Of Boundaries, Borders and the In(scription) of the Invisible

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Abstract

Boundaries and the discourses of boundaries are, to theorise the least, vast, versatile and taxonomic. In almost all human scientific thoughts, disputations and actions, the inventions and actualities of boundaries are almost, always certain, intended and proliferating. The more attempt to challenge, dismantle or undo boundaries has led to inadvertent erections of other invisible limits and limitations which are themselves absolute agencies of boundaries. My presentation will extend on received understanding of the nature of boundaries and, in that process, engage with categories and implications of boundaries as geographies of containment. I also imagine the Manichean intimations of the term, as extremity and liminality, and its dialectic possibility as the definition of marks and as marker of identity. In literary productions - narrative, dramatic and poetic - the performances of characters, and the compositions of transformations always involve reactions against and responses to features of boundaries and containment. Kinetic readings of the plot of characterisations point at the ubiquity of boundaries which the archetypal man (protagonist/voice) must encounter or manipulate within the structure of the text. Invariably, I posit that boundaries, once erected, are made to be broken, transcended and subverted, just as the discourse of that transcendence is as crucial as the imagination and the artificiality or physicality of the bounded space. As coda, I offer some visible or tangible impressions of the "boundary" as illustrations of its agency in recent inter/national politics and cultural productions. The attempt here is to evoke (a) the event of corporate imperialism (i.e. the South African Marikana memory), (b) the eventuality of internal imperialism (the Nigerian herdsmen outbreak), and (c) the phenomenality of a transgressive speech act (postproverbials), itselfa pointer to the liminal linguistic space between one conventional imagination and its radical other in African culture.

Keywords: Borders, Markers, Identity, Conflicts, Postproverbial

What happens to boundaries defined?

Are they natural or artificial, inherited or invented?

Do boundaries break or expand, shift or freeze?

Are they the conspiracy of lines, milestones and other forms?

Do they cross disciplines, diversify or congeal? Are boundaries boundless, blurry, seen or unseen? Are they thick like the fog, or do they just run like rivers through the forests of the mind?

Introduction

Discourses about and of boundaries are themselves boundless. I must start with a caveat emptor, that I do not hold any boundless knowledge about the subject of "boundaries", or "borders" but an engagement with it affords the scholar an opportunity to problematize it, to tum critical attention to the idea, and thereby reflect on some implications of the theory and practice of the concept.

Boundaries. Borders. Crossing. Margins. Threshold. The overarching concept allows us, scholars across disciplines, to operate in a huge space, reflectively and analytically so, that the vortex of relations becomes a huge bowl of interpretations about the subjectivities of identity, space, migration, movement, and the inevitable modes of existence in space and time. My intention is to repeat some of the definitive descriptions of the term "boundary" or its plural - boundaries, and in so doing, extend on the particularities of the term by drawing from personal stories, narrative encounters and artistic, cultural productions to query some of the received or stock definitions of the term. I hope to dwell briefly on the nature of boundaries (as sites and location of difference), as well as the categories, intimations and implications of boundaries. My basic argument is that the more attempt to challenge, dismantle or undo boundaries always leads to inadvertent erections of other invisible limits and limitations which are themselves absolute agencies of boundaries. I will advance that by their very construction, boundaries are made to be broken, transcended and subverted; for the discourse of that transcendence is as crucial as the imagination and the artificiality of the bounded space. In the end, I will elect to cross the objectifying threshold of my training as a literary scholar engaged in the (post)structuralist analysis of texts and events into the other humanistic and social scientific disciplines of politics, history, economics and philosophy to exact how ideologically charged the subject of boundaries and border formations can be.

Nature and Implications of Boundaries

The discourses of boundaries are, to theorise the least, vast, versatile and taxonomic. In almost all human scientific thoughts, disputations and actions, the inventions and

actualities of boundaries are almost, always certain, intended and proliferating. As imputed in my earlier statement, the idea of boundary is primarily related to the discipline of physical geography, but the concept (and actuality) of boundaries is present in sociology, psychology, archaeology, architecture, literature, and retrievable in almost all disciplines and human endeavours.

