
THE GEOGRAPHY OF EXILE

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In 1994, ten years ago this year, South Africa was welcomed into the global community, when it held its first ever national democratic elections after nearly 50 years of apartheid rule. A new government was installed with Nelson Mandela as its first President. Under his leadership, great effort was made to unite the racially divided society of the past (symbolically at least), and to set in place shared democratic values.

This terminated an entire period of human history – of slavery, colonization and foreign rule in Africa. With South Africa's liberation from apartheid, the last system of white domination on the continent was ended and the way was opened for a new era of African-led development. One of its chief protagonists has been Thabo Mbeki, second President of the Democratic Republic of South Africa, Nelson Mandela's successor.

Nelson Mandela and Thabo Mbeki

In relation to his predecessor, Nelson Mandela, Thabo Mbeki occupies a far less prominent place in the iconography of early 21st century politics. Nevertheless, his political vision is turning out to be as important, if not more important, for Africa, than Mandela's.

Both Mandela and Mbeki were born in the same part of South Africa, Transkei, a former apartheid Bantustan. Bantustans were «independent» territories established within South Africa's borders by the former apartheid government (HILL, 1964). Black

South Africans were forced to live in these areas, often by force, supposedly to be able to develop according to their authentic tribal customs and practices. Outside of these enclaves, yet inside South Africa, they were temporary residents, only entertained for the labour they supplied to the country's industries.

Bantustans, or «homelands» as they were otherwise known, were fragmented and discontinuous territories, located in unproductive and marginal parts of the country (HORRELL, 1973). They existed in a state of contrived sovereignty, recognized «internationally» as independent countries only by the South African state whose laws had set them up. Their borders, rarely mapped, marked stark divisions between modernity and the stasis of their enforced tribalism (BENNINGFIELD, 2003).

It is the shadow of these Bantustans, and their mirror, the military encampments of the liberation movements in exile, established outside South Africa's borders, that, I think, shaped and still shapes Mandela's and Mbeki's political projects.

Nelson Mandela spent 27 years in prison, mostly on Robben Island, in Table Bay, off Cape Town; Thabo Mbeki lived for almost 28 years in exile outside South Africa. Mandela's politics focused on uniting the divisions of South Africa's past and creating a society of shared democratic values. It was a politics of the interior, of unity, of closure. Mbeki's politics, on the other hand, has focused on repositioning South Africa in Africa and on integrating Africa into the global economy and body politic (MBEKI, 1998 and 2002). It is a politics of the exterior, of border crossings, of connections. Yet, paradoxically, Nelson Mandela is a symbolic figure that circulates globally, an international icon of human freedom; and Mbeki's internationalism has produced new forms of isolation and exclusion. Rather than seeing these two as opposites, they need to be understood as the anomalous partners, the Janus faces, of contemporary global geopolitics.

But a few more words about Mbeki's period in exile, for it is important to what follows.

Mbeki's exile years were characterized by continual movement from continent to continent and place to place (MBEKI, 1998). In the sixties, he was a student at Sussex University in England and then at the Institute of Social Sciences in Moscow. After 1971, as a key theoretician, strategist and diplomat for the African National Congress (ANC), he lived in exile in Africa, for large periods of time in the movement's exile capital, Lusaka. From here, he moved between Nigeria, Botswana, Swaziland, Mozambique and Zimbabwe, living in all these countries for various lengths of time, where he established underground bases and channels of communication for the

ANC. In the eighties, he became one of the most public faces of the international anti-apartheid movement, traveling around the world mobilizing sanctions against the apartheid government.

The geography of this exile life was made up of safe houses, disguised spaces, or ANC headquarters and diplomatic missions. For the most part, Mbeki lived in ANC educational or military camps situated in the remote hinterlands of one or other central or southern African state, isolated and disengaged from their surroundings. They were governed, not by the laws of their host countries, but by the constitution of the ANC, overseen by its internal structures, including its own military police, Mbokodo (whose methods have been found to have frequently exceeded those sanctioned by International Law) (TWALA and BENARD, 1994).

These isolated, extraterritorial nodes were collectively and effectively the ANC's territory in exile. Connected by routes and corridors that allowed a continuous flow of information, ideology, weapons, and supplies, they were the laboratory of the spatial politics now unfolding. The geography of exile, of networked nodes and the flows between them, of secret bases, located in space, but disengaged from their surrounding field, the geography that Mbeki lived in exile, that shaped his spatial experience, has come to characterise his post-exile politics.

