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Wildlife policy matters: inclusion and exclusion by means of organisational and discursive boundaries

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As a result of shifting wildlife policy, approximately one-sixth of South Africa’s total land has been ‘game-fenced’ and converted for wildlife-based production during the last three decades. The wildlife industry has thereby become a multibillion rand industry with an increasingly vocal political arena. Seeing nature and its production as an organised political project, this article sets out to give insight into the shifting power relations between wildlife utilisers, government officials and civil society in South Africa. It does so by examining the production of dominant narratives on wildlife in the emerging organisational field of wildlife policy. This article studies the Wildlife Forum, an important national discursive space in which government engages with non-governmental parties about wildlife policy. The article argues that by means of organisational and discursive restructuring, government and industry actors have promoted a discourse alliance that endorses both government’s conservation interests and industry’s development interests, while excluding dissenting voices.

Keywords: field-configuring event; wildlife policy; social transformation; neoliberal nature; conservation and development

Policy matters to game farmers. When asked about their concerns for the future, game reserve owners in the Eastern Cape answered that ‘among 24 obstacles to medium and long-term sustainability specified by Private Game Reserves, three-fourth (n = 18) directly or indirectly related to government policy’ (Langholz and Kerley 2006, 19). In follow-up studies in 2008 and 2011, policy concerns and specifically ‘the perception of a lack of political support, together with governmental instability which discourages international visitors’ were once again highlighted as a major risk factor (Snowball and Antrobus 2008). To influence wildlife policy, the South African wildlife industry is increasingly regrouping and organising itself. As wildlife policy is slowly shifting from being a provincial to a national affair, an emerging ‘organisational field’ (Bourdieu 1993; Garud 2008; Hardy and Maguire 2010) has geographically established itself in South Africa’s capitol, Pretoria. The city lies in the economical and political core of the country, in the Gauteng Province, as it accommodates the national ministries as well as the presidency. Mainly here, a politically transforming government, a proliferating group of wildlife producers and a collection of social and environmental activists set out to tinker and twitch political machinery to their advantage. They do so by producing narratives in the form of articles, speeches, policy drafts and debates with suggestions about official classifications of nature. These productions are voiced in public spaces such as meetings,

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forums, in the media and on the Internet, where they are staged in negotiation with other social actors and yield ‘power relations and debates over meaning’ (Leach, Mearns, and Scoones 1999, 235).

Although the wildlife policy debate has many head-on collisions, there is also much convergence and coalition building. What this article shows is that wildlife policy discussions in South Africa reveal a particular alliance between the state and capital. Government is implementing and considering measures that allow wildlife producers to self-administer their permits, while private landowners have declared themselves to be biodiversity managers. The two parties negotiate about economical incentives that are being brought into play to reward landowners for their role in biodiversity conservation. With various self-regulatory systems, stewardship programmes and fiscal mechanisms to provide ‘a more secure conservation agreement’, the current tendency points towards government deregulation and reregulation concerning conservation. This phenomenon is a hallmark of neoliberal policy, which seeks to move outside of the formal apparatus of the state to achieve policy aims through the institutions of civil society by means of public–private partnerships and by an effective and democratic free market (Peck and Tickell 2002). In practice, Robertson states:

\[\text{efforts to develop neoliberal environmental policy have led to endless numbers of ‘stakeholder forums’, in which to achieve the outcome and effect of market-led environmental governance, we had to avert our eyes from the actual acts of government occurring at a table crowded with bureaucrats. (2007, 503–504)}\]

The alliance should not be regarded as a consensual one however. Discussions are often framed in terms of a strong dichotomy between industry and government that stress the disconnection, the distance and the opposing goals the two have. This text attempts to show that in this seeming divergence government actors and landowners converge in a continuous politically dynamical process which excludes other actors such as labour and environmental factions.

Seeing nature and its production as an organised political project (MacDonald 2010), this article intends to give insight in shifting power relations between wildlife utilisers and government officials. It does so by examining the production of dominant narratives on wildlife in this emerging organisational field of wildlife policy. The field of study are those particular discursive sites and events that are pivotal in the (trans)formation of institutional change. With Lampel and Meyer, I call these ‘field-configuring events’ (FCEs; Lampel and Meyer 2008). Theoretically, the article aims to build on Lampel and Meyer’s work and add a dimension on social exclusion which I argue is inherently a factor of FCEs.

Empirically, this article will focus on one particular FCE: the Wildlife Forum. This platform is initiated by government to engage with a wide scope of organisations and discuss human control over wild animals. It is the only platform of its kind and, being staged at a national level, provides an important discursive space in which government interacts with non-governmental parties. Through its hosting body, the Department of Environmental Affairs, I was invited to attend the quarterly Wildlife Forum during the period 2009–2012. By means of a Promotion of Access to Information Act (PAIA) request, I obtained access to the Forum’s minutes and reports from its start in 2005 up until 2009. Leading up to the platform meetings, I studied and participated in various meetings that were organised by participants to streamline narratives and strategies.
Besides these Forum-related meetings, I contacted members and actors of the broader organisational field to establish discursive positions, expectations, evaluations and strategies for institutional change.

