors in tourism scouted the territory. Nelson Mandela even visited the Great Limpopo in 2001. Yet, very little happened on the ground. As of 2002, only one peace park existed: the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park in the South African and Botswanan Kalahari Desert. Will transboundary conservation die in the desert? It is not likely. The intellectual foundation of cross-border conservation grows stronger everyday. Ideas of bioregionalism, investor-led growth, and pan-Africanism now rattle the gates of Africa’s border posts (Duffy 1997: 442-44; Wolmer 2002).

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.<sup>15</sup> This carnage – the effect of “insularization”<sup>16</sup> – incriminated the entire system of discrete, bounded protected areas. Somehow, farmers and grazers would have to cede some land to migratory mammals. In Zimbabwe, planners 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 (Map 1) (Wels 2000: 211ff; Wolmer 2001: 165-66). In

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<sup>13</sup> “Beyond boundaries” is the title of van der Linde, et al (2001)

<sup>14</sup> Bonner (1993: 67-70), Duffy (2000: 128-29), and Wels and Draper (2002: 20) provide further details of Rupert’s career as a conservationist-tycoon.

<sup>15</sup> Beard (1988: 235ff) provides a compelling pictorial account of the death.

<sup>16</sup> 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.).

black communal lands, the CAMPFIRE program expanded wildlife ranges in the 1990s by confining agriculture.<sup>17</sup> 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 2002).

Their plea concealed deep contradictions, however, in the nature of “nature.” The bioregionalists’ distinction between mundane boundaries and sublime Creation applies more to stable land forms than to shifting wildlife ranges. The latter expand, contract, and move - often in response to human intervention. The term “habitat” logically requires a temporal frame, and Southern African bioregionalists often neglected to give it one. The late Richard Bell asserts vaguely that the Limpopo Valley contains “species that were formerly numerous in the Southern African lowlands.”<sup>18</sup> In fact, the ivory trade caused local elephant extinctions from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards (Alpers 1975: 70f; Miller 1988: 107-8). Regarding the 20<sup>th</sup> century, conservationists recognized anthropogenic flux but not its 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*. They “discounted [the future] into the present” (Harvey 1989: 291). More precisely, ecologists’ notion of “optimum habitat” bridged the gap between the known present and an imagined future. A 1994 World Bank memo assures that, in Mozambique’s Coutada 16 hunting reserve, “the habitat is perfect for wildlife.” The author misuses the present indicative tense. Elsewhere in the same document, she writes, “Land is so dry that animals are forced to migrate some place else.”<sup>19</sup> In truth, Coutada 16 *could* be - in the conditional mood - a wildlife range *if* (as the memo recommends) someone drilled boreholes for water. In a similar vein, the ecologist Raoul du Toit (1998: 4) affirms that “The optimum black rhino habitats [in Zimbabwe] are in the semi-arid areas” - at a time when the black rhinoceros was extinct everywhere but in private

<sup>17</sup> CAMPFIRE stands for the Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources. Dzingirai (2002), Hughes (2001b), and Moyo (1995: 271) argue that the program has alienated communal land.

<sup>18</sup> Richard Bell, “Concept paper for the Zimbabwe component of the Limpopo/Shashe trans-frontier conservation area.” Harare: CESVI, March 2001. p. 5.

<sup>19</sup> Paula Agostini. “BTO: the role of Gaza Safari in the Development of TFCA project.” Maputo: the World Bank, 1994. pp. 7, 8.



conservancies. In the future, a climate similar to today's could support rhinos not only there but in vast areas of Southern Africa (Estes 1991: 229, 232). Why does du Toit use the present tense? He imagines a richer landscape and, in so doing, commits the explorer's sin of false advertising: du Toit writes what Paul Carter calls "a model for constructing the truth" (Carter 1987: 92), or a conditional version of the truth itself. In the Great Limpopo's *conditional habitat*, animals roam and – due to another oversight – the climate does not change. Virtually all Great Limpopo documents ignore the scientific consensus that industrial carbon emissions are warming the atmosphere.<sup>20</sup> If future climate change follows past patterns, then plant communities will migrate towards the poles (Pitelka, et al, 1997). The Great Limpopo's biota might head south and exit the conservation area. In short, the conventional notion of timeless habitat conceals contingencies great and small.

