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Leo Zeilig

Centre for Sociological Research

University of Johannesburg

PO Box 524

Auckland Park

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South Africa

leo.zeilig@hotmail.co.uk

Nicola Ansell

Centre for Human Geography

Brunel University

Kingston Lane

Uxbridge

UB8 3PH

UK

nicola.ansell@brunel.ac.uk

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Abstract

African university students have long engaged in political activism, responding to changing political, social and economic circumstances through protest that has at times exerted considerable influence on the national stage. Student activism employs highly spatialised strategies yet has received minimal attention from geographers. Drawing on case studies from Senegal and Zimbabwe, we identify four phases of activism in which students have mobilised distinctive relational spatialities in responding to changes in the spatial expression of dominant political power. In so doing, we highlight the inadequacies of approaches to resistance that give excessive emphasis to a power/resistance dualism or to questions of scale.

INTRODUCTION

Geographers have focused attention on wide-ranging forms of political activism, including conventional labour movements (Herod, 1998; Silver, 2003) struggles for democracy (Routledge, 1997), identity politics (Kobayashi 1990; WGSG 1997) and anti-globalisation protests (Featherstone, 2003; 2005). Minimal attention has, however, been paid to the activism of university students. This perhaps reflects widespread political apathy among students in Western universities,¹ but is a major omission given the extent and influence of student activism elsewhere in the contemporary world. Any survey of postcolonial African politics reveals an astonishing level of student action that is frequently projected onto a national stage.²

Like both old and new forms of activism, student political activity is expressed spatially, and differs in its spatial expression with time and place. In this paper, we use case studies from Senegal and Zimbabwe to explore how students have spatially reconfigured their activism in response to changes in the spatial expression of dominant political power. We chart changing spatialities of student activism across four broad time periods. As Panelli (2006) points out, geographers have neglected the temporality of activist struggles, especially responses to long-term transformations of socio-political conditions.

Comparing across space, by tracing similarities in the two national contexts and students' responses, we challenge the national-scale perspective of student activists, thereby gaining insight into the scaling of their activism. The title of the paper highlights three seemingly distinct scales at which students' lives are shaped and to which they respond. Yet we reveal some inadequacies of a purely scalar framing of the problematic of activism, contributing to recent debates concerning scale and illustrating how students mobilise a range of other spatialities in confronting changing situations.

The paper begins by outlining the distinctiveness of students as activists. The theoretical context of the study is set out, followed by an outline of the research methods and settings. We then examine the spatial strategies employed during four distinctive periods of activism.

THE DISTINCTIVENESS OF STUDENT POLITICAL ACTIVISM

Student activism merits attention because it cannot be understood through the lenses of 'old' style, labour-based political activism, or 'new' social movements. While sharing characteristics of both, and changing over time, students form a distinct group.

Throughout postcolonial Africa students have had, in many respects, a politically privileged status. This is attributable to numerous factors including the relative weaknesses of other social groups (see Cliff, 1963); the cultural status of education (Bianchini, 2004); the small numbers who attend university; their shared identity with political leadership; the state's need for graduates; and the nature of campus life. While students generally aspire to high-status employment, they are a 'transient' social group who, although engaged in social reproduction, have no direct role in economic production. This liberates them from (excessive) concern about income, allows them to organise without the discipline of a workplace, and permits a minority to take action without being restrained by indifferent or hostile others (Harman, 1988).

While students are not (always) directly engaged in production, they are consumers and depend directly upon the state for funding and conditions. Much student activism is focused on students' immediate interests as recipients of government spending and policy changes. In Africa, though, students have often also seen themselves as a vanguard, representing the interests of workers and peasants (Bathily et al, 1995). However, African students are not

unambiguously positioned as subaltern actors. In Marxist terms, they do not constitute a social class (Halliday, 1969) and are (likely to become) materially privileged (albeit less so today than formerly). While able to engage their governments in heroic acts of resistance, only in conjunction with organised labour can they effect democratic change (Zeilig 2005).

While students are a distinctive group, student activism, and its relationship to other forms of activism, changes over space and time. Political and economic contexts change, and alter both grievances and the opportunities available to students. Students' ambiguous position – oppositional but not generally 'subaltern' – challenges conceptualisations of power and resistance and supports a relational approach to the spatiality of resistance. The next section outlines our conceptual approach to exploring students' responses.

THE SPATIALITY OF DOMINATION AND RESISTANCE

Early studies in the spatiality of activism saw resistance simply in terms of opposition to dominating power. Rejecting this view, Pile (1997:2) argues that 'while there are different forms of control that work through distinct geographies, geographies of resistance do not necessarily (or even ever) mirror geographies of domination'. For Sharp *et al* (2000), however, resistance and domination cannot be so readily disentangled. Drawing on Foucaultian conceptions of power, they assert that there are 'countless processes of domination and resistance which are always implicated in, and mutually constitutive of, one another' (p.1), and 'particular places ... become sites of contestation where the social structures and relations of power, domination and resistance are interwoven' (p.26).

In our analysis, we accept that domination and resistance are intrinsically interlinked, but agree with Featherstone that always to look for a 'domination/resistance couplet' (Sharp *et al*, 2000:1) 'obscures the ways in which subaltern politics generates multiple spatialities [and] rejects the possibility that resistance movements can construct distinctive, contested and diverse 'maps of power'' (Featherstone, 2003:408). Student activism is neither spatially independent of, nor a mirror to, a singularly organised dominating power.