**FCEs as discursive spaces**

Maarten Hajer (1995) talks about ‘discursive spaces’ as those places where the process involving production, distribution, consumption, translation and contestation of narratives occurs. These are physical or virtual spaces in which actors discuss, debate and dispute ‘issues they perceive to be of consequence to them and their group’ (Hauser 1999, 64). A discursive space has been defined as ‘a site of contestation in which competing interest groups seek to impose their definitions of what the main [problems] are and how they should be addressed’ (Jacobs, Kemeny, and Manzi 2003, 442). Each organisational field contains such particular sites, events that provide discursive spaces and are pivotal in their formation and transformation. Lampel and Meyer delineate those spaces that are pivotal for institutional reform as ‘FCEs’: temporary social organisations in which persons from diverse professional, organisational and geographical backgrounds assemble on a one-time basis or periodically to generate institutional change (2008, 1126). FCEs provide structured as well as unstructured opportunities for face-to-face social interaction in which information is exchanged and dispositions on common issues are presented. They are:

Arenas in which networks are constructed, business cards are exchanged, reputations are advanced, deals are struck, news is shared, accomplishments are recognized, standards are set, and dominant designs are selected. FCEs can enhance, reorient, or even undermine existing technologies, industries, or markets; or alternately, they can become crucibles from which new technologies, industries, and markets emerge. (2008)

Following Weick’s ideas about the production of meaning, Oliver and Montgomery (2008, 1149) speak of these events as facilitators for ‘shared sense-making’. They give actors the opportunity to launch their narratives on, for instance, wildlife, but are also opportunities to learn about other actors’ positions. In FCEs, actors can gain recognition, construct mutual understandings and also take up alternative, at times conflicting relational positions (2008). By means of negotiations, conflicts or mutual understanding, FCEs can thus instigate organisational as well as institutional change. Lampel and Meyer note that the organisation of FCEs may be for this very reason, to facilitate organisational change, so that institutional entrepreneurs can advance their own positions, create an interactive field or mimic more established fields (2008, 1028).

FCEs do not consist of merely one ‘key discursive space’; they are characterised by multiple spaces which are constructed around each other. Official forums are usually preceded and followed by meetings between organisations and their constituents as well as between coalitions of various representatives. They also co-constitute informal discursive spaces that can equally be foundational for new mutual understandings and narrative construction. Important coalitions forming or decision-making may occur over lunch, in the supermarket or even in the bathroom. FCEs should thereby not be regarded as single events, but as chains of interlinked moments in classification narratives which are produced, distributed, consumed and acted upon.
Notably, FCE participants communicate and compete with organisational actors outside the event. At a race, for instance, runners compete with each other to set the club record or the event record, but simultaneously compete with runners and records that are physically absent (see Rao 1994 for an example on automobile races). A runner may be triumphant in one particular event, but this does not necessarily mean that he has set the track, club or world record. His success may well alter the field and even do so significantly, but the actor is still in competition with those who are absent because they are unable to come, are uninvited, uninterested or have left the organisational field (having changed activities or perhaps because of death). Political forums, Garud (2008, 1081) shows, are rather different than sporting events though in the sense that they have not adopted clear-cut formal institutions to establish what constitutes victory. In sporting events, there are guidelines that determine which person may compete in which event, how they should perform during the competition (and leading up to it), what constitutes the race and how new standards are set.

In political forums, it is much more ambivalent how power configurations may be demonstrated, performed or measured. Garud (2008) speaks in such cases of ‘meta-races’ in which ‘criteria for victory are being negotiated even as the tournament is unfolding, thereby generating ambiguity endogenously’. Hence, political FCEs provide venues to compete and to set new standards throughout the field even though not all participants may agree on new standards and even though it is unclear how these new standards will affect the larger organisational field. Therefore, it is important to understand the narratives of actors in an FCE in relation to the narratives in the broader organisational field. Silenced and translated counter-narratives may especially reveal information about dominant actors, hegemonic discourse and processes that legitimise and change versions of the wild.

**Studying an FCE: South Africa’s wildlife sector and the Wildlife Forum**

With the rise of a global discourse on conservation and a strong national focus on tourism, the wildlife sector has been defining and redefining both themselves and their animals. In doing so, they have developed disparate and seemingly incommensurable narratives on the wild. On the one hand, more measures have been promoted to convert (sets of) environmental entities into capital, while on the other hand rigid conservation frameworks have been adopted which interpret nature as an inalienable good that ought to be protected from and for humans. Because of this, government, business and activists regularly fall out with each other and have become polarised in a debate on the management and control over nature. In South Africa, this has prompted a process of institutional reform amidst large-scale politico-organisational restructuring (Snijders 2012). After 1994, the country’s four provinces, which were principally responsible for environmental policy, were repartitioned into nine new ones. National and provincial government departments were forced to reconfigure themselves to establish who had which level of authority and which issues fell under what jurisdiction. Government divisions, such as the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Environmental Affairs, needed to recalibrate in relation to each other. There are now thousands of landowners involved in wildlife trade, tourism, ranching, breeding, taxidermy, fencing, transportation, veterinary sciences and so on (Bothma 2009), who grow to be more economically potent, politically vocal and organised. Furthermore, a whole range of
non-governmental environmental organisations, intent on monitoring human interactions with nature, have emerged, synchronised and spoken out where they can. Wildlife politics is in full throttle.