Among the more serious contingencies, the concept of "optimum habitat" obscures deep economic uncertainty. Du Toit describes the Great Limpopo as optimal because wildlife – and sport-hunting – hold a "comparative economic advantage" over cattle.<sup>21</sup> A seminal 1992 study had established this principle as orthodoxy in Zimbabwe.<sup>22</sup> Starting from a very low figure at Independence in 1980, tourism grew by 325% up to 1994<sup>23</sup> and continued to grow throughout the 1990s. In 1997, when du Toit analyzed the lowveld, sport-hunting *did* out-perform 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 retrojected 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 protected the Great Limpopo from skepticism based on the present. For instance, the Great Limpopo depended upon the rule of law in each of the three countries. When, in 2000, the Zimbabwean state deployed para-militaries to seize land, proponents of the Great Limpopo adopted the phrase "future government" (taking care, however, not to use that term in writing). Meanwhile, dictatorship and political violence destroyed the tourist trade. 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

<sup>20</sup> Makarau (1999: 14-15), a meteorologist, presents scenarios for climate change in Zimbabwe. 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).

<sup>21</sup> 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

<sup>22</sup> 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.

<sup>23</sup> As measured by the gross number of foreign visitors (Bond 2001: 231).

findings.”<sup>24</sup> 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 Chirizvizvi (Map 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.”<sup>25</sup> Such ambivalent commentary treats Zimbabwe’s ongoing politics as a transient anomaly.

Southern African investors embraced an equally flawed “anti-chronology.” For them, both the region 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.”<sup>26</sup> 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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. The call for new “cross-investment” denied this entire trajectory of development.<sup>27</sup> Looking to the future, consultants, officials, and journalists celebrated (mostly white) capitalists as *the* 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].<sup>28</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Personal communication, 7 February 2002.

<sup>25</sup> 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).

<sup>26</sup> Bell, *op cit.* p. 3.

<sup>27</sup> The phrase derives from a Maputo-based consultant (personal communication, 3 July 2001).

<sup>28</sup> “*corredor turístico*” ... “*A dinâmica empresarial obriga os homens que têm grandes negócios na África do Sul a buscarem noutros pontos 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.

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."<sup>29</sup> 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 2000), 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 digital slide show (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.<sup>30</sup> Will peasants march too?

Less materially, the *geographical scale* of Africa privileges tourists over peasants. The first pan-Africanists were white – and so are many of today's. Cecil Rhodes of the British South Africa Company conjured a Cape-to-Cairo empire. His contemporaries "opened" the bush – a terminological parallel of which de Villiers cannot be unaware.<sup>31</sup> Of course, inter-colonial boundaries soon closed the continent. Now, Southern African whites are again challenging partition. "Political boundaries are the scars of history," denounces Willem van Riet of the Peace Parks Foundation.<sup>32</sup> Even if bioregionalism cannot erase those scars, the rhetoric gives whites a politically accepted means to articulate an otherwise tainted ambition. Rhodes-like, Noel de Villiers pleads that "Africa should endeavor to join all of its game parks contiguously from Cape to Cairo."<sup>33</sup> Even the more sensitive Zimbabwean author and journalist Peter Godwin endorses this "ecological Cape to Cairo dream" (Godwin 2001: 17). In more subtle ways, Rhodes still shapes white geographical narratives. Godwin and other Euro-African writers embrace the continental scale reflexively. "... this is Africa," writes Alexandra Fuller, recounting a childhood spent partly in the Great Limpopo, "so hardly anything is normal." Deplaning in Lusaka from America, "The incongruous, lawless, joyful, violent upside-down, illogical certainty of *Africa* comes at me like a rolling rainstorm..." (emphasis added; Fuller 2001: 221, 287). For Fuller, the nation-state has failed in its usual role as a "geo-body" or an "imagined community" for identities and aspirations (Thongchai 1994; Anderson 1983). Even whites who supported nationalist movements ignore the nation-states in other contexts. "How write about *Africa*?" asks the South African Breyten Breytenbach, "From what angle? From

<sup>29</sup> Noel N. de Villiers, speech to the Community Tourism Association of South Africa annual general meeting, 10 September 1999.

<sup>30</sup> 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.

<sup>31</sup> In Chipinge, the gravestone of the 1893 trekker Thomas Moodie praises him for having "opened up the district" (cf. Lessing 1992: 183, 219; Worby 1998: 57-58).