In "Boundaries and connections", Fredrik Barth describes boundary as a complex cultural model:

It signifies a syndrome of ideas, ranging from an imagined line drawn on the ground, through various abstract separations and distinctions in realms of political and social organization, to a schema for conceptualizing the very idea of distinction. It thus carries massive cultural entailments. If people make use of other concepts or models, different!y constructed, then they may open quite different possibilities of thought and action for the people who use them, and will presumably configure experience quite differently for theirusers. (20)

When we speak ofboundary, or boundaries, we think of geographies of containment; we speak about markings, territories, and identifications; we imagine the other Manichean and polar intimations of the term: borders, fringes, frontiers, bonding, bondage, confinement, closure and enclosure, the extremity of mapping, migrations, emigration and of passages. Boundaries are contemplative divides of extremity and liminality; the implications for identity, self-inscription, and otherness are almost evident in all real-specific interpretation of boundary and boundaries.

Taxonomising Boundaries

Before further taxonomic notations of boundaries, I will like to draw attention to three definite descriptions which will put the subject in bold relief.

- (a) First, boundaries are to be recognized as enclosures, which are essentially discriminatory and disruptive in nature;
- (b) second, boundaries are to be understood as inevitable "zones" of difference, and
- (c) boundaries are possibly sites of versatility and connections.

The primate, root word "bound" evokes the sense of fixedness, fixation, restriction and control. In the history of the Middle Ages and the New World, boundaries are the interstices of the prosecution of the peculiar institution of slavery (where people are bound and bonded). In the history of Western objectification of Africa as a map, boundaries are a material, physical part of the project of colonization (activated in the 1884 balkanisation of the continent). In their physical figurations,

boundaries are the surveyor's rings around marked spaces with longitudes and latitudes which define location, ownership, and time.

In the contemporary history of the making of nations and regional and continental blocs, boundaries, being disruptive of free movements, are the linderos, limitations to global, economic exchanges.

Boundaries define, and regularize identities; and thus, boundaries are discriminatory and disruptive... (as illustrated in Anthony Cohen's *Signifying Identities*, an anthropological study of identity:

Boundary, identity and authenticity are all used... more as terms of discrimination than of relativity. They do not describe people as being more or less White/Aboriginal/Celt/Maori and so on, but as unambiguously one or the other. (4)

Anthropological studies have shown that boundaries could also be agency of connections rather than of disconnections (Barth and Cohen). Through social practices and lived experiences which produce categories of order, in which functions and roles are defined and pre-determined, what inhere more and bind clans, groups and societies together are the connective codes of defined boundaries of behaviors:

The boundary may be experienced as an extension of the self: at the point where the brush makes contact with the canvas, or the mortar with the pestle. Similarly, societies and social groups extend themselves into the world through the webs of their relationships, their economic activities and their inscriptions of themselves on the landscape, and their boundaries are located at these points of their furthest extension, the points at which they see themselves located in geographical and social space. (Cohen, 7)

Fredrik Barth's concept of boundary/boundaries: vast, versatile, unclear and even mystifying; and his anthropological study of how boundaries - abstract or physical - determine identity and group relations.

We are likewise inclined to use the image of boundaries to refer to the divisions that separate distinct social groups, especially when these are associated with territories. (18)

Types: Boundaries Abound

Scholarship of the naming of boundary/boundaries is pervasive: there are physical boundaries (state, national, continental), there are chronotopic boundaries which involve the difference in performance of both space and time; social boundaries,

colonial boundaries; racial boundaries, ethnic boundaries, linguistic boundaries (ref *Boundaries of Babel*), mental boundaries, religious boundaries, political boundaries, bodily, sexual (gender) boundaries, ideological boundaries, ecological boundaries (ecology impacting on inter-group relations), fluid boundaries, and thus shifting boundaries, including what I shall highlight subsequently as invisible and visible boundaries; there are also, as we know, disciplinary boundaries without which there can be no attempt at interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary studies (between physics and metaphysics, chemistry and biochemistry, archaeology and history). In one instance, there is also the qualification of "unknown boundaries" as highlighted in Robert Foley's inaugural lecture of 2005.