A particularly vocal group is that of the wildlife representatives, who in the past grouped themselves provincially (Transvaal Game Ranchers, Eastern Cape Game Management Association, etc.), but have now started clustering around South Africa’s political capital Pretoria. The South African Game Ranching Organisation (SAGRO), which managed to pressurise the Department of Justice to create wildlife ownership laws in the early 1990s but became dormant in the decade afterwards, was reconfigured in 2005 under a new management and a new name: Wildlife Ranching South Africa (WRSA). Government welcomed this body as the official voice of wildlife producers and the former Minister of Agriculture accredited it with being influential to the state’s thinking about wildlife in parliament:

Factors that contributed to a paradigm shift included the report [...] on the South African Wildlife Industry by the National Agricultural Marketing Council as well as the establishment of the Wildlife Ranching Association of South Africa.1

Hence, the predicaments which game farmers had with government policy did not go unnoticed. In 2005, the Minister of Environmental Affairs Marthinus van Schalkwyk commissioned three panels of experts to study the sector of wildlife utilisation, hunting and ranching (Burgener, Greyling, and Rumsey 2005; Patterson and Khosa 2005). The shared observations of these documents were that (1) policy, rules and institutions concerning the utilisation of biodiversity are too ‘complex and fragmented’, (2) communications between government and stakeholders should be improved and (3) local communities should be more involved in the industry as a whole. All three expert documents highlighted that more could be done to grow and enhance the development of capacity in the sector, particularly among previously disadvantaged individuals. Transformation was seen to be ‘slow [while] communities are keen to become involved in the industry. These opportunities need to be made available both on paper and in practice’ (Cousins, Sadler, and Evans 2008, 51). The expert reports contain few substantial recommendations on how these points should be addressed, although they do suggest the establishment of:

an appropriate representative wildlife industry forum that should include only the direct stakeholders (wildlife producers, hunters, labour) and which can be used by them as a joint platform from which to engage government and civil society. The forum, government and civil society should launch a collaborative initiative to develop a National Development Strategy and Action Plan for the industry and begin immediately by addressing short-term obstacles such as the hunting legislation. (Steenkamp, Marnewick, and Marnewick 2008, 5)

With the advice to create more direct national discussions, a new FCE was in the making. A hunting platform had already existed but was disbanded, as one Environmental Affairs advisor stated:

Before there was something called SAPHCOM (the South African Professional Hunters Committee) which had the hunters and the Professional Hunting school directors, PHASA and the provinces. Then at a stage government said, because the wildlife industry was not transformed, it was still a predominantly male, white orientated and it wasn’t a structure that fell under government bodies, such as the Working Group One committee. They didn’t
recognize that committee, so when the provincials wanted to attend, it wasn’t approved, because it wasn’t a formal committee. So we had to dismantle SAPHCOM; for a couple of years we tried to get something working again under Working Group One, but it wasn’t successful. (policy advisor DEAT 2010, personal communication)

As government started rolling out its new policies, communications between national wildlife representatives and department officials intensified. At this juncture, the recommendations by the Panels of Experts were catalysts for organisational change and the official Wildlife Forum was created in 2005. It was to meet four times annually and was to address deficiencies in communication between the private sector and government (minutes first meeting Wildlife Forum 28 September 2005). I will use this forum as an FCE case study to explore further the (co)construction of wildlife policy.

FCE membership: organisational boundaries

The composition of the forum was dissimilar to what was suggested by the Panel of Experts from the start. The platform was recommended to take direct stakeholders including labour, hunters and wildlife producers on board and collaborate as a forum with government and civil society to restructure the industry. Instead, a Wildlife Forum was initiated that was hosted and chaired by the Department of Environmental Affairs and invited hunting industry organisations that were involved in wildlife production (breeding, ecotourism, professional hunting, predator breeding, translocation, fencing, etc.) but excluded labour, welfare and civil society stakeholders. When asked why these stakeholders were absent, an industry member commented: ‘No, no, they are not real stakeholders. They don’t own anything; it’s [that they are] not hunters, not landowners’ (Executive WRSA 2009, personal communication). Regarding environmental organisations a high-placed official told me:

The big thing is we do not have the jurisdiction to address animal welfare. That is what those organisations talk about, but the Protection of Animals Act falls under Agriculture. We do have people who are animal-rights orientated within the government that try to bring in these things all the time. But we must be careful; if something doesn’t fall under our jurisdiction… why would you touch such a difficult subject? (Senior manager DEAT 2010, personal communication)

