

The Bondage of Boundaries

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Three post-colonial taboos have been broken in the Horn of Africa in the 1990s. First there is the UN's temporary 'tutelage' of the Somalis to help them back to self-government - the taboo of recolonisation. Then there is the independence of Eritrea with the cooperation of the government in Ethiopia, of which it was once a province - the taboo of officially sanctioned secession. Third, there is the rest of Ethiopia groping for a federal constitutional order based on ethnic autonomy - the taboo of retribalisation.

Underlying these three broken taboos is a wider question. How many of the state boundaries of present-day Africa will remain intact in 100 years? Until now it has been taken for granted that the last thing to be decolonised in Africa will be the colonial boundaries of the new states. After all, civil wars have been fought and at least 2 million lives lost defending the colonial boundaries of countries such as Nigeria, Zaire, Sudan, and in a special sense, Ethiopia.

Over the next century the outlines of most present-day African states will change in one of two main ways. One will be ethnic self-determination, which will create smaller states, comparable to the separation of Eritrea from Ethiopia. The other will be regional integration, towards larger political communities and economic unions. There is also a third factor which may help modify boundaries in Africa: the return of colonialism in a new form. I shall address this first.

A new form of UN trusteeship came in 1960 when things fell apart in the former Belgian Congo as the imperial power withdrew: on that occasion, the UN intervened to oppose Katanga's secession from the Congo. Officially, the United Nations ceased to be a trusteeship power in Africa as recently as 1990 when Namibia became independent. In Somalia in the 1990s the UN troops have so far ignored the self-proclaimed separatist Republic of Somaliland which has declared its independence from the rest of Somalia. But if the problem of stability and anarchy in Somalia turns out to be insurmountable, the sanctity of Somalia's borders

may one day be re-examined. Separatist Somaliland may yet survive to enjoy a legitimate UN seat - if not this time around, then after the next collapse of the Somali political patchwork. External recolonisation under the banner of humanitarianism is entirely conceivable. Countries like Somalia and Liberia, where central control has collapsed, may invite an inevitable intervention.

Although colonisation may be resurfacing, it is likely to look rather different this time around. A future trusteeship system will be more genuinely international and less western than it was under the old guise. Administering powers for the trusteeship territories could come from Africa and Asia, as well as from the rest of the membership of the UN. For example, might Ethiopia one day be called upon to run Somalia on behalf of the UN? This would assume the survival and transformation of Ethiopia as well as the disappearance of the historic animosities between the Somalis and the ruling elites of Ethiopia. But if Ethiopians and Eritreans can forgive each other, why not the Ethiopians and the Somalis?

Ethiopia was once a black imperial power, annexing neighbouring communities. The future may hold a more benign imperial role for it, though this may take a century to evolve. The recolonisation of the future will not be based on "*the white man's burden*" or the "*lion of Judah*". It may instead be based on a shared human burden: Ethiopia as an administering power on behalf of the UN to help nurture the sovereignties of its smaller neighbours - Somalia and Djibouti being the most likely to need that kind of help in the decades to come.

Return of the tribe

Until now independent Africa has, rhetorically at least, been in favour of regional integration; but in practice it has failed to realise it. Colonially created economic unions like the East African Community were dismantled, piece by piece, by the succeeding post-colonial governments of

Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. On the other hand, independent Africa has (on the whole, successfully) opposed ethnic self-determination. Secessionist bids like those in Nigeria (1967-70) and the Sudan (1955-72) were frustrated, partly as a result of considerable pan-African consensus in favour of the territorial integrity of colonial boundaries. Both the failure of regional integration and the stifling of ethnic self-determination have helped to preserve the inherited borders.

Now post-colonial Africa is being forced to take a fresh look at many of the sacred cows and taboos of the 1960s. Do the credentials of the tribe need to be re-examined, the legitimacy of tribalism be reviewed? Federalism was once taboo almost everywhere outside Nigeria. The Congo (now Zaire) rejected federalism as a solution to its immense propensity for instability. Is that blind post-colonial enthusiasm for the unitary state all over Africa now demanding another look?

