

# The politics of global environmental governance: the powers and limitations of transfrontier conservation areas in Central America

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**Abstract.** This article examines the concepts and practices of global governance as a definitively liberal project. It provides an analysis of how TFCAs intersect with wider neoliberal debates about the efficacy of global environmental governance, and explores the power and limitations of that governance. In particular, this article investigates the complex local contexts which global environmental governance schemes such as TFCAs encounter; in so doing it highlights the ways that local activities subvert and challenge global-level conservation schemes. Through an analysis of transfrontier conservation areas (TFCAs) in Central America, it contends that specific forms of global environmental governance require some rethinking to accommodate their potentially fragile and uneven nature, and that it is more open, opaque or uneven than many theorists suggest.

## Introduction

Globalisation has meant that states and societies have been incorporated into complex global networks that have directly impacted on the environment and on the ability of states to manage natural resources at a local level, and as such has transformed the role of states in the global system. Globalisation has produced new political, economic and social formations that have become inextricably interwoven with complicated networks. The post-Cold War global arena means that the state-centric system now coexists within an equally powerful, decentralised multicentric form of organisation.<sup>1</sup> Global politics is entering a new phase of turbulence where centralising and decentralising tendencies operate simultaneously and are fundamentally altering the identity and authority of an increasingly diverse number of actors on the world stage. In short the politics of everywhere affects the politics of everywhere else.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> James N. Rosenau, *Turbulence in World Politics: A Theory of Change and Continuity* (Hemel Hempstead/New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1990), pp. 10–12; and Anthony G. McGrew, 'Conceptualising Global Politics', in Anthony G. McGrew and Paul G. Lewis et al., *Global Politics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> Rosenau, *Turbulence in World Politics*, pp. 3–20; also see John Urry, *Global Complexity* (Cambridge: Polity, 2003).

This reordering of global politics is clear in the proliferation of forms of global regulation, or 'governance'. In this article, the contested and rather fuzzy term global governance is used to denote a theoretical framework as well as a related global project that centres on specifically neoliberal values. A standard definition of it is provided by the Commission on Global Governance which suggested that governance includes formal institutions and regimes empowered to enforce compliance, as well as the informal arrangements that people or institutions have agreed or perceive to be in their interest.<sup>3</sup> As such, global governance highlights a shift in the location of authority in the political, economic and social realms and indicates a shift away from the state-centric view of global politics.<sup>4</sup>

Governance is especially marked in attempts to manage environmental issues which are, by their very nature, transnational. While most attention has centred on global governance in the form of international agreements to regulate climate change, pollution and the trade in endangered species, there are also significant developments in attempts by groups of neighbouring states to develop common regimes for the management of ecosystems that spread across borders. In particular, the creation of Transfrontier Conservation Areas (TFCAs) is one example of transnational management which is informed by broader debates on global environmental governance. TFCAs go beyond being merely regional forms of environmental management because they are inextricably linked to numerous actors that stretch across the global to the regional, national, and local levels. Transboundary conservation initiatives have been variously called Peace Parks, TFCAs and transboundary protected areas amongst other things, but for this article the most common term 'TFCAs' is used. TFCAs can briefly be defined as conservation areas that cross the frontiers of two or more countries, and are intended to address the transnational nature of the environment. They are part of the wider process of diffusing authority away from central states to diverse networks of actors. As such they are reflective of and constitutive of what is broadly termed global governance.

The central focus of this article is an analysis of the networks involved in global environmental governance through an examination of TFCAs and the multiple challenges they face. This article firstly examines the concepts of global governance and the criticisms of it. Secondly, it investigates the practice of global environmental governance in the form of TFCAs, as a definite neoliberal project of ecosystem management. Finally, it examines the complex local contexts that face global environmental governance schemes such as TFCAs, which in turn have the capacity to limit the extension and power of external forms of governance.

### **Global governance**

The shift from the bipolar global system at the beginning of the 1990s prompted a fundamental change in the ways scholars have conceptualised and described inter-

<sup>3</sup> Commission on Global Governance, *Our Global Neighbourhood* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Martin Hewson and Timothy J. Sinclair, 'The Emergence of Global Governance Theory', in Martin Hewson and Timothy J. Sinclair (eds.), *Approaches to Global Governance Theory* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1999), pp. 5–11.

national relations. In particular, the realist framework (which emphasises interstate relationships) has proved inadequate for understanding globalisation and its complicated networks of actors.<sup>5</sup> Instead the increasing interest in global governance can be regarded as a useful framework for examining the ways that multiple interest groups operate together to govern and regulate. The debates on and definitions of global governance are well rehearsed elsewhere, and within the literature on global governance there are subtle differences in the ways it is understood.<sup>6</sup> For example Hardt and Negri have argued that it is a decentralised and deterritorialised regime of power which they term 'empire'.<sup>7</sup> In contrast, realists have argued that global governance reflects a further extension of the power of states in the global system despite the proliferation of non-state actors such as NGOs and international organisations.<sup>8</sup> Other scholars view global governance as a replacement for the term 'multilateralism', to indicate types of organisations which may be proliferating, but which are not backed by any centralised, sovereign authority, so they cannot be referred to as a world 'government'.<sup>9</sup>

However, even amongst these different ways of analysing global governance, there is some agreement about what it means. As Selby notes, it is a definitively liberal idea, conveying a pluralistic and post-ideological conception of the world. In essence the global governance project is normatively about dispersing power away from hegemonic centres of power, especially states, about extending and overcoming resistance to liberal democratic values and procedures, and about ordering people and things through recourse to reason, knowledge and expertise. In this way global governance is no less than a project for rationalising global social relations.<sup>10</sup> For the purposes of this article, global governance is defined as a set of neoliberal ideas that have been translated into similarly neoliberal programmes and policies. These policies aim to govern or manage people resources and activities through complex networks of actors, rather than a single source of power and authority, such as a state. Here, this article is concerned with what might be termed 'global environmental governance', which focuses on the regulation of environments and the actors that impact on them.

