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***Partie II Villes secondaires, confins et métropoles : l'innovation au cœur ou à la périphérie ?***

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## **Notes on territorial restructuring in South Africa and France**

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Territoriality has variously been seen in the contexts of space and law (Lefebvre, 1991; Taylor, 1993), behaviourism (Urry, 1985) and power (Sack, 1986; Taylor, 1993) and the like. These conceptions have often dominated the national scale, not least because sovereignty over territory has always been at the forefront of nationalist and separatist movements. As Taylor (1993) has shown, the establishment and dis-establishment of states represent victories for some social groups and defeats for others. Beyond this, we need to understand territoriality at scales of analyses including sub-national and personal levels. As Urry (1985) has commented, one’s conception of oneself and one’s place in society is subtly merged with one’s conception of the spacially limited territory of social interaction.

In practice, territorial organisation can be used as an instrument for socialising people into space, as with apartheid social engineering in South Africa and districting in the United States, or in the general organisation of the state. All these become highly questionable when political changes occur as experiences in countries undergoing dramatic socio-political changes, show.

### **Comparing experiences: South Africa and France**

The way we think of territorial restructuring is heavily influenced by local experiences. In this regard, South African analysts and observers are most likely to think of territorial restructuring as a unique South African experience. This is so because of over-emphasis of the effects of social and spatial engineering in that

country. Indeed, sub-national territorial divisions in apartheid South Africa were manifested in the urban-rural dichotomies and the establishment of bantustans. In those divisions, urban space symbolised the crucibles of western civilisation and white power and privileges that had been far removed from the indigenous populations in rural areas. That separation was anchored on the establishment of institutions such as the bantustans where black people were supposed to live. Attendant legislation and planning policies aimed to construct bantustans as distinct entities. For instance, what was dubbed betterment planning in officialdom was no less than a strategy to consolidate villages into settlement patterns that gave shape to bantustans. No wonder that betterment planning operated along ethnic lines – settlements for the Xhosa, The Zulu, The Sotho and so on, were all separated accordingly. In that way, people may have become socialised into spaces over the years, while the improvement of their material conditions had been extraordinarily difficult. That social engineering has thus effectively created and entrenched an artificial yet a debilitating reciprocity between human life and spatiality.

Nonetheless, France is not immune from the political construction of space. After all, states are a political creation! The French state is made up of a mesh of historical structures that can be subsumed into region, department and commune. All these reflect moments in the history of France. The smallest administrative unit, the commune is an interesting case because it has survived political changes in France since the Middle Ages. The debate among French scholars is how to deal with that institution in the face of demands for viable administration and the provision of services. However, the consideration of the commune as a cultural heritage imposes severe limitation on how those units could be realigned with evolving national and

economic imperatives. Interestingly, a commune such as the Orange in the north west of France is said to be home to conservative French who would like to keep their ‘national heritage.’ For South African observers, the Orange commune seems to share some commonalities with conservative Afrikaners of Orania (Irish scholars might wish to extend the analysis further!).

The concept of a territory as a cultural heritage could well imply that France does not require territorial restructuring at the sub-national level. This would be a simplistic view of the much stronger sub-national restructuring that is sweeping across the North and the South as a result of market forces, amongst other things. For France, the question is how the 36 000 or so communes would offer viable infrastructure and services in the face of population dynamics and economic changes. Critiques of globalisation could argue that the communes represent the arena of local resistance and articulation. Their survival, though, hinges on what happens at the region and/or department.

South African spaces also exhibit cultural dimensions. Urban areas demand the observation of white culture, which is often contested when non-whites move in. Thus, at the dawn of the new political order, the walls of the empirical apartheid city were pulled down and, as some would say, the city became a jungle. It suffices to say that transformation in urban areas is not overtly contested on cultural terms, culture is encoded in how the city should work. The cultural aspect is openly defended in rural areas where black territories are seen as representing African culture. Indeed, apartheid ideologues aimed to achieve the ‘Africanisation of territories’ through the institution of chieftaincy. Like the commune, those territories could well be defended

as a cultural heritage. The difference between ‘cultural territories’ in South Africa and France is that the need for change is greater in South Africa than in France. Thus, the urgent need for change in South Africa finds expression in projects that aim to alter the apartheid landscape. That urgency is absent in France, and change there is likely to occur as a result of political reform rather than a new political dispensation.

It should be pointed out that a new political dispensation does not necessarily guarantee radical changes. The three-tier nature of the state in South Africa has remained much the same after 1994, with the establishment of the new nine provinces to replace the four that existed between 1910 and 1993. However, the nine provinces have brought no significant changes in the organisation of territories for ethnic groups as envisioned by apartheid. Nevertheless, the municipal level has experienced radical changes in organisation and content. How these will infuse new meanings of territoriality still has to be assessed.

On the whole, the two countries are involved in the search for viable internal territorial units under very different conditions. They are in search of new territorial symbols whose meanings are contested at national and sub-national levels. As Paasi (1991, p. 245) wrote, ‘territorial symbols are often abstract of group solidarity embodying the actions of political, economic, and cultural institutions in the continual reproduction and legitimisation of the system of practices that characterise the territorial unit concerned.’ Nevertheless, political processes such as the demarcation of provinces and municipalities have the potential to either alter or reinforce inherited territorial symbols. These are the possible outcomes of South Africa’s new provinces and municipalities and France’s new phase of decentralisation.

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