Beyond Borders: Selected Proceedings of the 2010 Ancient Borderlands International Graduate Student Conference

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Introduction

The Ancient Borderlands International Graduate Student Conference strives to bring together work from diverse fields, in order to explore the application of Borderlands Theory to research. The papers presented here are revised versions selected from the 2010 conference "Beyond Borders: Ancient Societies and their Intellectual Frontiers."

What is a Borderland? And what is Borderlands Theory?

A Borderland is a land between political entities, as in "the US-Mexico border," but it is most essentially an interaction around a designated border: a set of rules to govern the interaction between entities. This is a powerful analogy. Borders can be both physical and conceptual, but most importantly they are imposed. Because they are imposed, borders are never perfect, for who can think of everything? Instead, they exist in a semi-porous state in which they both connect and separate simultaneously. Borders also become entities in themselves, and become more complex as they continue to exist and become reinforced through time, and these borders also change those entities that lie adjacent to them through interaction with the other side. These major characteristics of borders produce a very important set of questions that, if applied to a social or cultural interaction, guide a useful and fluid analysis.[1]

Borders are constructed things, which people create by designating a boundary of some sort. The easiest example is a fence between yards, or a border between states; on either side of the border, a different set of rules applies. Fredrik Barth, a pioneer within Borderlands Theory, most clearly expresses this idea. As Barth has observed, the construction of a border "creates both affordances and limitations" and makes the borderland a place of creation, profiteering, experimentation, and questioning;[2] indeed, he goes on to show that the variation of hybrid individuals occurs along the border through what he calls "inventive behavioral responses to the imposition of boundaries, and the effects of social positioning."[3] People meet in the middle; ambassadors may travel back and forth; there may be intermarriage, or the comingling of ideas; people might find they have a shared faith in spite of racial or ethnic differences—all of these sharing a space.

Because it is imposed, the border takes on a life of its own, and produces a new middle place, where the two sides meet, and comingle, and produce new variations. Indeed, there are always ways to cross the border, there must be ways to patrol and enforce it, and there are always myriad peoples and things crossing and trying to cross the border, permitted or otherwise. Consider the fence between houses: children hop fences, trees grow over them, weeds may spread, unsightly décor might upset, neighbors might wave or argue or chit-chat over them,

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[1] For the best overview of Borderlands Theory, see Bradley J. Parker "Toward an Understanding of Borderland Processes" in *American Antiquity*, Vol. 71, No. 1 (Jan., 2006), pp. 77-100; Mark A. Pachuki, *et al.* "Boundary Processes: Recent Theoretical Developments and New Contributions." *Poetics* 35 (2007): 331-351.

[2] Fredrik Barth "Boundaries and Connections" in Anthony Cohen (ed.) *Signifying Identities: Anthropological Perspectives on Boundaries and Contested Values* (London, 2001) 17-36, 27.

[3] Barth, "Boundaries and Connections," 28.

leaves will blow in the wind. Now, the border between nations: ambassadors and immigrants will come through the border, there will be rules to learn and follow, some will try to sneak in, or some will try to sneak out, police or military forces may keep it safe and regulated. This border might be marked with chain-link fence, or by a high wall with turrets, but a similar complex of problems and processes will surround it. What, then, of borders without barriers?

Borders between groups are not marked by a wall or fence, per se, but they are clearly marked in a myriad of other ways. From titles and verbal identity markers, to ways of dress and cooking, the actions of humans in society become the boundary markers between groups of people. There are still rules of being on this side or that, there are still ways to transgress and cross over, there is borrowing and lending, and there are definitely people and ideas that would patrol or police the boundaries themselves. The border and its markers can be manipulated, shared, borrowed, and experimented with: ideas and practices can cross the border, and be received, rejected, adopted, transformed, manipulated, and reproduced. Because so many facets must be examined together, when thinking about a border, it is helpful to have a good multifaceted lens, and Borderlands Theory provides one.

Borderlands Theory is actually best thought of as a complex of questions that come with ideas about likely patterns of response; this set of questions comes to us from various disciplines, and so each comes with its own subset of theoretical background. For example, because a border is characterized both by imposed change and unexpected reactions and productions, one useful way to talk about the groups and individuals involved in its construction and maintenance is to engage with Post-colonial ideas and terms.[4] For example, the hybrid figure, or liminal character, or "the other" might become an expected landmark.[5] In trying to conceptualize the border itself within a space of interaction, whether it be two groups in the same city, two groups sharing a building, or two states sharing a no-man's land, the consequences of use and transformation of space are often key, and thus theories of Space and Place are often crucial.[6] Within any borderland there is also cultural dialogue, and thus many forms of discourse can also be identified, usually through the examination of narrative.[7] As groups or states grow, and their borders expand, the possibility of core-periphery interactions increases, and every border interaction involves the competition for resources or power, and so anthropological theory is often key.[8] Finally, borders nearly always involve groups, and many sociological approaches are

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[4] For more information see Cohen, Jeffrey Jerome. "Introduction: Midcolonial: and "Hybrids, Monsters, Borderlands: The Bodies of Gerald of Wales." in *idem*, ed., *The Postcolonial Middle Ages* (New York, 2000): 1-17, 85-104; D. H. Strickland "The Exotic in the Later Middle Ages: Recent Critical Approaches." *Literatures Compass* 5 (2007): 58f; and Ania Loomba, *et al*. "Beyond What? An Introduction." In *idemes*, edd., *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond*, 1-38.