<sup>5</sup> Hewson and Sinclair (eds.), *Approaches to Global Governance Theory*, pp. 5–11; Rosenau, *Turbulence in World Politics*, pp. 10–12; McGrew, 'Conceptualising Global Politics', in McGrew and Lewis et al., *Global Politics*, p. 13; James N. Rosenau 'Toward an Ontology for Global Governance', in Hewson and Sinclair (eds.), *Approaches to Global Governance Theory*, pp. 290–6; Andrew Linklater, *The Transformation of Political Community: Ethical Foundations of the Post-Westphalian Era* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998); Barry Buzan and Richard Little, 'Beyond Westphalia? Capitalism after the "fall"', *Review of International Studies*, 25 (1999), pp. 89–104.

<sup>6</sup> Jan Selby, 'Introduction', in Feargal Cochrane, Rosaleen Duffy and Jan Selby (eds.), *Global Governance, Conflict and Resistance* (London: Palgrave/Macmillan, 2003), pp. 3–7.

<sup>7</sup> Michel Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 22.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Kenneth Waltz, 'Globalisation and Governance', *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 32 (1999), pp. 693–700.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Paul Diehl (ed.), *The Politics of Global Governance: International Organizations in a Changing World* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2001); Albert Paolini, Anthony Jarvis and Christian Reus-Smit, *Between Sovereignty and Global Governance: The United Nations, State and Civil Society* (London: Macmillan, 1998); Rorden Wilkinson and Steve Hughes (eds.), *Global Governance: Critical Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2002); Oran Young (ed.), *Global Governance: Drawing Insights from the Environmental Experience* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997).

<sup>10</sup> Selby, 'Introduction' in Cochrane, Duffy and Selby (eds.), *Global Governance, Conflict and Resistance*, p. 6.

Global environmental governance has raised questions about the contested nature and status of scientific knowledge. In particular, global regimes rely on ideas of positivist and uncontested science that can be used to draw up universally applicable forms of environmental management. These are then used to justify and legitimate highly political global interventions at the local level. The ability of knowledge-brokers to frame and interpret scientific knowledge is a substantial source of political power. Such knowledge-brokers are influential under conditions of scientific uncertainty that characterise environmental problems.<sup>11</sup> This idea of neutral scientific management translates into the use of universalist conservation ideas, which inform policy practice. The right to pronounce and act – or be authoritative – is not just a function of circuits of reproduction, it is inseparable from order-making. Such orders can emerge in the form of overt programmes, as indicated by global governance.<sup>12</sup> Litfin suggests that scientific information, like all forms of knowledge, is embedded in structures of power, including disciplinary power, national power and socioeconomic power. Due to its unrivalled status as a universal legitimator, science may facilitate international cooperation. However, as scientific knowledge becomes incorporated into stories and discourses, it is framed, interpreted and rhetorically communicated. As such, this politically-embedded scientific knowledge is vital in revealing, shaping and revising the ways that varied actors perceive their interests.<sup>13</sup>

However, it is also important to note that global governance as a project is rendered extremely complex when it is applied to specific cases. An examination of what happens to ideas and policies associated with global governance schemes at the local level can reveal how uneven its implementation and impact is. Rather than viewing global governance as an effective and efficient neoliberal project, we need to rethink the extent of its reach. As Latham argues, global governance theorists are so preoccupied with governance itself that the forces that might challenge or undermine order are ignored or treated as undesirable disruptions. These are the forces that strain and stress the global order, thereby threatening to produce instability. These forces are essentially ungovernable, and they are not recognised by the discourse on global governance, which assumes an ability to extend and enforce global control over all people and things.<sup>14</sup>

We are made aware of the power and limitations of global governance by the challenges it faces in its implementation. Duffield argues that the paradox of globalisation (and global governance), is that it simultaneously creates the conditions of autonomy and resistance in a response to its attempts to extend global control.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> See Karen Litfin, *Ozone Discourses: Science and Politics in Global Environmental Co-operation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

<sup>12</sup> Robert Latham, Ronald Kassimir and Thomas Callaghy, 'Introduction: Transboundary Formations, Intervention, Order and Authority', in Thomas Callaghy, Ronald Kassimir and Robert Latham (eds.), *Interventionism and Transnationalism in Africa: Global-Local Networks of Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 8–10.

<sup>13</sup> Litfin, *Ozone Discourses*, p. 51; Roderick P. Neumann, 'Primitive Ideas: Protected Area Buffer Zones and the Politics of Land in Africa', in Vigdis Broch-Due and Richard A. Schroeder (eds.), *Producing Nature and Poverty in Africa* (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2000), pp. 220–42; and also see Kalayanakrishnan Sivaramakrishnan, *Modern Forests: Statemaking and Environmental Change in Colonial Eastern India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

<sup>14</sup> Robert Latham, 'Politics in a Floating World: Toward a Critique of Global Governance', in Hewson and Sinclair, *Approaches to Global Governance Theory*, pp. 31–9.

<sup>15</sup> Mark Duffield, *Global Governance and the New Wars: The Merger of Development and Security* (London: Zed Books, 2001).

The various forms of global governance clearly generate their own forms and sites of resistance. These resistances to global governance have taken particular forms because they essentially represent the resistances of less powerful groups (in global terms). In this way global governance as a neoliberal project produces new and novel varieties of resistance as well as highlighting the pre-existing forms of passive and active, visible and invisible, silent and vocal resistance.<sup>16</sup> They also indicate the power relations between the local and the global, since they assist in defining the precise reach of global governance when faced with the local context. This article will now explore the governance of environments through TFCAs and the challenges they face. Firstly, it will examine the ways that TFCAs are justified and legitimated and how that links up with ideas of global governance as a neoliberal project. Secondly, this article will provide an analysis of the challenges and resistances TFCAs encounter. This in turn will offer an indication of what the limitations of global environmental governance are once governance projects reach the implementation stage.

### Governing transboundary environments through TFCAs

TFCAs are intimately bound up with discourses and practices of global environmental governance. This is clear in the ways that TFCAs are justified and legitimated by the numerous and interlinked networks of actors and interest groups that are involved in their conceptualisation, design and implementation. This article will focus on the ways that TFCAs intersect with global discourses and rhetoric about scientific environmental policymaking, neoliberal market systems, decentralisation of management to communities and the importance of non-state actors in regulating and managing the environment. This article will examine the rationale for TFCAs in the Belize-Guatemala-Honduras border regions, to provide a broader analysis of why TFCAs have been promoted as a form of global environmental governance.