Distrust of pluralism was another widespread tendency of post-colonial African ideologies. One-party states were one consequence of that; the 1990s have now witnessed revulsion and rebellion against the one-party system. One beneficiary of this restoration of pluralism has been the democratic process, however fragile. The other has been ethnicity and politicised tribal identity. A question persists as to whether re-democratisation and re-tribalisation cancel each other out.

Another sacred cow of the 1960s was modernisation and development. The abject failure of almost all development techniques adopted so far is forcing African policy-makers to review the relevance of tradition for development and growth. Was the old opposition between the modern and the traditional a little too simplistic? As traditional wisdom is beginning to regain respectability, ethnicity as the foundation of tradition must also have its credentials re-assessed.

The other great modifier of boundaries will, as I indicated, be regional integration in the sense of the unification of two or more countries. Why should this succeed in the future when it failed in the past?

In southern Africa the economies of the smaller countries are already so intricately linked with the economy of the Republic of South Africa that apartheid has been the main stumbling block in legitimising fuller economic cooperation. In the

post-apartheid era, southern Africa is bound to be led by the Republic of South Africa. That South Africa itself will subsequently federate or amalgamate with Lesotho, Swaziland, Botswana and Namibia into an even larger country is certainly one of the possibilities of the 21st century.

Elsewhere in Africa, regional integration may be fostered by desperate economic realities. Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania will almost certainly be compelled to revive the moribund East African Community. Also, in the course of the next century those three countries will at last be forced to bring to fruition the East African Federation that Jomo Kenyatta, Milton Obote and Julius Nyerere talked about in the 1960s and which they never found the political will to create.

Yet another factor favouring regional integration in Africa is the example set abroad. If Europe had been Africa's tutor on the nation-state in the 20th century, it may well become Africa's tutor on how to transcend the nation-state and form larger unions in the next century. Asia has had comparable lessons of pan-regionalism for Africa to examine - the most successful of which has been the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN). And North America may be on its way towards realising a major free-trade area.

Africa's tiny pockets of economic isolationism will look increasingly anachronistic in a world responsive to dynamic regionalist expansionism. The World Bank has been moving towards favouring regional projects and supporting trends towards regional integration in Africa. The influence of western investors may also favour larger markets - against the competition for western investment from Eastern Europe, Russia, India, Vietnam, China and elsewhere. To compete with the demands from elsewhere, Africa must put its house in order and end its excessive economic fragmentation.

In West Africa the situation is especially complex. Nigeria is a giant of nearly 90 million people. Its real rival in the region was never Ghana under Kwame Nkrumah, or Libya under Muammar Qaddafi or distant South Africa. The real rival to post-colonial Nigeria has all along been France. By all measurements of size, resources and population in West Africa, Nigeria should rapidly have become what India is in South Asia or South Africa has been in southern Africa - a hegemonic

power. Nigeria was marginalised not only by its civil war in 1967-70 but also by the massive French presence in West Africa, mainly in its own former colonies but also in Nigeria itself.

In the 21st century France will be withdrawing from West Africa as she gets increasingly involved in the affairs of Eastern and Western Europe. France's West African sphere of influence will be filled by Nigeria - a more natural hegemonic power in West Africa. It will be under those circumstances that Nigeria's own boundaries are likely to expand to incorporate the Republic of Niger (the Hausa link), the Republic of Benin (the Yoruba link) and conceivably Cameroon (part of which anyway nearly became Nigerian in a referendum in 1959).

Another African giant is Zaire. It is already the largest French-speaking country in the world after France; in the course of the 21st century, it will become the largest French-speaking country in the world. In mineral resources it is already the richest French-speaking country. If Zaire attains stability, it may become the magnet for the whole of French-speaking Africa. Will its boundaries remain the same? Congo (Brazzaville) may work out a federal relationship with Zaire in the course of the 21st century. It would help the transition if Zaire reverted to its own older name of Congo (Kinshasa). A confederal relationship of Zaire, Burundi and Rwanda is also conceivable. All three were once ruled by Belgium and have been deepening their relationship as a result of that experience.

In the interplay between culture and regional integration, the role of the Swahili language is also relevant. Kiswahili is already a national language in Tanzania and Kenya; it is widely spoken or understood in Uganda, Zaire, Rwanda, Burundi, Mozambique and parts of Somalia, Sudan and Malawi. It is already the continent's most successful indigenous language. Will regional integration be helped by such a grass-roots *lingua franca*?

