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# Migration and the Lived Spaces of Southern Africa

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When the *Mail & Guardian* reported on July 7, 1997, that two Mozambicans, a mother and child, had been devoured by lions in the Kruger National Park while their group tried to enter South Africa illegally, the story seemed to be little more than the perfunctory account of two lives lost in a part of the world that had seen more than its fair share of death. Park officials explained that about three hundred Mozambican "refugees" try to enter South Africa via the park every month and that some will die in the process. What else was there to say?

It probably did not occur to the officials, the reporters, nor most of the readers that this incident also represented an aspect of the international relations of the region. Yet in a few short paragraphs, the story captured an important segment of the struggles and contradictions that constitute southern Africa—a glimpse at the subjective reality of migration in that region today. I hope to show in this article that such lived experiences, rather than being the residue left over after the machinations of "grand politics" have played themselves out, are a crucial component of international relations and that our theoretical understanding of the field will remain incomplete unless the experiences of everyday life are incorporated.

In general, the analysis of international relations has eschewed the experiences of everyday life. A quick glance at the average IR textbook confirms that the field still exists in a rarefied realm occupied by statesmen (and sometimes stateswomen) and diplomats, the leaders of corporations, the media, and maybe even the leaders of transnational NGOs. The average person, however, be they worker, peasant or migrant, is not present in this space. No wonder, then, that the theories that emerge from this field tend to reaffirm this

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absence, thus masking the fact that international relations are, in the end, constituted in the very spaces of everyday life.

I believe that the focus on the lived experience of international relations is crucial for a number of reasons. For one, IR theory has consistently ignored such experiences and it thus became a part of the mystification of global realities in which individuals encounter global politics as the sum of anonymously determined oppressive forces, rather than as the products of their daily practices in spaces articulated in complex social relations. Furthermore, an emphasis on lived experiences holds the potential to imbue IR theory with an emancipatory potential that it has historically failed to realize. It is in that the recognition of the contradictions between the lived experiences and the ideological claims in which they are embedded that a potential for emancipatory action exists and an IR theory that does not capture that dynamic fails to account for the lived reality it attempts to explain.

This article's emphasis on labor migration in southern Africa is particularly suited to bring out the importance of these lived spaces to IR theory. Building on Lefebvre's approach to social space, I highlight patterns of spatial practice that have developed over the past century and a half and juxtapose these to hegemonic representations of space. The lived spaces—that is, the spaces where these contradictions materialize—are thus key to understanding the historical transitions in the region. Migrant workers, far from being exclusively victims of colonial and apartheid policies, emerge as active participants in shaping the space we recognize as southern Africa today. Furthermore, their notions of space may well be a foundation for a southern Africa in which the legacy of apartheid is overcome not only in abstract legal terms but also in the concrete spaces of everyday life.

In the section that follows, I provide a short outline of Lefebvre's approach to everyday life and social space. Then three further sections analyzing the contradictions of social space that led to the historical trajectory of social space in the region. In a concluding section, I recap the relevance of these analyses for our understanding of international relations and IR theory.

## Spaces and Everyday Life in International Relations

IR theory on the whole has persisted in embracing the view of space-as-container in its treatment of the state and the global system. Its practitioners spend little time thinking about space: they assume that the question of space has already been settled. Even if

it is problematized in terms of power relations rather than in institutional terms, the state is often seen as a fixed unit "of secure sovereign space,"[1] and thus as a container of society.[2] Peter Taylor has shown that such an "embedded statism"[3] is not an accident. After all, the evolution of the social sciences has mirrored the evolution of the modern territorial state. However, while the social sciences cannot be faulted for the fact that their "spatial ontology was materially based upon a very real spatial congruence of social activities,"[4] their failure to problematize this container image leads one to a key question: Is it error or is it ideology? The latter is more likely. If so, who promotes it? Who exploits it? And why and how do they do so?"[5]

The answer to this question, according to Henri Lefebvre, lies in a critique of everyday life, that contested place characterized by the mystifications of a hegemonic system and the struggle to overcome them. Throughout his work, Lefebvre advocates an analysis of concrete social realities, and consequently he focuses on the apprehension of "humble, familiar, everyday objects." Our search for humanity is, in his eyes, "too deep, in the clouds or in mysteries, whereas it [life] is waiting for us, besieging us on all sides." He considers the abstraction of social relations, for example the effort to turn concrete analysis of the lives of peasants or workers into an abstract theory about peasant or worker life, to be useless and without emancipatory potential. Instead, he proposed a focus on the totality of social life, which, while not making the subordinate position of the peasant or worker any more bearable, nevertheless puts this contradiction into sharp relief and thus provides the opportunity for humanity to face "a new imperative: the practical, effective transformation of things as they are."[6]

Lefebvre believes that the mystifications through which workers see themselves as free and equal to any other citizen are always only tenuous because the belief in freedom and equality also makes it possible to engage in action to demand that this mystical freedom and equality be made real.[7] This is the contribution of dialectical thinking for Lefebvre: Analysis of the dynamic unity of opposing forces reveals the possibilities for transformation. The common thread visible in his critique of liberal political economy is an emphasis on the contradiction between the ideological concept of the autonomous individual and the actual loneliness of the atomized person confronting the machinery of capitalism. As I stressed above, Lefebvre sees the possibility of transformation in the recognition and thus the demystification of this contradiction.

