

## **The Politics and Anti-Politics of Transfrontier Conservation in Southern Africa: Towards Cooperative Governance?**

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### **Abstract**

Since the mid 1990s, transfrontier conservation has been high on the conservation and development agenda in Southern Africa. Almost all countries in the region participate in the formation of new institutional and managerial arrangements that aim to more effectively and holistically conserve biological diversity and develop local communities in commonly shared bioregions. As the word transfrontier by default denotes political international relations one expects a highly politicised intervention process by which Transfrontier Conservation Areas (TFCAs) are being pursued. However, as is often the case in development interventions, TFCAs are being portrayed as technocratic, non-political, almost anti-political interventions. Naturally, this continuing paradox between politics and anti-politics in TFCA development leaves its mark on the governance frameworks and institutional set-ups that are being created. This paper looks at the politics and anti-politics in the strategies of intervention being pursued by various actors in order to make transfrontier conservation a reality in Southern Africa. It argues that the paradox between politics and anti-politics is a deciding factor in how transfrontier environmental governance and institutions are shaped and operate. In doing so, the paper relies predominantly, but not exclusively, on research done on the Maloti-Drakensberg Transfrontier Conservation and Development project between Lesotho and South Africa, where much of the project area connotes common property. The paper shows that especially the commonage areas form the central loci where the politics – anti-politics paradox unfolds.

**Keywords:** (anti-) politics, governance, Southern Africa, transfrontier conservation, development, commons

## Introduction

With (global) environmental governance becoming more and more complex and complicated every day, calls for coordinating and the ‘governing’ of environmental governance are burgeoning and intensifying. For instance, we see calls for elaborate computational modelling to enhance social cooperation (Axelrod, 1997), an overarching ‘World Environment Organization’ (Biermann and Bauer, 2005) and for ‘Multistakeholder Environmental Partnerships’ (Poncelet, 2001). Another such concept is that of ‘Cooperative Environmental Governance’, which is especially suitable to this paper, as it emanates from the paper’s region of interest: Southern Africa (see DEAT, 2003). But regardless where these calls originate, they all stem from the same basic puzzlement: how to manage the continuous exponential mushrooming of organisational development due to and coinciding with the continuous enhancement of individual capacities? One scholar who has written extensively about this *problematique* in general and in relation to the environment is James Rosenau (Rosenau, 1990; 1997; 2003a; 2003b).

Rosenau points out that there are several contexts that shape the way humans deal with the environment (Rosenau, 1997: 192-204). Under the rubric of *environmental* contexts he distinguishes between the scientific, temporal and disaster contexts. Basically, these take environmental dynamics as the central principle upon which action should be based. The scientific context tells us about environmental processes and dynamics, how humans impact on these and how we can or should deal with them. The temporal context relates the issue of how long-term environmental trends clash with short-term human economic preoccupations and finally, the disaster context posits the special instance whereby the temporal context is surpassed, as the dramatic urgency for concerted political action cannot be shunned.

A second set of contexts can be categorised under the heading of *political* contexts. According to Rosenau (1997: 201), this set of contextual factors

“involves the conditions under which environmental developments and problems are perceived, framed, addressed, and managed at every level of politics. For even as the scientific and temporal dimensions of the physical environment shape political structures, so is it the case that the latter operate as crucial determinants of how environmental opportunities are seized and environmental constraints heeded, ignored, or otherwise handled. In addition to the situation-specific variables that infuse dynamism into environmental issues, in other words, there is a larger political context, a set of structural constraints within which the interaction of human and nonhuman dynamics occurs.”

It is exactly this that the ensuing sections want to explore: elements of the political context, in the sense of structural constraints, regarding complex environmental governance schemes. In other words, this paper deals both with the interlinkages and complexities of environmental governance as well as the nature of tendencies adding to or influencing these interlinkages and complexities.

The specific element of the political context that is of interest to me in this paper is the concept of anti-politics. Within the broader framework of the current neo-liberal capitalist climate, anti-politics according to Schedler (1997a: 1) forms “an important, at times even hegemonic element of the ideological universe” and “after the presumptive end of ideology [...] may even evolve into a post-ideological core ideology”. What exactly the concept entails we will explore in the next section, but in short anti-politics, as the antonym of politics, in this paper constitute strategies of either draining the public sphere from its content or colonising the public sphere. Phrased more succinctly, anti-politics is the political act of doing away with politics. The specific complex environmental scheme that this concept will then be applied to

is that of Transfrontier Conservation Areas (TFCAs<sup>1</sup>) in Southern Africa. TFCAs are sizeable conservation areas that span the borders of two or more countries and as such are also managed by multiple states. As with many transboundary issues, TFCAs came to prominence in the 1990s and are currently at the centre of much of the attention around issues of biological diversity conservation, environment and development, particularly in the context of protected areas. In fact, the majority of TFCAs worldwide are actually Transboundary Protected Areas, rather than TFCAs as they solely consist of two or more existing adjacent protected areas across international borders. But although not the majority, a large portion of transfrontier conservation initiatives are TFCAs whereby multiple tenure structures and land uses are combined and whereby the aim is to conserve the local biodiversity, as well as the development of the resident population. One such TFCA is the Maloti-Drakensberg Transfrontier Conservation and Development Project between the Republic of South Africa and the Kingdom of Lesotho, where the majority of the research for this paper was conducted. However, evidence will also be presented from other TFCAs in the Southern African region, as well as from interviews conducted with key players in the region's TFCA 'scene'.

### **The concept of anti-politics: from machine to strategy**

Although anti-politics as a concept is of all ages and has been used within a wide range of social science disciplines, it has never really reached the level of acceptance or prominence that led to broad usage within wider social theoretical debates and writings. However, one would deem studies in environment and development to be an exception, as since Ferguson's seminal study of a World Bank and CIDA intervention in the tiny African country of Lesotho (Ferguson, 1994), his central thesis, that of development being an *anti-politics machine*, has made a tremendous impact and is very often cited. However, even here debates and further conceptualisations have focussed on the 'instrumental' side effects of development or environmental interventions<sup>2</sup>, such as the making and unmaking of (environmental or developmental) subjects (Escobar, 1995; Agrawal, 2005) rather than further developing the actual concept of anti-politics. This paper does aim to further conceptualise anti-politics, precisely because of the importance it may have for issues of environmental governance as explained above. The two main premises hereby are that most scholars, particularly anthropologists, focussed too much on the mechanical outcomes of the concept of anti-politics and never really defined its antonym of *politics*.

We start our discussion with Ferguson's conceptualisation of anti-politics as developed in *The Anti-Politics Machine* (1994), this being the original study to give the concept academic prominence in development studies. In his own words, the basic argument Ferguson tried to make is the following:

““Development” institutions generate their own form of discourse, and this discourse simultaneously constructs Lesotho as a particular kind of object of knowledge, and creates a structure of knowledge around that object. Interventions are then organised on the basis of this structure of knowledge, which, while failing on their own terms, nonetheless have regular effects, which include the expansion and entrenchment of bureaucratic state power, side by side with the projection of a representation of economic and social life which denies “politics” and, to the extent that it is successful, suspends its effects” (Ferguson, 1994: xiv-xv).

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<sup>1</sup> Transfrontier Conservation Areas are known by different names which all have the same basic meaning of conservation across borders. Other commonly used terms are Transboundary Conservation Areas (TBCAs) and Transboundary Protected Area (TBPAs).

<sup>2</sup> Although Ferguson (1994) does not generalise his conclusions for development intervention to include environmental interventions, I follow Escobar (1995), Brosius (1999) and Bending (2003) that the “radical critique of development [...] can be extended to this sphere of environmental governance” (Bending, 2003: 9), especially since with the coming to prominence of the term ‘sustainable development’ the two are often intertwined in theory and practice.

The point of departure for Ferguson to label the Lesotho discourse generated by development institutions a typical ‘form of constructed discourse’ is his comparison of a 1975 World Bank report on Lesotho with more academically inclined descriptions and interpretations of the country. Between the two bodies of knowledge he finds several odd disjunctions. In brief, Ferguson argues that the World Bank report makes Lesotho out to be ‘*aboriginal*’, ‘not yet incorporated into the modern world and the cash economy’; ‘*agricultural*’, ‘in that subsistence agriculture is the occupation of the majority of the Basotho; a ‘*national economy*’ whereby ‘national economic planning and sector-based economic programs’ are expected to function and lastly; *subject to the principle of governmentality*, which means that ‘the main features of economy and society are within the control of a neutral, unitary, and effective national government’. All of these assumptions are refuted by academic analyses: capitalism and a cash economy had been in existence in Lesotho for over a century; agriculture accounted only for six per cent of rural household income as other sources, such as remittances from wages earned in South Africa’s mines, were much more important; Lesotho could and can hardly be called a national economy as the major determinants of its economy lie with South Africa and lastly; there was hardly an effective national government in Lesotho, let alone one that can be called ‘neutral’ or ‘unitary’.