A similar answer was given about labour representatives whose issues are said to fall under the Department of Labour, thereby placing workers and their representatives outside the industry spectre. The environmental and labour organisations I spoke to had not heard of the forum. At public meetings, environmental society actors expressed being rejected from wildlife-related talks. One NGO director instructed me at a public discussion on damage-causing animals, ‘you go ask here who is invited, and who found out through the grapevine?’(2010, personal communication). I asked a government official how stakeholders are selected for public meetings, and she answered as follows:

Normally we have a list of stakeholders we deal with, like through the Wildlife Forum. Those are our direct stakeholders. What we normally do when it’s a big issue, like with the TOPS (threatened or protected species regulations), is that we invite our stakeholders and say to the provinces: this is an open workshop. There is no limit to the people that are invited. (2009, personal communication)
This approach gives FCE members an indirect privileged position. Those who are involved actively participate in discussions and are also part of a (virtual) discursive network through which invitations for other events are distributed. Non-members may thereby be excluded from main events as well as linked events. Such indirect ‘network-exclusions’ may be crafted arbitrarily (everybody is invited but we do not send invitations) or actively.

According to the founding documents, the Wildlife Forum can admit more members. During the period I attended the Wildlife Forum, two ‘outsiders’ applied to be part of the discussions: an Angling Association and a Veterinary Association. Both were asked to present themselves and were afterwards probed with questions about their jurisdiction, vision and their ideas about contributions to the forum. The most important question was ‘Does your code of conduct talk about biodiversity conservation?’, as this is a necessary requirement for anybody who wishes to be part of the forum. The Angling Club was accepted straight away and unanimously, while the veterinarians were rejected. Provincial officials supported the veterinarians, although the industry was generally not in support. Professional Hunting Association of South Africa (PHASA) acknowledged the necessity of having a veterinarian on board to give insights into complex issues such as animal health, but asked the Department of Agriculture to supply one. A translocation representative stated that ‘we always have had problems with vets up until now’ (2009, personal communication), referring to a proposal stating that the darting of animals was to be overseen by a veterinary council. Others feared discussions could become much more focused on scientific principles. A broadly shared opinion was that scientists already contribute to the discussions in other phases of the policy-making process. That is, the Department of Environmental Affairs works with scientists who provide them with species-related information and statistics and much debate is shaped by academic information. A South African hunting representative put it as follows: ‘we should not let scientific reasons preside over economical reasons’ (2011, personal communication). In the end, the application of the veterinarians was not supported by any member because the organisation was not representative for all veterinarians in the country. In a later meeting which was initiated by government, however, their membership was accepted. The initial hostility to wildlife academics is noticed also by Cousins, Sadler and Evans:

Those with scientific credentials want to incorporate more science into ranching, and our respondents felt that the science required translation into a more user-friendly form. Those interviewees working in the ranching industry without a science background generally felt that they had more practical experience than scientists, and that academic work was irrelevant to them. Integrating science into management will be challenging (2008, 13).

On the other hand, most industry members I spoke to were in favour of involving certain types of scientists, mainly those which take an agricultural economic scientific basis. Industry members see it as their responsibility to contribute towards the establishment of research capacities in these fields and have set up task teams to see to this (notes HAWASA Meetings 2008/2009).

Inclusion and exclusion in a context of social transformation

Since 1994, South Africa has been implementing intensive social transformation schemes to democratise the various levels of political and socioeconomic life and to fight the
inequities of the apartheid era. Broadly, the transformation of the wildlife industry can be effectuated in two different spheres that are closely related: the transformation of on-the-ground practices such as social relations, jobs and ownership patterns, and the transformation of political representation. Besides altering economic conditions, Dryzek states that there is a need for the extension and deepening of democracy with ‘the progressive inclusion of various groups and categories of people in political life’ (Dryzek in Scott and Oelofse 2005, 445).

Most independent reports on the wildlife sector show however that it has experienced a lack of racial and social transformation or ‘real empowerment’ in both spheres (Cousins, Sadler, and Evans 2008; Patterson and Khosa 2005; The National Agricultural Marketing Council 2006). This is recognised by activists, scholars and journalists, which have frequently described game farms as ‘wildlife playgrounds for a privileged elite’ (Kepe, Wynberg, and Ellis 2005), and by industry itself, which either sees this as an image problem that needs to be changed or an opportunity to grow. Industry members actively try to change this image problem: ‘we elected a new guy to the board who’s not Afrikaans, he’s German or English I think. This is a good move or else everybody will think we are just a bunch of white Afrikaners’ (RH, personal communication, 2009). More effectively, media events such as hunting galas, philanthropical donations and auctions are held in which high-profile politicians and business men are invited along with hunters and game farmers to publicise their bonds.