Lefebvre's interrogations of everyday life point to a moment where "tout converge dans le problème de l'espace."[8] After all, the

focus on the actually lived experiences implied attention to the space where these experiences took place. However, his explicit emphasis on space expands the traditional dialectic of historicity and sociality to what Soja calls a trialectic of sociality, historicity, and spatiality.[9] In Lefebvre's words, "space does not eliminate the other materials or resources that play a part in the sociopolitical arena. Rather, it brings them together and in a sense substitutes itself for each factor separately by enveloping it."[10]

Thus, the convergence of everything in the problem of space remedies what Lefebvre perceives as the separation of the dialectic method from spatiality.[11] Hitherto, the dialectic principle of thesis-antithesis-synthesis had mostly been conceptualized in temporal terms, which posited the workings of the dynamic unity of opposing forces to unfold along a historical trajectory. This privileging of historicity at the expense of spatiality had obvious implications for theory and practice, especially with respect to privileging the abstract over the concrete and the curious tendency to accept positivism and social engineering in both critical and mainstream social theory. A "double illusion" of the transparency and opacity has thus informed past philosophical debates of space.[12] The idealist approach, reflecting the former illusion, focused on space as mental construct understood through its representations; materialists, on the other hand, emphasized an objective, "opaque" space as a natural thing.[13] However, it would be incorrect to regard this double illusion as a conflict of competing philosophies; instead, each is linked to the other so that "the rational is thus naturalized, while nature cloaks itself in nostalgias which supplant rationality."[14]

Lefebvre's approach to social space is characterized by two dialectical movements, the dialectic of spatial terms and the dialectic of historical forms. The former consists of a "conceptual triad," consisting of spatial practice, representations of space, and spaces of representations (or lived space: *espace vécu*). Spatial practice refers to the manner in which social forces produce the spatial structures through which they organize their practices and that is directly apprehensible by the senses. It "is thus presented as both the medium and the outcome of human activity, behavior, and experience."[15] Representations of space refer to the manner in which space is conceived of in a society by those who participate in the creation of the dominant discourses—the manner in which the relations of production impose order. "Such order is constituted via control over knowledge, signs, and codes: over the means of deciphering spatial practice and hence over the production of spatial knowledge."[16] Spaces of representation, finally, incorporate

both of the previous legs of the triad and refer to "space as directly *lived*, with all its intractability intact, a space that stretches across images and symbols that accompany it, the space of inhabitants and users."[17] This focus on the actual, lived spaces enables us to analyze "counterspaces, spaces of resistance to the dominant order."[18]

The connection between Lefebvre's dialectics of spatial terms and historical forms lies in the manner in which the contradictions between the spatial terms of each historical form determine their historical movement, in particular the emergence of different spatial forms.[19] Lefebvre has identified four historical forms: absolute space, historical space, abstract space, and differentiated space, and the historical dialectic of social space is situated in the articulation of the various historical forms.

Absolute space is the space of "consanguinity, soil, and language."[20] It arises from fragments of nature that were chosen for their inherent qualities of place (often for ritual reasons), but that lost their naturalness the moment they were consecrated and thus became occupied by political forces. Absolute space is both "civil and religious,"[21] preserving unmediated relationships while also *establishing the beginnings of an administrative apparatus. It is thus* already differentiated between producers (peasants and artisans) and those who appropriated the products of their labor (priests and princes). In terms of Lefebvre's dialectic of spatial terms, however, the gap between spatial practice, representations of space, and lived spaces is not yet large. The primacy of place persists in that absolute space is still contained in the confines of the village or town. Nevertheless, absolute space already contains within it the contradiction between the political space of the town juxtaposed to the seemingly empty space wrested from nature that surrounds it. The forces of history thus "smashed naturalness forever and upon its ruins established the space of accumulation"[22]—historical space.

Historical space is thus the space of the town that controls its surrounding countryside, the space of accumulation, beginning with but not limited to the primitive accumulation described by Marx. Historical space is characterized by production for exchange, where "exchange value becomes general through the circulation of gold and silver."[23] The crucial characteristic of historical space, for Lefebvre, is the separation of productive labor from the "the process of reproduction which perpetuated social life."[24] However, this very separation, the independence of the labor process from social reproduction, represents a key contradiction of historical space. It permits the transformation of concrete labor *into abstract labor, and with it the establishment of abstract space* upon historical space.

Abstract space is the space of generalized exchange relations—of mass production, and consumption; it is the space of bureaucratic power, the space of modernity—in short, the space of capitalism. It is a space of wealth and power that expends violence,

> which subordinates and totalizes the various aspects of social practice—legislation, culture, knowledge, education—within a determined space; namely the space of the ruling class's hegemony over its people and over the nationhood that it has arrogated.[25]

Abstract space is a space dominated by representations of space that "amounts to abstraction wielding awesome reductionistic powers vis-à-vis 'lived' experience."[26] In other words, the qualitatively experienced aspects of social life tend to be replaced by abstract measurements and quantifications

> exemplified in the mass production, economic rationalization, social scientific management of space, urban planning, and bureaucratically controlled mass consumption that increasingly determine the experience of citizens in capitalist societies.[27]

While abstract space aims to flatten difference and homogenize social life, it, like the other spatial forms, harbors within it contradictions that have the potential to lead to a new spatial form, that of differential space in which exactly that which abstract space tends to homogenize—the lived experience of citizens, the spaces of everyday life—make possible humanized social relations.