Of course, the question Ferguson then asked was why this disjunction exists and why (for Lesotho) it is so ‘unusually pronounced’. The answer, according to Ferguson, is that “for an analysis to meet the needs of “development” institutions, it must do what academic discourse inevitably fails to do; it must make Lesotho out to be an enormously promising candidate for the only sort of intervention a “development” agency is capable of launching: the apolitical, technical “development” intervention”. And somewhat later, after having explained the ‘standard development packages that’ development institutions offer, he adds: ““development” agencies are in the business of trying to “sell” these packages, trying to locate and justify potential applications for them” and thus “their problem is to find the right kind of problem; the kind of “problem” that requires the “solution” they are there to provide” (Idem: 69-70).

Ferguson shows, and many others after him, how this development discourse and its related technical, apolitical interventions more often than not leads to the failure of development projects meeting their own targets. But the effect of this is not that nothing happens. Instead of the achievement of the intervention targets, ‘instrument-effects’ are the result of development interventions: side effects that function as an ‘anti-politics machine’, “depoliticising everything it touches, everywhere whisking political realities out of sight, all the while performing, almost unnoticed, its own pre-eminently political operation of expanding bureaucratic state power” (Idem: xv).

Ferguson’s conceptualisation of anti-politics is thus foremostly a *technocratic* anti-politics: since development institutions do not have a mandate to mingle in politics, but to stimulate ‘technical’ development<sup>3</sup>, they must portray their development target as being non-political in nature in order to justify their intervention. Ferguson even suggests that this process works like a machine, a metaphor which according to him functions “to capture something of the

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<sup>3</sup> There has long been a substantial debate on the role and meaning of technocracy and expertise in development cooperation and governance in general, inspired by thinkers such as Weber, Habermas and Foucault (see for instance: Angel Centeno, 1993). For the purpose of this paper, it suffices to say that the notions of technocracy and expertise in development have not decreased, but only increased in importance, exemplified for instance by notions such as ‘technical backstopping’, ‘technical expertise’, etc., which continue to play a major role in development cooperation.

way that conceptual and discursive systems link up with social institutions and processes without even approximately determining the form or defining the logic of the outcome”. Critically, he adds: “as one cog in the “machine”, the [*development*] planning apparatus is not the “source” of whatever structural changes may come about, but only among a number of links in the mechanisms that produces them” (Idem: 275).

It is generally recognised that Ferguson’s study has made a huge impact on the (academic) thinking around development and environment and so helped spur the growth of Foucauldian *post-development* theories (see: Rahnema and Bawtree, 1997). In general, however, these have not actively sought to further develop the concept of anti-politics. Instead, they have predominantly focussed on how discursive regimes, by agents of development, structure and determine what constitutes valid knowledge about development, thereby displacing (local) alternatives, leading over and over again to the failure of development projects and worse, the structural dominance of the first world over the third world (see especially: Escobar, 1995). This purely discursive approach to post-development has received a fair amount of critique, especially on the point that, although it explains why development so often fails, it offers no alternative and no way forward (Nederveen Pieterse, 2000; Schuurman, 2000). Knut Nustad however argues that this critique prematurely downgrades the contribution of post-development theory, as attempts to explain failure “must be kept separate from a call for alternatives” (Nustad, 2001: 479)<sup>4</sup>. The way forward, according to him, “is to examine how development interventions are transformed, reformulated, adopted or resisted in local encounters” (Idem: 485), thereby laying more emphasis on the agency of the targets of development intervention, especially local elites. Furthermore and in doing so, Nustad recommends studying the effects of discourses and thereby comes back to placing importance on Ferguson’s ‘instrument effects’. Both these ‘ways forward’ are not entirely new but deserve to be shortly discussed here, as they firstly try to go beyond the discursive post development approach and secondly, will make clearer the need for a wider conceptualisation of anti-politics.

The first point of local agency basically comes down to the question whether (discursive) development is unidirectional, imposed from above and therefore always top-down. Scholars like Escobar would argue it is. Others paint a slightly more nuanced picture. Two important contributions in this respect are works by Scott (1985) and Bayart (1993). In his study of peasant resistance in Sedaka, Malaysia, Scott argues that ideological domination is not as absolute as it is sometimes portrayed to be. In fact, he argues that elite values often do not even penetrate into lower classes due to peasants undertaking more practical material acts of resistance rather than ideology-laden ones. Ideological domination therefore is a continuous struggle and never outright unidirectional. Although not the main aim of his book, Bayart’s *The Sate in Africa: Politics of the Belly* (1993) also places emphasis on local agency, but from the exact opposite perspective. Taking a more historical perspective, Bayart argues that certain aspects of western domination over Africa could never have become so strong were it not for the help of local agency. Bayart for instance stresses that local African elites were crucial in setting up, executing and maintaining the system of slavery. Hence, the ways that local agents interpret, react to and re-appropriate outside interventions is crucial in understanding intervention outcomes.

Coming back to the environment-development debate, this is also the exact point Bending is trying to make when he sets out to ‘rethink the mechanics of the anti-politics machine’

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<sup>4</sup> Added to this, I would like to state that some have tried to outline what the post-development era might look like. One of the clearest examples of this surely is Rahnema (1997).

(Bending, 2003). Although Bending underlines development's instrument-effect of depoliticisation, he throws doubt on Ferguson's ideas on the repetition of failure within the anti-politics machine. If, as Ferguson argues, the deployment of development is basically unidirectional and the reasons for project failure have nothing to do with a conspiracy on the side of the development agents, then why does repeated failure not lead to a crisis? Bending himself suggests using the analogy of the tale of the emperor's clothes to solve this problem. In this tale, a vain emperor thinks he wears clothes so fine that they are invisible, but actually just parades around naked. But instead of telling him he is naked, the emperor's servants commend him on his fine clothes, believing it is better to lie than to tell the truth and so risk the emperor's wrath. Bending's point in using this analogy is twofold (Idem: 27):

“the construction of development as a unidirectional imposed regime and social movements as unidirectional resistance to that regime risks firstly treating any movement that expresses itself through the idiom of development as just a pawn of the development regime. Instead, we must read this as a legitimate strategic move in a context in which the discourse of development is hegemonic. Secondly, we must be wary of taking the self-presentation of a movement at face value just because they conform to our expectations. We do not want people to tell us that we are clothed or not. What we should really be paying attention to is the counter-hegemonic moment, the political response to an anti-politics machine, the moment when someone says, “The emperor has not clothes!”

These various reflections on local agency all make a case for a more nuanced multidirectionality in the development process that includes local pro and contra hegemonic conduct, both of which make the metaphor of a machine less suitable. Although the outcome of development might still often be the same - various forms of (western) dominance over and unequal negotiations with people that ‘need to be developed’ -, the processes that lead to the outcomes are more complex and less predictable than assumed by the metaphor of a machine. But there is another reason why the metaphor seems to have become less fitting. This has to do with the manner in which the instrument-effect of depoliticisation habitually has been operationalised.

Many critical scholars of development and environment interventions have in some way pointed towards the basic problem of the depoliticisation effect of interventions. Bebbington (2005) states it succinctly when he relates how developments within the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs affect the whole aid chain from Dutch co-financing institutions<sup>5</sup> to local NGOs in the Andes. In line with the changing development discourse, the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the 1990s started emphasising the concept of poverty reduction and especially the economic concept of ‘household level poverty’, which “has led to a certain depoliticization of poverty, in which poverty discussions are increasingly separated from questions of distribution and social transformation, and in which poverty reduction becomes something sought through projects rather than political change.” (Idem: 940). In other words, depoliticisation is operationalised as leading development conceptualizations further away from where the real problem of poverty lies: the global political constellations that produce wealth and poverty in the first place. Technocratisation of development thus serves to make sure that the system that keeps global inequality in place does not get compromised. The alternative to technocratisation often brought to bear by scholars is therefore obvious: “there is an important task ahead of reconstituting poverty within the political domain: namely, examining how poverty is produced and the relationship between processes that produce wealth and poverty” (Nustad, 2001: 488). But to be able to reconstitute poverty within the political domain, one must set out to better understand this domain. Unfortunately, most (post-) development studies, being dominated by anthropologists, geographers and sociologists, stop short here and have done little to further investigate the

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<sup>5</sup> Although this system is changing at the moment, there used to be several co-financing institutions in the Netherlands who were guaranteed the right to spend a certain amount of the aid budget of the Netherlands.

nature of politics (See Mosse, 2005: 242). Among other reasons, this is demonstrated by how many authors forego the possibilities offered by such an inherently political concept such as anti-politics. Thus we are left with a problem: if anti-politics is the doing away with politics without really defining what entails politics or conceptualising what entails anti-politics, then one is left with quite a meaningless ‘anti-politics machine’ indeed, as only what comes out of the machine is made clear and little about the character of the machine. A first step in addressing this problem would be to come up with a more political and more elaborate conceptualisation of anti-politics whereby the emphasis lies more on *anti-political strategies* than “the anonymous automaticity of the machine” (Idem: 5).