Firstly, in line with neoliberal ideas of global environmental governance, TFCAs are presented as following a neutral scientific rationale which in turn justifies highly political interventions. This is in part related to global debates about scientific prescriptions for environmental management that are relevant in the global rather than the local context. Transboundary conservation schemes can be defined as ‘any process of co-operation across boundaries that facilitates or improves the management of natural resources to the benefit of all parties in the area concerned’.<sup>17</sup> The

<sup>16</sup> James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985); James, C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990); Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984); Chasca Twyman, ‘Rethinking Community Resource Management: Managing Resources or Managing People in Western Botswana?’, *Third World Quarterly*, 19 (1998), p. 759.

<sup>17</sup> John Griffen, *Study on the Development and Management of Transboundary Conservation Areas in Southern Africa* (Lilongwe, Malawi: USAID Regional Centre for Southern Africa, 1999), p. 21; Daniel Berthold-Bond, ‘The Ethics of “Place”: Reflections on Bioregionalism’, *Environmental Ethics*, 22 (2000), pp. 5–20; Ned Hettinger and Bill Throop, ‘Refocusing Ecocentrism’, *Environmental Ethics*, 21 (1999), pp. 3–22; and Arthur H. Westing (ed.), *Transfrontier Reserves for Peace and Nature: A Contribution to Human Security* (Nairobi: UNEP, 1993).

idea of TFCAs was introduced as early as the 1920s, with the first binational park established on the US-Canadian border in 1926. By 1997, there were 136 existing and 85 planned TFCAs that crossed 112 international borders in 98 nations.<sup>18</sup>

The growing field of conservation biology has provided a clear scientific rationale for transboundary environmental management, in particular in terms of justifying the expansion of conservation to include entire ecosystems rather than small parts of it in a single national park.<sup>19</sup> Since political frontiers are not the same as ecological boundaries, ecosystems may be divided between two or more countries, and be subject to a variety of often contradictory management and land use practices.<sup>20</sup> TFCAs are specifically intended to 'naturalise' boundaries along ecological lines to ensure they conserve ecosystems rather than specific (nationally bounded) 'slices' of them. The promoters of TFCAs have pointed to the biological reasons for large transfrontier protected areas. The increasing isolation of habitats in national protected areas has reduced the genetic diversity of key species in certain ecosystems. It is critical to ensure that the range areas for key species are kept as large as possible and preferably transnational, in order to secure their long term survival. In this way TFCAs are intended to restore connectivity between parts of an ecosystem through migration corridors for wildlife found in the wider bioregion.

In accordance with this, the trinational Park that is planned for the Gulf of Honduras would bring in terrestrial and marine territories from Honduras, Belize and Guatemala. Part of the rationale for the park is that the endangered West Indian manatee (aquatic mammal) is found in the Gulf of Honduras. Currently, Belize has one of the largest manatee populations, and its manatee conservation legislation is the strictest in the region. However, while manatees are protected in Belize, once they leave Belizean waters they are subject to much less stringent conservation regimes. Moreover, manatee conservation laws in Honduras and Guatemala are even more weakly enforced than in Belize. As a result, it is difficult for Belize to maintain its manatee population when the policies of neighbouring countries undermine conservation efforts.<sup>21</sup> In an attempt to harmonise manatee conservation efforts, two local NGOs have joined together to assist cooperation between Guatemala and Belize. In Belize the Toledo Institute for Environment and Development (TIDE) and Fundeco in Guatemala have become part of a larger trinational alliance of NGOs to encourage cooperation over manatee conservation and management.<sup>22</sup> The focus on conservation of resources across national boundaries

<sup>18</sup> Griffen, *Transboundary Conservation Areas in Southern Africa*, pp. 11–15.

<sup>19</sup> William Wolmer, 'Transboundary Conservation: The Politics of Ecological Integrity in the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park'. Research Paper no. 4, *Sustainable Livelihoods in Southern Africa* (Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, 2003), p. 4.

<sup>20</sup> Griffen, *Transboundary Conservation Areas in Southern Africa*, p. 11; and Nurit Kliot, 'The Political Geography of Cooperation (and Conflict) in Borderlands', in David Newman, Clive Schofield and Alasdair Drysdale (eds.), *The Razor's Edge: International Boundaries, Geopolitics and Political Geography. Essays in Honour of Professor Gerald Blake* (London: Kluwer Academic, 2001).

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Nicole Auil, Manatee Researcher CZMP, Belize City, 23 November 1998; and interview with Roberto Echevarria, tour guide, Toledo Institute for Development and Environment, Punta Gorda, 23 May 2000; and 'Manatee Week '99: Get to know the Manatees', *Amandala*, 10 October 1999.

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Roberto Echevarria, 23 May 2000.

clearly mobilises a specific notion of environmental science to justify the creation of a transboundary political entity to accommodate wildlife migration and manage whole ecosystems that cross international boundaries.

TFCAs also have a clear neoliberal market rationale, in line with theories of global governance. TFCAs intersect with more established debates about the need for conservation to pay its way. As a result TFCAs are expected to be largely self-financing through the development of market-based economic activities.<sup>23</sup> For TFCAs the core economic activity is tourism, and more specifically ecotourism. For example, the trinational park planned for the Gulf of Honduras is intended to utilise ecotourism. Ecotourism is a central focus for the recently declared protected area in the Belizean portion of the Gulf at Port Honduras which is expected to benefit from the growing interest in luxury fly-fishing tours, kayaking and educational tours that incorporate trips to experience the marine environment and unique terrestrial ecosystems (mainly mangrove swamps and rainforests).<sup>24</sup>

Similarly, the transfrontier conservation area planned for Sarstoon-Temash has taken account of its ecotourist potential from its inception. Natalie Rosado, of the Forest Department, suggested that the local communities that inhabit the Sarstoon-Temash were keen to develop ecotourism, but that currently the area has no road. Since the TFCAs would cover 41,000 acres and require tourists to cross an international border, ease of access was considered a critical factor in the ability to develop ecotourism to secure the financial viability of the protected area.<sup>25</sup> The extensive economic justifications indicate that TFCAs are part of the extension of global governance through the proliferation of market-based systems, in this case to pay for conservation. As such, TFCAs fit neatly into broader conceptualisation of global environmental governance as a neoliberal, diffuse and market-oriented regime of power.