To theorise the relationship between spatialities of domination and resistance, Cox (1998:2) uses concepts of 'spaces of dependence', referring to the 'more or less localized social relations upon which we depend for the realization of essential interests', and 'spaces of

engagement', which are the spaces in which people act to contest those social relations. Discussion of the relationship between 'spaces of dependence' and 'spaces of engagement' has centred on questions of scale. While Cox (1998) advises that spaces of engagement may be either larger or smaller than spaces of dependence, there has been a tendency to understand spaces of dependence as (increasingly) large scale – with localities shaped by pervasive global capitalism and transnational institutions. To 'negotiate spatially stretched relations of power' (Featherstone, 2003:405), social movements must therefore construct 'spaces of engagement' that transcend or 'jump' scales (Miller 1997, Smith 1992).

Although Cox stresses that scale is not a natural concept, comprising a set of nested, bounded hierarchies, his concepts are often applied in this way. The notion of 'scale-jumping' suggests locally-based activists seeking to act nationally or globally against the institutions and practices of dominant power. There are two key critiques of this view. First, neither power nor resistance operate in discrete bounded areal units. The political and economic conditions that, for instance, shape students' lives and interests are products of decisions made in diverse arenas. The idea of local campuses nested within policy-making nations, in turn subject to the vagaries of global power is inappropriate, particularly when related to colonial Africa. It is more useful to understand scale in network terms, in line with Massey's (1998) notion that space comprises not bounded territories but 'constellations of temporary coherence' composed of social interrelations that coexist simultaneously at all spatial scales.³

A second (related) critique refers to the tendency to view the local (and activism) in concrete terms, but the global (and power) as abstract and intangible. Hardt and Negri (2000:xii), for instance, characterise the neoliberal global economic system as 'a decentred, deterritorializing apparatus of imperial control'. However, power that has global reach is both produced and felt in localised places (Routledge 2003). Equally, activism is not confined to a purely local stage, but nor can it operate in an ungrounded global way (Cumbers and Routledge 2004). Furthermore, we should avoid the trap of 'an a-spatial paradigm, in which the global is read as the (former or indirect) coloniser and the colonised is overdetermined as the 'local'' (Radcliffe, 2000:177) – coloniser and colonised are both located, but connected through complex webs of social relations.

Rather than regarding activism as practices that involve acting at, or jumping between, already-existing scales, it is helpful to recognise that scales are socially constructed. Constructs such as 'local' and 'global' can disguise the networks of relations that produce (experiences of) scale (Featherstone, 2003; Massey, 2000; Radcliffe, 2000). Furthermore, it is argued, 'there is no necessary relation between the material manifestations of political-economic processes and how that material reality is perceived, understood and, in turn, acted upon' (Miller 1997:172). The spaces of politics are simultaneously real, imaginary and symbolic (Keith and Pile 1993) and we cannot assume congruity of scale across these dimensions. The role of activists is thus not to jump between scales, but to constitute scales (Herod and Wright 2002), as one of a number of spatial strategies.

Recently, Marston et al (2005) have argued that the concept of scale should be abandoned, and replaced with a 'flat ontology'. They assert that even a network approach to scale reinforces hierarchical thinking, failing to disentangle local/global from agency/structure binaries. Their approach has been criticised, particularly for wishing away the hierarchical scalar ordering actually imposed by dominant economic and political actors (Masson 2006; Hoefle 2006). Such hierarchical constructs need to be understood by activists if they are to deploy effective socio-spatial strategies of resistance (Leitner and Miller 2006).

While it is important to consider scale, the spatial praxis of activist groups is only partially illuminated through this conceptual lens (Jonas 2006). Leitner and Miller (2006:116) have criticised the 'recent tendency in human geography to privilege scale over other spatialities, such as networks, space, place, region and mobility, or to subsume these spatialities under a fetishized master concept of scale'. Beyond considering scales of activism, we refer to three loose pairings of relational spatialities students have deployed to confront the changing spatial organisation of dominant power: proximity/distance; connection/segregation; and gathering/exposure.

Physical proximity to institutions and symbols of power has obvious advantages and can be deployed effectively by activists, but distance, too, can offer valuable freedoms (Silvey, 2003). Forging spaces of connection (such as the 'convergence spaces' identified by Routledge (2003)) may allow distinct social groups to mobilise around an issue (see Harvey, 1985), particularly where, for instance, students occupy social spaces in which they share structural

constraints with other groups. Conversely, activists may construct segregated spaces, or 'subaltern counter publics' (Fraser, 1990); sheltered political spaces in which the marginalized can gain voice (see Wainwright, 2007). These spaces of connection and segregation need not imply physical proximity or distance. However the capacity to gather with likeminded individuals is essential to activism. Gathering spaces may be products of the political-economic arrangement of society. In Java, for instance, 'because industries are spatially concentrated, and workers live in close proximity to one another, the conditions are ripe for workers to grow to view themselves as a community of laborers who have rights in common' (Silvey 2003:140). At other times, it is necessary to create such spaces. Finally, activism may be forged in spaces of exposure to particular conditions or ideas.

All these spatialities are constructed in relation to other social groups or to structural conditions. The 'opportunity structures' (Fincher and Panelli, 2001:129) afforded to activists are shaped by power relations that determine access to particular spaces, and affect the ways those spaces are experienced (Nagar, 2000). By examining student activism through four time periods we reveal how changing socio-spatial structures bring students into particular spatial relations with other societal groups, both powerful and marginalized, and how students have mobilised and constructed different spatialities to confront changing spatial configurations of political power.