I propose to investigate southern African spaces, especially as they relate to migration, from within this framework. Migration has long been a key factor in constituting the southern African region. Throughout the past century and a half, migration has made possible the production of abstract space in southern Africa and, at the same time, preserved within its interstices the absolute and historical spaces that preceded it. More importantly, as shown below, migration has the potential to foster the creation of new differential spaces "whose historicity and sociality are conveyed by the bodies that inhabit or traverse them."[28]

## From Absolute to Historical Space

An analysis of the contradictions of abstract space as they play out in the lived experiences of migrants in postapartheid southern Africa requires at least a cursory evaluation of the processes and

contradictions that marked absolute and historical spaces as they emerged and, in particular, as they were transformed in the establishment of capitalism and thus abstract space over the past century.

The exact nature of the processes that led to the peopling of southern Africa are still unclear; however, it is clear that the complexity of relations between the ancestors of the San and Khoikhoi and Bantu farmers defied the easy chronological explanations advanced by the early European historiography that was influenced by European ideas of migration and settlement.[29] However, there is little doubt that migration and particularly shifts in the directions of migration in response to environmental factors influenced the processes that led to the emergence of mixed farming communities. Such communities represented the first larger-scale settlements in southern Africa.

The spread of Iron Age culture, again, is assumed to have come about through a mix of the migration of peoples, the migration of knowledge, and the resulting adaptation of these new techniques in many venues. As political communities split, chiefly families migrated and established their rule over new constituencies with less centralized forms of rule. Cattle herding made possible not only status distinctions in these communities, but also the extension of power over larger areas, leading to sociopolitical agglomerations characterized by "a substantial central settlement surrounded at a distance by several smaller centers, each at the hub of network of smaller villages and hamlets."[30]

From Lefebvre's perspective, this early history marks the beginning of absolute space. Spatial practice, representations of space and lived spaces, were not yet marked by significant internal contradictions. The mix of herding, hunting, and limited agriculture reflected a relationship to nature that was still characterized more by appropriation than domination, yet these spaces already contained within them the potentials for transformation, in that cattle herding made possible a process of accumulation that transcended daily life.

In his discussion of the Karanga states, Malyn Newitt points out the similarities between the establishment and maintenance of states in Europe and southern Africa, as in the manner in which state power was underwritten by the initial separation of labor from the reproduction of the family.[31] Kiteve peasants, for example, were required to work on chiefly fields for a certain number days. This, in turn, facilitated another crucial development in the production of historical space—the deepening of regional trade flows that linked the wealth of East African port cities and the trade of goods produced in the interior through routes that "criss-crossed the high

veldt and linked its communities with neighbors beyond the Limpopo or north of the Zambezi."[32] As part of this general change, production for exchange rose in importance and, while not yet generalized, certainly decreased production for use in the mix of labor expended. In summary, then, most of the regional flows, including that of migrants, that characterized southern Africa prior to the penetration of the subcontinent by Europeans were determined by the particular circumstances of production at various locations and followed an East-West direction.

European settlement in southern Africa, first in Mozambique and later in the Cape Colony, represented a dramatic intrusion that was to change spatial practice, representations of space, and, consequently, the lived spaces in southern Africa. Initially participating in established circuits of exchange, the different goals of Europeans quickly brought them into conflicts with Africans. Driven by these conflicts, as well as those between the *voortrekkers* and the British and those between various African states, a new North-South pattern of migrations and flows emerged in the early parts of the nineteenth century that established new links connecting the Cape all the way to Lake Tanganyika to the north. These movements in turn led to the creation of fewer but larger African states, far more organized and bureaucratized than the smaller chiefdoms that had coexisted with one another.[33]

In short, we witness here the emergence of historical spaces in the beginnings of accumulation and the "relational networks of markets and communications"[34] in the region. European demands for resources and particularly for labor added new contradictions to the historical space, which set in motion the process that eventually led to the rise of abstract space. Lefebvre's key contradiction in historical space is the separation of productive labor from the general process of reproduction, which in turn leads to the emergence of abstract labor, labor as a commodity, and thus a generalized system of accumulation—and thus, abstract space. The beginnings of labor migration in the region thus represent the first step toward superimposing an abstract capitalist space on the region.

## From Historical to Abstract Space

### *Spatial Practice*

Until the middle of the nineteenth century, African farmers had a variety of options that allowed for social reproduction outside of the wage-labor economy.[35] The ability to exercise these options led

to a significant labor shortage in European agriculture. However, a variety of causes, ranging from environmental factors to local conflicts to taxes and forced labor requirements imposed by colonial governments, created regional variations in the degree to which these options could be exercise in any given community. Hence, some communities were in need of external sources of employment, while others were not. The case of sugar production in the Natal Colony highlights these complex relations.

By 1857, with sugar prices at an all-time high, the owners of the Natal sugar plantations began to exert pressure on the colonial administration to permit additional labor immigration. As a result of these efforts, the immigration of indentured workers from India and the recruitment of workers from southern Mozambique were legally sanctioned after 1860. While a crash in the sugar markets a few years later led to the end of Indian immigration, the recruitment of migrants from the north was seen as an opportunity to solve the labor shortage for the foreseeable future. Agents established reception huts in Lourenčo Marques and paid the Portuguese governor a passport fee of fifteen shillings for each worker.[36] As early as 1871, the Portuguese government demanded a formal agreement to regulate this trade in labor. An agreement was adopted in 1875, and by 1879 some fifteen thousand workers from southern Mozambique were employed in Natal.[37]

The discovery of diamonds in Kimberley led to a new influx of workers attracted by the higher wages paid at the mines. De Kiewiet estimated that about one hundred thousand Africans worked in the diamond fields between 1881 and 1895, providing support and livelihood for some four hundred thousand dependents who had joined them.[38] While organized recruitment of labor beyond the borders of the Orange Free State and Natal had increased dramatically with the increase in demand, a large number of Africans continued to make their way to the mines on their own and along clandestine routes.[39] Once De Beers had monopolized the diamond business, such flexibility was eliminated.