<sup>32</sup> Quoted in Godwin (2001: 11).

<sup>33</sup> Noel de Villiers, presentation to the first Agenda 21 "Indaba on culture conscious transfrontier conservation areas," 18 May 1999; quoted in Wolmer (2002: 6).

what background? Can it be done ... [without] the infinite variations of white alienation making Africa the back-broken object of its fears and desires" (emphasis added; Breytenbach 1996: 124-25)? The African scale, thus, suits a diasporic, dislocated population of writers, ecologists, and financiers. This African dream is made by and for whites.<sup>34</sup>

So is the Great Limpopo. Ecologists have configured the zone in a fashion that preserves the white agricultural highveld of Zimbabwe – contravening their own ecological principles. Financiers and boosters are seeking to attract and expand opportunities for a hospitality industry and tourist clique already dominated by non-African whites. Finally, the Great Limpopo responds to a white African yearning for continental holism and unity – for a post-nationalist place in which they can belong. In all these three ways, the Great Limpopo will benefit whites. It will allow them to move money, move themselves, and move their dreams across national lines. Will it, by the same token, harm blacks and inhibit their movement – making them the “back-broken object” of the African dream? Yes, but without such drama: the next section explains how, in subtle ways, aspects of the Great Limpopo have already constrained black peasants.

### 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 adopted the social model of bounded communities of place. Three intellectual currents – villagization, community theory, and bioregionalism itself – took them in this direction. First, state-led development and regulation in the 1970s and 1980s 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.<sup>35</sup> 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.<sup>36</sup> In the pejorative lingo of Zimbabwean planners of the 1980s, peasants “bombshelled” chaotically and illegally in all directions.<sup>37</sup> South Africa repressed bombshelling by confining blacks of all classes to Bantustans.<sup>38</sup> All such policies – from the well-meaning to the overtly racist – invited smallholders to dream the African village dream.

Although somewhat discredited by the 1990s, the village model still attracted conservationists because of its congruence with theories of resource management, particularly with bioregionalism and community. In the 1970s, seminal American bioregionalists had

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<sup>34</sup> Wels and Draper (2002: 21) extend this argument to include South Africans of Indian origin.

<sup>35</sup> On Mozambique, see Borges Coelho (1998). Tanzania’s 1970s program of ujamaa socialism is the most celebrated case of forced villagization (von Freyhold 1979).

<sup>36</sup> Ferguson (1999) describes this phenomenon as the “full house of rural-urban residential strategies” (cf. Scoones, et al. 1996)

<sup>37</sup> As recalled by a former resettlement officer in an interview (Vumba, Zimbabwe, 22 August 1999).

<sup>38</sup> I follow Mamadani (1996) in considering South Africa an extreme, rather than exceptional case, of colonial spatial politics.

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 2002: 4), 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 will most often manage their resources sustainably.<sup>39</sup> Policy-makers can safely entrust such “communities of place” with the control of wildlife, forests, and water. Southern African policy-makers 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 imposed boundaries on people. In Scott’s terms, planners and plans “saw” villages regardless of the spatial pattern in which people lived or desired to live. Indeed, 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). To begin with, in 1994, the World Bank commissioned a number of “social appraisals” in border regions of Mozambique.<sup>40</sup> As I consultant, I conducted one such study in an area outside the Great Limpopo. Flatteringly, my supervisor introduced me as the “communities expert.” Yet – after harrowing war and drought – the black population presented few of the features of a community. From Makandezulu in the Coutada 16 hunting reserve (Map 1), Mozambicans had fled to South Africa and/or sent their cattle far away to emergency pastures.<sup>41</sup> The World Bank’s foundational document acknowledged this sorry state of affairs in a backhanded fashion. “Traditional communities” in and around Makandezulu, found one author, “are difficult to identify following their disruption.”<sup>42</sup> 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 would reappear in peacetime. Indeed, the Great Limpopo project could help it reappear. The same World Bank study warned against “unplanned settlement as a result of returning refugees” and advocated rapid intervention in Makandezulu the form of community-based wildlife management.<sup>43</sup> Thereupon, Mozambique’s National Directorate of Forestry and Wildlife dove into the business of “community mobilization.”<sup>44</sup> In late 2001, the agency converted Coutada 16 into the Limpopo National Park. With the consequent

<sup>39</sup> Ostrom lists a number of other conditions relating to the people and the resources that increase the likelihood of sustainable management.