In the Wildlife Forum, the topic of transformation is not actively discussed. Outsider narratives on transformation, labour relations and tenant rights are not translated into the forum and organisational actors that represent these narratives are absent. Scott and Oelofse call these absent actors ‘invisible stakeholders’ and conclude that in South Africa they continue to be excluded from environmental policy processes ‘despite policy and legislative reform’ (2005, 462). The transformation of the sector, however, is discussed in the forum. At the very first forum meeting, concerns with employment equity, a government-wide programme to redress the inequalities of apartheid by giving previously disadvantaged groups economic opportunities, were raised by government officials. Members of the forum issued their problems with such programmes. A representative stated, for instance, that ‘taxidermists are small family enterprises and do not know how to incorporate Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) in the industry’ (Wildlife Forum minutes 2005). As BEE is mainly aimed at business with more than 50 employees, one of the first discussions of the Wildlife Forum was what the socioeconomic programme could possibly mean for the small, often family run, businesses of the wildlife industry. It was decided that a different structure was needed to talk through BEE’s implications for the industry. A separate commission was put together, consisting of industry and government members, and was titled the transformation task team (TTT). A separate discursive space was hereby invoked for bilateral interactions between government and industry. According to the minutes, however, this commission did not report back to the forum until November 2008. The industry representative said of the internal TTT meeting ‘I’m slightly pissed off, only the chair and I showed up’ (2009, personal communication). The meeting did result in a plan for transformation though, which was pitched by the industry representative:

What we ask this forum is to give us as TTT the mandate to create one charter that DEAT – with the help of a professional service provider – can create as an umbrella for the whole
industry: including National Parks, Taxidermies, Ranching, Hunting, and so on. (Wildlife Forum notes 2009)

To most participants who attended this forum it was unclear what ‘transformation charter’ meant. When the representative from Environmental Affairs mentioned that there was as of yet no budget for a service provider or other concrete steps towards transformation policy, a forum member cried out that ‘transformation was already in the minister’s speech!’ This points out how government is not only expected to bring about but can also claim success by means of programmes on social redistribution. In this case, although the ‘transformation charter’ had already been brought out into the open as a political success, there was little on the table yet. The discussion continued as follows between the forum chair and two task team representatives – one from industry (I) and one from government (G):

Representative (I): We want the mandate and decision to be made now.
Forum Chair (G): Can you circulate a document first? If we need to employ a professional we need more information about the plans. Also, if it is for the whole industry we need to vote.
Representative (G): I think it is fair to say that we do not need to vote on this. Everyone agrees, as we have been going at this issue for some time now.
Forum Chair (G): [After private consultation with the Representative (G)]. Ok, we give you green light to develop the document and we’ll circulate it so that we can continue our work and get the funding.
Representative (I): The reality is that we’ll never go back to this decision. I want it to be taken down in black on white. There will be one decision for one charter and that is made here. No going back later.

A discourse coalition with potential to change institutions was thus forged. By meeting in a separate discursive space the TTT members came to a mutual understanding of the social problem – the lack of social transformation in the hunting industry – and created a new dominant narrative on how to solve it. What is noteworthy here is that the TTT members, having worked together on a specific issue, seemed better aligned to each other than that the government representative who was his direct colleague, the Forum Chair. I asked the industry representative what happened:

Representative: I think at the forum, most people had no idea what was happening. But [the government representative] did, he understood the dynamics. Now all the subsets; ecotourism, hunting, farming, taxidermy, including the game reserves, will all be part of this thing: we’ll have a common charter we’ll agree to.
Researcher: But I don’t get it – what do they agree to? There was no text.
Representative: Agreement is the first principle: then I can go away and create the mechanisms and appoint government people to do this. I can’t use my own bank resources to do this.
Researcher: What kind of mechanisms would they be? You were talking about rural areas; will they be focused on rural upliftment?
Representative: It could well be this. Or instead of having 2000 government inspectors of abattoirs, training a black person to be a private inspector on the farm. Or let’s say the hunter’s assistant could be trained to do the inspection when they prepare the carcass for the customer. It’s empowering a black youngster to be an inspector. We have training schools and everything.
The TTT reported on its progress during the following forum meetings. Although the issues of BEE and transformation have been ongoing agenda points for five years, at the time of writing, no documents had been written or enforced. What is reported upon from time to time is successful fundraising activities by the industry. The PHASA has a yearly gala dinner with an auction, of which the donations are set aside for the ‘training of black students’. In the Limpopo province, game farmers and government officials raised ZAR 1.5 million by putting a ZAR 5000 premium on leopard permits. This money was awarded to similar training programmes. One local hunting organisation stated that ‘some politicians see us as enemies, but actually through fundraising 500.000 ZAR is set aside for transformation’ (PHASA spokesperson 2010, personal communication). However, there is lack of consensus about the meaning of ‘transformation’ or ‘Black Economic Empowerment’. In practice, it frequently refers to a narrow conception of empowerment, focusing strictly on the training and creation of low-skilled labour. There are very few discussions about changing land or wildlife ownership, or about the changing of management positions in the private wildlife sector. Structural reform thereby seems to remain unaddressed, while symbolic donations are highlighted as contributions to rural development by both the private sector as well as government partners.