Although almost all designated or definable boundaries evoke the acts of inclusions and exclusions, the characteristic of liminality or hybridity seems to be more adequate in interpreting or negotiating the question of identity (acquisition of or claim to identity) among latter-day postcolonial African youths: bi-racial, multiracial, Afropolitans who carry at least two international passports, one of which is privileged and is used to negotiate the various contraptions of the bordered continent.

In addition, there are public and personal/private boundaries; with particular reference to the individual, it is the provenance of man to challenge himself or to confront his limitations as a condition for being in the path of progress; in other words, without the struggle against personal or private inhibitions, without reaction against inflicted trials, or without frictions, acting outside the proverbial comfort zone, without the provocation of personal limitations, progress or transformation remains an immobility, a farce, if not a mirage.

On the Idea of Invisible Boundaries

Beyond the physicality of borders (especially as this relates to state, nation, and continent), the discourse of boundaries in some other disciplines is being challenged to the extent that it is more valid to speak of the collapse of binary differences in which there is no longer a clear-cut disparity in the formation and the constitution of the bounded space and those who operate within it. The desire for innovativeness and the achievement of hybridity are contributory to the debunking of the existence of boundaries, even if they still abound in particular shades. For illustration, in contemporary Hausa society, there is a third category of gender referred to as the "dan Daudu" which harbours non-heterosexual identities. Although this third category itself is a liminal space, it is a boundary of sort, even if it is definable as a blurred boundary.

In the dialectic ofliterature and the new media, the idea ofblurred boundaries is

the subject of Eva Wirten in *No Trespassing: Authorship, Intellectual Property Rights, and the Boundaries of Globalisation*, where she privileges convergence in her discussion of the erasure of traditional boundaries between media forms and the commingling of diverse platforms in media, telecommunications, and software,... (10). The term "digital divide" - a curt reference to humanity's transgressive journey from one technology to hypertext technology - contains the scientific notion of movement across boundary, in the same way that Thomas Kuhn has described his concept of shifting paradigms. Yet, as much as the dividing lines between orientations and ideologies are blurred, there are other hermeneutic readings of such borderlines as unyielding and distinctive. It is such distinction between convention and subversion/innovation that Marc Prensky recognized when he theorized on the indelible generational borderline that exists between two regions of the mind, action and attitude, two categories of responses to the technological revolution, the pragmatic difference between those he referred to as "digital natives" and "digital immigrants":

The importance of the distinction is this: As Digital Immigrants learn -like all immigrants, some better than others - to adapt to their environment, they always retain, to some degree, their "accent," that is, their foot in the past. The "digital immigrant accent" can be seen in such things as turning to the Internet for information second rather than first, or in reading the manual for a program rather than assuming that the program itself will teach us to use it. Today's older folk were "socialized" differently from their kids, and are now in the process of learning a new language. And a language learned later in life, scientists tell us, goes into a different part of the brain. (2)

If the industry of printing "extended the boundaries of literature" (Marshall McLuhan, 159), it can be imputed that the industry of social media in the digital age explodes and re-enacts the immediacy of orality.

The Composition of Boundaries in the Literary Text

In the preface to *Broaching Frontiers, Shattering Boundaries*, T. E. Knight has reflected on the qualities of cultural containment, violation and eruptions which invariably create experiences that become materials for literary productions:

The one universal fact that emerges from the experience of the colonial enterprise seems to be that of social frontiers shattered and of cultural boundaries violated. Not a small portion of this heritage is the phenomenon of the diaspora. The diasporic project of redeeming identity and preserving traditions has now become a common human legacy. It is a quest that leads

from the experience of community scattered, of disruption and translocation, to the struggle to contain or assimilate 'alien' cultural irruptions. (9)

In literary productions - narrative, dramatic and poetic - the performances of characters, and the compositions of transformations always involve reactions against and responses to features of boundaries and containment. Kinetic readings of the plot of characterisations point at the ubiquity of boundaries (public, private or institutional) which the archetypal man (protagonist/voice) must encounter, manipulate, or be manipulated within the structure of the text.