Furthermore, global governance also requires a commitment to decentralising control away from states and towards the local level. In this way TFCAs conform to concepts of global environmental governance as projects carried out by diverse power networks that draw together multiple actors and interest groups at global and local levels. TFCAs are intimately bound up with global rhetoric about devolving management of protected areas to local communities, and their promoters conceptualise communities as vitally important actors in ensuring that TFCAs are socially as well as environmentally sustainable.<sup>26</sup> The intention is that communities will constitute the key actors involved in directly managing transboundary conservation areas. One of the main NGOs involved in lobbying for the establishment of

<sup>23</sup> Elizabeth Boo, *Ecotourism: The Potentials and the Pitfalls*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: WWF, 1990), pp. 1–3; also see Rosaleen Duffy, *A Trip Too Far: Ecotourism, Politics and Ecotourism* (London: Earthscan, 2003).

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Roberto Echevarria, 23 May 2000; Ministry of Tourism and the Environment/Inter-American Development Bank, *Tourism Strategy Plan for Belize* (Belmopan, Belize/Toronto, Canada: Help for Progress/Blackstone Corporation, 1998), pp. 7–10.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Natalie Rosado, Conservation Division, Forestry Department, Belmopan, 17 May 2000.

<sup>26</sup> Neumann, 'Primitive Ideas', pp. 220–42; and Christopher B. Barrett and Peter Arcese, 'Are Integrated Conservation Development Projects (IDCPs) Sustainable? On Conservation of Large Mammals in Sub-Saharan Africa', *World Development*, 23 (1995), pp. 1073–84; and see Bill Cooke and Uma Kothari (eds.), *Participation: The New Tyranny* (London: Zed Books, 2001).

transfrontier protected areas, the Peace Parks Foundation, argues that community-based management of wildlife and other natural resources is essential to making the TFCAs workable. Leonard Seelig of the Peace Parks Foundation suggested that many communities that live beside protected areas are suspicious of TFCAs because of the history of exclusion of local people from protected areas. However, he also indicated that communities are excited at the prospect of transfrontier areas because they might allow people to re-establish historical links, and they are more likely to support transfrontier initiatives if they genuinely foster a local cultural renaissance.<sup>27</sup> For example TFCAs promise cross-border cooperation that can assist in reinvigorating traditional cultural practices such as dances and spiritual rituals. Conejo Creek in the Sarstoon Temash area has re-established its deer dance with funding from the Kekchi Council of Belize. This funding allowed them to rent costumes from Mayan communities in Guatemala that still practised the dance.<sup>28</sup> The promise of cultural reconnection and revitalisation through the extension of cross-border cooperation is a vital part of the justification for TFCAs. Global supporters of TFCAs have defined community support and participation as critical and required for effective implementation of new conservation schemes. In so doing, TFCAs represent a departure from conservation, traditionally in state hands, and is more in line with debates about decentralisation of power and control over policymaking and environmental management. This fits neatly with global environmental governance as a definitely liberal idea that relies on diffuse networks to implement it.

TFCAs clearly draw together transnational networks of power and governance, since communities are not expected to manage or participate in TFCAs in isolation. Rather they are intimately interlinked with global actors. The moves towards transfrontier conservation areas can be viewed as part of the broader process of decentralising power to multiple networks by shifting responsibility for conservation out of state hands and into the hands of interlinked sub- and supra-state entities. In Central America, discussions over the proposed parks are often conducted between local communities, local and global NGOs, and international financial institutions such as the World Bank. For example The Nature Conservancy and the United Nations Development Programme have given financial backing to the Meso American Biological Corridor Project and the transfrontier parks initiatives in southern Belize.<sup>29</sup> TFCAs have attracted enthusiastic financial backing from other organisations regarded as supports and implementors of neoliberal global governance, such as donors and international NGOs. A number of TFCAs have received funding from the World Bank's Global Environmental Facility (GEF), and the Meso American Reef System Project received US\$10 million from it. Belize is set to benefit significantly from this new source of funds since it has been chosen as the regional

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Leonard Seelig, Micro Development Programme, Peace Parks Foundation, Somerset West (South Africa), 16 March 2000.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Gregory Ch'oc, Kekchi Council of Belize, Punta Gorda, 23 May 2000; also see Duffy, *A Trip Too Far*, p. 112.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Natalie Rosado, 17 May 2000; 'Meso American countries meet to discuss reef sustainability', *Amandala*, 26 September 1999, and 'Toledo eco-politics: Maheia vs Espat', *Amandala*, 11 July 1999.



headquarters of the transfrontier reef management scheme.<sup>30</sup> The announcement of World Bank funding brought further pledges from donors to assist the stakeholders in getting the transfrontier reef project up and running. For example, the Netherlands/World Bank Environmental Partnership Fund, the Canadian Trust, the Food and Agricultural Organisation and the Central American Commission on Environment and Development provided funds for a regional workshop on the Meso American barrier reef system.<sup>31</sup>

In conjunction with a community based justification, TFCAs have a political rationale because they are promoted as a means of reducing conflict through increasing cross-border cooperation, especially in areas with a history of interstate conflict. Hence TFCAs have often been styled 'Peace Parks'. This integrates well with one area of global governance, which is the growing interest in conflict prevention and management. Supporters of TFCAs, such as the World Bank and The Nature Conservancy, argue that they encourage regional integration and foster peaceful cooperation between countries that have been or may be engaged in conflict with one another. Broadly, regional links at the highest government levels over TFCAs are intended to increase cooperation and reduce the possibility of regional conflict. TFCAs are also promoted as a means for reducing or eliminating the impact of violence in or over natural resources, and for cooperatively encouraging sustainable economic development and peace.<sup>32</sup> This provides an additional political rationale for transboundary environmental management that draws on ideas of global environmental governance.