SETTINGS, METHODS AND APPROACH

Recognising the 'importance of historical, cultural, and geographical *specificity* to any understanding of 'resistance'' (Moore, 1997:89), this paper focuses principally on African student activism in two national institutions, the University of Zimbabwe (UZ, formerly University of Rhodesia) in Harare and the *Université Cheikh Anta Diop* (UCAD, formerly *Université de Dakar*) in Dakar, Senegal. Both were among the foremost universities in Africa, with high profiles regionally, but located in very different parts of Africa with different national histories. The common patterns they reveal thus tell us something more broadly about student activism across Africa. The comparison also enables us to decentre the national scale that dominates student politics. Primary and secondary material was collected during 2001-2004. Primary research methods included interviews with 40 current and former activists and non-political students and participant observation with several student organisations and a student strike at UCAD. Secondary sources included newspaper

archives, unpublished journals and wide-ranging published sources representing all periods of student activism.

Focusing on four broadly consecutive time periods ('colonialism', 'independence', 'neo-liberalism' and 'globalisation'), the following sections chart changing geographies of domination and resistance. In each period, dominant political power had a different spatial organisation. We outline the associated spatial expression of higher education; and in turn the geographies of student resistance. The time periods identified are not entirely synchronous in the two settings and, importantly, none is defined by stasis.

a) Colonialism

Between the 1880s and the 1960s, Africa's political landscape was transformed through European colonialism. The forms colonialism took and its impacts on African society varied spatially and temporally. French and British colonies were governed through different spatial mechanisms of control, and while dominant political power was generally exercised remotely, in settler states control progressively shifted to locally-resident administrators. Moreover, nowhere was colonial power absolute. African people exercised a degree of power, sometimes in collusion with colonial regimes, but frequently through forms of resistance.

The spatiality of higher education afforded opportunities for students to construct spaces of activism that ultimately secured them a role in reshaping African political space. Higher education was limited and geared to providing functionaries for colonial administration. For most African students it was characterised by lengthy journeys away from home. The very few universities established in Africa commonly provided only foundation years after which students progressed to the colonial metropolis. Regional institutions, such as Dakar's *École Normale William Ponty* and *Institut des Hautes Études*, received students from colonies that lacked institutions of their own. These journeys to colleges in Africa, Europe and North America have been labelled 'pilgrimages' (Gellner, 1983; Foucher, 2002a): like religious journeys, they were both physical – separation from community of origin – and spiritual – involving development and transformation. Physical displacement aided the development of political thought (Tyner, 2004), in part through distancing students from the concerns of home.⁴

Students pilgrimages also constructed spaces of exposure to new ideas: freedom and democracy (Hanna, 1975), as well as Marxism (Georgakas and Surkin, 1998) were propounded in Western universities. More significantly, colonialism's spatial structures brought young Africans together in European and American universities. Gathering spaces were forged to contest those same structures, in part through establishing student groups. In London, the West African Student Union (WASU), formed in 1925, was regarded as the 'training ground for Nigerian nationalists' (Federici, 2000:90). WASU provided accommodation and support to West Africa students, but was principally a campaigning union that sought to 'agitate for and emphasise the needs of the future 'United West Africa'' (Adi, 1998:34).

Similarly radical student organisations were active in Paris: the *Association des Etudiants Sénégalais* (AES) and the *Fédération des Etudiants d'Afrique Noire en France* (FEANF) were crucial to students' emergence as a distinct social group (Diaw, 1993; Diané, 1990). Chambrier Rahandi (1990:16), a former leading member of FEANF, explained how the organisation instilled ideological coherence among disparate communities of African students studying in France:

one learnt to live, to think and to act together, FEANF was a school where we took our first political lessons. It was within FEANF that African students formed a concept of African nationalism ... Through the practice and theory of the union they forged an idea of freedom.⁵

Collectively, African students organised influential intellectual and cultural movements – notably the Harlem Renaissance in New York and the Negritude movement in Paris. New symbolic and imagined political spaces were forged, at scales from the national to the continental. Pan-Africanism was born through the mixing of Africans outside the continent. Students were also exposed to the idea and practice of the Westphalian nation state, which they employed to construct nationalist agendas (Anderson, 1991). Advocating and inspiring independence struggles from the 1930s, students transformed by their *luttés syndicales* in overseas universities included Amilcar Cabral in Portugal, Leopold Senghor in France and Kwame Nkrumah in the US and Britain.

Segregation was a more problematic spatial relation for student pilgrims. Their travels tended to divorce them from the immediate concerns of life in colonial Africa, and from those involved in nationalist struggles at home. Students, nonetheless, became aware of the gap between Western living conditions and their marginalised homelands, and of their own exclusion from colonial boardrooms (Anderson 1991). An extensive postcolonial African literature deals with experiences of 'educational' separation,⁶ which impacted on students' self-identity, generating feelings of guilt and debt towards the 'masses', and simultaneously 'feeling[s] of divorcement from, and superiority to them. The intelligentsia are anxious to belong without being assimilated, without ceasing to remain apart and above' (Cliff, 1963:20).

Student activism was not, however, limited to the actions of diasporas in Europe and America. In the 1940s and 1950s training centres, teaching colleges and universities were established in Africa. Imparting knowledge of European provenance, they were located in administrative capitals, near the hub of colonial organisation. As independence approached, the departing authorities viewed these institutions as spaces for forging an amenable 'national-bureaucratic caste' (Boyer, 2002).

African institutions became contested ground where political leaders learned to see themselves and their activism as crucial to future independent states. Like overseas universities, campus provided segregated gathering spaces, but here proximity to colonial authority was (ironically) more immediate. Physical locations offered strategic advantages: students could act immediately against colonial oppression, but were also more readily subject to surveillance and control.

