

Global Politics and Peace Parks

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Nowhere is the need for transnational forms of management more apparent than in the realm of the environment. Natural resources—such as marine life, wildlife, the atmosphere, and the ozone layer—are not bounded by national borders, and thus, effective conservation requires international cooperation. If an ecosystem, or a wildlife population, extends across international borders, the conservation efforts of one country should not be undermined by other countries' poor management or weak enforcement, be they neighboring states, multinational corporations, local businesses, or communities. As a result, the need for global cooperation in environmental management is clear.

The growing interest in peace parks reflects this need. Briefly defined, peace parks are conservation areas that cross one or more international borders and use common management practices to conserve a single transnational ecosystem. They have been particularly promoted in border regions in the developing world (see Wolmer, 2003: 2). Such schemes have received enthusiastic support from organizations as diverse as national governments, international NGOs (including Conservation International, World Wide Fund for Nature, and the Peace Parks Foundation) and international financial institutions (IFIs), such as the World Bank's Global Environmental Facility (GEF).

Peace parks are not simply neutral, technical policies, however. They have not developed in a social, political, and economic vacuum; instead, they reflect wider changes in the global system since the end of the Cold War. Increasing levels of globalization have led to growing global regulation, which is often referred to as "global governance." This term indicates a shift away from nation-states as the key centers of power in the global system, and towards complex networks of actors that stretch from the local to the global level. Academics and policymakers alike must recognise that the creation and implementation of peace parks occurs within this global political framework.

The Global Context of Peace Parks

The development of new forms of global governance is related to the broader shift in global politics at the end of the Cold War. Duffield (2001: 44) argues that globalization is marked by structures and relationships that are fluid, mutable, and non-territorial. Examining these fluid and de-territorialized networks of governance is particularly useful for understanding the new forms of politics that arise in the implementation of peace parks. The increasing debate about new forms of global politics and regulation has focused on "global governance," which differs significantly from national "government."¹ In essence, global governance extends (neo)liberal democratic values and procedures and focuses on ordering people and things through recourse to reason, knowledge, and expertise (for further discussion,

¹ The 1995 UN Commission on Global Governance defined governance as including the formal institutions and regimes empowered to enforce compliance, as well as the informal arrangements that people or institutions agree or perceive to be in their interest (Commission on Global Governance, 1995: 2-4).

see Rosenau, 1990; Wilkinson and Hughes, 2002). Thus, global governance can be regarded as a neoliberal dynamic: a process that promotes neoliberalism as *the* universal model for economic and political development, or what Fukuyama famously referred to as “the end of history” (Fukuyama, 1992).

The environment is a key area for global governance in practice because environmental change is rarely bounded by nation-states—rather, it is transnational. In line with global governance theory, managing peace parks requires a range of innovative mechanisms, through which networks of international organizations, NGOs, and local community groups supplement or displace the previously dominant role of the state (see IUCN-ROSA, 2002: 2).

In this paper, I will examine and critique the rationale that underpins peace parks. In particular, I suggest that peace parks, like global governance, do not represent a radical new departure for conservation; instead, peace parks operate within the existing framework of political and economic liberalization, and, as such, they do not challenge it. Furthermore, if we regard the expansion of neoliberalism as causing or contributing global environmental degradation, then peace parks cannot “save” the environment. Instead, peace parks can only hope to achieve small successes in the realm of environmental conservation and peacebuilding that impose costs for some and bring benefits for others. In order to fully understand this, we should investigate the intellectual rationale for peace parks and how it has played out in practice.²

Do Peace Parks Work?

In line with global scientific discourses about environmental management and protecting biodiversity, supporters argue that peace parks are based on a scientific imperative. Since political frontiers are not ecological boundaries, key ecosystems may be divided between two or more countries and subjected to a variety of often contradictory management and land-use practices. Ecosystems have often been separated by “artificial” national political boundaries, and peace parks seek to restore ecosystem connections through common management policies. However, Neumann (2000) argues that such scientific justifications for global conservation strategies tend to gloss over the magnitude of political change involved, and instead invest international conservation groups and states with increased authority over resources and, often, over local communities. For example, many new global conservation schemes require registering land and creating buffer zones—both highly political interventions that are likely to face serious challenges where communities have claims to those lands (Neumann, 2000: 220-222). The failure to recognize the level of political change required and to anticipate community responses to new forms of control over natural resources by external agencies (e.g., NGOs, IFIs, transnational management authorities) can affect the long-term implementation of peace parks.

As a result of the promotion of neoliberalism as the most effective and appropriate political and economic policy, peace park supporters have consistently argued that they have a neoliberal, market-oriented economic rationale in the form of tourism (especially ecotourism). Peace parks are intended to be economically self-

² For reasons of brevity I will concentrate on a discussion of peace parks in general, rather than the practice of specific parks (which I have discussed elsewhere; see Duffy, 2005; Duffy, 2006).

sustaining, providing revenue to the state, its conservation agencies, and the local communities that live within or adjacent to the transfrontier schemes. Therefore, discussions of peace parks intersect with more established debates about the need for conservation to pay its way. However, the promotion of tourism as a way to financially sustain conservation is a misplaced effort (Duffy, 2005). For example, local communities that subsist on the resources held within the new peace parks may be asked to relinquish such user rights in return for promises that tourism will bring more revenue. Yet, new tourism ventures often take a number of years to become financially viable, and this is simply too long for many poor communities to wait. In addition, the revenues, profits, and employment opportunities from such ventures are not always clearly earmarked for local community use, but instead often end up in the hands of external (and wealthy) tour operators (see Mowforth and Munt, 1998).