In sum, it is clear that the management of TFCAs requires a range of innovative mechanisms, through which the previously dominant role of the state is reduced and displaced by complex networks that include international donors, non-governmental organisations, and local community groups amongst others, and which is designed to cut across national boundaries and ensure cooperative and complementary management of single ecosystems. In this way TFCAs can be viewed as one example of the growing phenomenon of global governance, since control of environments and the resources and people they contain are subject to global forms of control. The rationales for sub-state and supra-state management indicate a shift in emphasis from single power bases such as national governments, to a situation where diverse networks of actors exercise power and influence over policymaking. However, this article is also concerned with what happens when these networks attempt to design and implement TFCAs.

<sup>30</sup> 'Belize designated international barrier reef headquarters', *Amandala*, 13 June 1999; and 'Ministry of Natural Resources and PACT: seeking to improve relationship with the public', *Amandala*, 18 July 1999.

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Natalie Rosado, 17 May 2000; 'Mesoamerican countries meet to discuss reef sustainability', *Amandala*, 26 September 1999; 'Regional Meso American Barrier Reef System Project planning workshop complete', *Amandala*, 17 October 1999; 'Meso American countries meet to discuss reef sustainability', *Amandala* (Belize), 26 September 1999; 'Fishers lead in planning for sustainable reef resources management', *Amandala*, 5 September 1999; and 'Regional Meso American Barrier Reef System Project planning workshop complete', *Amandala*, 17 October 1999. The Meso American Biological Corridors Project aims to re-establish wildlife migration corridors, and create unbroken bioregions that cover rainforests, mangroves and coral reefs which stretch from Mexico, through Belize and Guatemala, to Honduras.

<sup>32</sup> World Travel and Tourism Council, *Southern African Development Community's Travel and Tourism: Economic Driver for the 21st Century* (London: WTTC, 1999), p. 48; T.J. Weed, 'Central America's Peace Parks and Regional Conflict Resolution' *International Environmental Affairs*, 6 (1994), pp. 175–190; and Litfin, *Ozone Discourses*.

### Challenges, resistances and limitations

Although supporters of global environmental governance may present it as neatly and fully implemented, it does face numerous challenges which can limit its extension and power. Here this article will examine areas where governance has ‘gone wrong’ in some way, and is not effectively implemented. On one level TFCAs as a form of global environmental governance produces new challenges in response to the attempts to extend its power. However, it is important to note that the resistances to global environmental governance, which more specifically TFCAs encounter are not necessarily in response to them as new forms of governance. Rather, new policies encounter processes, activities and actors that have a long history, but which are suddenly thrown under the spotlight as spaces that are resistant to new forms of regulation. The complexity of the local and global contexts in which TFCAs operate mean that policy implementation is far from being a simple process. Instead, global environmental governance is rendered extremely complex and problematic once specific actors at the global, regional, national and local levels attempt to implement it. From the following discussion it is clear that the local level challenges to TFCAs go beyond any simple clash between national sovereignty and transnational networks. Rather, the multiple activities that challenge and limit global environmental governance may have started for different reasons, be carried out in different ways, and challenge in different ways but their cumulative effect is that they prevent full implementation of globally-inspired projects. An analysis of these challenges indicates where global environmental governance gets stuck, broken or reversed.

The supporters of TFCAs have consistently argued that they have an economic rationale through the development of ecotourism. However, the strong emphasis on ecotourism as a trouble-free means of providing a financially sustainable form of conservation has been misplaced.<sup>33</sup> One of the difficulties associated with such regional plans is that some partners stand to gain more than others. For example, Belizean government officials refused to accede to a request from the Mexican Government that the Belize barrier reef be renamed and marketed as the Maya Reef or El Gran Arrecife Maya. The Belize barrier reef is part of a much larger reef system that stretches from Honduras in the south to Mexico in the north. While the reef is marketed as part of the Mundo Maya experience, the Belize Government was concerned that Mexico had already degraded many of its reefs (especially around Cancun) and so the Mexican tourism industry would benefit disproportionately from claiming that the Maya Reef was in Mexico. In effect the Mexican tourism industry would make financial gains from giving the impression that the less environmentally damaged reefs of Belize were within Mexican borders.<sup>34</sup> The often complex political and economic relationships between neighbouring states means that the reliance on ecotourism is highly problematic despite the assumption that it provides a good economic rationale for conservation programmes. The problematic nature of relying on ecotourism represents one set of challenges that are encountered by global environmental governance schemes. Such local tensions over the

<sup>33</sup> Rosaleen Duffy, ‘Shadow Players: Ecotourism Development, Corruption and State Politics in Belize’, *Third World Quarterly*, 21 (2000), pp. 549–65.

<sup>34</sup> ‘Airlines in bed together: Tourism Minister Henry Young’, *Amandala*, 18 May 1997.

pace and direction of tourism development do have a direct impact on the capacity for implementing global and regional level schemes.

TFCAs that include areas in Toledo District are also problematic because broader development processes have brought new threats and opportunities for TFCAs from other development interests, and from competing national planning processes that emphasise road building and the creation of export processing zones. The difficulty is that national support from the Belize Government for transfrontier reserves has been undermined by the Belize Governments' own support for conflicting development interests in the form of the Economic, Social and Technical Assistance Project (ESTAP). Here, local disputes over an internationally backed national development policy has had a direct impact in the implementation of TFCAs in Belize. The proposed developments under ESTAP are located in an area that has been identified as key territory for a TFCA. In general the local Mayan communities have protested against ESTAP, while other ethnic groups in Toledo District have responded with mixed feelings. Supporters of ESTAP argue that it will develop local infrastructure and facilitate transport and trade through the region.<sup>35</sup>

The main source of conflict is the plan to build the southern highway (financed by the Inter-American Development Bank, IDB) to join up with the Peten Highway, which is a major transport artery in Guatemala. In 1998, at the start of his term as Prime Minister, Said Musa announced on a visit to Toledo District that the only way for the southern highway to be truly economical and deliver significant benefits to the district was for it to be extended into Guatemala.<sup>36</sup> Mayan communities have pointed out that a road through to Guatemala would irrevocably change their way of life, destroy a key resource on which they depend for subsistence, and negatively affect a planned TFCA for the area. Mayan communities have claimed that paving the southern highway will lead to land speculation, and since the land in the area is a government-owned 'Indian reservation', local villages will have no real protection from private sector and government land speculators. In an attempt to mitigate this and prevent land speculation, a two-mile corridor either side of the highway was established where no new developments were allowed.<sup>37</sup> However, Mayan community organisations have remained concerned that the corridor will not be respected once the highway is paved.