The University of Rhodesia was established in 1955 as '*A Non-Racial Island of Learning*' (the title of a study by Gelfand, 1978), educating both settler and black students. However, Barkan's (1975) self-contained community, segregated from both rural life and the urban centre, created, briefly, a unique political and social space for activism: it was regarded as a tense and difficult place during the liberation war (Cefkin, 1975).

The 'pots and pans' demonstration in 1973 represented a highpoint of resistance on the campus (Tengende, 1994). The protest initially focused on racial discrimination in university employment practices: the campus was not so segregated from the racist Rhodesian state as to preclude exposure of students to such realities. A crowd of students removed tea-making equipment, symbolic of white power, from every department before petitioning the university authorities. When a decision was made to expel these students, a riot ensued – Z\$70,000 worth of property was destroyed. The state responded by restricting students' spatial freedoms: 150 were arrested, many sentenced to six months with hard labour and thereafter restricted from coming within 20 kilometres of the city (Tengende 1994). The authorities also intensified political repression on campus. With the minimum conscription age reduced to 17, white students roamed the campus in military fatigues. The mass arrests, expulsion of students, and militarisation of the campus, ended open resistance until independence. Dominant power proved able to limit student activists' capacity to deploy spatial strategies within the colony.

b) Independence

Independence, attained in 1960 by Senegal (in line with most colonies) and in 1980 in Zimbabwe, led to a (diachronous) moment of state-led development across the continent. African leaders sought to forge new nations upon formerly colonised territories. Although former colonial powers retained influence and the reach of international institutions was growing, the nation state, and national scale, had an unprecedented (but short-lived) significance, both symbolically and materially.

Following independence, governments invested heavily in higher education. Students and universities were transformed, often slowly and reluctantly, into 'national bodies' with 'national responsibilities'. For a decade universities were central to attempts to Africanise the state (Emmerson, 1968), required to produce 'elites' to power development (Mamdani, 1994). Students anticipated graduate employment across the expanding state sector, and were overwhelmingly well funded through grants and scholarships.

In Senegal, the 1,018 students in higher education in 1960-61 (Diop and Diouf, 1990:190), were disproportionately from elite backgrounds (Hanna, 1975). With independence, government demand for qualified functionaries (the civil service expanded from 6,000 to

67,000 by 1981 (Foucher, 2002a)) required recourse to less affluent youth. In the first ten years of Senegalese independence most were sponsored by future employers, government scholarships or private organisations (Hanna and Hanna, 1975). By 1978/79 enrolment had risen to 10,000 (Diop and Diouf, 1990:190).

In Zimbabwe, although majority rule arrived two decades later, the state similarly sought to increase the supply of trained personnel, civil servants and bureaucrats, and dramatically expanded enrolment⁷ at the renamed University of Zimbabwe (UZ). Tasked with producing a new national elite, UZ remained physically segregated from the wider population. The contradictions this encapsulated within an ostensibly socialist state were readily apparent. Speaking at the university in 1981, Prime Minister Robert Mugabe quoted the academic Joel Barkan:

The world of the African University student is a rarefied one, for he [sic] lives in a realm which less than one percent of his countrymen ever see. His time is monopolised by an institution, which is both physically and spiritually removed from the society which surrounds it. He attends class and resides on a campus that forms a self-contained community, segregated from the rural areas where he was raised, and often detached from the main urban centre of his country as well (Mugabe, 1982:6).

That the distance of Zimbabwean students from their rural families was not merely physical was equally clear to students themselves. As one remembered, even by the mid-1990s:

The payout [grant] was too much for me. The first thing you do when you finish your first term is to go home and show off [...] I could afford to drink beer daily and still have \$3,000 in my pocket for the vacation. Some of us even had enough to pay for our brothers and sisters to go through school (Hopewell Gumbo, interview, 28/07/03).

Distance and segregation were thus no less significant than when students attended institutions on other continents.

In Senegal's first years of independence, students who had been in the vanguard contesting colonial authority were required to embrace the project of reconstruction and

development. Writers have described a social pact between students and the state, premised on the reward of graduate employment (Foucher, 2002b). However, students' relative affluence, the prestige attached to their institutions, and their politically privileged position (linked to their role in independence movements (Boren, 2001)), combined with the spatial affordances of a rarefied campus (Halliday, 1969) (a prime 'gathering space'), and campus locations in proximity to power, afforded them considerable influence.

Within a very brief period students became oppositional, regarded as 'rival politicians rather than students' (Hanna, 1975:13). As Senegal's anti-colonial consensus broke down and development disintegrated, student resistance escalated. In 1968 the university was at the centre of a crisis that shook the regime. Student strikes and demonstrations highlighted rising food prices, falling living standards, graduate unemployment and foreign control of domestic industry. National government was the focus, but extra-national factors played a role, and connections were made to parallel demonstrations in France (although the first student strike started before events in France (Bathily 1992)). Students explicitly connected their struggle to wider social demands, and the trade union congress, the *Union Nationale des Travailleurs Sénégalais* (UNTS) adopted the students' political slogans (Bathily, 1992). Thus students constructed spaces of connection both within and beyond the nation state. The collision of student and working class demands (relating to rising prices and high unemployment) culminated in a general strike.

This moment in Senegal's recent history reveals a general point about African student activism. Although students might initiate protests against a regime, they can become one element of a general movement. The predicament of 'successful' student protest is that as the pace of wider popular struggles quickens, students' visibility diminishes, and they must cease to see their activism as deriving from the "feebleness of other social classes" (Cliff, 1963: 17). The capacity of students to trigger 'spaces of connection' with wider social forces conditions their ability to effect social transformation.