[5]Daniel Boyarin "Hybridity and Heresy: Apartheid Comparative Religion in Late Antiquity." In Ania Loomba, *et al.*, edd., *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond* (Durham, 2005), 339-358. a*nd Borderlines: the Partition of Judaeo-Christianity*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004. Homi K. Bhabha *The Location of Culture*. (Routledge, 1994); Jeffrey Jerome Cohen "Monster Culture: Seven Theses." In *idem*, ed., *Monster Theory* (Minneapolis, 1996), 3-25; Elaine Pagels *The Origin of Satan* (New York, 1995); and David Frankfurter *Religion in Roman Egypt: Assimilation and Resistance*. (Princeton, 1998).

[6] See Benedict Anderson *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London, 1983); Pierre Bourdieu *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge, 1977).

[7] See Thomas Sizgorich "Narrative and Community in Islamic Late Antiquity." *Past & Present* 185 (2004): 9-42; Margaret R. Somers "The Narrative Construction of Identity: A Relationship and Network Approach." *Theory and Society* 23 (1994): 605-60; and George Lakoff *More than Cool Reason? A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor* (Chicago, 1989).

[8] See Clifford Geertz *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, 1973); Frederik Barth "Boundaries and Connections" in Anthony Cohen (ed.*) Signifying Identities: Anthropological Perspectives on Boundaries and*

also useful in conceptualizing and analyzing a borderland.[9] All of these theories being engaged at once can make Borderlands Theory seem daunting, or cumbersome, yet it allows for many dimensions of analysis to be juxtaposed, and thus provides for a fluid yet steady understanding of complex cultural interactions.

Because there are so many borders of various types and scales, the foundational questions become: 1.) What kind of border is it? 2.) Who is creating it? 3.) Why and how is it being created? and finally 4.) How does the existence of the border demand a patrol force, and rules that maintain the border itself? In the case studies below, we will see the application of different parts of Borderlands Theory to a very disparate group of borders, and all being applied in different ways. This is both the charm and the danger of Borderlands Theory—while it provides for a fluid analysis, it must be applied carefully, lest the swath cut be too broad, or the cross-section only reveal flesh.

The opening paper by Sarah Davies leads us through an examination of the conceptual boundary of Roman imperium, and changes brought to Rome by the establishment of Roman military authority in Carthage and Corinth. As the expansion of the Republic attained a sort of critical mass, feedback from the frontiers brought change to the center. In Borderlands Theory, the idea that the inscription of the borderland itself begins the process of change is a fundamental concept. Engaging heavily with core-periphery models, and studies of ethnic change in the Hellenistic world, Davies examines the rhetoric of the center, in order to understand how Rome was able to cope with its new status and imperial boundaries as it renegotiated its own identity in the Mediterranean world. Likewise, Davies also makes explicit the link between the internal transformation of the conceptual boundary, defined by the Roman idea of imperium, and the real political ramifications of the year 146 BCE.

Looking ahead in time to the 3rd-7th centuries CE, David Jonathon Felt examines the construction of boundaries through a cultural discourse between India and China, mitigated by central Asia, about the conception of spatial constructions of the world. When ideas about the world reached China from India, the Chinese were forced to accommodate the new incoming ideas into their preexisting narratives about the world's construction. In Borderlands Theory, it is important to remember the idea of permutation, or "fuzzy sets," in which the reactions to an event or idea will be varied, and fall along a spectrum rather than into distinct and easy categories. Felt makes it clear that the drive to "re-center" the world was but one of many reactions to the new incoming knowledge, and presents an intricate view of Chinese constructions of space and borders.

Utilizing sociological theories about conflict and the formation and change of identity, C. Thomas Fratz turns to biblical polemic in order to show the creation of boundaries within the

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Contested Values (London, 2001) 17-36; James Brooks *Captives and Cousins: Slavery, Kinship, and Community in the Southwest Borderlands* (North Carolina, 2002); and Stuart Tyson Smith *Wretched Kush: Ethnic Identities and Boundries in Egypt's Nubian Empire* (Routledge, 2003).