Invariably, the negotiations of boundaries are almost always strategically structured into the plots of texts, however simple or complex, and characters always react, move within or against bounded spaces. As I have tried to show in the reading of an entire literary tradition, the operating trope in African American literature which connects to racial and class relations, is the trope of journey, variously composed as quest motifs and as acts of transgression and passing. The plotting, or mapping of boundaries, in which landscapes (or seascapes) are primary spatial setting of texts, is a crucial subject of critical interpretation. Indeed, the understanding of African American literary tradition begins with a knowledge of the creation of borders and the archetypal character's struggle to negotiate, transcend or overcome the boundaries of race, class and sexism. Thus, the kinetic character is always engaged in boundary crossings, and there are temporal and spatial crossings which both serve as part of what I have called "chronotopic boundaries".

Ralph Ellison's epical character in *Invisible Man* (1952) readily comes to mind: invisible man moves from the borders of invisibility through visibility into gestures of invincibility. Toni Morrison's protagonist in Song of Solomon, Milkman, is constantly engaged in a reverse motion, from the North to the South, in quest of his roots, preceding or serving as exemplary template for the journey of the protagonist of Daniel Omotosho's They Tell Me of a Home (2005).

In Breena Clarke's Stand the Storm (2003), the Coats family struggles to cross boundaries and gain freedom. As bondsmen and women, they successfully negotiated and reclaimed some of the grounds of their exclusion from rights and privileges through determination and hard work. They eventually became free to control their own time, work for themselves and earn their own money- all of which were boundaries they wouldn't dare cross before they became free. In Richard Wright's epochal novel, Native Son, the contours of crossings are graphically delineated and actualized action of the novelistic text: the boundaries of action are laid out with the character, Bigger Thomas, groping and grappling through the

borderlines of fear, flight and fate.

I must hasten to note that the discourse or interpretation of kinetic actions and the quest for transcendence is not the province only of African American literary tradition. I have only drawn reference from the familiar, or rather the peculiar n terms of the plethora of critiques that the literature has endured. If we must draw further reference from the most familiar tradition, the African, it must be reiterated that most critical perspectives can subject the performance of the character to the absolutist, yet essentialist predilections of motion, migration and movements; for the virtual argument will always be that, within the plot of characterization, characters contain, encounter and cross boundaries.

Poetry has been used to imagine and project borders; subjects of encounters, displacement, dispossessions, reclamations, transgressions and disappearances have been integrated or implicated, and can be retrieved in the works of creative writers. For instance, two representative examples of the demarcation of cultural border which operates doubly as the meeting point of two civilisations (Europe and Africa) can be found in Gabriel Okara's "Piano and Drums" and David Rubadiri's "Stanley meets Mutesa":

Thenlhearawailing piano solo speaking of complex ways in tear-furrowed concerto; of far away lands and new horizons with coaxing diminuendo, counterpoint, crescendo. But lost in the labyrinth of its complexities, it ends in the middle of a phrase at a daggerpoint.

And I lost in the morning mist of an age at a riverside keep wandering in the mystic rhythm of jungle drums and the concerto. (Okara)

At Mutesa's court fires are lit.

No more the burning heat of the day

But song, laughter and dance.

The village looks on behind banana groves,

Children peer behind reed fences.
Such was the welcome
No singing women to chaunt a welcome
Or drums to greet the white ambassador;
Only a few silent nods from aged faces
And one rumbling drum roll
To summon Mutesa's court to parley
For the country was not sure.
The gate of needs is flung open,
There is silence
But only a moment's silenceA silence of assessment. (Rubadiri)

In Wole Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests* (1963), the boundary between the world of the living and the world of the dead is collapsed, momentarily, into an invocation of the past which gets ritualized into the present as an indexical query for the future; in Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* (1964), Ezeulu desires that his son be the representative head of the transition from traditionalism into an agency of Western civilization; in Bessie Head's *A Question of Power* (1974), the protagonist endures stages of psychological transactions through the boundaries of in/sanity; in Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine*, the fate of the female protagonist in the human world is inextricably bound to the desire and prediction of the supernatural world.

