

# Reinforcing colonial triumphs white north and black south

Is the G8 perpetuating the division between the so-called white north and black south of Africa? **Naefa Khan** argues that this division continues and is reflected in regional groupings formed under the auspices of the G8.

*Africa is divided into Black and White, and the names that are substituted – Africa south of the Sahara, Africa north of the Sahara – do not manage to hide this latent racism. It is affirmed that White Africa has a thousand-year-old tradition of culture; that she is Mediterranean, that she is a continuation of Europe and that she shares in Graeco - Latin civilisation. Black Africa is looked on as a region that is inert, brutal, uncivilised – in a word, savage. There, all day long you may hear unpleasant remarks about veiled women, polygamy and the supposed disdain the Arabs have for the feminine sex. All such remarks are reminiscent in their aggressiveness of those that are so often heard coming from the settler's lips.*

(Fanon, *F. The Wretched of the Earth*. London: Penguin Group. 2001.)



Fanon's words continue to ring true nearly 50 years on and these 'latent' prejudices are clearly manifested in the regional groupings adopted by the G8. Although physically existing within the African continent, North Africa remains a region ensconced within the greater Middle East or Mediterranean because of her predominantly Muslim and fair population. The region still falls prey to exotic portrayals of the East as Orientalist views unfortunately continue to dominate. It is therefore of little surprise that the G8 formulated the Broader Middle East and North Africa initiative (BMENA) incorporating North Africa with the Middle East and that the European Union

(EU) Mediterranean Partnership includes most of the North African countries.

Regional groupings of North Africa with the Mediterranean, Europe and the Middle East reinforce Black and White Africa and validate cultural and religious differences. This contextual perception of North Africa creates fissures where none in fact may exist.

In most cases a strong affiliation by some North African governments with African issues, rather than Middle Eastern has been and remains evident. This is clear in the case of Algeria, which faced a lengthy war to achieve its independence. It welcomed former president Nelson Mandela and provided training and assistance to

Umkhonto we Sizwe. Its current leader, President Bouteflika, along with Presidents Mbeki and Obasanjo, is spearheading Nepad and the adoption of an African identity is evidenced by Bouteflika's participation as an African representative at the G8 Summit. Egypt too is tentatively looking south as she realises the benefits in doing so. This is illustrated by her attempt to gain an African seat on the Security Council and her role in the Sudan peace process.

Nonetheless there is still the persistent need to divide the continent. Although expediency may easily justify the membership of North African countries in the EU Mediterranean Partnership, the grouping clearly conjures the Graeco-Latin, cultured associations which Fanon so astutely noted. Furthermore, as with most partnerships involving erstwhile colonists the driving motivation behind the partnership is to ensure the economic and physical security of the dominant partner.

One of the top priorities of this partnership is security. In the case of North Africa a legitimate concern as those responsible for the bombing of the Twin Towers and Madrid came from Egypt and Morocco respectively. Moreover, the bombings, which shook Paris in 1995<sup>1</sup>, and the fear of 'boat people' if Islamists were allowed to win the Algerian elections<sup>2</sup> necessitated emphasising security concerns and the incorporation of North Africa, the breeding ground for Islamic extremists, into the partnership.

Aside from security issues, economic concerns are also prioritised. Free trade association agreements have been signed with most members of the partnership, while others are in the process of being negotiated. These agreements are negotiated with each member state. As a result it may be best for a company wishing to invest in the region to set up base in Europe and take advantage of these association agreements rather than a country in the region since the agreement works with Europe and not between countries in the region.

Another concern is that removal of tariff

barriers will affect those countries in the region heavily dependent on import duties for government revenue. Finally, aid and investment to this region will never be as extensive as that being funnelled to Eastern Europe. Consequently, aside from capturing the historic, cultured and European air, which comes from being part of the Union, the partnership is likely to benefit the European members most as it seeks to stave off Islamic fundamentalism and to gain economically. Hopefully, as some analysts maintain, the remaining members will see some benefit in the long term.

A similar programme is being adopted by the G8 in the form of the Broader Middle East and North Africa (BMENA) initiative adopted at the Sea Island Summit in 2004. Interestingly, the response of the US and Europe to the initiative illustrates the different political strategies of the two. The initiative seeks to ensure greater democracy, economic liberalisation and social freedom by encouraging and supporting civil society activity with the understanding that these initiatives will reduce the spread of radical Islam. The US wants forced conditional change, whereas Europe encourages change from the inside. The Europeans take cognisance of the Israel/Palestine problem and acknowledge cultural, and religious differences, issues the US fails to heed. The UK maintains that she works within the EU Mediterranean Partnership to strengthen the objectives of the G8 in terms of its BMENA plan<sup>3</sup>. The desire to achieve the objectives as set out in the BMENA initiative was confirmed once again at Gleneagles.

Any success of the BMENA initiative should be viewed as cautiously as the G8's lyrical waxing at Gleneagles of its plans to save Africa, which is often portrayed as the lost continent with images of conflict, poverty and death of black people. This is the image the G8 leaders understand. The fair skinned Arabs of North Africa fail to fit into this picture and therefore it makes sense to group them with the rest of Europe, the Middle East and the Mediterranean. By acquiescing to these groupings we buy into

long established colonial boundaries. A united Africa has far more leverage when engaging with economic blocks such as the EU. North Africa should therefore prioritise its affairs and become more integrated into the AU to ensure African influence with other regional blocks.

Bi-lateral trade agreements such as the one entered into between South Africa and Algeria and being sought between South Africa and Tunisia help to build relationships between the north and south and encourage interaction.

On the softer side of engagement, cultural, religious and academic exchanges should occur to integrate the regions on a more personal level. Northern and southern governments should create exchange programmes and cultural fairs highlighting the diversity of the continent, which in turn will facilitate dialogue. Africa as a continent was colonised, and, in the process, stripped of her identity as her peoples were treated as subhuman. Post-colonial Africa has experienced coups and leaders who have betrayed their people, causing the continent to suffer economically. North Africa is not a Kuwait, Bahrain or Saudi Arabia. Africa has more binding it than keeping it apart. A united effort is needed to illustrate the capacity and strength of Africa at an international level. An independent North African initiative as sought by the G8 works to the benefit of the G8 and to the detriment of Africa while simultaneously reinforcing a divide long ago established by colonial forces.

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#### Footnotes

1. Sweeney, J and Doyle, L. 1997, 9 November. *We bombed Paris for Algeria*. *The Observer*.
2. Stone, M. 1997. *The Agony of Algeria*. London: Hurst and Company. 242
3. Douglas, A. Minister of State. *Stronger Global Economic Governance*. UK