### **Towards a political conceptualisation of anti-politics**

As we have seen, the way anti-politics has generally been conceptualised in studies of environment and development is a *technocratic* anti-politics, often without defining politics. Here, I want to work towards a broader conceptualisation of anti-politics, based on a more explicit understanding of politics and by making a more explicit link with the politico-ideological framework it is reinforced by: our current climate of neo-liberal capitalism. Of course, this not to say that the above-mentioned studies have not taught us anything about politics. To the contrary and as we will emphasise more emphatically below: the ways in which discourses are used to determine outcomes in terms of power are inherently political. My point here, however, is that these lessons have only sporadically been brought into a more explicit conceptual framework of politics and therefore leaving us in the dark as to what is meant by the ‘reconstitution of poverty within the political domain’.

Nowadays, few would deny that we live in neo-liberal capitalist times. This is of course not to say that the end of history has arrived as some have asserted (Fukuyama, 1992). Like any hegemonic ideology, it is both reinforced and resisted in multiple ways, both from the inside and the outside and both consciously and unconsciously. Here, however, I am not so much interested in reinforcement and resistance. Rather, my aim is to briefly spell out what I believe are the core characteristics of neo-liberalism, so as to more explicitly link conceptualisations of politics and anti-politics with the contemporary politico-ideological climate. But where to start? The term liberalism embodies many rich and diverse streams which can never be done justice in a short paper. I therefore limit myself to what John Gray has argued are the ‘two main faces of liberalism’ (Gray, 2000)<sup>6</sup>.

Gray argues that there have always been two incompatible philosophies within the liberalist tradition: liberalism as a ‘theory of universal rational consensus’ and liberalism as ‘a project of seeking terms of peaceful coexistence between different regimes and ways of life’. The first face of liberalism – the currently dominant one associated with liberalism’s globalistic tendencies - stresses equality of all human beings. Toleration of differences in this view is seen as “an instrument of rational consensus, and a diversity of ways of life is endured in the faith that it is destined to disappear” (Gray, 2000: 104). Gray, one of the greater critics of the enlightenment project, argues that all the varieties of liberalism within this stream based on enlightenment universalism and positivist philosophy create ‘false hopes’ by promising ‘an end to conflicts of value’ (Idem: 137). Gray himself puts his faith in the second face of liberalism: the one in which “toleration is valued as a condition of peace, and divergent ways of living are welcomed as marks of diversity in the good life”. He calls this the *modus vivendi*. In this liberalist mode, contradictory tendencies in world politics are not seen as obstacles, but

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<sup>6</sup> Naturally, Gray’s interpretation of liberalism has its critics but it is interesting to note that one of them states that despite their different conclusions he agrees with “Gray’s estimation of political liberalism as a “species of anti-political legalism”” (Talisso, 2000: 456; Gray, 2000: 16).

as a given that can be worked on or with, without creating false hopes<sup>7</sup>. It is from these two faces of liberalism that I will now work towards conceptualisations of politics and anti-politics, whereby I take most direct inspiration from Schedler (1997) and Marden (2003).

Following Schedler (1997) I define *politics* very broadly as encompassing four things: politics is the act of organising the *public sphere* (as opposed to the private sphere); Politics presupposes difference and is the management thereof; politics is the art of the possible or contingency (as opposed to fate or necessity) and finally; politics presupposes authority as in the establishing of rules and regulations and making them binding to the members of a polity. Together, this is a fairly broad conceptualisation of politics, but, according to Schedler, a ‘functional’ one, as these four elements define “politics according to the societal tasks it is supposed to fulfil” (Idem: 3): It defines social problems and conflicts and tries to manage them through regulation and arbitration, leading to the authoritative enforcement of decisions. Key here is that this broad politics is the domain of the public sphere, whereas the private sphere is self-regulatory<sup>8</sup>. Naturally, the dividing lines are not that sharp, but at least in the public sphere it is accepted that not ‘anything goes’, and thus authority is needed; that it is thought possible to improve life and that plurality and conflict are accepted and managed. To deny these things constitute anti-politics, states Schedler, which is not to say that the above named elements necessarily connote with what we associate with free and democratic regimes. Hence, both Schedler and Marden narrow politics to make the case for a more normative *democratic* politics, based on language, communication and deliberation. Or in Marden’s words (2003: 234): “Essentially though, it [*democratic politics*] is to recognize and promote discursive contests, to uphold or contest political decisions, to contest dominant hegemonic metaphoric language that disguises alternatives or constrains choice, and finally, to recognise that decisions are made within larger discursive frames that define the parameters of the problems and the possible solutions; to have less is to deny politics”. Thus, our conceptualisation of politics links in very well with the general discursive tendencies of post-development studies, albeit arguably takes a more critical realist turn by also putting emphasis on the need for authority and leaving open the possibilities for exploring the material effects of politics as stressed by Scott (1985). However, the material is always given meaning, contested and regulated by the discursive, which is why the core of any politics has to be found in discourse.

Having conceptualised politics, we can elaborate on what constitutes antipolitics. Schedler (1997), inspired by Habermas, distinguishes four types of antipolitics (see also Marden, 2003: 235): 1) instrumental antipolitics, 2) amoral antipolitics, 3) moral antipolitics and 4) aesthetic antipolitics. First, *instrumental* antipolitics comes close to Ferguson’s anti-politics in the sense that it wants all decisions to be made by technocratic experts, based on rational cost-benefit analyses. Instrumental antipolitics does not regard political resistance as serious, as this must stem from irrational ignorance. The road is thus open for technocratic engineering of the social world and basically the end of democratic politics and deliberation. Second, *amoral* antipolitics basically comes down to the privatisation of the public domain. It regards human beings as utility maximising homo’s economicus whose interests and preferences should be

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<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, without him so much acknowledging it, Rahnama, in his outline of the post-development era stresses this face of liberalism when for instance he asserts that “this recognition that all humans are not, in real life, endowed with the same qualities of wisdom and character differs from the illusions created by modern ideologies. The latter postulate an abstract equality between people, while actually fostering the worst types of hierarchy among them” (1997: 394)

<sup>8</sup> Which is not to say that there is no politics in the private sector. To the contrary, politics as the art of the possible and the establishment of rules is at the core of private functioning. However,



clear from what makes most commercial and economic sense. Politics hereby becomes a mere ‘strategic power game’ whereby rational choice prevails. The third type of antipolitics, *moral* antipolitics, replaces ‘procedural normative arrangements’ with ‘material norms’, thereby stifling democratic political debate. In other words, ethics and morale are seen as constituted on quantifiably immutable goals and outcomes and disagreement with proposed material norms is seen as ‘amoral’ or even ‘treason’. Compromise becomes superfluous because norms are derived external from human ethical and moral consideration. A good example of this type of antipolitics is the often blind reliance on econometrics in development economics to design what are basically moral and normative policies. Fourth and last, *aesthetic* antipolitics stifles democratic politics by substituting words for images, theatre and drama. Democratic politics become trivialised as they are represented by the visual rather than the deliberative or communicative. In Marden’s words (235): “this is the triumph of the symbolic over verbal communication, the virtual over the actual and the ritual over the experience of learning. This is a form of ‘bread and circuses’ and the spectacle of politics which is regarded as a coloniser because of its potential to replace important elements of public life and *vita activa* with layers of stimulation such as expressions of emotion over plausible argument”.

Schedler, as a firm believer that we live in anti-political times, asserts that many aspects of the above four types of anti-politics form core elements of the currently dominant rational consensus market liberalism. As a consequence, with the advance of rational consensus liberalism it is thus hypothesised that the four types of antipolitics become more and more pervasive in all aspects of life, including conservation and development (projects), something that is already clear from Ferguson’s study in Lesotho (Ferguson, 1994). But if Ferguson’s technocratic anti-politics is the explanation for and the effect of the difference between rhetoric and reality, Schedler’s anti-politics is the more abstract delineation of an almost necessary set of political strategies if you consider the public sphere to be ‘colonised’ by outside forces with their own way of doing things, such as market liberalism. In a way, the two are each other’s corollary, but differ in abstraction and conceptual width. In order to clarify what I mean with this, we need to more explicitly make the link between Schedler’s anti-politics and the discussion this paper started off with: the problem of coordinating environmental governance. I want to do this practically by using Transfrontier Conservation Areas as prime illustrations of the current challenges facing environmental governance and showing that TFCAs are what they are because they are typical children of our neo-liberal time and thus need to adhere to the wider conceptualization of anti-politics as described above.