Pan Africanism

The key idea around which Thabo Mbeki has shaped his political project is that of an «African Renaissance», a pan-African project for Africans to overcome their colonial and neo-colonial past, and to re-imagine and reposition the African continent as part of the global community (MBEKI, 1998a). This project has been articulated in the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD, 2001), a pledge by the African leaders of the newly established African Union (successor to the Organisation of African Unity) for Africa's renewal.

But NEPAD's spatial impact too, is developing paradoxically. On the one hand, it is producing increased continental and global integration and connectivity, while on the other, it is producing increasing local discontinuity and fragmentation.

Integration and Connectivity

Africa and Africanness have been defined, for centuries, by the politics of the line. At the Berlin Conference of 1884, lines arbitrarily carved it into colonial territories, with little understanding of or respect for pre-colonial territorial practice (OLIVER,

1994). Apartheid policy drew lines to create racial and ethnic territories (ADDISON, 1981). Contemporary global geo-politics continues to engage with Africa through lines of exclusion, marginalisation and denial.

This landscape has been translated, in post-colonial times, into one of contestation and conflict. The borders of former colonial nation states have become the frontier zones of internecine conflict, between rebel armies, effectively extra-territorial spaces governed by warlords, vigilantes, private entrepreneurs, clan chiefs, armies for hire or youth gangs, in a state of low intensity, permanent warfare. Africa's cities are sites of similar levels of contestation and conflicting claims, and resemble the fractured landscapes of the war zones.

Mbeki's vision is to overcome these political and socio-economic conflicts, which he sees as part of Africa's colonial and neocolonial heritage, and to configure a new, seamless pan African space, through the merging of national frontiers, through border crossings and bridgings and through the politics of dialogue, reconciliation and partnership.

The site of the configuring of this newly conceived continental space is the recently established African Union, a pan-African forum for political, economic and social dialogue and for the collective negotiation of Africa's global future.

In the policies being developed by this new political body, national borders and sovereignty are not eradicated, they are simply absorbed into larger, regional economic units – the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) etc. – that facilitate co-operative adventures – cross-border infrastructure, cross-border energy flows, cross-border trade, trans-frontier conservation areas, co-operation on shared rivers, transport development corridors, etc. These new co-operative strategies are aimed at eradicating blockages that have stood in the way of opening up Africa to the movement of people, goods and services. Their ideal is a seamless, continuous, integrated continental space, to enable the fluid and uninterrupted flow of resources into, through and out of Africa (NEPAD, 2001).

Clearly, one of the major impediments to the realization of this vision is the persistence of armed conflict on the continent – between rebel movements in Bujumbura, Burundi; between the Lord's Resistance Army and the Ugandan military in northern and eastern Uganda; in Darfur on the border between Chad and the Sudan, in Ituri in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), in Côte d'Ivoire, in Sierra Leone, in Liberia, etc.

These hot spots are the target of Mbeki's diplomatic energies and of South African troop deployment on peacekeeping missions across the continent – currently in Burundi, the DRC and Liberia. Here a politics of the thickened boundary – dialogue, negotiation and transitional forms of government – is being pursued, modeled on South Africa's own transition to democracy.

Discontinuity and Fragmentation

In apparent contradiction to this vision of a pan-African politics and a seamless, developmental pan-African space, *and yet the medium through which it is being realised*, are the new boundaries, new fragmentations and new spatial exclusions of contemporary Africa. For this pan Africanism, conceived of more as an instrument of Africa's globalisation than of its identity formation, is not being realized as a great unifying play across the continent's surface, but as the intersection between extraterritorial flows (of information, goods, services, and people) and localized nodes (often taking the form of extraterritorial or partially extraterritorial islands).

As African space is opened up by new flows, it is being torn apart by new frontiers – military camps deployed for the defense of oil contracts or foreign investment; new internationally supported conflicts over natural resources, particularly oil and diamonds; infrastructures – airports, hotels, leisure resorts, conservation areas – to service the needs of foreign nationals or local elites; special enterprise zones or nodal development initiatives, designed to be exempt from the requirements of national or international law for the exploitation of labour or environmental resources; gating, the defensive spatial practice of the urban elite. Spatial closure has become the sign of both global connectivity and upward mobility.