Linguistic Boundaries: Beyond Babel

Like the creation of physical borders, it is in language, and in the natural difference of tongues, that the boundary thickens. An interesting exception here is the status of Swahili as the lingua franca of much of East Africa and a part of Central Africa, and the possibility of signifying it as an exemplary illustration of how both natural and artificial boundaries can be broken and expanded. This is a Bantu language that harbours or belongs to no single African ethnic group, a language that has over the centuries evolved from a phylum of coastal languages and which has spread through migration, trade and concerted official policy. As a language of administration, commerce, cross-border trade, security and digital communication (mobile telephony), Kiswahili builds bridges across a region, and has broken at least ten national boundaries (Tanzania; Kenya; Uganda; Zaire, with two dialects - Katanga and Kivu; Comoros Island; Burundi; Rwanda; South Sudan; South Somalia; and the Pemba region of Mozambique).

Invisible but Thick Borders

In this section, I intend to show, through two action-events and one phenomenon, how the discourse of boundaries can be real, tangible and crucial for survival and relationship even at the present time. The attempt here is to invoke (a) the event of corporate imperialism (i.e. the South African Marikana), (b) the eventuality of internal imperialism (the Nigerian herdsmen outbreak), and (c) the phenomenality of a transgressive speech act (postproverbials), as symbolic representations of the ideology of collision and collusion in the bordered space. I will signify on these choices in a moment.

Marikana's Shadow: The Geography and Politics of Corporate Imperialism

On 16August 2012, men of the SAPS shot dead 34 striking mineworkers at Marikana platinum mine in North West Province, the bloody culmination of a violent ten days that left 44 dead and 94 injured. What has come to be referred notoriously but euphemistically as "Marikana Scene 2" is a tragic scene where 57 police from four units fired 295 bullets at mineworkers. On the heels of that massacre, the South African Government established the Marikana Commission ofliquiry led by Judge Ian Gordon Farlam.

Details of the narrative show that boundaries even exist in open spaces; concentric boundaries are created as charged lines between the police (as agents of state and defender of order and of the multinational Lonmin corporation, near Rustenburg) and the miners of Marikana (as labourers, members of the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU).

Deriving information from the Marikana Commission, coupled with report of David Bruce (an independent researcher), the developing archive of personal narratives, photographs, witness accounts and forensic details show that the arena of conflict between the police and the miners is graphically circumscribed as a boundary of violence, oppression, distrust, fear, destruction and liability.

Between Herdsmen and Farmers: The Geography and Politics of Internal Imperialism

Since the founding of Nigeria's Fourth Republic in 1999, the farmer-herder violence has killed thousands of people and displaced tens of thousands more. It followed a trend in the increase of farmer-herder conflicts throughout much of the western Sahel, which can be traced to an expansion of agriculturist population, reduction in arable land and an unyielding attachment to nomadism even in conditions of receding pastureland.

Conflicts between herdsmen and farmers always involve dispute over land; therefore, in spite of attempts to politicize the conflict, territorial rights or acts ofland usurpation are at the roots of the orgy of killings and bestialities that have been visited upon communities and entire ethnic groups in the region of Nigeria known as the Middle Belt (now geo-politically designated as North Central region). It is also noteworthy that there is a convergence between ethnicity and labour, between pastoral and agrarian identities, where most herdsmen are of Fulani extraction, and the large population of farmers are non-Fulani, in particular, the Tiv or Taro, the Idoma and other ethnic groups of Benue, Plateau, Taraba, Jigawa, Zamfara, Adamawa, and Kogi states. From 2003 to 2013 the total number of deaths increased from 4 to 80; in 2014, the death toll increased from 80 to 1,229. In 2015 alone, the middle-belt Taraba state recorded 847 deaths, and the northern state of Zamfara recorded 229 deaths. In addition to terrorist attacks, Fulani militants were also involved in non-state armed conflicts with groups from Eggon, Jukun and Tiv farming communities. These conflicts resulted in over 800 deaths. From 2017 to 2018, over three thousand people have been killed by herdsmen and hundreds of thousands displaced.