Conservation through development: a discourse alliance

One of the very first discussions in the Wildlife Forum focused on the symbiosis between consumptive and non-consumptive wildlife management (Wildlife Forum minutes 2005). It was meant to create a strong communal link between all platform members whether they were in favour of public parks, ecotourism, hunting or meat production. The forum thereby embraced different conservation and production narratives and knotted the representative organisations together to promote a type of ‘green capitalism’. Officials of Environmental Affairs who were critical of commercial approaches to wildlife over time accepted that wildlife producers can contribute to conservation as a premise for negotiation. They follow Minister Van Schalkwyk of Environmental Affairs (now Minister for Tourism) who avowed that ‘game farming and hunting contribute significantly to conservation, tourism development, job creation and sustainable development in rural areas’ (November 2007). Wildlife professionals were offered official conservation titles (such as nature reserve instead of game farm) and shifted to a discursive position that accepts the necessity of regulation. During the forum and in private statements, industry representatives deplored private sector members who do not practice conservation and produce ‘freak animals’, offer caged hunting or run intensive breeding programmes. Most industry spokesmen, who originally adhered to a strict production narrative, have now incorporated conservation issues in their rationale, even if these are placed clearly behind profit motivations. When pressed on conservation matters, narrators are quick and proud to indicate that landowners saved certain species from extinction. ‘This happened to the quagga’, one farmer told me, ‘it went extinct, but for the foresight of a few brave farmers, the Bontebok and the Black Wildebeest would also have been extinct’ (Eastern Cape game farmer 2011, personal communication). It is stressed that these animals are not saved by conservationist or state regulations, but by means of entrepreneurial behaviour, ‘because the love of a landowner for his plas [farmland] and his animals’. This then also is the answer to contemporary conservation problems:
If you allow people from overseas to hunt cheetah, the farm owners will protect cheetah because they can make money out of it. If you cannot trade it, why must you look after an animal? We have been telling governments for how long now, let us get value out of cheetah and then we will protect it, but sometimes it is difficult to get people to understand this if they don’t live in nature and stay in offices all day (WRSA representative 2010, personal communication).

Hereby we see that the new narrative has a win-win glow to it, which predicts and assures that conservation and economic development go hand in hand. Money-making and conservation thus become interdependent. The rationale is that government can succeed in their goals to conserve land and species, if and only if rules are made to facilitate wildlife private property markets. National stewardship programmes have therefore been launched in which game farmers are offered subsidies and fiscal incentives that range from tax deduction for the removal of alien species to having the value of the land deducted from one’s taxable income (Snijders 2012, 8). Voices that originally spoke ‘production’ have thus reconfigured their speech to stress their ideas about conservation, while conservationists have taken in economic arguments to come to this new narrative of ‘green capitalism’.

Unstable dynamics

Discourse coalitions are not fusions in which goals and organisations are thoroughly aligned: they leave room for manoeuvre, interpretation and private goals. Because of this, the ‘green capital’ coalition is fundamentally unstable and is renegotiated constantly as events unfold. In the Wildlife Forum, this is played out particularly by industry members who have committed to conservation and development, but pressurise government by warning that they can defect to the Department of Agriculture (and effectively a strict production narrative) at any time. A discussion from the forum illustrates this:

WRSA: We are concerned about increasing legal obligations. All these new regulations in the 9+1 system come with a huge administrative burden and delays for the industry, while tax incentives and drought relief are non-existent. Why should we stay with Environmental Affairs?
Chair: You do not fall strictly under Environmental Affairs, you fall under all South African law, whether it is justice, land reform, labour or environment.
Province: The industry should be cautious for hasty decisions. They do not know what they have here.
Industry: In any case, we believe the Forum needs more extensive representation of Agriculture.

The last did not happen, but the dialogue does show how power relations continue to be performed in discourse coalitions. The funding of programmes that fall under coalition agreements, in this case conservation on private land, is hereby of continuous discussion. Farmers and hunters complain that they cannot help government with its goal of expanding conservation with private money only. ‘We think tax concessions will result in compliance; there is a greater need for incentives for the wildlife industry’ one spokesperson said (2006, personal communication). In later sessions, it became clear that the chair as well as the minister (through a letter to the Forum) encouraged incentivising game farmers, and this endorsement further encouraged DEAT to consult and explore available options. Although these incentives would have to be organised with
the province, a national workshop between game farmers and government members was held to debate the issue.

Despite its instability and tensions, the alliance is rewarding to the involved partners and has effect on the organisational field by propelling those organisational actors who retain strict original narratives to discursive fringes. Animal rights activists, land and labour activists as well as intensive production advocates are not welcomed by dominant green capital actors and are actively excluded.