The economic justification for peace parks is closely linked to the use of rural communities as “partners” to give the schemes local legitimacy. In line with theories of global governance, which include devolving responsibility away from national governments, local communities are named as key actors and stakeholders in peace park initiatives. Supporters of peace parks, which have been intimately bound up with notions of community conservation, see communities as vitally important actors in ensuring that the schemes are socially as well as environmentally sustainable (for further discussion, see Hulme and Murphree, 2001). However, as Neumann (2000) argues, demands from local communities for the power to control, use, and access environmental resources are not the same as plans for local participation in externally driven conservation schemes and commitments to sharing benefits locally. Local participation is far from politically neutral and has often helped the dominant economic, political, and social groups within communities further their interests at the expense of others. Furthermore, presenting communities as single units with common interests that support peace parks is a clear oversimplification. Local communities affected by or involved in peace park schemes are organizationally complex, contain many different interest groups, and are stratified by age, gender, income, and so on.

As part of peace park proposals, local communities are expected to enter into complex relations with external agencies, such as local and global NGOs, donors, and IFIs like the World Bank. Peace parks have attracted enthusiastic financial backing from such organizations. In Central America, for example, The Nature Conservancy and the United Nations Development Programme have financially backed the Mesoamerican Biological Corridor Project and the transfrontier parks initiatives in southern Belize. The GEF has given funding to a number of peace parks, including US\$10 million for the Mesoamerican Reef System Project (see Duffy, 2005). However, these decentralized or multicentric linkages among communities, governments, international organizations, and the private sector are not unproblematic. Wolmer (2003: 7) suggests peace parks are the latest in a line of top-down, market-oriented environmental interventions by international bureaucracies such as the World Bank, bilateral aid donors, and international environmental organizations. He asserts that the fashionable language of “stakeholders,” “partnerships,” and “capacity building” has led to an unhelpful and depoliticized discussion of community involvement in peace parks. On one hand, the bargaining power of communities can be significantly enhanced through their relationships with international NGOs. On the other hand, the needs and political power of communities can be severely undermined through their

participation in transboundary conservation schemes that incorporate a number of globally powerful actors.

Finally, supporters of peace parks have used arguments about national security, environmental security, and conflict resolution to justify these schemes. Conflict resolution has become a key component of global governance, and peacebuilding is linked to concepts of better resource management through partnerships and networks, market-oriented economic development, and western-style liberal democracy. The World Bank and the Peace Parks Foundation argue that transfrontier conservation encourages regional integration and fosters peaceful co-operation between countries that have been—or may be—engaged in conflict with one another. Peace parks are promoted as a way to reduce or eliminate conflict over natural resources and to cooperatively encourage sustainable economic development. This rationale is in line with Homer-Dixon's definitions of environmental security and the notion that resource scarcity is a cause of conflict in the developing world (see Homer-Dixon, 1999; Kaplan, 1994; Bannon and Collier, 2003).

The assumption that peace parks reduce competition over scarce resources, however, needs more refined analysis of peace parks in practice. Indeed, an examination of peace parks indicates that the assumption that resource scarcity leads to conflict, as Homer-Dixon (1999) or Kaplan (1994) might argue, is highly problematic, and that cooperation in the environmental sector does not necessarily lead to a reduction in violent conflict. An abundance of resources—rather than scarcity—may create new conflicts over who can access or control the resources (see Peluso and Watts, 2001; Fairhead, 2001; Richards, 1996).

Furthermore, peace parks are already “transnationalized” by illicit networks. Peace parks are often proposed for areas that provide key resources for those illegally harvesting flora and fauna for local use or international trade. Yet, this dynamic process is often overlooked by academics, IFIs, NGOs, and policymakers alike. It is a politically sensitive issue, often lacking hard evidence, but it affects the success or failure of peace parks. It is clear that networks utilize weakly enforced borders to traffic arms, drugs, stolen cars, and people, as well as to illegally trade endangered species of plants and animals, such as ivory, rhino horn, rare orchids, furs, and tiger bone. These border regions are often where environmental NGOs, state governments, and local communities look to establish peace parks (Duffy, 2005; Duffy, 2006).

To conclude, peace parks are clearly linked to wider changes in the global system that can be broadly termed “global governance.” Peace parks are particularly important in the environmental arena because ecosystems can cross national borders and environmental change is often transboundary. In addition, in line with theories of global governance, peace parks have a scientific rationale, rely on market-based principles, and incorporate complex networks of actors that stretch from the international level, through state agencies and local NGOs, to rural communities. In this way they do not just reflect the global system's shift since the end of the Cold War—they are also part of such changes. Peace parks are highly political interventions, far from the neutral conservation strategies that their supporters might imagine them to be. The advocates' scientific justifications, promotion of tourism as a financially sustainable practice, and the use of communities as partners or stakeholders are not neutral practices. Furthermore, the failure of the planners to

recognize the ongoing and often longstanding illicit activities, and the networks that support them, make it even more difficult to implement peace parks successfully.

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