Clearly the issue of developing Toledo District is a politically charged question, with competing interest groups ranging from Mayan communities to road-pavers claiming that they offer the appropriate pathway to development for the region. In debates about TFCAs as an example of global environmental governance, it is important to understand the complexities of the local situation which such plans encounter. Global environmental governance projects are often at odds with other local, national and global projects. Global environmental governance has added a new layer of complexity because it relies on diverse networks that stretch across national boundaries and link together global and local interest groups.

<sup>35</sup> ESTAP, *Regional Development Plan for Southern Belize* (Belize City, Belize: ESTAP/GOB/Inter-American Development Bank, 2000).

<sup>36</sup> 'Espat faces Musa', *Amandala*, 9 May 1999; 'Musa visits Toledo', *Amandala*, 9 May 1999; and 'PG debates Toledo Development Corp. Bill', *Amandala*, 26 September 1999.

<sup>37</sup> Interview with K. Mustapha Toure, Project Manager, ESTAP, Punta Gorda, 25 May 2000; and interview with Gregory Ch'oc, Kekchi Council of Belize, Punta Gorda, 23 May 2000.

In addition, despite the centrality of community management in the rationale for TFCAs, the role of communities is not problem-free either. These competing local interests, that are intimately linked with global actors (such as funders) through complex networks, constitute a key arena which has the power to place limitations on the effective implementation of global environmental governance. In particular, communities continue to resist and confound external attempts to govern them and the resources they use. As Neumann suggests, current 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 local benefit-sharing.<sup>38</sup> The difficulty is that local participation is far from politically neutral and has often assisted dominant economic, political and social groups within communities to further their interests at the expense of others. The presentation of communities as homogenous units with common interests that support TFCAs is a clear oversimplification. Local communities affected by or involved in TFCA schemes are organisationally complex. As a result, communities can be involved in supporting as well as resisting global governance schemes like TFCAs.

In the case of the TFCAs for Belize-Guatemala, the communities that surround the Sarstoon-Temash ecosystem, which crosses the international border, have been involved in lobbying for the Park and for a meaningful role in its conservation and management. Gregory Ch'oc of the Kekchi Council of Belize stated that he had been elected by the twelve communities in the Sarstoon-Temash area to represent their interests and conduct negotiations with relevant outside agencies, such as the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank.<sup>39</sup> However, this has led to frustrations and claims that participation has been limited rather than being any kind of genuine involvement that is in accordance with ideas of global environmental governance.

TFCAs have certainly attracted the attention of international and local NGOs seeking to be involved in the latest trends in conservation. Given the number and variety of actors involved, and their inevitably differing interests and attitudes, it is scarcely surprising that differences arise between them. The role of NGOs in particular has been criticised by other actors in the conservation sector. For example, Gregory Ch'oc of the Kekchi Council of Belize suggested that national and international environmental NGOs that were involved in shaping the Sarstoon-Temash management plans hardly had room for the local community perspective. He pointed out that it was vitally important that community viewpoints were properly addressed in a practical way to ensure that the TFCA would be workable.<sup>40</sup> The interplay between local and global NGOs has proved to be extremely complex, and has challenged attempts to govern environments from a regional or global level. On the one hand the bargaining power of communities can be significantly enhanced through their relationships with the international NGOs. On the other hand, the

<sup>38</sup> Neumann, 'Primitive Ideas', pp. 235–7; and also see Sivaramakrishnan, *Modern Forests*; and Cooke and Kothari, *New Tyranny*.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Gregory Ch'oc, Kekchi Council of Belize, Punta Gorda, 23 May 2000; and interview with Natalie Rosado, Conservation Division, Forestry Department, Belmopan, 17 May 2000.

<sup>40</sup> Interview with Gregory Ch'oc, Kekchi Council of Belize, Punta Gorda, 23 May 2000.

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. In the end global conservation schemes that appear to have a genuine commitment to local participation and management can squeeze out or suppress the local 'voice' in order to push through schemes that satisfy global commitments and obligations to carry out conservation initiatives.

One of the paradoxes of global environmental governance, and more specifically TFCAs, is that while they lay claims to reordering politics so that complex networks of non-state actors govern, authorise and regulate, the process of implementation is still heavily reliant on national governments. Global environmental governance has on the one hand meant a shift in location of power away from the state, but paradoxically increased the expectations amongst global actors about the capacities of states to implement globally defined and approved environmental schemes. Critics of TFCAs have argued that far from reducing state control over border areas, TFCAs actually provide an opportunity for national governments to increase control and surveillance over borderland areas. Neumann suggests that the extension of state control through environmental policymaking constitutes a major new development in the South. Global conservation organisations have assisted national governments in obtaining control over border areas through the demarcation of protected areas and their surrounding buffer zones. Neumann argues that global conservation strategies tend to gloss over the magnitude of political change involved and invest international conservation groups and allied states with increased authority to monitor and surveil rural communities.<sup>41</sup>

Numerous conservation programmes emphasise the neoliberal policy of land tenure reform and land registration as the key to stimulating conservation-oriented behaviour within local communities. In the end, the prescriptions for biodiversity conservation in protected areas and their buffer zones has meant that the state has encroached on local environmental resources.<sup>42</sup> So rather than local people encroaching on parks and reserves, the opposite is the case with global interventions where conservation management encroaches on the domains of local communities. This in turn is rationalised as a global environmental good, which allows for prescriptions regarding practices defined as appropriate and inappropriate forms of resource use. The ways that global and local actors define the various forms of acceptable and unacceptable resource use feed into transnational environmental policies; however, these policies can further exclude economically and politically marginalised groups in favour of the vastly increased state control and extension of state-approved forms of environmental management.