<sup>40</sup> In 1995, I conducted an appraisal for what became the Chimanimani Transfrontier Conservation Area.

<sup>41</sup> Legislation allows Mozambicans to inhabit and grow “subsistence” crops in hunting reserves.

<sup>42</sup> Environment and Development Group, “GEF transfrontier conservation areas and institution strengthening project: preparation studies.” Oxford, UK: Environment and Development Group, 1994. p. 29.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>44</sup> Direcção Nacional de Florestas e Fauna Bravia, TFCA “Annual Progress Report” covering 1998, Maputo: Direcção Nacional de Florestas e Fauna Bravia, 1999. P. 21.

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 never had or never wanted. The (potential) compact, self-contained "community" has no need for long-distance resource use.

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."<sup>45</sup> "We have been shut in," lamented a headman's son from an area known as Manesa (Map 1).<sup>46</sup> By the time a Zimbabwean environmental NGO, Safire, visited Manesa in 1999 irredentism was running high.<sup>47</sup> 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?"<sup>48</sup> 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."<sup>49</sup> Orally, one man elaborated, "We are chased away."<sup>50</sup> 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!*"<sup>51</sup> 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."<sup>52</sup> Such political insight and bluntness caused difficulties for the staff. "The problem is they are too much looking

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<sup>45</sup> Katz (1998: 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).

<sup>46</sup> "Tavharirwa" (Manesa, 4 August 1999). Vijfhuizen (1998: 178) provides further testimony on this eviction.

<sup>47</sup> Safire is an acronym for Southern Alliance for Indigenous Resources.

<sup>48</sup> "...zviwanikwa zviru mudunhu renyu" (Manesa, 4 August 1999).

<sup>49</sup> "seri kwaSave;" "kupurazi" (my notes from PRA workshop, Manesa, 4 August 1999).

<sup>50</sup> "Tinodzingirwa" (Manesa, 4 August 1999).

<sup>51</sup> "zviwanikwa zviru muarea yenyu, please!" (Manesa, 4 August 1999).

<sup>52</sup> "Nyika yakatorwa negame." "Saka toita semaborder jumper" (Manesa, 5 August 1999).

behind that fence,” complained one fieldworker. Neither he nor his colleagues wanted to try to solve that problem.<sup>53</sup> “Effectively, we are part of the system,” confessed one manager to me at a later date, “We are not change agents anymore.”<sup>54</sup> 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.<sup>55</sup>

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 cadastral priorities.

Whereas this private agency at least recorded peasants’ transboundary ambitions, government in the Great Limpopo sometimes ignored them completely. Within a few month Safire’s appraisal of Manesa, the Chipinge Rural District Council held a workshop involving nearby locality, Chibuwe (Map 1). Also on the east bank of the Save, Chibuwe shared Manesa 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 “Campfire officer” - later showed me their original map (Map 2) and his adaptation of it for his final report (Map 3).<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Interview, Manesa, 4 August 1999.