The discovery in 1886 of gold at the Witwatersrand led to a significant expansion of the regional market for labor. Gold mining in South Africa involved deep underground work that was both capital and labor intensive. Whereas De Beers had quickly monopolized the diamond mining, gold mining remained a relatively competitive business. The varying quality of the ore posed a problem for mine owners in that the richer mines had an incentive to improve labor conditions and offer higher wages in order to attract labor, while the poorer mines needed lower wages in order to remain profitable. Beginning with the Native Labour Organization

(1893) and the Native Labour Supply Association (1896), mine owners solved the competition problem through the adoption of organized labor recruiting to flood the market with migrant workers while pushing through a reduction in wages.[40] By 1899, seventy thousand Mozambicans worked in the gold mines, which amounted to 75 percent of the total labor force. "The phenomenal success of management in bringing through and holding a wage reduction of well over 25% while at the same time increasing the workforce by 21% depended on the recruitment of cheap Mozambican labour."[41] Ultimately, the very success of the gold mining industry in South Africa depended on the availability of Mozambican labor, without which the relatively marginal ores could not have been extracted profitably.

A similar process of organizing flows of migrant labor for both agricultural and mining activities characterized neighboring colonies—in particular, South West Africa and Southern Rhodesia. Beginning in the early years of the twentieth century and accelerating in the years between the two world wars, labor recruiting in South West Africa, for example, not only integrated the various parts of the colony but also created flows across borders in Bechuanaland, Angola, Northern Rhodesia, and even the Cape Province.[42]

By 1946, Witwatersrand Native Labour Association (WNLA) had created an elaborate network of recruiting stations: six in Bechuanaland; thirteen in Nyasaland; twenty in Mozambique (South); five in South West Africa; four in Northern Rhodes; and two in Southern Rhodesia. Many of these stations were strategically placed to attract workers from areas with which South Africa had no formal recruiting agreement. The stations in Bechuanaland's Okavango area, for example, were intended to attract Angolan workers, and the stations in Nyasaland also attempted to recruit workers from northern Mozambique.[43] Recruiting in Basotholand and Swaziland was organized by a separate organization that had eight stations in each area.

In short, migrant labor was crucial in bringing about the mineral revolution between the 1880s and 1910, which in turn provided the basis for the industrialization of South Africa. By the 1970s, this system had become so entrenched that it constituted a defining characteristic of southern Africa. In terms of spatial practice, therefore, labor migration—both in the form of the movement of people organized along bureaucratic lines and as an individual practice in search of income—thus played a key role in the consolidation of the regional networks that make up southern Africa. The institutionalization of labor migration also helped fix

the North-South pattern of flows and was a crucial part of the production of modern southern Africa.

*Representations of Space*

Representations of space, in Lefebvre's perspective, reflect the manner in which space is conceived of in a society. It is the space of "technocratic subdividers and social engineers—all of whom identify what is lived and what is perceived with what is conceived."[44] This description could not be more fitting for southern Africa during the period under discussion. Although the spatial practices in which social forces engaged during the period in question without doubt contributed to the production of the regional space we call southern Africa, that very space was conceived of in terms of territorially bounded national states. Imbued with the ideology of nationalism emanating from Europe, the conception of territorial space was considered the sole spatial form in which to secure a political community. The efforts of the *trekboers* to establish their own republics after 1850 were clear reflections of this trend.

The aftermath of the Berlin conference witnessed the concerted efforts of the colonial powers in the region to demonstrate "effective occupation" and to display "symbols of sovereignty" in the territories they were allocated as a result of the conference, thus reinforcing the territorial notion of space. Such conceptions of space also reflected the emerging abstract space. Sovereign space is, after all, abstract space—it "implies a space against which violence is directed"[45]—a violence that, in turn, derives from the dynamics of accumulation and unification and that aims to bring about "a unified and hence homogenous society."[46]

The territorial representation of space, while conceived of in the image of European national states, contained one further element that represented a disturbance in the abstract space being created: race. Early European discursive conceptualization of their contact with the indigenous population reflected religions and civilizational prejudices that served as the moral justification of the expropriation of their land, cattle, and labor, rather than the imputed racial differences.[47] However, these earlier forms of racialist thinking still held open the possibilities of conversion and/or self-improvement. Consequently, the conceived spaces did not yet include a clear spatial separation between Africans and Europeans, and both lived in relative proximity to each other. Even sexual relations reflected the relatively lax attitudes toward spatial/racial mixing.[48] In other words, Africans and Europeans, while unequal, were nevertheless still considered members of the same community.

During the nineteenth century, however, racial thinking shifted decisively toward a "scientific" approach to race that held that differences between the races were permanent and not erasable through religious conversion or "civilizing influences." These changes, in turn, reinforced Boer racial conceptualizations based on their peculiar interpretations of the Old Testament.