As in colonial Rhodesia, proximity to symbolic spaces of authority shaped the spatiality of activism and responses to it. The government reacted to the strike by ordering the army onto the campus, prompting workers and students to march to the presidential palace. French troops openly intervened, occupying iconic sites: the airport, presidential palace and

French embassy. The university was closed, foreign students expelled, and 3,500 students arrested. President Senghor alluded to 'foreign' manipulation of the movement, France being gripped by a similar crisis (Bathily, 1992). Thus even when the locus of political power rested most apparently at nation-state level, connections to France were important for both government and students.

The *Université de Dakar*, and particularly the most politically active faculties, the *Faculté des Lettres et Sciences Humaines* and the *Faculté des Sciences Juridiques et Politiques* erupted repeatedly onto the political stage in the 1970s, disrupting the capital's administrative spaces (Bathily, 1992). The longer-term government response was to attempt to spatially reconfigure higher education. *Gaston Berger Université*⁸ was built to accommodate the two troublesome faculties in Saint Louis, 180 miles from Dakar. Explicitly to quell student activism (Sougou, interview, 13/03/04), President Senghor sought to eliminate the spatial advantages afforded to students by proximity to the capital. To further isolate unrest, the new university was ten miles from central Saint Louis.⁹ However, *Gaston Berger* was not opened until 1990, and by 2000 the student roll remained very small.

In Zimbabwe student activism immediately post-independence was limited to protests against foreign embassies (representing 'imperialists'). Students vocally supported the Zimbabwean regime. However, an anti-corruption demonstration that took place at UZ in September 1988, in support of Mugabe's drive to return his party to the Leadership Code¹⁰ was angrily dismissed by the president (Saunders, 2000). This was a violent moment of truth for hundreds of student activists who had regarded Mugabe as their hero, and marked an abrupt fissure in the relationship between students and the ruling party.

c) Neo-liberalism

Global recession seriously affected Africa from the mid-1970s. Primary commodity prices collapsed on world markets, leaving governments starved of foreign exchange. Interest rates soared on debt incurred for state-led development in the 1960s and '70s. In exchange for rescheduling debts, the World Bank demanded rigorous structural adjustment programmes, embracing neo-liberal principles. Much control over national political space was ceded to extraterritorial institutions.

Economic recession and structural adjustment transformed the spaces of African higher education. In line with World Bank recommendations, higher education was deprioritised,¹¹ and state funding withdrawn¹² (Konings, 2002; Frederici *et al*, 2000). Campus infrastructure deteriorated, facilities were privatised, and with the introduction of tuition fees and 'levies', students were effectively pauperised (Zeilig and Seddon, 2002). Graduates' prospects of state employment diminished as the state shrunk and campuses, no longer 'rarefied', represented materially spaces of exposure to the conditions of neoliberalism.

Neo-liberal university campuses, still gathering spaces for discontented students and (generally) physically proximate to state institutions, became sites of grievance that inspired renewed political activity. The imagined scale of politics remained the nation state. Activists targeted national governments, contributing to 'democratic transitions' across the continent in the 1980s and '90s. However, neo-liberal 'reforms' continued, partly because political dominance now lay outside the nation state, presenting activists with the challenge of confronting extraterritorial institutions.

In Senegal, students participated in the '*alternance*' that ousted President Abdou Diouf and the *Parti Socialiste* (PS), in power since independence, installing Abdoulaye Wade and the *Parti Démocratique Sénégalaise* (PDS). The UCAD campus was the focus of a strike aimed at improving students' conditions. However, students did not confine their activism to the campus, but constructed a space of connection extending into the rural areas. Student groups commandeered hundreds of mini-buses (Interview, Ibrahima Ba, 12/02/04), to mobilise support for Wade and register rural voters. As one student, Idressa Gassama, elaborated: 'During the campaign the university was empty. Students went to their villages and around the country ... They wanted the change and students I can say made the change' (Interview, 04/03/01).

To persuade their families and villages to vote students described their situations. Conditions on campus were deployed at a distance to forge connections to rural people. Meissa Toure, then a student leader, explains that because Diouf was influential in rural Senegal:

[Students were forced to] say to our parents that today 'I am at university and I don't have either a grant or room, I live in incredibly difficult conditions ... I don't eat or I only eat one full meal a day ... to change these things it is necessary to get rid of Abdou Diouf ... and if you continue to vote for the president ... after we have finished our Masters we will not be working' ... and our parents understood. They voted for President Wade and we were responsible for the result (Interview 12/02/04).

Yet distance and segregation remained important, and uncomfortable, as in earlier decades. Senegalese students describing their activism during the *alternance* referred repeatedly to the distances (geographical and metaphoric) they travelled to university, leaving their parents' 'African' world for the 'European' university (Mor Faye, interview, 05/02/04). Such distance heightened students' sense of belonging to an, albeit impoverished, elite and the significance they attached to their activism.

Having contributed to Wade's victory, students believed they had a 'pact' that would secure improved conditions at the university. However, in January 2001, the government introduced an unfavourable World Bank-funded education plan, *Programme Décennal d'Education et de Formation*. Students threatened action unless the government revoked certain elements (*Sud Quotidien*, 2001a) relating to campus conditions, rent and meal ticket costs and the allocation of grants.