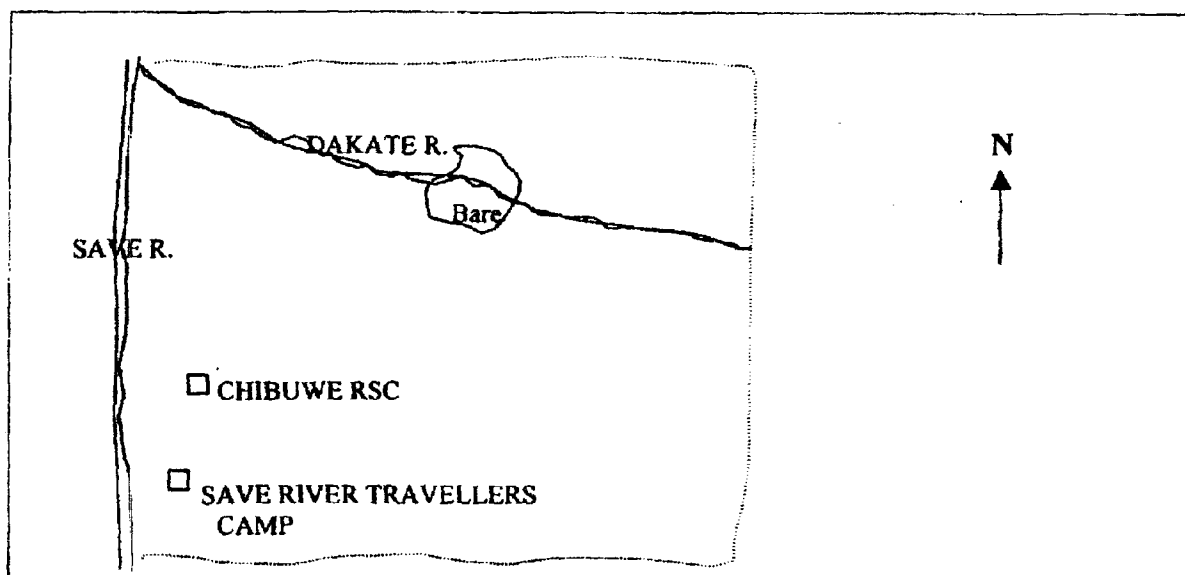
<sup>54</sup> Interview, Harare, 23 August 1999. Safire had formed a tight collaboration with the Chipinge Rural District Council, among other councils.

<sup>55</sup> Manasa Sibanda, “PRA baseline report on the Manesa Ward, Manesa Village workshop” (Harare: Southern Alliance for Indigenous Resources), 1999, p. 3.

<sup>56</sup> Chipinge Rural District Council. 1999. “Report on natural resources management workshop held at Manesa Training Centre on 26-30 April,” p. 6.







Map 3

Reproduction of Map 3 in PRA report

(Source: Chipinge Rural District Council. 1999. "Report on natural resources management workshop held at Manesa Training Centre on 26-30 April," p. 6)

Astonishingly, his design deleted all notations west of the Save and introduced a border around the community. As he put it, the officer "reproduced the information that was relevant for the workshop."<sup>57</sup> Presumably in this 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.<sup>58</sup> Like baskets, dances constituted intensive development, a means of making more money in the same, bounded zone. In effect, the PRA congruent with whites' 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*."<sup>59</sup> Zimbabwe's "Communal Area Reorganisation Plan" articulates the principle of "planning defined geographical space to be occupied by defined communities." In this view, social action follows from a pre-determined territorial unit – with, as the document assures, "effective and thorough public debate and

<sup>57</sup> Interview, Chipinge, 16 August 1999.

<sup>58</sup> 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).

<sup>59</sup> Emphasis added; Direccção Nacional de Florestas e Fauna Bravia, TFCA "Annual Progress Report" covering 1998, Maputo: Direccção Nacional de Florestas e Fauna Bravia, 1999. P. 21.

community participation.”<sup>60</sup> 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.<sup>61</sup> “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.<sup>62</sup> 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.”<sup>63</sup> 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 area.”<sup>64</sup> 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.<sup>65</sup> When I relayed their concerns, a district officer responded, “Land being scarce, we cannot set aside for futures?”<sup>66</sup> An agricultural extension agent defended his practice with regard to unborn children: “Normally we don’t plan for somebody who is not there.”<sup>67</sup> 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.”<sup>68</sup> 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].”<sup>69</sup> 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.

<sup>60</sup> Agritex, “The communal area reorganisation programme: Agritex approach.” Harare: Agritex, July 1988, pp. 2, 1

<sup>61</sup> As reflected in the attention devoted to “geomatics” in the 1990s (*Cultural Survival Quarterly* 1995). Cf. Hodgson and Schroeder (2002); McDermott (2001); Peluso (1995); Rocheleau (1996); Srait, et al (1994); Walker and Peters (2001).

<sup>62</sup> Workshop on GPS/community mapping, Chipinge, 18 August 1999.

<sup>63</sup> Interview, Chimanimani, 14 July 2000.

<sup>64</sup> “PAAP community action project,” brochure in English and Shona. The Shona phrase is “*Iva nhengo yechirongwa chebudiriro yenzvimbo yako.*”

<sup>65</sup> “*Takagariswa semaresettlement, maline... Vana vedu havana pokugara*” (Chibuwe, 23 July 1999).

<sup>66</sup> Chipinge, 17 August 1999.

<sup>67</sup> Manesa, 4 August 1999.