### **Governance, anti-politics and transfrontier conservation in Southern Africa**

Rather than delving much deeper into what exactly TFCAs *are*, the purpose of this section is to provide some general characteristics of and explanations for how the TFCA movement *came to be* and what it *represents or is made to represent* internationally, but more specifically in Southern Africa. The aims hereof are to establish TFCAs as typical products of their time and therefore susceptible to and shaped by neo-liberal tendencies of anti-politics and subsequently using this to further characterise and illustrate the political context that influences and structures (transfrontier) environmental governance, as stated in the introduction. In doing this I want to forego the policy and practice or rhetoric / reality discussion. Based on empirical evidence provided elsewhere it is assumed that there is a basic rhetoric / reality divide in transfrontier conservation in Southern Africa (Amerom and Büscher, 2005; Büscher and Dietz, 2005). Moreover, whether this rhetoric / reality divide is considered in terms of failure or success is not my main occupation here. Like Mosse, I am

more interested in examining “the way in which policy interpretations are produced and sustained socially” (Mosse, 2005: 8), albeit substituting ‘socially’ for ‘politically’.

Although the first transfrontier conservation venture originates from 1932 (The Waterton / Glacier Transfrontier Park between The United States of America and Canada), transfrontier conservation as an international movement only came to prominence in the 1990s. In this coming to prominence, the Southern African region voiced such a high-flying role that many believed the concept to originate from that region (Michler, 2003; Amerom and Büscher, 2005). One of the reasons for this was the establishment and marketing capabilities of the first NGO solely dedicated to TFCA development, the South African Peace Parks Foundation, founded by prominent figures such as the recently deceased businessman Anton Rupert, former South African president Nelson Mandela and the late Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands. Other reasons include the international attention devoted to the joint South Africa – Zimbabwe – Mozambique Great Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation Park (GLTP) as one of the ‘three exemplary cases’ in the world (Mittermeier et al, 2005b) and the fact that the first major IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature) conference within its Parks for Peace initiative was held in South Africa (Sandwith et al, 2001)<sup>9</sup>. At the moment, over 22 actual and potential Transfrontier Conservation initiatives have been identified in the Southern African region. All of these are in various stages of conceptualisation or implementation, but out of 22, six are generally regarded as being quite well established and developed (Amerom and Büscher, 2005). As the regional ‘superpower’, South Africa is involved in all six of these TFCAs, which include the above-mentioned GLTP, the Ai-Ais Richtersveld TFCA between South Africa and Namibia, the Lubombo TFCA between South Africa, Mozambique and Swaziland and the Maloti-Drakensberg Transfrontier Conservation and Development Area between Lesotho and South Africa.

As the word transfrontier by default denotes political international relations one expects a highly politicised intervention process by which TFCA implementation is pursued. However, in line with the above observations about development – environment interventions, TFCAs are being portrayed as technical, non-political, almost anti-political interventions<sup>10</sup>. Consider the following quote from a recently published conservation volume about transboundary conservation:

“How can we explain the tremendous increase in the number of transboundary protected areas in the last few decades? And why has this phenomenon generated such tremendous enthusiasm in the conservation community? The answer is that the transboundary element can act as a multiplier, greatly amplifying the benefits protected areas already provide. Transboundary conservation area initiatives allow conservationists to operate at a larger scale, moving across political boundaries to protect a transboundary ecosystem in its entirety, rather than stopping at political borders that rarely correspond to natural systems. By the same token, a TBCA [*Transboundary Conservation Area*] can create unique social opportunities; for example, by reuniting communities divided by borders or allowing mobile peoples to move across their traditional territories more easily. TBCAs also add an enticing political dimension to conservation, which is the capacity to reduce tensions or even to help resolve conflicts between countries, in particular those stemming from boundary disputes. This peace-making dimension enlarges the range of benefits parks provide in a significant way. It also provides powerful evidence for one of the central tenets of conservation – that protected areas are not only necessary to secure the planet’s ecological integrity but, more broadly, that they are an essential component of any healthy, peaceful, and productive society” (Mittermeier et al, 2005a: 41).

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<sup>9</sup> The International Conference on Transboundary Protected Areas as a Vehicle for International Co-operation, Cape Town, South Africa, 16-18 September 1997.

<sup>10</sup> This statement is further backed up by interviews conducted with key role-players in the TFCA ‘scene’ in Southern Africa in 2003, 2005 and 2006.

It is quite a beguiling paragraph with many obvious leads for a social scientist. What is striking first of all is that the *political* dimension of TFCAs is squarely equated with *peace-making*. That there would be few (social) scientists that would directly equate politics with peace-making is quite an understatement. However, this idea has gained such firm roots that TFCAs are also commonly referred to as ‘Peace Parks’. Secondly, the paragraph praises the multiple positive effects of TFCAs: in the environmental, social and the politics realms, but also in the economic sphere (Hanks, 2000; Amerom and Büscher, 2005), TFCAs supposedly bring great and positive contributions, ‘greatly amplifying the benefits protected areas already provide’. Naturally, this is pure Public Relations speak, as in the real world the benefits of (transboundary) protected areas are not always as clear cut, whether in the economic (Amerom and Büscher, 2005), social (Idem; Igoe, 2004; Brockington, 2004; Draper et al, 2004), political (Amerom and Büscher, 2005) or, although much less so, even in the environmental (Wainwright and Wehrmeyer, 1998; Wunder, 2001) sense. Thirdly, the paragraph as a whole has a distinctive feel to it as though protected areas (PAs) are more and more being moulded to perform as a new all-embracing teleology of ‘health, peace and productivity’, with the adjective ‘transboundary’ being the latest and perhaps definite stage in the process. As such, it increasingly seems that (transboundary) PAs are presented as a unifying ideological model that could help to alleviate the post-modern ‘crisis of meaning’ as predicted by Nietzsche (Sarles, 2001) and further conceptualised as a post cold war phenomenon by Zaki Laïdi (1997) and thus compete with older and more widely accepted or fundamental ‘models of meaning’ such as religion, nationalism and ethnicity. Evidence from the Southern African region for this argument comes from the official slogan of the Peace Parks Foundation, which reads ‘the global solution’<sup>11</sup>.

Although exceptionally lyrical, the three identified assumptions in the above quoted paragraph are certainly not exceptional but very widespread among policy documents, consultant reports, workshop proceedings, studies or even more academically inclined research articles on transboundary conservation (See for instance: Griffin et al, 1999; Sandwith et al, 2001; Zunckel, 2003; Porter and Sandwith, 2005). However, as stated previously and despite much evidence refuting or assuaging these assumptions, I am not so much interested in the rhetoric – reality aspects of these assumptions but rather how and why they are so pervasive and so easily and habitually reproduced. In order to pursue this line of thought, we must turn the above assumptions around and investigate why environment and development interventions *need* to bring peace and be all-inclusive and give meaning. Should conservation and development literally have to take *everything* into account? Looking at the lists of criteria and principles that donors *and* ‘stakeholders’ want development and environment schemes to attend to, this question does seem relevant, as these lists grow ever larger. In this line of thinking, TFCAs surely are the epitome of what can possibly be asked of conservation-development interventions: besides the conservation of nature and the uplifting of people (reduce / eliminate poverty), TFCAs are supposed to facilitate participation, enhance ownership, empower communities, enhance international cooperation and understanding, re-unite and reinvigorate cultures, stimulate spirituality, encourage economic growth and tourism, educate, form partnerships, bring peace, enhance security, adhere to good governance and so forth. Hence, the conservation-development teleology seems complete and ready to compete. Where states used to be the archetypical focal points from which the above was expected, with the shift from government to governance, whereby the state is just one of the many actors pursuing goals, implementing policies and influencing what happens in the public sphere (Rosenau, 1990, 1997; Rosenau and Czempiel, 1992), many other actors and

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<sup>11</sup> See the PPF website: [www.peaceparks.org](http://www.peaceparks.org).

actor-groups-around-a-theme<sup>12</sup> try to fill the void left by a less all-encompassing conceptualisation of the state and an international ‘crisis in meaning’. Consequently, these actors and actor-groups must more consciously and strategically start behaving as part of a political arena in which they have to compete for popular support to justify their existence and interventions. The way to do this is similar to more ‘classical’ political mobilisation settings: to gather as many people as possible under unifying, all-embracing and seemingly non-contestable concepts, premises and promises. In a word: anti-politics.

My argument here is that, instead of TFCAs forming ‘the global solution’ to social, environmental, political and economic problems, they in fact are the solution to many of the social, political, economic and environmental pressures on environment and development interventions today. Let me state this even stronger and more generic: dictated by the influence of neo-liberal capitalism and further reinforced by the exponential increase in organizational development and human capacity that fuels more and more governance without government<sup>13</sup>, many aspects of our world, and especially such politically sensitive issues as environment and development, have reached such heights of political sensitivity that a wide array of anti-political strategies have become an absolute necessity to get new initiatives off the ground or maintain existing initiatives. Phrased succinctly: the more intense the politics, the more intense the anti-politics. Coming back now to what I stated at the end of the last section, the reasons for the need of conceptually widening Ferguson’s – or more generally anthropological post-development’s - anti-politics into a more political and nuanced conceptualisation of anti-politics, such as the one by Schedler, are twofold and rest on one basic premise. The premise is that, in what Rosenau calls an increasingly ‘turbulent’ world, as it becomes ever more difficult and complex to maintain order and govern change, it becomes ever more difficult and complex to formulate and develop answers in terms of governance structures that are required. Following from this, a wide range of anti-political strategies are thus firstly necessary for political mobilisation and secondly, more and more the only option to at least discursively adhere to complexity.