It is no accident that this hardening in racialist thinking coincided with the efforts to consolidate territorial states. Foucault's concept of governmentality is extremely helpful in understanding these shifts.[49] The shift toward the "science of government" and the adoption of the concept of "population" as an entity to be apprehended by scientific means were part and parcel of this consolidation of the territorial state everywhere. Consequently, once they had created their new republics, the Boers began to implement the spatial segregation of Africans from Europeans. After the establishment of the Union, these antecedents were formalized in the Land Act of 1913 (and its later amendments), which established the "native reserves" or "homelands" and, in turn, served as the basis for the policies of apartheid instituted after 1948. These discourses of space and race ultimately had their meeting point in the body. Spaces were identified by the skin color of those who were permitted to live through them. It was possible to read off the body of an individual whether or not that individual was in the proper space: the pass laws in South Africa and the housing of labor in hostels and compounds adjacent to mines and, later, manufacturing facilities reflected this racialization of space in southern Africa.

### *Lived Spaces*

The contradictions between spatial practices and the representations of space manifested themselves in the lived spaces of migrants. The ability of Africans to move easily from mine to mine in search of better wages or working conditions quickly led to efforts to limit their ability to do so. The compound systems, pass laws, and the monopolization of recruitment efforts were all designed to control the flow of migrants to South Africa and to contain them in specific spaces after they arrived. The treatment of migrant workers during the late 1800s thus anticipated the manner in which the majority of the Africa population of South Africa was to be treated after 1910 and again after 1948.

Similarly, South African and Portuguese authorities attempted to imprint the stamp of the state onto the flows of migrants. From the first agreement to permit recruitment in 1857, via the conventions

of 1909 and 1929 to the 1964 agreement, both states attempted in varying ways to make the flow of labor subject to their tight control, while vying for advantageous terms regarding tax rates, wage remittances, and so on.[50] Similar experiences hold true for other source and destination states, in particular the BLS states, southern Rhodesia and Southwest Africa.

While the flows of migrants that the planners and practitioners hoped to create did materialize, they did so in ways that were often not controlled by these planners. Similarly, the racialized space that formed the basis of the apartheid ideology never really created the neat segregation envisioned by its advocates. The needs of individual migrants and employers often conspired to create conditions on the ground that were quite different from those envisioned by the racial planners. The forced removals from the 1960s onward are in part testament to the state's inability to control these spaces in the decades after the 1913 Land Act.

Because proletarianized labor has no choice but to sell its labor power, migrants resisted the process of proletarianization at every stage. Most viewed their migrations to the mines in strictly utilitarian terms as a means to acquire resources not available at home. Connections with home were maintained, even at times when poor transportation options made such efforts difficult to pursue. In the early years, indigenous peoples left the mines when hunting season came or the cold winter temperatures made life around Kimberley or Johannesburg too miserable. Harvest time was also an important reason to leave for home.[51] As a result, employers were forced to offer higher wages to entice workers to stay. Only after the introduction of the compound system, changes in pay periods, and the bureaucratization of the recruiting process was the presence of the workers assured.

Migrants made every effort to evade organized recruiting efforts so as to maintain their choices of employment locations and time period. In the early years of the Kimberley mine, large numbers arrived on their own and served as informal references for family members or friends who had an interest in coming to the mine. Even after the implementation of the large-scale recruitment apparatus outlined above, migrants from southern Mozambique and other source areas made every effort to circumvent the formal recruitment mechanisms:

> Clandestine emigration allowed the African miner an element of choice as to where and for how long he worked, and of course enabled him to evade the deferred pay arrangements. In 1967 it

> was estimated that although only 80,000 Mozambicans were working on official contracts in South African mines, there were altogether 300,000 workers in South Africa.[52]

This element of clandestine migration continues to play a significant role to this day. While the current arguments about illegal immigration into South Africa are certainly overblown, there is nevertheless sufficient evidence that migrants continue to view South Africa as a place for potential employment and that they are willing to cross borders, either legally or illegally, to reach these opportunities.

Initially, the desire to participate in migration, preferably outside of controlled channels, was driven by the opportunities cash income provided. On the whole, "working in Kimberly combined a steady and high wage with the element of a lottery: by finding and safely disposing of a valuable diamond, a man was catapulted upwards in social hierarchy"[53]—that is, in the social hierarchy at home. Upon returning home, migrants were able to evade the power of elders in their communities since their resources earned allowed them to acquire cattle and tools independently and thus pay bride wealth, the ultimate means by which elders controlled the younger men in their kin group.[54]

The influx of remitted wages into southern Mozambique, for example, led to a dramatic increase in consumption of imported goods so that the practices of the migrants also contributed to the establishment of commodity flows that had not existed before.[55] Similarly, remittances from work in South Africa helped supplement incomes of Botswana families, permitting the purchase of plows and other agricultural implements or the hiring out of plowing, which in turn improved agricultural productivity and contributed the economic diversification in an area that suffered from significant climatic constraints on agriculture.[56] Migrant workers therefore used employment in South Africa as a means to advance their family or individual goals, just as the mine owners were using the workers to produce gold from ore that, without access to cheap labor, would not have constituted a profitable resource.

