

## **Transforming the Frontier: Peace Parks and the Politics of Neoliberal Conservation in Southern Africa and Parks, Peace, and Partnerships: Global Initiatives in Transboundary Conservation**

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## Transforming the Frontier: Peace Parks and the Politics of Neoliberal Conservation in Southern Africa

By Bram Büscher. Durham, NC, USA, and London, United Kingdom: Duke University Press, 2013. 312 pp. US\$ 24.95. ISBN 978-0-8223-5420-8.

## Parks, Peace, and Partnerships: Global Initiatives in Transboundary Conservation

Edited by Michael S. Quinn, Len Broberg, and Wayne Friemund. Calgary, Canada: University of Calgary Press, 2012. 576 pp. US\$ 45.95. ISBN 978-1-55238-642-2.

Violent conflict is no stranger to transboundary mountain regions. In many such places, international peace parks seeking to link peace-building, nature conservation, and sustainable livelihoods have become a favorite tool. According to their promoters, peace parks are today an essential component of any healthy, peaceful, and productive society. At the same time, it is well known that protected area development has entailed displacements, racialized dispossession, and lack or loss of access to resources. *Transforming the Frontier* and *Parks, Peace, and Partnership* offer two very different perspectives on this tension. The former is a critical analysis of the Maloti-Drakensberg Transfrontier Project (MDTP) in the mountain range shared by South Africa and Lesotho. The latter is a collection of examples from around the world written by peace park practitioners and experts. The 2 books appeal to different audiences. The former will be of interest mostly to researchers, whereas the latter is more likely to speak to practitioners.

Büscher asks why peace parks have become such a popular conservation paradigm, when protected areas have generally failed to arrest biodiversity loss. He situates his analysis in 2 broader historical trends: the growing pressure to end the “de facto extraterritorial” status of protected areas and better align them with societal demands, and the impact of the global neoliberal political economy on conservation discourses and practices.

The first 2 chapters provide conceptual and historical context. In chapter 1, Büscher traces the colonial and postcolonial roots of nature conservation in southern Africa, where land was a key element of the racist, capitalist political economy. After apartheid ended, South Africa used environmental rhetoric to regain international standing. In parallel, community-based conservation became aligned with postcolonial neoliberal practices. The rise of transfrontier conservation was similarly influenced, especially by the Peace Parks Foundation (PPF). Chapter 2 argues that the peace parks idea fits neoliberal political ideology because it is accompanied by a politics of consensus-making that hides contradictory realities, because these realities are suppressed by means of positing transfrontier conservation as antipolitical, and because discursive constructions, rather than realities on the ground, become the real assets to be marketed, including through neoliberal devolved governance strategies such as ecotourism and payments for ecosystem services (PES).

The following 5 chapters illustrate the concepts of consensus, antipolitics, and marketing, building on ethnographic fieldwork. Chapters 3 and 4 deal with consensus. Given the strong lobbying on the part of mountain enthusiasts and the extra push provided by the governments of Lesotho, greatly dependent on donor funding, and South Africa, in need of water from the Drakensberg mountains, as well as nongovernmental

organizations (NGOs) such as PPF, chapter 3 suggests that the question was not if, but when, the project would materialize, even though it took 5 years to create consensus and get the MDTP proposal approved. The project officially started in 2003, with independent project coordination units (PCUs) in Lesotho and South Africa. Chapter 4 illustrates their different approaches, focusing on nature conservation and conservation-oriented baseline studies in South Africa, and community involvement in Lesotho. Intense differences on the ground were nevertheless downgraded or concealed in outside communications. Büscher argues that this was possible through an increasing emphasis on nonregulatory strategies such as ecotourism and PES.

Chapter 5 focuses on antipolitical strategies. The South African PCU used “instrumental antipolitics” that stressed technical and scientific rationalism. In Lesotho, by contrast, the PCU employed “moral antipolitics” that emphasized local rights to resources. On the ground, the political impact of the MDTP was negligible because local actors used “pragmatic antipolitics” to get as much out of the project as they could. Here Büscher parts with actor-oriented studies and, instead, advocates a structural view based on the more abstract dominance of neoliberalism and its tendency to generate inequality.

Büscher proposes that discourse becomes the only realm in which inequalities can be hidden and claims to consensus attained and maintained. Chapter 6 examines how donors (ie the World Bank), the private sector, and consultants marketed the MDTP in neoliberal terms. This becomes still clearer in chapter 7, where ecotourism and PES strategies are revealed as evidence for discourse to become the preferred level of engagement. The final chapter summarizes the wider implications of the contemporary politics of neoliberal conservation. Büscher

concludes that although consensus, antipolitics, and marketing fit the neoliberal political economy, they are *not* inherently neoliberal. Consequently, the task of critical studies is to open up their progressive possibilities.

