The Boundaries of a New South Africa

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Introduction

The 'New South Africa' has become a global term of reference yet few are aware of the momentous boundary changes that have been accompanying the changed political power structure.   As Europe demonstrates, after three world wars this century (Cold War included), a redistribution of power generally results in boundary changes.   In the case of South Africa, these changes include the award of Walvis Bay to Namibia in February 1994, South Africa's August integration into the Southern African Development Community (SADC), the reincorporation of the ten homelands, the delimitation of nine new provinces, and the reorganisation of the municipalities including the outer and inner boundaries of every metropolitan area.   The new shape and the lines that distribute South Africa's wealth and power pose new opportunities and new problems.

State Boundaries

With the award this year of Walvis Bay to Namibia, South Africa gave up one of the best deep water ports along the Atlantic coast of Africa, some 11,264 square kilometers of mainland area, 12 guano-rich offshore islands, and strategic assets including a military base and air field. Territorial waters include another 4,600 square kilometers.

The islands had been annexed by the British in 1866 and the exclave was made part of the British Cape Colony in 1878. These territories then passed to the Union of South Africa in 1910 and later to the Republic of South Africa. Before Namibia became independent of South Africa in 1990, Walvis Bay was the leading port and industrial centre (fishing) for the Administration of South West Africa. Thus, Namibia wasted no time in declaring Walvis Bay a Free Trade Zone and a focal point for the development of the newly independent country.

Namibia's gain is not entirely South Africa's loss. By acceding the territory South Africa resolved the only major boundary conflict with its neighbour and furnished the basis for further political and economic cooperation. For example, Namibia is cooperating with both Botswana and South Africa on a project to build a highway linking Johannesburg to the port.

Regional Boundaries

South Africa's new membership in the SADC as of 31 August, 1994 affects boundaries in multiple ways. First, a new SADC sector on defense and security issues reveals a blurring of international boundaries between South Africa and neighbouring states. South Africa's joint decision-making with SADC states to resolve the August-September 1994 crisis in Lesotho marked a break with the more autarchic approach to sovereignty shown by the previous government and initiated a new era in the regional level organisation of bounded space. Now up for debate is the employment of South African expertise and manpower to create a regional peacekeeping force (deploying the SADF in Angola is being approved at this writing). Also under discussion is a plan to expand the role of Armscor into a regional weapons procurement organisation.

Secondly, basic energy resources and transport are becoming areas of cross-boundary cooperation. In one SADC agreement due to be signed shortly, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Swaziland, and Lesotho will be merged into a single energy grid. There is even discussion of eventually moving beyond SADC boundaries and establishing a single African electricity grid from Cape to Cairo that utilises the electric potential of the Congo River for all Africans.[1]

Perhaps less effectively, efforts are also being made to coordinate policy in transport because of the array of disorganised cross-border charges for the shipment of goods between countries. These charges often escalate as one country slaps

another with ridiculous retaliatory tariffs. Moving one small truck of goods across the borders of Mozambique can cost as much as US$300. Until the SADC can rationalise these tariffs and regulations, many exporters and importers will be unable to compete successfully.

Of longer term significance to boundary issues, South Africa's integration within the SADC has encouraged speculation about pan-African unity. There is a basic and underlying disappointment with the system of the nation-state in Africa and regional organisations such as the SADC are seen by some as links in the chain leading to a unified Africa. Innumerable papers, articles and conferences suggest that the 'New South Africa' has the technical expertise, finance, and infrastructure to be the linchpin that can link the Southern African piece of the puzzle together. While these goals may be achievable, they are decades removed. The first major advance to watch for would be attempts to rationalise the three regional organisations in Southern Africa (the SADC, the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, and the South African Customs Union) in a way that defines the Southern African states as a single trading bloc.

The opportunities presented by a blurring of Southern African boundaries can be sources of potential conflict. There are many who fear that more integration and open borders will see South Africa develop into a hegemonic bully within Southern Africa. It is doubtful, however, that South Africa benefits from poor and weak trading partners, many of which are still recovering from war. While low priced South African goods might flood neighbouring economies, the neighbours often return contraband and the unemployed.

A recent reduction in South African border controls for economic reasons (e.g., the SAR has ceased blanket radar monitoring of air activity at R200 million a year) and humanitarian reasons (e.g., the electric border fences have been reduced from fatal to stun) has resulted in a huge influx of drugs, arms, and economic refugees. For example, between January and September of 1994, South Africa arrested and repatriated (mainly by train) 57,333 illegal aliens, of which 43,345 were from Mozambique. South African cooperation within the SADC is likely to continue but proposed protocols to allow the free movement of people across borders awaits the reconstruction of Southern Africa as a whole while issues of security and the development of

energy steam ahead: different than the pattern of European integration.

Reincorporating the Homelands

In late 1993 the four so-called 'independent' homelands of Transkei, Venda, Bophuthatswana, and Ciskei (the TVBC states) and six nominal homelands were legally reincorporated into South Africa. Thus, the quintessential symbol of Grand Apartheid changed on our maps and legal documents. However, the ten homeland administrations have not yet been abolished and the transition may take some time. The apartheid system left many of these regions in shambles with poor infrastructure, rural poverty, inefficient systems of land use, conflicting legal systems, a bureaucratic culture (most of the population is employed in the public sector), and large populations of dependent female heads of households because of the legacy of male migrant workers.

Thus, in place of legal boundaries, there remain landscapes of poverty and despair that must still be addressed as a 'homeland' problem. This is complicated by centuries-old ethnic rivalries marked by cultural faultlines such as the Kei River that separates the Transkei from the Ciskei. In this example, the Ciskei is benefiting from the relocation of the capital of the Eastern Cape at Bisho rather than Umtata leaving in its wake resentment about further peripheralisation of the Transkei.