Working in the mines was also a rite of passage—an introduction to adulthood. Miners displayed what Moodie and Ndatshe call "fierce masculinity,"[57] often strengthened by the fact that groups of friends from one area migrated together. "Mine migration, at least before the 1970s, gave rise to variant strains of migrant culture whose common motif was commitment to and satisfaction of patriarchal proprietorship over a rural homestead."[58] This gendered nature of migration has persisted to this day. Dodson shows that

migration is still heavily a male centered activity, although she points to the likelihood that female migration, which is far more likely to be illegal than that of male migration, is probably undercounted.[59]

The period between 1880 and 1970 witnessed the emergence of abstract space in southern Africa. The transition was driven by the contradictions inherent in the dialectic of spatial terms of that period. These contradictions manifested themselves in the everyday lives of migrants. The spatial practices both of the Chamber of Mines and the migrants built a regional network of flows with a firmly established North-South pattern of flows. At the same time, southern African space was increasingly conceived in terms of fixed territorial units containing clearly identifiable societies. As a result, a migrant's labor was increasingly separated from the social reproduction of the migrant's household. Resistance to proletarianization was pronounced, and to some extent this slowed the formation of abstract space. By the 1970s, however, migrant labor had indeed become abstract labor.

## The Consolidation of Abstract Space

One key aspect of Lefebvre's dialectic of spatial history is that earlier forms of space do not cease to exist but are subsumed in the later forms. Absolute space, for example, survives in part as the basis for lived spaces, as places of political or religious symbolism.[60] Similarly, in the southern Africa case, aspects of historical space, such as the village and its surrounding countryside, survived in the context of the abstract space, enabling limited opportunities of maintaining the unity of labor and reproduction.

This survival was directly related to the racially stratified nature of southern African space, in the case of migrants, for example, their families were generally not permitted to join them at their place of employment, and thus the families maintained village life, albeit in a form quite different from the premigration era. As a result, the process of producing an abstract southern African space was not really completed until the legally sanctioned racial divisions were abolished, first in the Portuguese colonies, then in Zimbabwe and Namibia, and finally, in 1996, in South Africa. In short, it was not until after 1996 that the production of abstract space in southern Africa—a space governed exclusively by the logic of capital accumulation and commodity exchange—was complete.

As I pointed out above, this abstract space is one in which spatial practice and lived spaces recede into the background: Representations of space dominate. In southern Africa, the experiences

of migrant workers, especially miners, were therefore increasingly determined by rationalization, planning, and bureaucratic control as mining became one of the largest sources of employment in South Africa, reaching a level of 534,255 in 1986.[61]

These bureaucratic manipulations are evident in the fluctuation of the share of foreign workers in the total. James has pointed out that the degree to which foreign miners were employed has been subject to internal dynamics in that they were utilized as a means to blunt the power of South African miners, but also to external dynamics when Zimbabwe or Malawi, for example, changed their view of migration.[62] Since the late 1980s, the mines have gone through a massive retrenchment, which by 2000 had brought down employment levels to 197,537.[63] The burden of retrenchment has been born more by South African miners than their regional counterparts. Between 1978 and 1984, the share of foreign miners had declined from almost 48 percent to about 42 percent, only to increase again to almost 50 percent by 1997.[64] There is little doubt that the success of unionization among South African miners and the recognition of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) in 1984 are directly connected to the reversal of hiring strategy.[65] However, the benefits of hiring nonunion foreign labor ended when the NUM won bargaining rights for all miners. Many foreign miners were permitted to vote in the 1994 elections, and since then two offers for permanent residency have been made.

Directly related to the dramatic retrenchments in the gold-mining sector is the emergence of a relatively new phenomenon—subcontractors who employ retrenched miners (as well as novices), often in positions that are no different than the ones they occupied before they were laid off, albeit at dramatically reduced wages and virtually without benefits.[66] Foreign miners still constituted 33 percent of total subcontract employees, but that number is below the percentage for regular employees, which is about 50 percent. These patterns derive from the more specialized nature of the jobs that subcontractors are hired to perform. To the extent that these involve core production activities, they require experienced workers who predominantly come from Lesotho and Mozambique.[67] Equally important, reduced availability of employment opportunities through formal migration channels has also increased the degree of informal migration, not just to South Africa, the most publicized case, but also to other states in the region.[68]

A further factor in the decline of mine migration lies in post-apartheid South Africa's changed role in the region, both as a political and an economic actor. The adoption of the Growth, Employment, and Redistribution program (GEAR) in 1996 represented a

significant departure from the more radical rhetoric of the pre-1990 ANC. As Ahwireng-Obeng and McGowan point out, the key principle underlying the GEAR strategy is that the inequalities brought about by the long history of discrimination and apartheid are not to be remedied through internal redistribution but through a strategy of economic growth that is founded on a significant expansion of nonmineral exports to the rest of Africa, in particular southern Africa.[69]

In line with this goal, although not necessarily driven by it, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) has transformed itself into a proponent of a regional free-trade zone and has become a vehicle through which South African capital, as the springboard of global financial interests, has extended its penetration of the region. This is not to say that such penetration is new: The spatial practice of the past century has always been based on such a penetration. However, as Mlambo has pointed out, the 1970s and 1980s were characterized by a significant degree of capital flight from the region, in particular from South Africa.[70] Since the end of the apartheid government, such capital flows have been redirected to the region, thus increasing South African penetration significantly. We see, therefore, that the region's integration into the global economy is currently being rearticulated according to the abstract logic of neoliberalism. This logic manifests itself in any number of regional projects, of which the Maputo Development Corridor project is but the most obvious example; other spatial-development initiatives are to follow a similar direction. These spatial patterns of action are, of course, not new; they are simply a reaffirmation of social spaces that have existed ever since the great trek and the *mfecane*.