Proximity to the city and opportunities to gather were crucial. Demonstrations involved several thousand students, many marching into town. On 31 January, a group of students throwing stones forced the police to retreat and took 'control' of Avenue Cheikh Anta Diop, the main road to the city centre. Before long, riot police returned with reinforcements; shots were heard and demonstrators ran for cover. Dozens of students were wounded and Balla Gaye, a twenty-four year old law student, was killed inside the university campus.¹³

Within hours media attention focused on the university, incredulous that *papa Sopi's*¹⁴ government was responsible: 'The first year of the new government registers the first student killed by security forces within the university compound' (*Le Matin*, 2001). The symbolically inviolable, segregated campus had been violated. The president agreed to meet

a delegation of students. Concessions were made but the students' demands were not fully met.

For the first time, students from *Gaston Berger Université* partially overcame their enforced segregation to add support, boycotting lectures and organising sit-ins and demonstrations. Some requisitioned vehicles to travel the 10km into town to spread the strike to local schools; others marched into town shouting '*policiers assassins*'. Finally, following four days of national mourning, student representatives met Wade at the presidential palace and won their concessions (*Sud Quotidien*, 2001c). The World Bank's recommendations were overturned. By targeting their national government, student activists successfully limited the reach of an extraterritorial institution.

In Zimbabwe, too, students have been prominent in the struggle for democracy amid recent neo-liberal reforms. Although Zimbabwe suffered financial difficulties from the late 1980s, students remained relatively protected from the disinvestments from higher education prevalent elsewhere in Africa. In the mid-1990s, however, students' 'rarefied' existence began to break down. A new structural adjustment programme, introduced in 1996, confronted students with hardships far removed from the 'heaven on earth' that the ex-student activist Brian Kagoro experienced in the early 1990s (Interview, 23/06/03). The UZ campus, like UCAD, became a space of exposure to neo-liberal conditions.

In 1998 UZ's accommodation and catering departments were dissolved, leaving students dependent on private caterers (*The Daily Mirror*, 18 August 2004). Following a period of intense activity over late disbursement of the payout and privatisation of campus facilities, the university was closed for almost five months. In 2000 the government's Millennium Economic Recovery Programme introduced 'cost-sharing', with tuition fees at state universities increasing up to thirty fold, and further privatisation of facilities. This inspired student protests in universities and colleges nationwide (*Socialist Worker*, 2002).

From 1998 students also began to raise explicitly political demands. Questions of the 'payout' were relegated as student leaders argued that only by building a political movement would the government respect the right to free education. Dislodged from their advantaged past by structural adjustment reforms to university education, students' interests converged with the wider urban poor. The Zimbabwe National Student Union (ZINASU) and Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) found common cause and established new organisational spaces. Student activist, Hopewell Gumbo, described explained: 'we were clear that the Working People's Convention (WPC) was a movement of the ZCTU and ZINASU.' Subsequently, students and workers forged new spaces of connection in the branches of the Movement for Democratic Change that opened across the country. These provided forums for resisting state policies, outside the traditional organisations of trade union and student politics.

While in some respects the spaces of connection with social groups students had historically regarded as their 'responsibility' to liberate now required little imagination or solidarity to inhabit, the encounters could be problematic, as Gumbo explains: 'the ZCTU considered that we could *toyi-toyi* [dance] and mobilise ... but there was no reciprocal respect that students were equals.' (Interview, 28/07/03). Nonetheless, the spatial terrain of student activism shifted to forums that symbolised the uneven unity of the new movement.

Besides connection to other social groups, the space of gathering and exposure constructed by students on campus, as in the 1960s (Halliday, 1969), was crucial to their activism. According to activist Steve Biko:

students have a significant part in the movement based on the fact that in Zimbabwe almost all students who go to higher institutions are at campus and so they have some togetherness and it adds some mass character to the activities of the students. Secondly, in the lecture rooms and the library, students are in constant interaction with ideas; it's easy for them to have ideological development, they develop faster than those who learn from concrete experiences. The students engage with ideology on an abstract level so they can quickly raise their consciousness (Interview, 16/05/03).

The students had a freedom to act on campus that was unavailable elsewhere in the city. Thus they were the only group mobilised in the (failed) 'final push', launched by the MDC in June 2003, wider urban society having been militarised (see also Zeilig, 2004). However, the relatively free, segregated space of the campus soon evaporated. In the aftermath of the 'final push' demonstration on campus, almost 4,000 students attempted to access the approach road that would have taken them to the city. The military police pursued them back wielding batons and tear gas. The corridors in one hall of residence, nicknamed Baghdad, were left covered in blood, and one room burned out. Forty-five students were admitted to hospital. By the end of the week Mugabe expressed 'regret' at having to teach these 'youths' a lesson (Zeilig, 2004).

d) Globalisation

Africa has witnessed minimal economic growth over the past two decades and, despite many countries' transitions to 'democracy', governments remain subject to external pressures. 'Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers', for example, require approval from international financial institutions which demand wide-ranging public sector reforms. Public sector employment remains poorly paid and of low status, and few opportunities for 'advancement' have arisen in the private and voluntary sectors. Unsurprisingly, many Africans envisage futures outside the continent.

While financial crises, public expenditure cuts and the deprioritisation of higher education have seen public universities deteriorate, the number of students qualifying for and wishing to enter university continues to increase. Worldwide, neo-liberalism not only reduced funding, but transformed the character of higher education. Education has become a 'good', knowledge commodified 'as procurable and securable 'information', rather than as a qualitative, experimental capacity for analysis and judgement' (Boyer, 2002:207). Education of this form can be provided through the market. (Western) corporate interests in education have grown, leaving many universities tied less to the state than to capital (Roberts, 2000).