All of this is not to say that TFCAs are mere discursive constructions to deal with the pressures of our time. TFCAs do have validity in reality as indeed it makes (biological, managerial) sense that ecosystem across borders are looked at and managed holistically; that often previously disadvantaged communities living in or near these areas have a say in the management of TFCAs and that more regular cooperation between countries can enhance understanding. In pursuing these objectives, many actors involved in transfrontier conservation do honestly strive for what they believe are the best strategies in governing TFCAs and hence thus strive for democratic politics as defined above. But they do have a governance problem: how to coordinate TFCA governance if – as an anti-political summum – within TFCAs everything has to be taken into account and the only ‘way out’ often constitutes anti-politics? In other words: how to strive for democratic politics if people’s behaviour is more and more determined by anti-politics? It follows that this continuing paradox between politics and anti-politics in TFCA development must leave its mark on the governance frameworks and institutional set-ups that are being created, but also on the intended or unintended outcomes – in terms of power – of these frameworks and set-ups. The assumption is that cooperative governance is very hard to achieve *as-it-is* and made even harder – if not outright impossible - because of the imprint that the politics – anti-politics dynamic leaves on

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<sup>12</sup> With this I mean for instance actors more or less loosely grouped around a common interest, such as development, environment or both.

<sup>13</sup> This is of course not to say governments are becoming irrelevant. They remain important and crucial actors but the point is that they are not as all encompassing and powerful as they were (seen to be) before.

governance, institutions and actions. In order to assess this assumption we need to test it against empirical evidence. And as TFCAs form excellent illustrations of the multiple pressures that conservation and development interventions are subject to nowadays, I therefore turn to empirical evidence from TFCA development in Southern Africa, relying mostly, but not solely, on research done on the Maloti-Drakensberg Transfrontier Conservation and Development Project between South Africa and Lesotho.

### **Consequences of politics - anti-politics dynamics in transfrontier conservation**

With the limited space available in a short paper, it is only possible to touch the empirical surface and present some notes that support and illustrate the above assumption<sup>14</sup>. My approach is therefore to look at the main policy or behavioural strategies of selected actor groups in TFCAs in Southern Africa and characterise these in terms of politics – anti-politics. In line with the above discussions and taking multidirectionality in the intervention process into account, I distinguish three types of actors in the transfrontier conservation intervention process: 1) those who undergo the intervention: the target population / area, 2) those who do the intervention: the actual direct implementers and 3) those who formally guide and steer the intervention: the actors that have a formal role or are highly influential but do not directly implement or undergo the intervention. Naturally, these categories of actors are not as clear-cut in reality but are sufficiently recognisable in practice as to function as a basis for the organisation of the empirical material. However, first is it necessary to provide minimal background information on the Maloti-Drakensberg Transfrontier Conservation and Development Project (MDTP) where most of the research for this article was conducted during the period of January 2005 until January 2006<sup>15</sup>. Of the six most advanced TFCAs in Southern Africa the MDTP surely is one of the most complex and most invested in TFCAs. After the Southern African flagship TFCA, the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park (GLTP, see above) the MDTP draws the most funding and is best developed in terms of the intervention structure (e.g. treaties, Memoranda of Understanding, institutions, human and financial resources)<sup>16</sup> and is therefore suitable as a case-study of transfrontier conservation in Southern Africa. However, comparisons will be drawn with the flagship GLTP on which fieldwork was conducted in November and December 2003. The main methods of investigation were semi-structured interviews with key actors involved in the MDTP and the general TFCA ‘scene’; participatory observation among diverse actors in and around the main TFCAs, both locally in the MDTP area as well as those that have ‘institutionalised’ positions in the intervention project and the collecting of relevant project documentation during fieldwork trips.

### ***The case: the Maloti-Drakensberg Transfrontier Conservation and Development Project***

The MDTP has its roots in the 1980s when especially South African individuals became concerned about the degradation of the Maloti-Drakensberg<sup>17</sup> Mountain ecosystem that runs along Lesotho’s eastern border with the South African provinces of KwaZulu Natal (KZN) in the centre, Free State in the North and Eastern Cape in the South. As South Africa was still governed by the apartheid regime and Lesotho had over the years become more focal in its denunciation of the regime, cooperation was highly constrained and only possible as

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<sup>14</sup> As this paper forms part of a wider PhD research project on the politics and governance of transfrontier conservation in Southern Africa more in-depth data will be presented in various forms in the following years.

<sup>15</sup> For a more extended overview of the MDTP and the issues at play see Büscher, 2005.

<sup>16</sup> I am aware that I am perhaps surpassing the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park between South Africa and Botswana, but since it always has been a de facto transfrontier *park* (not area) there has not been a major intervention structure.

<sup>17</sup> Maloti is the Sesotho word for mountains and Drakensbergen – dragon mountains - was the name given to the mountain range by the Cape Dutch *voortrekkers* or *boers* so as to express the spectacular, mystical and untamed character of the range.

‘intergovernmental liaison’ on ‘technical’ issues. Under this heading was established the ‘Drakensberg Maloti Mountain Conservation Programme’ (DMMCP), in which the principal actors were the Natal Parks Board (now Ezemvelo KwaZulu Natal Wildlife, the KZN nature conservation agency) and the Lesotho Ministry of Environment, Gender and Youth Affairs (whose role was later taken over by the National Environment Secretariat (NES) under the Ministry of Tourism, Environment and Culture). The DMMCP commissioned various studies on the Maloti-Drakensberg Area, including socio-economic, ecological and hydrological issues, with the aim of understanding what needs to be done to conserve the mountain ecosystem and, gradually, also the uplifting of poor communities living in the area. The DMMCP activities came to a halt at the end of the 1980s when (South African) funding dried up and only really resumed in 1996 when the European Union was willing to fund a three year programme (also named the Drakensberg/Maloti Mountain Conservation Programme), aimed at conservation and development. The main result of the programme, according to the then director of NES, was that it “provided information for the design of MDTP in conjunction with [the] Design Phase of MDTP”. Concomitantly with the EU project, World Bank interest in the project grew strongly and according to the same informant this was because of the transfrontier nature of the project, which around that time started becoming a popular new fad amongst donors. The World Bank facilitated a first important workshop in 1997 between Lesotho and South African officials in Giant Castle Nature Reserve in South Africa, where it was agreed that they would be working towards a bigger TFCA project. The World Bank was subsequently instrumental in convincing the Japanese Government to finance a 1,5 year preparation phase for the MDTP. Based again on several studies of the area, the preparation phase led to a Project Appraisal Document which together with an MOU between South Africa and Lesotho on the 11<sup>th</sup> of June 2001 laid the basis for the eventual Global Environment Facility grant that now, through the World Bank, finances the MDTP. The actual MDTP started in early 2003 and is to last until the beginning of 2008<sup>18</sup>.

The project area stretches out over various provinces and districts in South Africa and Lesotho and these also determines the most important actors involved in the intervention. In South Africa the MDTP stretches out over the Free State, KwaZulu Natal and the Eastern Cape provinces, while in Lesotho it covers the districts of Botha Bothe, Mokhotlong and Qacha’s Nek. In these provinces and districts we find the local residents (mostly local ‘communities’ but also commercial farmers and village residents), which together with the environment they live in make up those who undergo the intervention. Those who do the intervention in South Africa consist firstly of the three provincial conservation agencies or departments: KwaZulu Natal’s Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, a parastatal working under KZN’s provincial department of Agriculture and Environment; the Free State Department of Tourism, Environmental & Economic Affairs and the Eastern Cape Department of Economic Affairs, Environment and Tourism. Besides, the national conservation agency South African National Parks is also one of the five official implementing agencies due to the (Greater) Golden Gate National Park being situated in the MDTP area and lastly, the national Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT) plays a supervisory and intermediary role as the official receiver of the funding from the donor, the Global Environment Facility through the World Bank, and acts as the ultimate authority to deal with transnational issues (a role in the MDTP delegated to DEAT by the SA department of Foreign Affairs). In Lesotho, the Ministry of Tourism, Environment and Culture (MTEC) plays the

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<sup>18</sup> As the programme is still running at the time of writing, I decided to leave out names of people interviewed for sensitivity reasons. Also, as the MDTP is highly complex it must be noted that what is presented here can never fully account for the complexity of the project. It can only aim to highlight some of the issues that are of specific importance to the topic of this paper.

lead implementing role, supported by other ministries, such as the ones dealing with Finance, Forestry, Agriculture, Local Government and Foreign Affairs. In both countries, however, the implementing agencies are supported by an independent Project Coordination Unit (PCU): substantive teams of professionals working full-time to support and implement the MDTP. As these have de facto done most of the implementation in the project so far, the analysis will focus mostly on them. Lastly, the most important actors who formally guide and steer the implementation of the MDTP are the World Bank as this case's GEF implementing agency<sup>19</sup>; DEAT as the implementer focussing mostly on supervision and guidance and the Peace Parks Foundation, as the most influential regional NGO dedicated to TFCA development and implementation who actively supports the Lesotho side of the MDTP, engages in general TFCA conceptualisation and mobilisation and finances major facilitating structures for various Southern African TFCAs. The next sections will look at the major strategies of these various actors and characterise them in terms of politics – anti-politics.

