

ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO THE NATURE AND PRACTICE OF GEOGRAPHY: A CASE STUDY OF AKIN MABOGUNJE'S GEOGRAPHY (1962 - 1984)

Patricia E. Campbell

This paper seeks to apply Buttimer's interpretative framework to the geography of Akin Mabogunje (Buttimer, 1984). Its purpose is to demonstrate that the nature and practice of geography can be more fully assessed by a contextual approach. Theories are understood to have their academic, cultural and political environments.

The interpretative framework focuses on the interplay between personal vocation (MEANING), mode of discourse (METAPHOR), societal context (MILIEU) and geographic scale (HORIZON) within an individual's research. Each theme searches the extent to which a researcher is structured by his societal context and how he has actively and uniquely sought to serve that society.

Extensive inter-disciplinary dialogue, the examination of published works and autobiographical accounts of senior colleagues, combine to yield the explicit and distinct themes in the hermeneutic framework outlined below.

An Interpretative Framework:

1. MEANING

Four distinct, though not mutually exclusive personal vocations of geographers, were discerned as reflective of an individual's talent and preference on the one hand and externally defined job-definitions on the other.

Poesis: (Literally; evoking discovery.) The concern may be to elicit curiosity and provide insight into man's relationship with the environment. An invitation to geographic awareness, speculation and critical reflection, often expressed in literary terms.

Paideia: (Literally; education, formation.) Vocation is primarily dedicated to teaching, lecturing, the writing of textbooks and field work.

Logos: (Literally; systematic categorisation, logic.) Aim is to develop general laws and theories which explain the distribution of phenomena. Concern here is with analytical rigour and science-making.

Ergon: (Literally; action, social duty.) The emphasis here is on how geography can participate in solving problems, be they social or environmental problems.

METAPHOR

A metaphor refers to a particular image of reality and its concomitant claims to truth held by a scholar. Four root metaphors were discerned.

Organism: An integrated view of reality where the aim is to synthesise diverse but interrelated factors into an organic whole.

Map: Reality is here construed as a mosaic of patterns and forms. The emphasis here is on classification and categorisation.

Mechanism: Explains phenomena in terms of causally interrelated systems. Emphasis is on the underlying process.

Arena: Seeks to explain events as they unfold in unique spatial and temporal contexts. Each event is evaluated in its own terms.

3. MILIEU

This theme focuses attention on the relationships between academy and society. It explores those clusters of public interest which have sponsored a research project and to which it has addressed itself.

Identity: Geographic research may address society's need for a sense of national identity or cultural awareness.

Order: A response to the concern for the management of collective life.

Niche: Responds to the interests in the conservation and management of the resource base.

4. HORIZON

This theme searches the interplay between the changing horizons of geographic research and those of national governments. They vary from *Local, Regional, National to International*. (Buttimer, 1984).

A Case Study: Akin Mabogunje, 1962 - 1984

The application of this interpretative framework to the nature and practice of geography is not, by any means, aimed at a definitive judgement upon the worth of that research. Rather its value lies in elucidating some of the external factors in the shaping of scholarly practice. This permits thought-styles to be understood in terms of their participation in the ideologies and philosophies of their environments.

The basis of this evaluation was a sensitive reading of nine published texts, together with a knowledge of their contemporary political and academic milieux. Autobiographical information and a video interview between Akin Mabogunje and Torsten Hagerstrand furnished further relevant information.

Akin Mabogunje was born in Nigeria in the early 1930's and thus would have commenced his geographic career in the mid-1950's. He submitted his doctoral thesis in Urban Geography to London University in the late 1950's and returned to Nigeria to assume an assistant lectureship at the University of Ibadan in 1958-9. The following year (October 1960) his country became the independent Federation of Nigeria.

The new Government inherited from the colonial past the administration of a vast territorial unit (356,699 sq. miles); a population of 55 million (1963 census); an established 'enclave economy' where industrial and commercial wealth was controlled by a relatively small sector of society in dispersed pockets of development; a rural population still locked in traditional lifestyles which, it became increasingly apparent, could neither support their rapid population growth nor compete for resources and political power with the modern sector. The most urgent need was for a theory of development which would create a more equitable distribution of life opportunities. The concern here is if, and in what manner did, one academic make his research relevant to the needs of his nation. The focus will be on perceptions of problems and the consequent solutions proffered through academic research, and with an elucidation of the forces shaping those perceptions.

In comparison with his later work which explores the wider national and international problems of the development process, Mabogunje's work of the early 1960's is orientated towards devising an incisive method of interpreting the spatial distribution of phenomena. Throughout this decade there is an intertwining of explicit emphases under the rubric MEANING. Paideia (teaching) is his predominant aim in the historical analysis of residential patterns in Ibadan in the post-colonial period (Mabogunje, 1962). An essentially a political study with a local horizon, this research appealed more to strict academic interests rather than seriously challenging any social problems. Ergon (social change) pre-empted this emphasis in the later urban studies of the city of Ibadan and Nigeria as a whole (Mabogunje, 1967, 1968). This research begins to question the more immediate problems of administrative inefficiency in managing resources. Thus in a paper in 1967 he argued that:

If the City Council of Ibadan cannot reform itself,
it may find itself in the current predicament of Calcutta.