*Parks, Peace, and Partnership* results from an international conference celebrating the 75th anniversary of the world's first formal peace park, located in the Rocky Mountains on the US–Canadian border. The book consists of an introduction by one of the co-editors and 19 chapters divided into 4 sections. Section 1 addresses lessons from the field, with examples from the US–Canadian border, the Australian Alps, the European Alps, the US–Mexican border, and the Lake Titicaca region. Section 2 is dedicated to the rapid and extensive expansion of trans-frontier peace parks in southern Africa. Section 3 examines education-based initiatives. Section 4 looks at peace park proposals such as the Siachen Peace Park in the Kashmir region and the Korean Demilitarized Zone Peace and Nature Park.

Several chapters are concerned with mountain regions. Mihalic shares a series of lessons from more than a century of conservation in the neighboring Waterton Lakes (Canada) and Glacier (US) National Parks, where the world's first international peace park was created in 1932 to symbolize good relations between allies while providing a model of peace for nations around the world. He highlights the importance of local initiative, especially the personal commitment of individual staff members, which contributed to the establishment in 2001 of the Crown of the Continent Managers Partnership for improving ecoregional management and ensuring long-term funding support. Mihalic concludes, however, that the two parks ultimately operate independently and that none of the international designations have made much of a difference.

Ehringhaus reflects on 20 years of conservation efforts in the Mont Blanc border area of France, Italy, and Switzerland, where international tourism and infrastructure and real estate development are threatening the natural and cultural heritage. In 1986 the 3 countries agreed to establish an international park and created an NGO to promote it. In opposition, Ehringhaus argues, local and regional politicians set up the much larger Espace Mont Blanc for advancing their own version of regional sustainable development. In her view, this initiative has fostered cross-border cooperation, much of it funded through European Union programs, but it has actively hindered transboundary conservation and neglected to involve stakeholders such as conservation NGOs. Despite her strong indictment, Ehringhaus sees signs of improvement, such as the recent nomination of Mont Blanc as a potential World Heritage Site.

In the book's only example from the Andes, Walters analyzes the Collaboration Framework for Lake Titicaca. He argues that the joint management of a shared natural resource has extended far beyond the resource itself, producing spill-over benefits in scientific, military, congressional, regulatory, and community-based collaboration. According to Walters, the failure of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan to save the Aral Sea through collaboration was sufficiently instructive for Bolivia and Peru to institutionalize legal collaboration in support of Lake Titicaca. In the mid-1990s, the two countries established a binational authority, which has operated under a joint ownership model that ensures integrated management of the entire water system.

The chapter on the Maloti Drakensberg range, written by the former South African project coordinator, is essentially a summary of the 20-year strategy compiled for the MDTP. It reflects many of the features raised by Büscher, including a technical, antipolitical, and

consensus-oriented outlook, an emphasis on discursive marketing, and an optimistic focus on ecotourism and PES. Zunckel nevertheless acknowledges the historically different approaches by South Africa and Lesotho and notes that many implementing agencies have so far failed to fully integrate the MDTP into their operations; hence, the balance between existing capacities and agreed conservation targets will need increased attention. The willingness of implementing agencies to continue without external funding is seen as an encouraging sign.

Biringer and Cariappa stress the urgency of environmental peace-building in the Karakoram Mountains of the western Himalayas. Around the Siachen Glacier, 20 years of violent and costly conflict between India and Pakistan have produced huge amounts of military waste that is dumped in glacier crevasses and eventually emerges downstream. A peace park proposed as far back as 1994 remains to be implemented. Similarly, the establishment of a demilitarized zone for peaceful scientific use on the Antarctic model has so far gained little traction, although the International Karakoram Science Project has begun to network interested parties. Political will, the authors conclude, is the main obstacle.

The two books could hardly be more different. *Transforming the Frontier* is a concise book-length analysis of one particular transboundary conservation initiative. It expertly combines extensive theoretical discussion with the results of in-depth but somewhat dated field work. At the same time, it demonstrates how the MDTP is illustrative of a wider trend in contemporary conservation discourse and practice. Büscher's efforts to link MDTP dynamics to the regional and global neoliberal political economy are convincing, albeit somewhat repetitive. In *Parks, Peace, and Partnership*, the main strength is also the principal weakness. The volume offers interesting examples of

transboundary conservation from around the world, many of them written by senior participants. However, the collection lacks coherence, especially with regard to the theme of peace, which is relevant in southern Africa or the Karakoram Mountains, but less so elsewhere. The quality of

the contributions also varies considerably: Scientific analyses are mixed together with highly personal reflections and summaries of strategic documents. The book is a useful reference, but readers in search of analysis are advised to look elsewhere.

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