In general, in the forum and beyond, strong hostility exists between green NGOs and industry or hunting organisations, who frequently refer to the former as ‘greenies’, ‘bunny huggers’ and ‘environmental terrorists’. At industry meetings, direct strategies to limit ‘greenies’ access to the institutional field are discussed along with tactics to weaken their legitimacy. When an NGO that aims to protect leopards and publicly castigates landowners for killing them, was discussed at one industry meeting, a representative stated:

> From an intelligence point of view this is a business opposition, we need to break them down. The question for us is: how do we face the normal guy on the street? Disney has glorified the leopard. The jackal and hyena always stay ugly and dumb, but not the leopard. We as an industry need to protect the leopard ourselves to take away [the NGO’s] credits.

(Fieldnotes 2009)

Animal welfare and rights organisations use similar abrasive wordings to describe wildlife industry members and hunters. Collaborations between government and industry are condemned especially and both are accused of institutionalising animal abuse to make millions of dollars:

> Wildlife and environment conservation must not be abandoned to an animal-unfriendly system that uses profit to justify the killing of healthy, defenceless animals. By allowing hunters to make the claim that they ‘pay for conservation’, human society is failing in its responsibility to wildlife. The fate of wild animals has literally been abandoned into the hands of killers. (ARA website, accessed July 2009)

To counter the influence of the dominant green capitalism narrative and their co-authored texts, various environmental organisations have produced their own texts and probed media, fundraising and alternative legal routes to institutionalise these texts. In August 2009, for instance, a number of NGOs held a meeting to initiate a new ‘people-driven’ South African law on conservation issues. The intention was to gain broad support from citizens so that the proposal could be directed to parliament immediately and could thereby avoid departmental procedures and politics (such as the Wildlife Forum). Although not much came of this, the hunting coalition strongly condemned these activities in the forum. Government members in the Wildlife Forum generally welcome environmental organisations for their ‘watchdog function’, but said to have difficulties with their approach which was labelled as ‘negative’ or ‘aggressive’. ‘We would organize something’, one official said, ‘and they would come in, shout, and then leave the meeting’ (senior official of DEAT 2011, personal communication). Other complaints about local environmental NGOs were the public rebuking of officials in media reports, the sharp and aggressive tone, and the ‘hundreds of questions’ which costed substantial government capacity.
The lack of coalitions between environmental NGOs and forum members is somewhat remarkable because coalitions between industry members, government and green NGOs do exist on the ground. The animal welfare organisation National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, for instance, is institutionalised and funded by government and cooperates closely with the administration of the Animal Welfare Act. Also, there are a number of conservation alliances between ecotourism operators and animal rights organisations. Shamwari game reserve in the Eastern Cape, for instance, works with the high-profile Born Free Foundation, whose official goal is fighting ‘the ivory trade and ‘sport’ hunting, opposing killing wild animals for ‘bushmeat’ or challenging the exploitation of wild animals in zoos and circuses’ (www.bornefree.org.uk, accessed September 2011). Also, one could expect amateur hunters and animal welfare organisations to team up as, in some cases, these organisations share a critique on wildlife commodification and a passion and reverence for the experience and protection of nature. However, these coalitions do not materialise in the national political force field, where ‘hunters’ and ‘activists’ stand at opposite sides of the spectrum. In the Wildlife Forum, this may have to do with the strong focus on hunting. Ecotourism does not take a very active role in the Wildlife Forum (although they are generally members of unions like WRSA that attend the forum). To advance their position against critics – particularly against ‘alternative land-use’ narrators – this subsector chooses different routes for legitimisation. The ecotourism industry in the Eastern Cape, for instance, substantially sponsors independent researchers to write reports on the impacts of ecotourism farms (e.g. reports funded by the Wilderness Foundation 2006, 2008, 2011) and engages with government on a provincial level.

In the Wildlife Forum, a ‘green’ narrative which criticises wildlife utilisation is physically unrepresented, but it is recurrently translated into the arena as the forum’s strongest counter-narrative. After many cases of perceived negative publicity, the forum decided to institutionalise the counter-narrative by creating a Communication Task Team (CTT) which was to create texts about wildlife issues and distribute them to media (19 April 2006). This CTT is a prime example that shows how organisations engage in new relational activities by first forging a close collaboration and consequently producing texts that bear only one author: the collective voice. Wildlife ranchers, (Professional) hunters and DEAT took place in this task team, with the following instructions (August 2006):

- Investigate opportunities to approach the media and get a voice for the wildlife industry
- Be proactive, not only reactive
- Create positive information distribution opportunities
- Investigate opportunities for awareness raising
- Develop a media list and identify target groups and organisations

The wish to include an additional official from agriculture who would be ‘responsible for the implementation of the animal welfare act’ was expressed also, although it is unclear if this ever happened. Throughout its existence, government remained reserved about its role in the CTT and stated that messages from the forum with any implications for their department needed to be approved by the Director of Communications before they could be publicly released (12 June 2008). Specific and recurring requests were soon tabled to
the commission and the department (1) to publicly highlight agricultural and conservation benefits wildlife utilisation provided and (2) to strongly condemn anti-industry narratives.