(Mabogunje, 1967, p. 463)

Now, combining a historical/structuralist approach, he begins to examine the social structures underlying patterns of economic development and under-development. Throughout the 1960's it was becoming apparent that economic growth had widened social inequities and exacerbated, rather than relieved social and economic inequalities between developed and under-developed regions. The socio-political dimension to the issue of development forced recognition of these problems during the violence and strikes which erupted throughout this decade. These externalities may have evoked a geography of broadening horizons and deepening perspectives. There was a gradual shift in emphasis in Mabogunje's work at this stage from exploring the surface manifestations of under-development, towards an explanation of the underlying processes which engender it. Examining the nature of this

response yields an interesting interplay of shaping forces.

METAPHOR we have already defined as a researcher's conceptualisation of reality, or the lenses through which problems are perceived and consequent solutions proffered. These views of reality frequently derive from the wider political milieu within which theses are formulated and research questions are asked. For example, the organicist thought style (synthesis of diverse factors within an integrated whole) is most often cited in relation to the nineteenth-century imperialist tradition of geography-making. It was this view of reality that enabled colonisers to translate vast areas of the African continent into functioning regions of the world capitalist economy. The organicist metaphor which prevails, albeit to a greater or lesser extent, throughout Mabogunje's work, traces its lineage to this tradition. The British integrative/regional paradigm was the basis of geographic practice at the University of Ibadan, established while Nigeria was under colonial rule. This might explain the influence of organicist thinking on Mabogunje's work throughout much of his academic career.

The well-documented conflicts leading to the demise of the colonies did not result in a concomitant demise of the organicist metaphor. The problems of redistributing resources, and reconciling a multiplicity of heterogeneous groups under the national flag was part of the inheritance of Independent African Governments. By necessity, the organicist metaphor was also inherited and it became the ideological basis for the administration and government of post-colonial Nigeria. It served the function of maintaining existing territorial boundaries, it assured acquiescence to the goals of national unification and it legitimised the authority of the Nigerian Government. Development was thus perceived, politically and academically, as a process of synthesising diversities under an umbrella of redefined national goals and objectives carried on inside the old structures of pre-Independence Nigeria. This view was challenged in the mid-1960's by secessionist groups operating mainly in the Northern and Eastern Provinces. The two problems of inequitable distribution of resources and limited access to political power now combined with an emergent ethno-nationalism culminating in the declaration of Independence by the Ibo region of Eastern Nigeria. In response to these events, Mabogunje's geography proposed new regional economic policies formulated within a redefined national urbanisation policy (Mabogunje, 1968). In this instance, Mabogunje responded to the economic needs of minority groups while participating in the political ideologies of those they confronted.

This leads to a consideration of the third rubric of the interpretive framework, namely MILIEU. This refers to those clusters of public interest to which research addresses itself. Mabogunje's geography of spatial organisation primarily addresses itself to the public interest in Order (management of collective life). In view of the secessionist challenge, it may be argued that spatial skills applied to the administrative regionalisation of territory appealed more to managerial interests rather than popular interests in Order. Similarly, the relative emphases on the interests of national identity and Niche (concern for the management of resources) may also have had selective appeal. Niche is of particular interest here since the Eastern Province, which demanded secession from the Federation, was the region containing Nigeria's valuable petroleum resources. Economic expediency must have consolidated the political decision to deny regional autonomy to this area. This latter alternative is nowhere evident in Mabogunje's research, raising as it does the question of the role of powerful interest groups in shaping academic research. In this instance, solutions to developmental issues accorded with the dominant politico-economic interests of Nigerian society. This may be partially explained by government financing of research projects. Throughout this period there was large financial investment by successive military leaders in research and development projects. In one instance alone, a Four Year Reconstruction Plan (1969) allocated £1,113 million towards such projects.

Research, while structured to an extent by its academic and political milieu, also uniquely and creatively responds to external challenges. Concurrent with Mabogunje's holistic/descriptive geography produced at the University of Ibadan, was the rise of quantitative geography at the newly-established University of Ife (Okpo, 1981). Akin Mabogunje, while he became a master of the quantitative techniques, did not re-orientate his research to the theoretical 'New Geography'. Thus, at a time when Logos was becoming an increasingly popular vocation among his contemporaries, this orientation is noticeably absent in Mabogunje's research. This may indicate an implicit critique on the part of the researcher of the applicability of western economic theory to the developmental problems of his nation. Challenging the economic strategies hitherto adopted in Nigeria, Mabogunje explores the inadequate realisation of the growth centre concept with its theory of backward linkages. The first

decade of development under the Independent Government had proved unsuccessful. It had failed to alleviate poverty. It failed also to increase access to economic resources and political power among the mass of people. So severe were these problems in Nigeria, that they had precipitated the country into Civil War. There was clearly a need to review the accepted synonymy of economic growth and economic development. It is, perhaps, for these reasons that Mabogunje adopted a more Mechanistic metaphor (systems explained in terms of their underlying processes) in his geography of the 1970's.