Most new universities established in the 1980s and 1990s were private, built in collaboration with foreign institutions and funded by students and private donations. They attract affluent, depoliticised students who aim only to complete their studies and leave the country. Many

provide a period of study before students transfer overseas. Suffolk University in Dakar opened in 2000 as an affiliate of its namesake in Boston, USA. It charges US\$5,000 annually (Suffolk University, 2004) for two years of language study and undergraduate courses, after which students complete their degrees in the USA (*Sud Quotidien*, 2000). Located ten minutes from UCAD, it resembles a private school, overlooking the sea with immaculate manicured lawns, spotless buildings and excellent facilities. No strategic consideration was given to its location beyond space for sporting and recreational facilities. Students involve themselves in campus-based activities unconnected with national politics.

The aspiration to leave Africa is widespread and competition for the few scholarships to western universities intense. Many in Zimbabwe aim to leave for South Africa (Tevera 2005). Ironically, their desire is coupled with increasingly draconian visa restrictions.¹⁵ Contemporary activism often reflects this spatial reconfiguration; student groups demonstrate for wider visa allocation outside western embassies in Dakar.

Wade returned to UCAD for the inauguration of a new extension in March 2004, and used the occasion to promote the new *Université Virtuelle Africaine* (UVA). Courses taught through satellite links with French, American and Canadian universities will ensure, according to Wade, 'the diploma in the end will not be equivalent but the same' (*Le Soleil*, 2004). Students need no longer travel overseas (or obtain visas) as the West's universities will have come to Senegal. These trends should not be exaggerated: not all courses can be provided (in 2005 only Business Administration and Computer Science were available). But such initiatives symbolise the collapse of the state project of higher education in Africa (Mills, 2004) and make African students consumers, again, of largely foreign knowledge (see Ngugi, 1981).

Private, overseas and virtual universities all appear to restrict opportunities to construct spaces for activism, particularly in the national political sphere. Students at private universities are consumers, but hold proprietors, not governments, responsible for the conditions in which they study. Study at overseas universities physically removes students from the national political stage, as governments are aware. The students who organised the strike at UCAD in 2001 were almost all in France on government-awarded scholarships by the end of the year. Deme Abdoulaye claims that the decision to send the leadership abroad 'killed the student movement that had taken years to construct' (Interview, 18/03/04).

Ironically, while this deliberate strategy denies activists the possibility of exploiting proximity, it may, like the overseas pilgrimages of colonial era students, facilitate the construction of gathering spaces for political mobilisation within Western universities.

Governments have not been alone in emasculating activism by sending students abroad. Structural adjustment both restricted the role of national government and encouraged a proliferation of non-governmental organisations. Besides substituting for the state in providing welfare, many NGOs have overtly political objectives. This is particularly the case in Zimbabwe, where (until prohibited) NGOs funded opposition to a government perceived as tyrannical. However, donor money distorted activism (see Petras, 1999; Ungpakorn, 2004): student organisations were funded to attend overseas meetings and conferences (which afford opportunities to gather with other activists), where some were offered asylum.¹⁶ Such practices influence the motivation of those becoming politically active at university, as John Bomba explains:

[I]n some sense there has also been an element of misplaced international support that has actually drawn us back. With this asylum thing it has opened a massive window for opportunists ... With the crisis in Zimbabwe and the attention that has been focused there has been massive monies coming into Zimbabwe. You find a plethora of NGOs ... that do nothing that is relevant to the plight of Zimbabwe but nonetheless they are getting massive financial support. So there is this element, which we call the 'commodification of resistance', people now selling the ability to resist (Interview, 22/05/03).

A virtual university probably offers fewer opportunities to construct spaces for student activism than study overseas. Students attending courses at the plethora of internet cafes that pepper African cityscapes are physically (and temporally) dispersed. Given the observations of those studying the internet's significance for activism (Law, 2003; Staeheli et al, 2002), it is unlikely that students will develop collective identity, let alone political activism, without opportunities to gather in physical space.

CONCLUSIONS

Drawing on case studies from Senegal and Zimbabwe, we have examined four phases of student activism, each with a distinctive spatiality related to changing structural conditions. In the early twentieth century, when political control was exercised from Europe, or by Europeans located within the colonies, African youth travelled to European capitals to attend university, and fomented nationalist politics in student associations. As states attained independence, the nation state came to dominate both imagined geography and, to a large extent, policy-making. Universities located on campuses close to centres of power played important symbolic roles. Although indulged as future leaders, students quickly became active critics of their new governments. Later, with the ascendancy of neo-liberalism, beleaguered governments, falling state spending and rising graduate unemployment, students became more marginalised – both socially and spatially. New universities were established in places where students would be less able to draw attention to their demands, yet students continued to resist marginalisation. Most recently, the globalisation of higher education has witnessed growth in private universities, the advent of 'virtual universities', and the use of overseas scholarships, all of which may limit students' political influence.

Changes in the spatial expression of dominant political power have shaped students' experiences, the issues that concern them and opportunities available to them. Campuses have changed, as has the place of the campus within the nation and students' opportunities to travel or otherwise to connect with places overseas. Students have responded to these changing spatial configurations of dominant power through changing geographies of resistance. As Jonas (2006:403-4) indicates, 'different site-scalar configurations and territorial structures create opportunities for a variety of different site-scalar-strategic actions'. Through their actions, students have in turn helped reconfigure geographies of political domination and of higher education. This is clearest in Senegal, where student activism contributed to a change of government and to the new government's agreement not to implement fully a World Bank-funded plan for higher education. However, governments have responded to activism by restricting students' opportunities to mobilise particular spatialities (notably spaces of proximity and gathering). They have engaged in what Pile (1997) describes as 'spatial technologies of domination' to 'continually resolve specific spatial problems, such as distance and closeness, inclusion and exclusion, surveillance and position, movement and immobility...' (p. 3).