Global environmental governance is also rendered highly problematic and limited by activities such as illicit trading networks in border areas that often pre-date TFCA schemes. This form of opposition to TFCAs raises intricate issues that ultimately relate to the complex role of frontier regions within a globalised international system. TFCAs are characteristically promoted for border areas that are often remote from large centres of population and central state agencies. The central problem in establishing TFCAs is not one of removing these areas from national

<sup>41</sup> Neumann, 'Primitive Ideas', pp. 220–42; and Sivaramakrishnan, *Modern Forests*, pp. 4–13.

<sup>42</sup> Neumann, 'Primitive Ideas', pp. 220–42.

jurisdictions, and placing them under a supranational authority. It lies in the fact that they are already 'transnationalised' for purposes that are closely associated with other, and often illicit, processes of globalisation.

The cross border sites for TFCAs are transnationalised or globalised by a number of interest groups that carry out a variety of clandestine activities. Equally, these clandestine activities are the object of attempts to extend control over the border regions, while at the same time they manage to frustrate and subvert plans to bring borderlands into TFCAs. This is not to suggest that aiming to quash some forms of illegal activity is necessarily a bad thing. Rather that the will to control borderlands makes little distinction between illegal users of natural resources who harvest for subsistence use, and those who are allied to lucrative global trading networks dealing in, for example, tropical hardwoods and drugs.

The international border has proved to be particularly problematic for law enforcement agencies. Fishermen, orchid hunters and illegal loggers all make use of the differing laws on either side of the border and the inability of law enforcement agencies to pursue them into the territory of a neighbouring country. For example, Belizean inhabitants of the Sarstoon-Temash area had complained that Guatemalan fishermen were laying nets across the mouths of rivers in Belizean territory. They could easily avoid being caught and prosecuted for fishing practices that were illegal under Belizean law by skipping over the border into Guatemalan territory. Once in Guatemala, the fishers were subject to different fishing regulations and Belizean agencies could not pursue them to make arrests.<sup>43</sup> In a sense, this is one indicator of transnational subversion of attempts to gain control over border regions. The skilful use of differences in legislation and management regimes on either side of the international border is precisely what TFCAs attempt to stamp out, thereby assisting the extension of state control within its borders plus transnational control through a myriad of networked actors.

TFCAs are often planned in areas that already provide key resources for those interested in illegally harvesting flora and fauna for local use and international trade. For example, the Sarstoon-Temash area is more heavily used by various groups from Guatemala, and is largely under-utilised by Belizeans. In Sarstoon-Temash people from Sastun village cross the international border from Guatemala into Belize to collect orchids in the protected area. The orchids are used locally for medicinal purposes as a blood tonic, and there are concerns that they are also trafficked into the international trade in rare plants (Belize is one of the few places where the extremely rare black orchid can be found, which is prized by international collectors).<sup>44</sup> The problem for law enforcement is that the orchid collectors simply disappear over the international border to avoid capture and prosecution. This is compounded by an understandable unwillingness amongst the local *alcades* (local councillors and representatives) in Sastun to admit to the problem. The *alcades* fear reprisals from the illegal harvesters who are often heavily armed and have lucrative business interests to protect. Similarly, local people on the Belizean side of the Sarstoon-Temash area are afraid of the harvesters, whom they regard as particularly

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Gregory Ch'oc, Kekchi Council of Belize, Punta Gorda, 23 May 2000.

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Roberto Echevarria, tour guide, Toledo Institute for Development and Environment, Punta Gorda, 23 May 2000; and interview with Gregory Ch'oc, Kekchi Council of Belize, Punta Gorda, 23 May 2000.

menacing and dangerous.<sup>45</sup> These illicit processes indicate that areas identified for TFCAs are already transnationalised. These global networks, represented by illegal hunters and traders, present a significant challenge to the attempts to implement global environmental governance, and mean that the debates on global environmental governance are made much more complex once they are considered in relation to a specific case area or activity.

In addition, illicit logging has presented a real problem for the implementation of TFCAs. One of the most controversial issues in Southern Belize and the border area is logging of tropical hardwoods for export. It is also one of the most pressing concerns for the various agencies pushing for the TFCA. The outcry over legal and illegal logging in the District is also intimately bound up with the death of the Mayan Leader, Julian Cho.<sup>46</sup> His death set interest groups in the area against each other as one faction argued it was accidental and the other faction maintained that he was murdered for his outspoken stance against logging companies.<sup>47</sup> In the local press the issue of development in the Toledo District was debated and links were made to broader questions of political corruption in the country. Opponents of the 'big development' plans in the district were convinced that political interests in the area were related to the abuse of a Malaysian logging licence in the Columbia Forest Reserve. For example, the concession to log the Columbia Forest Reserve unleashed furore among the local Mayan community. The anger stemmed from the Mayan community's belief that the logging concession was detrimental to their way of life, that the logging was unsustainable and that there had already been extensive abuses of the licence.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, the issue of logging was intimately linked to fears over ESTAP plans for paving the southern highway, because there was a local perception that the road was to be upgraded to specifically benefit loggers rather than contributing to broad development in the district.<sup>49</sup> The high-profile arguments over logging overlap with and undercut the attempts to implement TFCAs in the region, and indicate that simplified global or regional schemes that claim universal applicability, such as TFCAs, encounter complicated and challenging local contexts that inhibit their implementation.

The international trade in narcotics also raises critical issues for TFCA planners because it is part of a much wider trade sustained by clandestine global business networks. The transborder trade in narcotics has proved to be a central focus of any discussion regarding a policy of opening borders between states. The US Department of State identified Belize as a significant drug transit country. Since Belize lies between the producing countries of South America and the consumer countries of

<sup>45</sup> Anonymous interviewee, Belize City; and anonymous interviewee, Punta Gorda.