He begins to penetrate the processes, social and institutional, underlying the spatial distribution of resources:

The concept of the enclave economy must be understood to have both a spatial and an institutional dimension . . . The institutional dimension is perhaps the most important since it not only underpins the spatial dimension but also determines the overall relations of the enclave economy to the rest of society.
(Mabogunje, 1976, p. 233)

Spatial re-organisation includes land-reform, re-structuring of transport links and the evolution of a system of cities appropriate to the task of stimulating widespread socio-economic development. Institutional re-organisation involves a "co-operativisation" of social relations, and the mitigation of capitalist market forces which Mabogunje saw as militating against social equity (Mabogunje, 1980). Solutions of development problems call for overall socio-economic transformation with a mobilisation of the entire population in a process of self-centred, self-reliant development. Mabogunje's geography, which found its MEANING in Ergon, adopted a Mechanistic METAPHOR and addressed the MILIEU interest in Order, now combined the triad of emphases characteristic of research orientated towards social reform.

Finally, it is useful to provide a brief discussion on the fourth rubric of the interpretative framework, HORIZON, and its influence on Mabogunje's work. Throughout his career the geographic scale of Mabogunje's research progressed, in order of magnitude, from local to national, to international scales of analysis. Penetrating the processes inhibiting development, he isolates external trade relations as a crucial factor shaping the patterning and maintenance of the enclave economy. He cites the Marxist argument that it was not isolation but integration into the Western capitalist system which created the reality of under-development (Mabogunje, 1980). To counteract this, his geography of development expands its geographic scale to explore new south-south relations between different under-developed countries in the southern hemisphere. The changing horizons of his research may also have been affected by the increasing sponsorship of international organisations concerned with the development process at an inter-continental level. It may also be linked to the broadening horizons of a Nigerian government seeking to establish political and economic relations with its partners in the Economic Community of West African States.

This rather cursory glance at one researcher's perceptions and orientations indicates something of the interpenetration between academy and society in a post-colonial, African society. A more in-depth analysis would undoubtedly reveal a network of other reciprocal linkages. It is sufficient to conclude with a metaphor borrowed from the author of the interpretative framework used in this study. "Academic endeavour", Buttimer argues, "Janus-like, faces in two directions: to social structuration as well as to the existential value of research" (Buttimer, 1984).

REFERENCES:

Unpublished Sources:

Buttimer, A. (1984). *Meaning-Metaphor-Milieu in the Practice of Geography*.

Geography:

Buttimer, A. (1984). Video interview with Torsten Hagerstrand and Akin Mabogunje.

Okpo, Sr. M. (1981). *The Diffusion of Geography as an Academic Discipline and Teaching Subject in Ireland and Nigeria: A Comparative Survey with special reference to Second Level Institutions*. Vol. 1. Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, N.U.I.

Published Sources:

- Holt-Jenson, A. (1980). *Geography: Its History and Concepts. A Student's Guide*. London: Harper and Row. 910 41267
- Johnston, R. H. (1981). British Political Geography since Mackinder: A Critical Review. *In Political Studies from Spatial Perspectives: Anglo-American Essays on Political Geography*. (A. D. Burnett, P. J. Taylor, eds.) Chichester: John Wiley.
- Johnston, R. H. (1983). *Philosophy and Human Geography: An Introduction to Contemporary Approaches*. London: Edward Arnold.
- Mabogunje, A. L. (1967). The City of Ibadan. *The Geographical Review*, 59, 462-463.
- Mabogunje, A. L. (1980). *The Development Process: A Spatial Perspective*. London: Hutchinson University Press.
- Mabogunje, A. L. (1962). The Growth of Residential Districts in Ibadan. *The Geographical Review*, 52, 52-77.
- Mabogunje, A. L. (1978). Manufacturing and the Geography of Development in Tropical Africa. *In Fundamentals of Human Geography: A Reader*. (J. Blunden, ed.) London: Harper and Row.
- Mabogunje, A. L. (1972). *Regional Mobility and Resource Development in West Africa*. Montreal: Queen's University Press.
- Mabogunje, A. L. (1976). Spatial Production Organisation and Integration in Developing Countries: The Case of Africa. *Geoforum*, 7, 233-241.
- Mabogunje, A. L. (1970). Systems Approach to the Theory of Rural-Urban Migration. *In Readings in Social Geography*. (E. Jones, ed.) London: Oxford University Press.
- Mabogunje, A. L. (1968). Urbanisation in Nigeria. *Geography*, 55, 118-119.
- MacLaughlin, J. (1986). State-Centred Social Science and the Anarchist Critique: Ideology in Political Geography. *Antipode*, 18, 51-72.
- Pedler, F. (1979). *Main Currents in West African History, 1940 - 1978*. London: Macmillan. 960-3