What about the role of religion? Africa has a triple heritage of religions: indigenous, Islamic and Christian. Indigenous African religions are tribal and therefore not pan-African. Christianity in Africa does have the power to mobilise believers to political solidarity. But the most alert to the trumpet call of solidarity is Islam.

Yet while Islam in Africa is responsive to global solidarity (Africans identifying with Palestinians, for example) and to national solidarity (e.g. Muslims in Nigeria identifying with each other), it is not a bond of pan-African solidarity to any real extent (e.g. Hausa Muslims in Nigeria identifying with Baganda Muslims in Uganda). Still, Islam is spreading faster in the continent than either Christianity or atheistic ideologies. Its expansion has been aided by the end of colonialism, the decline of western cultural influence, the rise of Muslim petro-missionary activity, the racial tolerance of Islam as compared with the Euro-Christian racist record and Africa's search for new moral codes in the face of post-colonial normative anarchy.

Yet another stimulus for pan-Africanism and regional integration in the 21st century will be the threat of global apartheid which has been unfolding since the end of the cold war. The world may be getting polarised afresh - but this time racially once again.

Global apartheid

A world with only one superpower has strengthened Europe, while weakening regions like Africa. Europe without the former Soviet Union needs America less now than it did in the face of the old menace.

Africa, on the other hand, is probably worse off after the cold war. With the loss of socialist allies in international organisations, Africa has become more marginalised. The resources available for solving its problems are beginning to decline in the face of competing claims on the West and on international lending institutions - claims from the former members of the Warsaw Pact and, increasingly, from Vietnam. India is returning to the capitalist fold, and even China is courting western investment. All these new rivals are creating a black Cinderella on the world stage.

Are blind market forces polarising the globe along racial lines more deeply than ever - with black people almost everywhere at the bottom, and white people in control of global wealth, with Asian people in intermediate levels of stratification? Is this the global apartheid which is emerging, at its sharpest between white and black? Is the racial divide structural (caused by historical and

ecological factors)? Or is the global apartheid overt - caused by conscious racism?

We may indeed be witnessing mankind's temporary return to the world of the *"White Man's Burden"*. Somalia may be a precursor of things to come - a throwback to the words of Rudyard Kipling:

*"Take up the White Man's Burden
The Savage Wars of Peace
Fill full the mouth of famine
And bid the sickness cease*

*The ports ye shall not enter
The roads ye shall not tread
Go make them with your living
And mark them with your dead."*

In the face of such global marginalisation and a new international racial polarisation, African states may be forced to re-examine the potential strengths of African unification. With nations as with individuals it may sometimes be powerfully appropriate to proclaim: *"We must all hang together, or else hang separately"*. But the most fundamental of all changes in the next century and half will be the boundaries of what constitutes Africa itself. Where does Africa end?

The decision as to where Africa ended was not made by Africans themselves but by European cartographers. These map-makers ignored the fact that the Arabian peninsula was once part of Africa and was torn off from it by a colossal earthquake which also created the Rift Valley. Long before Islam there were cultural links across the Red Sea, including the linguistic ones by which Amharic and Tigrinya, two of the leading languages of Ethiopia, have remained Semitic languages like Hebrew and Arabic.

More recently the two sides of the Red Sea have been further linked by two inter-related processes: the spread of the Islamic religion and of the Arabic language. We know that North Africa has been transformed by both. It has become not only Muslim but also Arab. Northern Sudan has also experienced both changes. Northern Nigeria, on the other hand, has experienced religious assimilation without linguistic assimilation.

It is certain that the Muslim part of Africa will be much larger a century from now than it is today. But what about Arab Africa? Will that also be

larger? Will the southern Sudanese have become Arabised? Will Mauritania have become completely Arab? How Arab will Eritreans be a century from now? After all, Egyptians were not Arabs at all when Islam first arrived in an age of limited communication 14 centuries ago.

If more of Africa is Arab a century and a half from now, will this lead to a redefinition of the Arab world? Or will the world at long last accept that the Arabian peninsula is part of Africa? The African continent ends at the Arabian/Persian Gulf, and not on the shores of the Red Sea. Bring out your atlases - and start pencilling in the changes.

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