Indeed, boundaries are zones of difference, and conflict. Conflicts occur especially where there is a difference in the understanding of border or boundary markers. This is eventuated by the condition of "shifting boundaries" in which the concept of borders and enclosures are swift and fluid depending on cultural preference, experience, and cognition; for instance, in many parts of the West African sub-region, the herdsmen and farmers have differing concept of boundaries: whereas the farmer is stationary, creates boundary, demarcates, claims, plots and inherits the field or the farm, the herdsman is migratory, peripatetic and therefore constantly shifting his boundaries; he does not recognize the idea of static boundaries, and he does not inherit the farm but he claims the space by imagining an open boundary for his herds to graze and cross borders. The underlying and unyielding philosophy of the Fulani herdsman on boundary is contained in a proverb - "If cattle die, then Fulbe dies." A related proverb with deeper nuance that captures the essence of that worldview is "nagge duraige waatata" meaning "a rearer of cows never dies". Metaphorically, it means that the rearer's soul is one with the cow, and there is a spiritual (inter)connection of the rearer with the cattle. By extension, the proverb explains why the "cowless" Fulbe can kill without remorse; he is bound to the ownership of the herd, and the most significant industry that humanizes him is cattle rearing. For the herder, boundaries are not demarcation but shifting sites that are defined as luxuriant for grazing, therefore useful, or barren, therefore useless.

Let me state that I have referred to Marikana as a symbolic site of difference and conflict, nothing more. Yet, my bias is clearly on the side of the underdog, the subject who is imagined as an object, commodified, reduced to a decimal part of the labour game. [As an African scholar, my response to anything cultural and political on the continent must be beyond borders, so I have no interest in paying heed to the problem of being misunderstood]. As for the herdsmen-farmers conflict, this is clearly about the struggle for possession, not of economy or geography, but of heritage. I offer these tangible impressions of the invisible "boundary" as illustrations of its agency in recent inter/national politics and cultural productions, for these are indelible episodes where invisible borders congealed into visible crises.

Proverbial Borderlines: Between Convention and Invention

In my work on the prevalent practice of postproverbials, a 'new' speech act among emergent generations of African youth who are usually located in urban and periurban spaces, I come to a preliminary conviction that the exercise of dynamism and iconoclasm is made possible by the deliberate intention to break boundaries, to transgress, and to transcend from convention to invention, from *sense* to *non-sense*, and from assemblages to disassemblages. I have argued that as fossilized as Yoruba wise-sayings may tend to be, "it is impossible not to recognize a certain radical shift or the transgressive force in the making and use of proverbs in recent times" (Raji-Oyelade,

As an interpretive tool, the critique of the postproverbial space allows us to see or mark the difference across generations of speakers of the given African language. It is about bounding and bonding, as well as it is about boundaries and breaking the order of a verbal art, an index of the liminal linguistic space between one conventional imagination and its radical other in African cultural production.

Conclusion: The Inevitable Bind

The image of a boundary, in the abstract sense of a separation that surrounds a social group and divides it from other groups and from its surrounding environment, has proved analytically powerful for many purposes in social science.. In the study of ethnicity, it has helped us understand the signalling effects of cultural idioms whereby membership in contrasted ethnic groups are made visible and thereby socially effective. In these and many other ways, it has proved useful and insight-giving, and will continue to be a powerful concept in our analytical arsenal (Barth,

Finally, may I reiterate the obvious that the discourse of boundaries abound and proliferate; that the potential to break or cross boundaries is always present in abstract, tangible and invisible forms. Each time we try to break, cross or close boundaries, they thicken and become more invidious, i.e. discriminatory, and each time boundaries are challenged or revised, they become inevitable and binding, theoretically.

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