***Those who undergo the intervention: the target population / area***

Due to the dynamics of the Maloti-Drakensberg project, there is as of yet not too much to say about those who undergo the intervention. After various phases of planning, studies and consensus forming preceding the MDTP, the World Bank and others thought that the implementation of the project could make a 'flying start', but this has so far not materialised. Upon taking up their job, the newly installed PCU members on the South African side challenged the original Project Appraisal Document (PAD) and wished to spend more energy and time on detailed planning and supportive data gathering. The SA PCU argued that the data gathered was 'anecdotal data', which was not spatial and perhaps only accounted for ten per cent of the total data needed for proper conservation planning. With the initial approval<sup>20</sup> of the donor and other project authorities such as the Project Coordination Committees of the two countries and the Bilateral Steering Committee, the SA PCU embarked on an extensive data gathering and planning exercise for the Maloti-Drakensberg bioregion and thus relatively little direct interventions were made on the ground in the project area. In Lesotho, the PCU choose not to challenge the PAD but instead to lay more emphasis on building local and institutional support for the project. However, when asked about it, the coordinator of the Lesotho PCU admitted in October 2005 that neither in Lesotho much direct implementation had occurred and most energy was spent on 'base-line' studies, political mobilisation and planning.

All of this does not mean that the target population has not participated in or been affected by the MDTP. In South Africa, the PCU embarked on a strategy of 15 'pilot projects', ranging from socio-economic and environmental assessment studies to more practical community conservation and tourism projects. In Lesotho, many lekgotla's (community meetings) were held to explain the goals of the project, form local committees and plan and interact with local people. Around the time of writing, many of these pilot projects and meeting come down to the same thing: making the target population part of the planning process and (proposed) institutional structures of the project. Post-development scholars would explain this as the cooptation of local people into the predetermined goals of the project and making them in effect co-responsible, which either pre-empts possible resistance or makes it much less effective. Whether this is true in the MDTP case is yet to be seen, but focus here is on how

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<sup>19</sup> The Global Environment Facility has three implementing agencies: the World Bank, the United National Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). This number might however be extended soon due to discussions with other aspiring implementing agencies.

<sup>20</sup> Later in the project, several project authorities starting doubting the strategy of extensive planning and data gathering.

communities reacted to these ‘outreach’ activities of the MDTP. Evidence from attending community meetings and workshops suggests that, as the MDTP emphasis on community development rests mostly on ecotourism, local people are keen to exploit the perceived possibilities offered increasing tourism. Responses by local Basotho villagers after hearing about the project included looking forward to ‘weaving and cooking for tourists’, ‘the building of traditional huts that tourists like’, and, dealing more with trade with South Africa, ‘selling resources (mohair and wool) that they don’t have, and buying from them resources that we don’t have, like certain animal breeds’. Similar responses came from villagers from South Africa when asked about the MDTP. All in all too little has happened on the ground in the MDTP to draw conclusions but the signs so far point towards quite rational economic and commercial reactions to perceived possibilities the MDTP might offer.

In other TFCAs, those who undergo the project have had more pressure to deal with the intervention and come up with a reaction strategy. This is most notable in the Great Limpopo TFCA. There, the target population of the TFCA intervention consists mostly of people living on the border of the South African Kruger Park and several villages in the newly established Mozambican Limpopo National Park, which borders the Kruger. Regarding the former, the issue at stake is to have a say in the management and development of the GLTP, especially since one of the communities, the Makuleke, actually owns part of the Kruger since they won their land-claim in 1998 (see Steenkamp and Uhr, 2000). Regarding the latter, the issue at stake is removal from the park to make way for wildlife. In both cases, a lot of resistance has sprung up in reaction to the evolving GLTP. Interestingly, these reactions had two distinct variants. The first and predominant type of reaction was that of outright resistance, both to the GLTP itself, as well as to the processes in which ‘community consultation’ was conceptualised and implemented (University of the Witwatersrand, 2002; Amerom and Büscher, 2005). As Spierenburg and Wels (Forthcoming) show, communities in the Mozambican Limpopo national park actively contested outside claims that what happened to them was ‘voluntary removal’ after ‘extensive community consultation’. Hence, by challenging outside interpretations, the community tried to create discursive space in the light of what seems to be a strategy of *amoral* anti-politics by the ones influencing the intervention: they explained their preferred outcome (removal of the communities from the park) through a rationalisation of that option making most economic sense, thereby discarding other preferences as ‘irrational’. This is backed up by an interview with a Peace Parks Foundation staff member in August 2005, who stated that the communities in Limpopo national park would be far better off in a newly build village outside the park rather than in their current place of habitation in the park. He referred hereby specifically to the improved housing for the villagers and the compensation they would receive. However, issues of whether the land was cultivatable or whether their current residence perhaps has spiritual or historical meaning did not come up in the interview.

The second type of reaction to the GLTP intervention, albeit limited to one community – the Makuleke -, is one of both resistance and opportunism. Although the Makuleke resist not being taken seriously in the management structure of the GLTP (Amerom and Büscher, 2005), they are, because of their position in the heart of the GLTP, also in the most preferential position to “capitalise on the new tourism opportunities that will be created by the free flow of park visitors between South Africa, Zimbabwe, and Mozambique” (Friedman, 2005: 39). First through hunting, but later through up- market lodges and safaris, the Makuleke presented themselves as *the* Southern African success story of ‘community-based natural resource management’. However, this success is only partial, as many have blamed the Makuleke for doing exactly that which they have fought against: undemocratic and



unaccountable decision-making and improperly distributing benefits within the community (Friedman, 2005). While doing so, the Makuleke strategy used for self-promotion within the broader GLTP framework very much resembled a form of aesthetic anti-politics: dramatic imaging of the poor community being trampled by outside forces, while as the relatively most well-off community in the area (Holleman, 2004), shrugging of their own internal problems through theatrical displays rather than words. Phrased differently: outside anti-politics of alleged successful community based conservation was to a certain extent successfully contested, but internal politics were shrugged away behind aesthetic veils of coherence and equality. Whether this was a conscious strategy cannot be said, but it certainly seems the most logical one, considering all the attention for and pressure on the Makuleke.

***Those who do the intervention: the actual direct implementers***

As said, within the MDTP, the main strategies of implementation so far are detailed planning for the MDTP bioregion and conducting supporting studies that have to feed into the planning for the area. Moreover, there are several pilot projects in South Africa and training and infrastructure projects in Lesotho, but up till now these have received less emphasis. Though it was originally intended that the lead implementing agencies in both countries take the lead in the project, in reality the two PCUs have taken up this role and the main strategies therefore also derive from them, albeit sanctioned by other project authorities<sup>21</sup>. Although preliminary considering that the project is still underway, I will focus here on the strategy of planning and argue that this strategy is basically one of *instrumental* anti-politics. I will also contend that others in the project reacted to this with a strategy of *moral* anti-politics.

It is especially the SA PCU that choose to lay core emphasis on planning and studies with the assumption that all these plans can and will be used in eventual implementation. Over the time of the project, this thinking in terms of planning has become so dominant that slowly there has occurred a shift in thinking from the MDTP as an implementation project to that of a planning and data-gathering project. Various PCU members, especially from South Africa, but also from Lesotho, mentioned that the MDTP should be seen as a ‘longer-term programme’ whereby this phase was basically a ‘planning’ phase. Consequently and according to the SA PCU coordinator, the official goal of the project also changed from the “*conservation of globally significant biodiversity to developing a bioregional planning strategy for the next 20-plus years*”.

But, if there is such overwhelming evidence in the academic literature and even in formalised project evaluations that are carried out within the development framework and its internal constraints on what can and what can not be said, that there is always a (vast) difference between planning and policy on the one hand and implementation and practice on the other hand, why did the SA PCU still want to focus all its attention on ‘proper planning’ and the gathering of the remaining 90 per cent of the data needed for proper planning? Surely, the PCU members, being all highly educated and experienced, are aware of inevitable differences between policy and practice, so why still put so much emphasis on this strategy? According to two PCU members, the chosen strategy of planning and supporting studies was something that linked in with their principles of the ‘right’ way of undertaking such a complex project. What this exactly entails is not completely clear, but one can speculate that a perceived legitimate principle could be that of making sure that in such an immensely complex project as the MDTP, everything that can be taken into account in project implementation is available as information to be taken into account. While valid, this still does not solve the rhetoric-

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<sup>21</sup> This was stated in interviews with PCU members in both countries, as well as in interviews with staff of the lead implementing agencies.

reality problem, as the amount of variables to be accounted for in order to implement the strategy will always be so great as to never be fully encapsulated even in the most systematic and all-embracing governance framework. Besides, the planning strategy also necessarily rests on certain political assumptions (for instance that certain concepts remain politically acceptable or that political will remains to see implementation through) that one cannot expect to all remain the same for the whole planning period. Hence, it seems likely that other explanations for the adoption of this strategy exist – ones that might not even be consciously known to the ones doing the implementation.