[9] See Walter Pohl "The Construction of Communities and the Persistence of Paradox: An Introduction," in Richard Corradini, Max Diesenberger, and Helmut Reimitz eds. *The Constructions of Communities in the Early Middle Ages: Texts, Resources and Artifacts (*Leiden: 2003); Grant, Don Sherman. "Symbols, Stories and Practices: New Empirical Directions in the Study of Religious Meaning." *The Sociological Quarterly* 42 (2001): 233-251; and Margaret R. Somers "The Narrative Construction of Identity: A Relationship and Network Approach." *Theory and Society* 23 (1994): 605-60.

early Christian community. When examining the interactions of social groups, Borderlands Theorists are prone to point out the ways in which people use rhetoric to characterize the Other. In his examination of the Gospel of Matthew, Fratz engages heavily with the works of Borderlands scholars Daniel Boyarin and Thomas Sizgorich to describe how the author of Matthew was trying to link, through the deliberate construction of narratives, the persecution and death of Jesus at the hands of Pharisees with the persecution and supposed eventual death of his own community at the hands of a current Pharisaic community. By making this link explicit, Matthew also helps to construct and reinforce the border between these two social groups, and simultaneously changes the perceived definition of both sides.

In a cross-cultural, cross-temporal comparison, Ana Mitrovici juxtaposes the ritual games and spectacles of the Romans and the Aztecs. The display of conquered peoples by imperial powers is commonly examined in the light of post-colonial theories about power struggles and identity. In addition, with a spectacle like those examined here, the deliberate injection of peripheral images into the center of power shows the centers construction of power and self-identity very clearly. Using her comparison to show the functions of spectacle in imperial identity formation, Mitrovici highlights some of the uses of violence and display within a borderlands complex.

Suggesting a strong, if not symbiotic relationship between religious narrative and the use of violence, Matt Recla examines this diabolical dichotomy. Engaging heavily with Sizgorich and Boyarin, Recla shows how the ambiguity of boundaries becomes useful as it provides for the experimentation with and reintegration of cultural ideas and traditions within religious groups. The study of narratives is essential to an examination of a borderland complex, as so often the establishment of borders between groups begins with and is maintained by the use of rhetoric. Focusing on the ways in which individuals and groups interacted with the narrative of martyrdom, Recla gives us an important examination of the inextricable bonds between violence and belief.

Returning to Rome, Emily A. Schmidt presents us with the creation of Flavian dynastic identity, and the ways in which its construction integrated representation of the Jewish god. Engaging heavily with spatial theories and ideas of narrativity, Schmidt presents the ways in which the Romans' vocabulary could and did accommodate Jewish ideas about divinity, as well as the ways in which the Flavian dynastic identity brought representations of the periphery into the center in a very deliberate construction of power. Physically representing the actual triumph over the Jews, the Arch of Titus became propaganda, showing the place of the Jews within the Empire, and simultaneously presenting the conquest of the Flavian gods.

Working with a physical border, in fact a wall, Douglass Underwood examines the Romanization of Toulouse, through the imposition of civic structures. Using spatial theories, Underwood examines the ways in which the boundaries and borders themselves can even become markers of identity. Romans imposed the Roman identity of the city of Toulouse, and the city wall itself, far from being merely a defensive structure, served a more important purpose of sending a message of power. By forcing a Roman identity on the city of Toulouse, over time, it did indeed become a Roman city. This examination problematizes the use of archaeological data, and examines the ways in which people deal with imposed structures.

Looking out from the center, Colin Whiting examines the ways in which a group might conceive of "the other" in their rhetoric. Specifically focusing on the ways in which Christians defined themselves in antiquity, Whiting shows some of the ways in which terms and ideas about previously encountered enemies—Jews and Pagans—were brought forward and used again on groups of other Christians. In Borderlands theory, the maintenance of boundaries and borders is a well-known phenomenon, and it often takes the shape of re-inscribing the rules, and thus redefining the sides of a conflict or interaction. Whiting engages heavily with the work of Daniel Boyarin, and shows the shifting ideas and identities involved in the formation of Christian communities.

These case studies bring together important patterns of examination, and show the multifarious ways in which the idea of a borderland can be extrapolated and applied as a means of analysis. Whether looking at individuals or groups, the center or the periphery, maintaining old identities in the face of cultural change, or drawing a boundary around new groups and identities, the questions asked by Borderlands Theory, and the various lenses offered by it, provide for useful and fluid conceptualizations and analyses of historical circumstances. Though the papers presented here focus on the pre-modern world, the patterns they identify are important and still active and recognizable in our own time. In addition Borderlands Theory allows for an interdisciplinary approach and a way to conceive of cultural change without the reliance on a rigid dichotomy. The goal of the conference at which these papers were presented is to bring together studies from multiple disciplines all engaging with this new and exciting approach, in an effort to explore and refine its application. In presenting these papers to you, we hope to continue the discussion.

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