When the International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) distributed posters at airports that aimed to discourage visitors from buying curios made out of wildlife products, the forum agreed that this could have negative consequences on their industry and summoned the CTT to counteract ‘since the advert by IFAW infringes the constitutional right of the wildlife industries’. When an activist wrote an ‘anti-industry article and distributed it widely’ the CTT was asked again to counteract. However, when the commission reported back to the forum on its activities its Chairperson said media releases were not signed by government. He publicly questioned if the commission and even the forum meetings were necessary ‘if nothing will come out of them’ (13 March 2008). When pressed on the anti-industry article DEAT recommitted itself to the CTT but said the Minister would not respond to such an article because government supports freedom of speech, transparency and democracy.

Conclusions

Morgan Robertson (2007) observes that neoliberal nature is often understood to operate outside the formal state by means of free-market instruments and supportive non-governmental flanking mechanisms. In practice, however, Robertson shows it has led to endless numbers of government-lead ‘stakeholder forums’, where bureaucrats and business partners team up to discuss and implement market-led environmental governance (504). This article has attempted to grasp the concept of neoliberal nature in a bureaucratic field by asking how changes in wildlife policy are brought about and what roles FCEs such as stakeholder forums play in this process. To do so, this article adapted a discursive perspective which emphasises the role of language and narratives in the shaping and legitimising of policy (Dickson and Adams2009, 113; Hajer and Versteeg 2005). I broadly distinguish between three parties, namely government, industry and civil society organisations and, on closer examinations, attempt to show how these groups are internally fragmented and how different discourse coalitions are created between individuals and clusters.

First, contextually, I showed how wildlife authority in South Africa has been shifting organizationally as well as spatially. A number of reasons have been given for this in this article and previous ones. The country changed its governance structure in 1994 when Mandela’s ANC was elected to lead government. By spatially redividing the country, nine provinces were established and thereby nine new environmental structures were superimposed on the existing provincial and homeland conservation institutions. Because government announced a new superseding national environmental framework (breaking away from the previous government structure which gave provinces authority), different sets of legislation were not aligned and are until today deemed confusing by virtually all stakeholders. Pressure to implement the national framework has been extended (1) by these frustrations, (2) by international environmental conventions that South Africa signed, (3) by a steadily increasing wildlife industry which has to abide by environmental legislation and (4) by a variety of environmental activists who attempt to pressurise the existing institutional framework. A politically inclined organisational field has thereby emerged in which organisations attempt to influence, modify, abolish or create institutions. As institutional power is moving from provinces to the National Department
of Environmental Affairs, this force field is spatially establishing itself in Pretoria. This goes paired with the formation of FCEs such as the Wildlife Forum, a discursive social organisation in which persons assemble to discuss and tinker with the field’s standards and institutions.

By studying the social dynamics in the Wildlife Forum, I attempted to show how FCEs can configure standards in a broader organisational field, how participants interact with ‘outsiders’ and how in this process inclusion and exclusion are constantly negotiated. In the forum, certain stakeholders such as labour organisations and environmental activists were actively barred from participation while, similar to MacDonald’s (2010) findings on the Convention on Biological Diversity, I showed how national government shaped ‘a political dynamic in which capitalist interests seek to secure continued access to resources by using multiple channels of influence to shape policy’ (531).

What can be said generally about the membership to this FCE is that it upholds a strong established group of insiders from initiation and is not easily accessible to outsiders. It upholds strong borders particularly towards external actors that fall outside the sphere of government, industry and hunting organisations. As the forum’s ‘institutional logic’ is produced in a utilitarian manner by the field participants, it favours those who are involved and holds back those who are not. The definition of the Wildlife Forum and its make-up have thereby been translated from being broadly inclusive in founding documents to an ‘industry forum’ in its actual composition. Its boundaries are defined rigidly on the basis of strict requirements, although these definitions seem weak inside the forum. Topics that go beyond the strictly defined jurisdiction of wildlife or conservation policy, such as racial transformation, labour issues but also animal welfare, may be reasons for outsiders to be kept out, while being considered for discussion internally.

By means of organisational and discursive restructuring, government and industry actors have promoted a narrative that endorses both government’s conservation and industry’s development interests. Business has thereby been endowed with a privileged position through which environmental policy ‘can be shaped in ways that accommodate the interests of capital accumulation and seek to control the conditions under which regulation is imposed’ (MacDonald 2010, 531). Thereby, I argue that the exclusion of narratives in an FCE can institutionalise a bias of inequality that affects the broader organisational field.

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Notes
1. Question 1485 for Written Reply, National Assembly: Mr. P.J.C. Pretorius (DA) to ask the Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, 9 October 2009.
2. Although an independent journalist and visitor to a public meeting of the forum told me: ‘It is incredible having a black government chairperson here between all these khaki shirts. Twenty years ago he would be shot in public!’

Note on contributor
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