Here some examples from my own city, Johannesburg, illustrate the point.

- Early underground mappings of Johannesburg's gold mines identify the most profitable seams of gold as «payshoot» (DEPARTMENT OF MINES, 1954). Today's maps of the city's streets, blocked by road closures, security fences and electronic gates, closely resemble these subterranean tracings (JOHANNESBURG ROADS AUTHORITY, 2004). Just as the marking of discontinuous geological seams once displayed the city's wealth, so discontinuous streets and avenues now mark and measure the scattering of wealth across its surface. Wealth and spatial discontinuity once again intersect. The city is torn apart by a multitude of frontiers.
- South Africa does not use camps for hosting African refugees or asylum seekers. Instead they are expected to integrate into South African society. Many enter the country

and seek refuge in Johannesburg's decaying high-density inner city suburbs – Hillbrow, Joubert Park, Berea. These have become bysites of intense verbal abuse, physical attack, police harassment and racial profiling. Here, in a strange re-enactment of apartheid, South Africans have violently reasserted their national claims against those whose bodies (marked by darker skin colours or foreign accents) are seen to be outside the law (LANDAU, 2004). Inner city suburbs have been transformed into war zones. The limitations of Mbeki's cosmopolitanism have been exposed.

- Under apartheid law, each South African town or city had its «township». These were spatial institutions, created by apartheid law, for housing black workers. They were separated from the city by geography or infrastructure and excluded from the general laws governing city space. They were places of non-life, urban warehouses for black bodies. Now that apartheid has ended, these townships are, in a sense, no longer there. They have slipped out, leaked and scattered. The city, Johannesburg in particular, has become a Township-Metropolis (MOTSEPE, 2004).

The city is being both opened up and torn apart by the new logics of national and transnational wealth and politics.

Viral Geographies

This concatenation of the open and the closed, of networks and nodes, is also evident in the epidemiology of the HIV / Aids epidemic, a viral disease spread through connectivity and flows (sex), and producing the ultimate exclusion (death) in the midst of the most active parts of the social body (its youth). With HIV / Aids, death is no longer confined to the margins of social experience (amongst the old, the infirm, the weak), but is located at its heart, at the very site of its reproduction (WALKER, REID and CORNELL, 2004).

The geography of the HIV / Aids epidemic is a thoroughly global one. It cannot be separated from the global political economy – disparities of wealth, patterns of international migration, the global production and distribution of pharmaceuticals, global circuits of mass media, music and popular culture. HIV / Aids is unevenly distributed and spread by mobility (POSEL, 2003). The Great North Road through Zambia, for instance, is one of the primary conduits for its transmission throughout central Africa. Zambia, a country with borders to seven other central or southern African states, has one of the highest prevalences of HIV / Aids in Africa. 20% of its

adult population between 15 and 49 years of age was infected in 1999 (VAN KESTEREN and VAN AMERONGEN, 2000).

Thabo Mbeki's attitude towards HIV / Aids has been a dissident one. He disputes the conventionally held view that HIV causes Aids and that its transmission is primarily sexual. This must be taken as a refusal of the contradiction between life (as invoked by ideas like the African Renaissance) and openness (to global flows) on the one hand, and infection, exclusion and death on the other. The idea that connectivity, openness and mobility, the central vectors of his project, are disrupting life and producing vast swathes of poverty and death is, for him, unthinkable.

Yet this logic inheres in the emerging patterns of Africa's modernity, which is episodic, fragmentary and discontinuous. Mbeki's political vision for its renewal is being realised in incomplete and disconnected episodes. His Africa, while whole, is not continuous. It is comprised of islands of wealth in a sea of poverty, of territorialized nodes in networks of deterritorialised power, of internally homogeneous, yet externally disengaged enclaves. This is not the result of a failure of imagination on his part, but rather a product of the kind of spatiality in which his political imagination was honed – that of the Bantustan and the exile encampment. The irony is that extraterritorial connectivity, disjointed territoriality and suspended sovereignty, once features of a politics of expulsion or exile, now lie at the heart of the contemporary geopolitical imagination. Global geopolitics, in the words of Paul Gilroy (2004), have been «South Africanised».

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