This strategy, especially in light of the high level of unemployment, will clearly have an impact upon regional migration. The debate surrounding the redrafting of the immigration act and the 1997 green paper that served as its basis highlighted the contradictory social forces at work. The mining houses, on the one hand, wanted to keep in place the preferential position that their labor-recruiting system supported, while government and nonmineral businesses were interested in a migration-control system that was in line with the labor requirements of the GEAR strategy. To the extent that South African dominance in regional trade and investments, combined with neoliberal restructuring policies and the retrenchment in traditional migrant's jobs lead to increasing unemployment in their home countries, the flow of undocumented migrants into South Africa is likely to increase: "Put differently, as South Africa closes the main gates . . . , it unconsciously opens up the back door for undocumented migration."[71]

In response to a perceived increase (the actual numbers are very much in dispute) in both legal and illegal immigration—in particular, from the region, but also from Africa in general—various sectors of society and the government (especially Home Minister Mangosuthu Buthelezi of the IFP) have called for decisive actions to curtail this inflow. Migration has emerged as one crucial area in which domestic concerns clash with regional reality. A gut-level reaction to immigrants has led to an expansion of the use of barriers and fences, some of which are electrified.

The policy of closed borders is, however, unlikely to produce the desired effect since the regional spaces already created through the actions of migrants are a reality that limits the ability of the government to implement its policy. Even during the apartheid years, efforts at influx control and the policing of the movements of Africans were of limited success. The needs of employers, the desires of women to join their husbands, and of families to visit relatives were all translated into spatial practices that defeated any attempt at bordering. Today such efforts are bound to be even less effective.

## Toward Differentiated Space

The notion of differential space is the one least developed in Lefebvre's analysis of social space. It emerges when people "leave the *space of consumption*" and instead "move towards the *consumption of space*," in the sense that they demand a different space—a space not of quantity but of quality.[72] It is a demand for spaces that have meaning—spaces of festivals and family that are characterized not by "capitalist utilizers [but] community users."[73] Differential space is always already present in abstract space in that the latter is both homogeneous but also fragmented. It emerges first "on the margins of the homogenized realm"; it centers around those who are excluded, "on the edges of the city, shantytowns, the places of forbidden games."[74]

But this presence does not, in itself, lead to transformation. While Lefebvre recognized that the spaces of leisure or nonwork contain emancipatory potentials, he was well aware that these spaces are also prone to being dominated by capitalism. Lefebvre claims that "only the class struggle has the capacity to differentiate, to generate differences which are not intrinsic to economic growth";[75] he is thus well aware that the bourgeoisie still maintains a hegemonic position in the production of social space.

Casey provides one perspective to the question of transition. Building on Lefebvre's claim that abstract space, while tending

toward homogeneity, can never completely erase absolute and historical space, he advances an argument that the "heterogeneous in space is present as the trace of the historical as well as the prospect of the differential" and that this heterogeneous manifests itself in specific places in their "individuating and concretizing powers."[76]

It is this power of place that can play a key role in holding abstract space at bay in southern Africa. As I pointed out above, differential space exists at the margins of abstract space, and migrants in southern Africa indeed constitute such a marginal population. However, this marginality holds the potential for resistance and transformation. While much of the evidence below is gathered from research done under the auspices of the Southern African Migration Project (research conducted to provide an empirical foundation for the debate over role of migration in South Africa), the interviews with migrants from a broad selection of countries reveal exactly a clear sense of place and, thus, a resistance to the extension of abstract space highlighted by Lefebvre and Casey.

A survey of Basotho migrants in Lesotho and South Africa, for example, found that a majority of the respondents viewed their work time in South Africa in strictly utilitarian terms as a temporary means to achieve certain monetary goals. They had no intentions of living in South Africa permanently; instead, they expect "the short-term satisfaction of getting a job, salary and benefits from a South Africa which uses the miner and which is in turn used by the miner."[77] The preference for living in Lesotho was to some extent dependent on the ownership of land and/or cattle, but respondents also expressed a general sense that life in South Africa was not wholesome and the "social laws of South Africa are such that it is difficult to maintain social values in the households."[78] Among those migrants who were willing to take up permanent residency, there was also a sense that this was "only a device to get back what Lesotho should get through legitimate means, namely, to win back the 'Conquered Territories,' which consist of most of the eastern Free State."[79] These individuals did not view permanent residence in terms of a physical presence in South Africa, but in terms of being a beneficiary of the services and pensions that they helped to produce.

Similar insights emerged from a survey of Mozambican miners in the fall of 1996.[80] Like their Basotho colleagues, Mozambicans did not consider permanent residency in South Africa a desirable option. Only about 40 percent of those eligible applied, and some of those who did have reportedly given up that status. A large majority of those surveyed had no intention of settling in South Africa on either a temporary or permanent basis. The statement "I only go there to work" seemed to be the general consensus. Those

who did apply for permanent residence status, did so only because they expected alternative employment opportunities and improved retirement payments.