Viewing power and resistance in purely dualistic terms has limitations. While students are often oppositional, their relatively privileged status means they cannot represent, unproblematically, subaltern resistance to structures of domination. Instead of a dualistic opposition between power and resistance (or spaces of dependence and engagement), spatialities of student activism are best understood as relational – operating in relation to both dominant power and to other groups in society such as peasants and workers. Furthermore, these spatialities may operate within material, symbolic or imaginary domains.

Student activism has deployed space in diverse ways and at different scales. We have identified three pairings of relational spatial processes: distance/proximity; segregation/connection and gathering/exposure. Distance has long been mobilised by students who travel away from home to study, escaping the surveillance of families, and sometimes the state. Proximity to sites of power can be deployed to gain influence, but also renders activists vulnerable to power's reach. Students' segregation from their (often rural) families, overseas or within secluded campuses, can shape how students imagine and relate to others in society. Nonetheless, students forge spaces of connection with their communities and with labour movements, as well as, crucially, spaces to gather and take action with other students. Lastly, they are exposed to ideas, and to conditions of life in their own and other societies, and need also to expose their own grievances to those who can contribute to their resolution.

Spaces of activism are constructed in relation to other social groups and in relation to imagined spaces and scales of domination. While domination and resistance are not always dualistically opposed, it is useful to recognise a degree of distinction between the spaces through which activism is enacted and the spaces or scales at which it is targeted. Students have strategically deployed the physical spaces of campus and city streets, and more extensive networks and travels, but their target (or imagined 'space of dependence') has overwhelmingly been the African nation state. To understand activism thus requires 'thinking about scalar dimensions of practices, rather than practices occurring at different scales' (Mansfield 2005: 469). The gathering of African students in Europe is significant less for its 'international' dimension than the opportunity it afforded students to construct both an idealised pan-Africanism and the new national-scale political order that eventually

prevailed in Africa. Subsequent actions, for instance to overturn World Bank-inspired reforms, have continued to target national governments.

While student movements have successfully projected grievances onto a national stage, and in Senegal secured government rejection of World Bank prescriptions, the national scale is of diminishing significance in shaping students' experiences. With 'changes in the scale organisation of politics' (Low 2004:129), national governments today lack sovereign power over African higher education and should not be students' only 'target' as the role of international actors increases. Furthermore, new configurations of higher education render conventional spatial strategies more problematic. Opportunities for 'resistances [to] negotiate spatially stretched relations of power' (Featherstone 2003:405) clearly need to be sought in the new configurations of higher education.

Looking to the prospects for student activism, the emergence of extraterritorial activism with the hesitant growth of the anti-capitalist movement and the Social Forum process in Africa perhaps pre-figures future possibilities. Furthermore, the long view taken here suggests that students studying overseas might once again mobilise distance and segregation to imagine a new socio-spatial order, not confined to the nation state. We have shown that students in diverse parts of Africa face similar situations, responsibility for which lies not wholly with national governments. Coming together in overseas or 'virtual' universities they might construct new spaces for activism.

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Endnotes

¹ The major recent exception was the massive student movement against France's proposed employment reforms in 2006 (Kouvelakis, 2006). The only recent geographical research on student activism examined the opposition to sweatshop labour expressed by students on American college campuses (Cravey, 2004).

² Geographers have also neglected African activism more widely, including pan-Africanist and anti-colonial movements (Tyner 2004).

³ Cox defines 'spaces of dependence' in areal terms (e.g. the territories subject to one tier of government), while 'spaces of engagement' comprise networks.

⁴ See Silvey (2003) in relation to young female factory workers.

⁵ Interviews in Senegal were conducted in French and, like the newspaper reports, translated by the first author.

⁶ In *No Longer at Ease* (1960) Chinua Achebe describes the difficult homecoming in newly independent Nigeria, Gani Fawehinmi (2002) details hardships he encountered as a student in 1960s London, while JP Clark in *America, Their America* (1962) relates the racism that he confronted as a Nigerian student in the USA.

⁷ Student enrolment rose from one percent of the age-cohort in the mid-1960s to three percent by the mid-1990s (World Bank, 2000).

⁸ New universities were also established in Zimbabwe and some degree programmes devolved to teacher and technical colleges (Zvobgo, 1999).

⁹ Student activists could, nonetheless, cause disruption by closing down the major road north which lay outside the campus (interviews, 2004).

¹⁰ A strict anti-corruption code drawn up by ZANU-PF.

¹¹ Primary education was believed to bring higher economic returns than secondary or tertiary. At the 1986 Conference of African Vice-Chancellors in Harare, the World Bank questioned the very existence of universities in Africa (Imam and Mama, 1994).

¹² In Senegal, the World Bank (1992) recommended privatisation of restaurant facilities, allocation of student accommodation according to academic results, reduced enrolment and increased charges to students.

¹³ The demonstration is described in *Le Matin* (2001) and *Sud Quotidien* (2001b).

¹⁴ 'Father Change' – an affectionate name for Wade.

¹⁵ Senegalese students are currently denied visas, for example, to study English in the UK because English classes are available at the British Council in Dakar.

¹⁶ Members of the former student union executive were offered asylum in Norway in 2002 when collecting the International Peace Prize on behalf of the national union. Their lives were not at risk in Zimbabwe.