<sup>68</sup> Interview, Chimanimani, 21 July 1999.

<sup>69</sup> Interview, Harare, 31 March 2000.

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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. Denying absolute space, 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 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.

Is there a third way? Many peasants already dream a mid-range dream – at a cross-river scale. Back on the banks of the Save, a Manesa woman asked me, “Will we die looking at, waiting, and watching what is over there?”<sup>70</sup> Then she showed me *her* scar caused by the electric fence. Neither the PRA nor the eco-region offered her relief, but within months her dream came to fruition. In 2000, floods caused by Cyclone Eline first washed away the Save fence. Then, the veterans of the independence war, abetted by the ruling ZANU-PF party, occupied commercial farms and ranches across Zimbabwe. One para-military band even invaded tourist lodges in the Save Valley Conservancy<sup>71</sup> – news of which converted Zimbabwe’s portion of the Great Limpopo into a no-go zone for all but the brave or foolhardy. Meanwhile, Chibwe farmers – including land-poor young men – pegged fields in the Conservancy’s Humani Ranch.<sup>72</sup> In short, tourists moved less and peasants moved more in the Great Limpopo. Adding irony to irony, poachers converted the fence wire into snares and, by 2002, had decimated game throughout southeastern Zimbabwe.<sup>73</sup> This outcome would be shocking if it had not been so predictable. If not bedfuddled by capitalist conjuring, any planner could have foreseen that peasant youth would eventually proclaim their existence in spatial

<sup>70</sup> “*Tofa here takanangisa, takambomirira tichitarisa zviri ikoko?*” (Manesa, 5 August 1999).

<sup>71</sup> “Farm invasions update,” Commercial Farmers’ Union, Harare, 24 April 2000, 12 May 2000. From the west, smallholders from Matsai Communal Land had squatted in the Conservancy in 1998, but the state repressed this occupation (Wels 2000: 301-9).

<sup>72</sup> Interview, Chipinge, 16 July 2000; Commercial Farmers’ Union, “Land invasions update,” 18 July 2000, 27 November 2000, 18 December 2000; Wolmer (2001: 210).

<sup>73</sup> Sharman, op cit. Busani Bafana, “Poaching, invasions threaten tri-nation conservation park,” *Zimbabwe Standard* (Harare), 22 July 2001. Fiona Macleod and Jenny Sharman, “Political chaos takes its toll on Zim’s wildlife,” *Mail & Guardian* (Johannesburg), 18 December 2001. Wolmer (2001: 195ff).

terms. Likewise, if not bedazzled, economists surely could have guessed that the tourist market might one day realize its potential to go bust. But, the Great Limpopo planners *were* surprised.

Face to face with a new reality, some institutions have reacted quickly. In the “invaded” Gonarezhou park, Safire began to negotiate a lease on behalf of squatters (cf. Wolmer 2002: 25). In 2000, the Save Valley Conservancy declared to the government, in writing, its “commitment to resource sharing” and “meaningful black participation.”<sup>74</sup> Regarding those blacks, some private paternalism still prevailed. “The Conservancy will carry the burden” financially for peasants,<sup>75</sup> a manager told me in 2002, forgetting that evictees had made the conservancy possible by carrying the burden of land scarcity (cf. Wels 2000: 285). If somewhat gropingly, the Great Limpopo’s land-holders are rethinking their practices with respect of race and space. In 2002, the Save Conservancy was discussing with peasants means by which they might resettle on its land and embark on joint ventures in tourism (Wolmer 2001: 212-13). “This is not a well-beaten road in Africa,” confessed the same (white) ecologist, “It is pretty much blazing a trail, certainly for Zimbabwe.”<sup>76</sup> This trail brings the Great Limpopo closer to Manesa’s dream – a *middle ground* on which tourism and smallholder agriculture can meet more fairly. Therein lies a new regional metaphor.

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<sup>74</sup> Save Valley Conservancy, Bubiana Conservancy, Buby Valley Conservancy, and Chiredzi River Conservancy. “The way forward to resource sharing in lowveld conservancies.” Submission to the Minister of Environment and Tourism, 26 October 2000. Pp. 3, 1.

<sup>75</sup> Interview, Mapari, 13 January 2002.

<sup>76</sup> Interview, Mapari, 13 January 2002.

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