A logical answer seems to be that planning and data gathering is the safest anti-political strategy possible. If it is true that ‘the more intense the politics, the more intense the anti-politics’, this would certainly apply to the two PCUs, as their real and perceived political situation is arguably as intense as to border on what a person can or wants to take personally and professionally. Many PCU members expressed feelings of immense personal and professional strain; some stated that had they known this before applying they might not have taken the job and a few even said they could not wait for their contracts to be finished so they could move on. Much of the political intensity comes from the fact that the MDTP is an enormously complex project whereby every possible implementation move would have to face much political resistance. Added to this in South Africa is the fact that the majority of the PCU consists of Caucasians, which is considered politically inappropriate in post apartheid South Africa<sup>22</sup>. In Lesotho, an added strain is the cooptation of the project by numerous other actors including ministerial departments, NGOs, local communities, chiefs and companies that all want to have a piece of the pie. All of this makes any choice within the project extremely difficult, and therefore it seems safest to focus on the technical and thus resort to *instrumental* anti-politics. However, the act of anti-politics is inherently political, and although the most logical strategy for the PCUs, other actors in the project, most notably those who formally steer and guide the MDTP in South Africa, increasingly started resisting the choices made by the SA PCU.

***Those who formally guide and steer the intervention: the donors, states and other influential actors***

Although initially subscribing to the strategy set out by the PCU, several actors guiding and steering the project, most notably the SA Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT) and the World Bank, started doubting the extensive planning and data gathering and started pressing for more direct implementation. Although still adhering to conservation as the ultimate goal of the project, these actors started emphasising that local communities should be benefiting more than they were doing so far. In this, it is remarkable that DEAT and other SA actors took the Lesotho PCU approach of doing extensive community participation and collaboration as an example of how it should be in South Africa as well, despite the fact that all the consultation and participation had not (yet) led to demonstrable tangible benefits in Lesotho. But when looking at the prevailing policy environment this strategy makes more sense. Two key issues play a role here: the enormous pressures for land reform in South Africa related to the injustices of the past and the dominance of the official policy models of ‘community based natural resource management’ (CBNRM) and ‘sustainable use’. Both these issues exert enormous pressure on the South African government, and also on donors such as the World Bank, to be seen to be ‘community based’ and making sure that target groups are believed to benefit. Obviously, planning and data gathering does not instantaneously benefit poor people in the MDTP area and since governments and donors also know and

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<sup>22</sup> As stated by many people in the project interviewed by the author, both in South Africa and in Lesotho.

acknowledge that implementation is delicate and frail, postponing it is a political risk, especially as it increases expectations. With these pressures in mind it seems more logical that DEAT, and to a certain extent also the World Bank, started demanding more community based implementation from the PCU, who felt and acknowledged the pressure, but remained firm in believing in their chosen strategy.

So, where the SA PCU tried to close off discursive political space when it comes to planning by saying that the other role players in the project subscribed to this strategy in formal meetings, several of these actors more and more started deviating from this course and pushing for another strategy: namely the implementation of community (conservation) projects. How the latter should be worked out was unclear though. One staff member of the TFCA section of DEAT started pushing for (environmental) education programmes, but this was immediately refuted by the SA PCU, which caused the relationship between the two actors to deteriorate. In response to this, actors around the SA PCU, including those from Lesotho, increasingly started to sprout the conviction that more community-based or participatory implementation work must be prioritised by the SA PCU, but what this exactly entailed remained unclear. However, from an anti-politics point of view this does not seem to be relevant. In reply to the political choice of technical planning, they started promoting the political choice of community based conservation in such a way as to strive to ‘monopolize and defense of goals it takes for immutable’ (Schedler, 1997: 13). In a word: a strategy of *moral* anti-politics. Whereas the SA PCU is convinced it follows the right technical process and takes this as a highly valued non-political principle, other actors are convinced they are morally right by pushing for community conservation, in line with the apparently non-political dominant convictions of the time. Whether either actually helps in bringing about developmental or environmental goals in reality is not at stake here and up for discussion. The point is that these two different anti-political strategies within the MDTP close discursive space for democratic and constructive debate and make actors talk past each other rather than with each other.

Naturally, there are many more strategies of influential actors, but one here is of particular importance: the strategies adopted by the Peace Parks Foundation in trying to reach their goal of stimulating TFCAs. Although just one NGO out of many, the PPF has been extremely influential in conceptualising TFCAs and pushing the TFCA agenda throughout the Southern African region. One reason for this is their enormous fund-raising capabilities, which de facto give them much power over TFCA strategies in the region. Being driven mainly by people with a clear business background, it is no surprise that the PPF works according to business logic (see also the PPF website: [www.peaceparks.org](http://www.peaceparks.org)). Their strategy is therefore one of a combination of amoral anti-politics and aesthetic anti-politics: placing most emphasis on economic and commercial logic and creating images of TFCAs as ‘Peace Parks’ that can form the ‘global solution’. As Draper and Wels show, through their wilderness images and framing of problems of parks in such a way that ‘peace parks’ form the solution, they are able to gain significant leverage over the framing of TFCAs, which has clearly already impacted on developments in the GLTP (Amerom and Büscher, 2005), but might also do so on the MDTP, as the PPF becomes more involved and is being approached for funding once the World Bank / GEF funding of the MDTP runs out in 2007.

It is clear from this and the previous sections that all actor groups in transfrontier conservation adhere to anti-political strategies to obtain their goals. It has also been shown that actors strive for democratic politics in order to break through discursive closures and so create space for alternative conceptualisations of how TFCA interventions should develop. It follows from this

that the paradox between politics and anti-politics is a deciding factor in how transfrontier environmental governance and institutions are shaped and operate. In order to see how this works out, we will turn to the role of the commons in TFCAs, as this tenure category is most under pressure because of the still often prevailing idea of the ‘tragedy of the commons’ in nature conservation. Commonage institutions are thus heavily politically contested in TFCAs and therefore the institutions created to deal with the commons must bear the politics – anti-politics burden.

***Institutional consequences: the special role of the commons***

It is not that hard to imagine why especially the commonage areas are more contested arena’s than certain other modes of tenure. Firstly, the management of the commons is not always as straightforward or clear as most private or state tenure systems and secondly, many actors guiding, steering or actually doing the implementation feel they have less control over commonage structures than over other forms of tenure. This is also clear in the MDTP, where much of the area connotes common property: all of the Lesotho part and major parts of South Africa are commonage land, falling under various authority schemes, both ‘indigenous’ (tribal councils, chiefs, etc.) and more ‘modern’ (SA municipality councils, community councils in Lesotho). Creating institutions for commonage land that both aid people’s livelihoods and conserve biodiversity is therefore a major challenge, which is reflected in the institutions created or stimulated for these purposes under the MDTP. I will here discuss the two most notable institutional examples: the Managed Resource Areas in Lesotho and (planned) protected areas and their social outreach in Lesotho and South Africa.

In Lesotho, commonage rangeland and its associated environmental and governance challenges seem timeless foci of attention. One particular issue concerns overgrazing and the subsequent degrading of the rangelands. In order to tackle this issue, Resource Management Areas (RMAs) were set up in the 1980s, with the purpose of regulating grazing in particular areas by ‘Grazing Associations’ (GAs), of which local people could become a member and so obtain grazing rights and a say about the governance of the range commons. The success of these RMAs has been limited (Turner, 2003), but the MDTP has focussed its attention on these institutions in order to further its own goals of biodiversity conservation and development. Predominantly focussed on livestock grazing, the MDTP sought to widen the RMA concept by including the concept of biodiversity conservation. Hence, RMAs became Managed Resource Areas (MRAs), governed by Managed Resource Associations and designed to take care of all biodiversity and natural resources in the range commons (Büscher, 2005). Whether these reinvigorated institutions will be successful remains to be seen, but judging from the past, the chances are slim (Turner, 2003; Büscher, 2005)<sup>23</sup>. Too many boundary disputes, too little regard for authority of the GAs and too much pressure on the rangelands have all contributed to their further decline over the two decades since the RMA concept was introduced. But besides the rhetoric – reality predictions, for this paper it is interesting to see the paradoxes and tensions developing in the MRA concept. Basically this has to do with the same juxtapositions described above between the more technical planning of the SA PCU and the more community-based ideas of DEAT.