This theme is further repeated in surveys undertaken with people in Namibia and Botswana. Reflecting the generally higher standards of living in those two countries, visits by friends and relatives, rather than employment opportunities, emerged as a more important reason for crossing the border to South Africa. However, respondents in both surveys clearly stated preference for living in their own communities, thus repeating an assertion made by the respondents in Lesotho and Mozambique.[81]

Since the 1994 election, South Africa has experienced a significant increase in the influx of traders who sell at street stalls. Particularly in the handicrafts and curio sector, these traders have emerged as very visible participants. As a tourist destination, South Africa is a natural target for such migration, and a recent survey of such traders found that they move a considerable amount and a wide variety of merchandise across borders.[82] The actual goods sold in South Africa come from as far away as Central and West Africa. Traders engage in such international trade both directly and through wholesalers, and traders also take South African merchandise with them as they leave. Traders from the SADC region, in particular, export a wide variety of goods. About 75 percent of those who exported South African goods did so in amounts of R2,000 and above.[83] Anecdotal evidence indicates that similar cross-border trade exists throughout the region. Again, most of the cross-border traders have no intention of settling in South Africa and maintain their families in their home countries—so that they can, in the words of one Malawian trader, "live in their own culture."[84]

Related to this migration of traders is an increase, visible across the region, in the number of women migrants.[85] Whereas men have traditionally migrated to participate in the formal economy, women migrants are more likely to be engaged in informal activities such as trading. Consequently, the nature of the migrations as well as their destinations vary. Women tend to cross borders more frequently, and when doing so visit larger cities, which offer better markets both for selling and procuring goods. As has been the case with male migrants, women, on the whole, regard migration to South Africa in strictly utilitarian terms as a means for economic advancement. They have little intention of residing in South African on a permanent basis. Male migration, while providing a significant source of monetary support for a household, also increases the "productive and reproductive responsibilities" of the women who remain behind.[86]

Migration as a strategy for coping with these responsibilities adds a further gendered dimension to the process in which regional spaces are created. Whereas most of the miners and traders are examples of the migration of skilled individuals with a long work experience, there has also been a long-standing pattern of migration of low-skilled workers, mostly in the construction and agricultural sectors. As I pointed out above, migration to the Natal sugar plantations was the starting point of regional migration, and South African farmers today, especially in Mpumalanga and the Northern Province, continue to rely on migrant labor, which today, more likely than not, is undocumented and therefore subject to extremely poor working conditions. Estimates range from eighty thousand to one hundred thousand Mozambicans in the two provinces and between seven thousand and eight thousand Zimbabweans in the Limpopo Valley.[87] Despite significant obstacles (besides poor working conditions, there is the danger of being deported, abused by police, and cheated out of their pay by farmers who call in the police just before payday) work seekers continue to "jump borders" and engage in the production of a regional space.[88]

We see in these accounts a keen sense of differential space, characterized not by homogeneity but differentiation. Migrants throughout the region have a clear sense of local place called home—that is, the place in which they want to live with their family and where they have their homestead and sometimes their cattle, which they hope to preserve. Yet, they also ignore the very borders that would define such a home in an abstract sense. This seeming contradiction is resolved in their multilayered concept of space.

While the majority of respondents in the surveys cited above expressed strong feelings in favor of borders, their sense of the purpose of these borders was limited to questions of voting rights. In other words, borders were defined as devices that determined citizenship and thus defined the unique spaces to which they felt a personal attachment. However, similar majorities insisted that migrants ought to have access to and receive the same treatment in a broad variety of social services, employment, and so on—benefits offered in South Africa and, to some extent, in Zimbabwe.[89] When linked to the stated desire of protecting one's home, the apparent contradiction seems resolved. Borders are associated with those aspects of statehood that preserve one's local sense of home, one's sense of cultural autonomy, of identity, but not as means to interfere with one's ability to earn a livelihood and to have access to the social services that make that livelihood possible. A regional network of

flows across boundaries and a secure place called home are therefore not contradictory, as the territorial sense of space would have it.

The migrants in southern Africa, like migrants everywhere, therefore represent a disturbance in the abstract space of globalization—a disturbance in the sense that their practices resist the homogenization inherent in a world characterized by the logic of capital accumulation, mass production, and mass consumption. The importance of place in their lives, an importance that so clearly emerges from the empirical evidence presented above, can be seen as a kernel from which a differential space could emerge. The very experience of migration in southern Africa seems to emphasize the experience of difference and thus produce resistance to the further extension of abstract space.

This is not to say that such potentials will inevitably be realized. But the struggles for the practical realization of differential space "are waged on many fronts—and along many frontiers; they may have no obvious links with each other; they may be violent or nonviolent in character; and some combat the tendency to separate while others combat the tendency to confuse."[90] The struggle of migrants in southern Africa is therefore part of multiple struggles over the future of the region, and these struggles unfold in the spaces of everyday life.

I began this article with an account of the death of two Mozambican migrants on their way to South Africa, and did so as a way of stressing the failure of much IR theory to take everyday life experiences into consideration. By virtue of its links to the emergence of the modern state, statecraft, and the rise of the bourgeoisie as a dominant social class—that is to say, by analytical and historical fiat—IR theory has obscured the concrete production of international relations in the daily practices of workers, families, and migrants. However, the demystification of IR theory cannot be a "merely" theoretical problem—truth without reality, as Lefebvre would put it. It has to be based on the practical experiences of those whose reality it attempts to explain. In Robert Cox's words, "Theory is always *for* someone and *for* some purpose."[91] If it is to have meaning for those traditionally excluded, it must lead to "the construction of a larger picture of the whole."[92] That is why the recovery, or discovery, of IR theory's emancipatory potential is a crucial task. The emancipatory potential of all social theory lies in the ability to generate questions, rather than to tell us what reality is. The unfortunate Mozambicans caught in the Kruger National Park did not need to be told what their reality was. We, on the other hand, need to ask why their reality has not figured in our theoretical ruminations and how its inclusion would affect them.

## Notes

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