Provincial Boundaries

Among today's nine provinces, only the Orange Free State remains from the previous four provinces established in 1910. Old magisterial districts from the Cape, Transvaal, and Natal were chopped and swapped to add eight entirely new sets of boundaries. Although discussion and debate lasted from May to November of 1993, the Commission on the Demarcation and Delimitation of States, Provinces, or Regions (CDDR) took only seven weeks (between 8 June and 31 July) to define the provinces. The approaching April 1994 elections established the rushed timetable.

The boundaries were selected with as much concern for political party power as for long-term environmental, economic, and cultural impacts. For instance, the National Party had high expectations of winning the Northern Cape (72%

are Afrikaans speakers) and by political bargaining with the ANC managed to create a province with little economic viability (it is twice the size of any other province but has the lowest gross domestic product). Interestingly the NP negotiated a last-minute excision of three magisterial districts from the North West Province to increase the argument for the Northern Cape's economic viability. That modification brought in enough black voters to swing the provincial vote to the ANC which won by a narrow margin.

The 1993 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act allows for referendums and inter provincial negotiations to resolve disputed provincial boundaries and offered the possibility of 'self-determination' for Afrikaners. There have been attempts to employ the referendum. A movement to obtain the required 160,000 signatures for a referendum on splitting the Eastern Cape in half failed by nearly 100,000 signatures. Demands that Namaqualand be moved from the Northern Cape to the Western Cape also appear to have faded for lack of enthusiasm. A stronger case is building to make Umzimkulu, now an enclave of the Eastern Cape in the KwaZulu-Natal, a part of the latter province on cultural and practical grounds.

Another potential change includes making Pretoria an independent district similar to Washington, D.C. The Ndebele have also complained that the administrative boundaries of Gauteng (formerly the Pretoria-Witwatersrand) cut across their cultural homeland. Many disputes are minor and point to the need for modifications to existing boundaries (e.g. the Bushbuck area between the Northern and Eastern Transvaal Provinces). The location of a 'volkstaat' is more problematic: volkstaat support is greatest in metropolitan suburbia. The political force to achieve an Afrikaner homeland is also questionable: nearly every proposal leaves the Afrikaners a small minority surrounded by a majority black population. Recently, the Volkstaters lowered their demands to negotiations on fourth tier government status.

Overall, it is too early to assess the viability, stability, and popularity of the provinces. For many South Africans, the provinces are an abstract concept since the transfer of powers from the central to regional powers is far from complete. Each province has its own legislature and therefore considerable powers of administration are to be transferred from Pretoria in areas that include cultural affairs, education, environment, regional planning, and tourism. Each competency is negotiated between the province and the appropriate central government ministry in tug-of-war fashion as most ministries are reluctant to relinquish powers. The general lack of experience with local government (or democratic government for that matter) also means that South Africans do not fully understand the process and blame cash-strapped provinces for not delivering on their promises.

Urban Boundaries

Nearly every city, municipality, and community in South Africa is being subjected to major boundary changes that must be completed before the October 1995 national municipal elections date. This total reorganisation of third tier government boundaries is premised upon the goal of reducing the great disparities in income between townships, informal settlements and wealthy suburbs. Thus, scores of 'white' municipalities are being twinned with 'black' townships and unincorporated areas or integrated into larger metropolitan areas with the aim of mixing rich and poor rate payers, experienced and inexperienced government officials, and creating racially integrated local councils.

The outer boundaries of the largest cities were finalised at the end of October and attention has turned to the municipalities and the inner boundaries of metropolitan areas. For instance, the Western Cape province has rationalised 276 local authorities into 93 Transitional Local Councils (TLCs). The entire delimitation process could be repeated again after the October elections if the democratically-elected leadership questions the boundaries set by negotiations between old statutory bodies elected under apartheid conditions and non-statutory bodies that were not elected at all (e.g. leaders of civic organisations).

While the new local government boundaries present opportunities for creating a racially desegregated South Africa, conflict is also inherent in these changes. Many local authorities will vanish altogether and others will become sub-structures within expanding metropolitan areas. This has led to acrimonious debate and some resistance. For instance, the municipality of the Strand has filed a case with the Supreme Court opposing its forceful incorporation into the Cape Town Metropolitan Area (in one poll 97% of the citizens were opposed to incorporation). Some 400 rate payers opposed to paying for expensive

litigation then occupied local government office buildings forcing the council to find private funding for the court action.

The size of boundaries has also been a key area of conflict with political actors either arguing for large boundaries for reasons of resolving disparities in wealth, or for small boundaries to provide accessibility, community cohesiveness, and control over local issues. Generally, the argument for larger boundaries has been winning. This has resulted in some unwieldy government councils such as Greater Cape Town with its 160 councillors. Sometimes expanding the boundaries of municipalities brought in new voters and new political actors that altered the complexion of local government.   The National Party stronghold of Worcester found itself with an ANC mayor while ANC-dominated areas like Robertson found themselves with a National Party mayor.

Conclusion

South Africa's new regional, state, provincial, and urban boundaries provide an excellent illustration of how boundaries are responses to shifting power relations. While these new lines and shapes offer the 'New South Africa' an opportunity to carry out an agenda quite different from the old South Africa, they also present new conflicts. At the moment, the average South African is most keenly aware of how he or she may be affected by changes at the most local level.   In terms of general awareness, the other shoe has yet to drop: boundary changes accompanying even larger shifts in power at the provincial and regional level.   This new distribution of wealth and power represents dramatic changes that may surprise and certainly will affect every South African in the years to come.

1   Hartley, R. (1994) 'Cape to Cairo Grid
          Plan', *Sunday Times,* 4 December 4.

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