<sup>46</sup> 'Maya lawsuit against GOB still pending', *Amandala*, 5 April 1998; 'Toledo Maya take Government before Inter-American Commission on Human Rights', *Amandala*, 16 August 1998; 'Rural Belizean "Toledoans" want to address the House of Representatives', *Amandala*, 11 October 1998; and 'Toledo Ecotourism Association pleased with reception in the city', *Amandala*, 18 October 1998, .

<sup>47</sup> Interview with Pio Coc. Toledo Maya Cultural Council, Punta Gorda, 24 May 2000; and 'Julian Cho Memorial Mass', *Ix Chelisa, TMCC Newsletter*, May 2000.

<sup>48</sup> 'Erosion of democracy: the Malaysian logging concession', *Amandala*, 29 March 1998; 'Maya lawsuit against GOB', *Amandala*, 5 April 1998; and 'Toledo Maya take Government before Inter-American Commission on Human Rights', *Amandala*, 16 August 1998.

<sup>49</sup> 'Present state of affairs of Toledo Mayas', *Amandala*, 21 November 1999; and 'Erosion of democracy: the Malaysian logging concession', *Amandala*, 29 March 1998.

Europe and North America, its position marks it out as an ideal route for smugglers.<sup>50</sup> In the local press, the increase in trafficking of so-called hard drugs has been partially blamed on drug cartels utilising the old trafficking routes for marijuana through Guatemala, Belize and Mexico and on to the US in order to target its markets for cocaine and heroin.<sup>51</sup> It is clear that authorities in Belize have been unable to cope with trafficking. However, elements in the formal state apparatus have been complicitous, leading to the state's incorporation into global trafficking networks. For example, the US Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs stated that the ability of the Government of Belize to combat trafficking was severely undermined by deeply entrenched corruption, that reached into senior levels of Government. In addition, it indicated that Ministers in the Government as well as police officers were complicitous in the drug trade in Belize.<sup>52</sup> This means that these interest groups engaged in the illicit narcotics trade are highly resistant to new forms of control over borderlands. In essence, they regard the levels of local, state and global control represented by TFCAs as a significant threat to their own globalised business interests.

Paradoxically, TFCAs offer a means of ensuring that state agencies can extend their law enforcement to transnationalised and criminalised spaces around borderlands. However, the deeply entrenched corruption in the state apparatus adds a new layer of complexity. For those elements in the state apparatus that are involved in such illicit activities, the idea of a greater degree of law enforcement, monitoring and governance poses a significant threat. In those cases, corrupt elements in the state frustrate and block attempts to extend national control over transnational spaces. Discussion about security issues, and especially criminal activities, has rarely appeared in official reports and NGO literature about the TFCAs. One of the reasons why governments are reluctant to join transfrontier initiatives is precisely because of these issues of security. On the one hand there is a fear that opening borders would allow a free-for-all for criminal elements that already inhabit those areas. On the other hand certain elements within the state apparatus fear exposure and the closing down of their illegal activities, because the borders will be subject to more effective law enforcement and the prying eyes of conservation agencies and tourists. It is clear that global environmental governance in the form of TFCAs face multiple challenges that can limit their implementation. As such, global environmental governance needs to be thought of as much more open and complex than its supporters suggest. The criminalised networks that inhabit and use areas earmarked for TFCAs can significantly inhibit or even prevent their implementation.

<sup>50</sup> International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, 1997: Canada, Mexico and Central America, *Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs*, p. 1; 'Whose colony is this anyway?', *The Guardian* (UK) 17 June 1997; 'US pressure in drug fight rankles some', *Amandala*, 19 January 1997; 'Colombia and Mexico sign agreement to co-operate in anti drug fight', *Amandala*, 9 February 1997; and 'Drug traffic increasing in the Caribbean', *San Pedro Sun*, 12 December 1997. For further discussion of the global nature of the drugs trade see Paul B. Stares, *Global Habit: The Drug Problem in a Borderless World* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1996); and see Bernard Nietschmann, 'Protecting Indigenous Coral Reefs and Sea Territories, Miskito Coast, RAAN, Nicaragua' in Stanley Stevens (ed.), *Conservation Through Cultural Survival: Indigenous Peoples and Protected Areas* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1997), pp. 193–224.

<sup>51</sup> 'Belize caught in the middle of a drug war', *Amandala*, 3 August 1997; and see Nietschmann, 'Protecting Indigenous Coral Reefs and Sea Territories', pp. 193–224.

<sup>52</sup> *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, 1997*, p. 2.



## **Conclusion**

This article demonstrates that neoliberal definitions and theories of global governance are often presented as a compelling narrative, pointing to the power and control afforded to the complex and interrelated networks that carry out global neoliberal projects; but an examination of what happens when such ideas and projects encounter challenges from local actors indicates that notions of global governance need some rethinking and more careful nuancing. The multiple challenges that global governance faces from the local level, subvert and limit its full implementation. As such, the analysis of TFCAs presented here highlights a need to rethink and reconfigure how global governance is defined. Rather than being a powerful neoliberal project, able to create and fully enforce universal norms and practices, it needs to be reconceptualised as something more open, opaque or uneven.

In terms of adding to the debate on what global governance is, TFCAs are one example of what might be termed global environmental governance, and in accordance with this they are indicative of how specific ideas and fashions in conservation can be transmitted between the local and global levels. In particular transboundary conservation is an example of global environmental governance, that is, regulation and management of locally held resources according to globally approved conservation norms and practices. Furthermore they are indicative of governance through complex networks of actors that act at the global, regional, national and local levels, and span across NGOs, communities, national governments, private companies and international financial institutions. The ways that TFCAs have been planned and established in Central America constitute one indicator of the power of global environmental governance. However it is an analysis of the responses to global schemes which reveals the limitations and boundaries of global environmental governance. The uncritical promotion of TFCAs as a neat form of delivering ecosystem conservation that equally brings development, community participation and decentralisation is clearly at odds with the highly complex local contexts that TFCAs are expected to be imposed upon and operate in. Instead, an analysis of how, where and if TFCAs are implemented in Central America provides an indication of how local actors can subvert and challenge globally inspired and supported schemes for conservation. Finally, the ways that the power of global governance is questioned here are important for our understandings of it, and it is clear that it requires some rethinking to accommodate its potentially fragile, uneven and contested nature.