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<sup>23</sup> Although Turner in 2003 judged the future for the range commons to be quite bleak, he is more positive in 2006 (Turner, 2006). According to him (Idem: 16) “the new decentralised disposition of state authority in the country, the legal reforms achieved through the Local Government Act and the envisaged redeployment of customary and statute law in the Land Bill combine to reaffirm Basotho’s social concept of their kingdom as a commons”. However, although the commons have been reaffirmed officially, this does not mean that the governance challenges themselves have changed or been assuaged. In fact, it is this paper’s assertion that the inherent paradoxes created by the politics – anti-politics dynamics in transfrontier conservation will make governance even harder.

In Lesotho, the commonage culture runs very deep and exclusion and privatisation in official policies remains a hazardous thing (Turner, 2006). Therefore, the MRA concept as developed by the Lesotho PCU is “founded on the principles of Community Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) which aims at empowering the local community to manage all natural resources within their jurisdiction in a sustainable manner” (MDTP, 2005: 27). Hence, allegiance lies the development aspect of the MRAs. In order to achieve the CBNRM principle, three ‘key components underpinning the conceptual framework’ for MRAs need to be in place: the surrounding political, operational and institutional components. According to the same concept note (Idem: 29):

“All three components need to function in harmony to achieve a balanced and equitable sharing of the resources. Weakness in an individual component undermines achieving the objectives of the ERMA, for example, a lack of political commitment or inadequate legal and institutional arrangements. While good technical support can prop up the process in the short term, it cannot make it sustainable in the longer term. An inherent assumption is that each component is consistent within itself; thus, inter-sectoral policies, plans and practice must be complementary. However, the three components must also be compatible with one another. Therefore, legal and institutional arrangements need to support operational strategies and vice versa. Importantly, the enabling environment is created by the political component. Consequently politics at village, local, national and international levels all affect the potential for operations of the ERMA”.

The document then goes on to state which elements of the political component must be in place for it to be ‘internally consistent’. One issue of particular importance is that of boundaries: according to the note these must– in line with Ostrom’s (1990) famous principles for successful governance of the commons – be clear, both physically and socially. However, the author of the document, in a meeting with a consultant presenting a report on the concept of MRAs, states that strict resource boundaries are problematic, because “as a Mosotho<sup>24</sup>, I feel that all the resources belong to all the people”, indicating exactly the opposite: that boundaries are ever flexible and contested. Also, the same consultant, in his report to the MDTP (Turner, 2005), concludes that the simpler the institutions that are created, the better. However, indications from fieldwork on the MDTP clearly indicate that so far the institutions suggested by the MDTP in Lesotho are adding complexity to an already complex institutional landscape. Naturally, there are various reasons for these paradoxes, but here I would like to suggest that one particular reason is the continuous contestations between politics and anti-politics as identified in the MDTP above. The way to make this clear is by drawing on the second institutional example often suggested by the MDTP, the establishment of protected areas (PAs).

Currently in the MDTP, PAs are mostly found in South Africa, with only one in Lesotho: Sehlabatebe national park. PAs are the predominant institutional structure for biodiversity conservation in South Africa and also in the South African area of the MDTP. From the start of the MDTP, South Africa and the World Bank have been pressing Lesotho to establish more PAs, especially around the fragile water catchment areas high up in the Maloti Mountains, near the border with South Africa. But also in the South African part of the MDTP, it is aimed to increase the amount of PAs. According to SA PCU member: “We have enough high altitude PAs, we need more protected lowlands!”, whereby is meant that especially the fragile biodiversity in lower areas is not sufficiently protected. Incidentally, most of these lowlands in South Africa connote common property and hence, the special role of and the pressure on the commonage is again emphasised. Important to add hereby is that the SA PCU reasons exactly opposite to the Lesotho PCU: they want to increase the protection of biodiversity which subsequently attracts tourists, which in turn aids local people. In Lesotho, the reasoning

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<sup>24</sup> Inhabitant of Lesotho (singular). Plural: Basotho.

starts with the empowering of local people, leading to improved grazing management, which in turn should lead to sustainable management of biological diversity. Both in the Lesotho MRAs and its envisaged PAs as well as in the current and envisaged South African PAs, these models of reasoning clash, leading to the above-described paradoxes, which can be found on both sides of the border. In fact, one can state that the MRAs are under pressure of the more stricter PA system, while the South African PAs – as institutions – are increasingly pressurised in terms of making the physical, environmental and social boundaries they represent more flexible. At the core, the paradoxes can be traced back to the two forms of anti-politics already mentioned, whereby the South African side adheres more to instrumental anti-politics and the Lesotho side more to amoral anti-politics. As both sides defend their stance as highly principled issues that are really non discussable and thus non political, it hampers debate on finding middle ground, leaving institutional development even more complex as they have to constantly deal with paradoxes that officially do not exist.

### **Conclusion: towards cooperative governance?**

This paper started out with a critique on the dominant conceptualisation of the concept of anti-politics in current post-development literature. Although especially Ferguson's (1994) study was tremendously important in showing the anti-political effects of development interventions, I essentially argued here that his thesis, and much of the post-development literature that it spurred, is only part of a wider story; one that could only have begun to be clearly understood from the beginning of the 1990s onwards due to globalisation and its related developments in information and communication technology and associated organisational mushrooming taking place on hitherto unprecedented levels. These factors exponentially complicated environmental governance to such extent that calls for the governance or coordination of environmental governance have become increasingly more focal. These complications, inherent in environmental governance since time immemorial, are basically found on two levels: environmental and social / political. It is the latter complexities and complications put on the coordination of environmental governance that this paper aimed to explore and explain. Reconceptualising the concept of anti-politics proved essential hereby, both by widening it to include different variants of anti-politics and by placing it in a more explicit political framework of neo-liberal capitalism, the dominant political ideology of our time.

The paper showed how rational consensus neo-liberalism emphasises anti-political strategies as an absolute necessity to 'make things happen' in intense political environments and demonstrated that environment-development interventions are especially applicable in this sense as they have always been politically very fragile and intense. As such, current transfrontier conservation efforts seem to be anti-political pinnacles in the environment-development field due to their nature to take almost everything into account. It has subsequently been shown that the paradox between politics and anti-politics is a deciding factor in how transfrontier environmental governance and institutions are shaped and operate. The empirical material presented supported this conclusion by identifying various forms of anti-politics – instrumental, moral, amoral and aesthetic anti-politics – in transfrontier conservation in Southern Africa, relying mostly on the case of the Maloti-Drakensberg Transfrontier Conservation and Development Project. These various forms of identified anti-politics are multi-directional: they are employed as essential strategies by all actor groups: those who undergo, those who do and those who steer and guide the intervention. On the other hand, anti-political strategies are contested: actors try to open up discursive space and contest images portrayed as being non-discussable to forward their own priorities and agenda's. Politics and anti-politics thus mutually feed off each other, but – importantly -

without making the need for a wide variety of anti-political strategies by all actors less necessary.

Hence, although the different actors or actor groups naturally do not have the same amount of power in the transfrontier process it is very interesting and relevant to note that many of their strategies vis-à-vis each other derive from the same source (pressures of rational consensus neo-liberalism) and are based on the same logic (anti-politics). And although we have also seen that actors do try to increase their 'room of manoeuvrability' in terms of democratic politics as defined in this paper, it is clear that the pressures to adhere to one or more strategies of anti-politics are becoming ever greater. This conclusion in itself is important, as not many people in the conservation-development field are consciously aware of this. But the logical following steps should also be stressed. First, what effects do these politics – anti-politics imprints on institutions and cooperation have on the ability of conservation-development interventions to reach their targets? Post-development scholars would say very little or even adverse effects, but as Mosse (2005) has shown, this is too one-sided. Intervention success or failure is also socially and politically constructed but this does not mean that unintended side or instrument effects of interventions can still be both positive and negative for either the environment or for the target population. Rather, a second consequence of my conclusion is what I specifically want to lay emphasis on and this has to do with the links between power, knowledge and consciousness. Of course, since Foucault the link between power and knowledge is a favourable topic among many academics, exemplified by the post-development critique already discussed above. However, what this paper also shows is that although all actors or actor groups are subjected to the same pressures and to more or lesser degree forced to resort to similar strategies of anti-politics, some do this in a more conscious way than others. These more reflective actors can be found on different levels and among all actors groups discussed. The crucial question for future research however, one that will be extremely hard to answer, is how and to what extent the degree of consciousness about and making use of (neo-liberal) pressures and logical subsequent (anti-political) strategies translated into different forms of power or the challenging of entrenched power holders. As it follows from this paper, it cannot be assumed that entrenched power holders are always dominant in this respect, but surely they have numerous advantages. To teeter out these issues should say more about the actual chances for the material reality of environment-development issues to be improved upon as well as on the limits and possibilities of environmental and developmental governance. In our world of short-term competitive gains and ever increasing superficiality this might be extremely hard, but it is the only way.

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