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CONTESTED BOUNDARIES AND EMERGING PLURALISM*

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Abstract The rise and fall, construction and deconstruction of different types of boundaries – biological, psychological, geographical, cultural, social, political, economic – make up the very story of human civilisation and of contemporary social transformation. Drawing from a wide variety of contexts, this paper shows how new boundaries do not replace the old ones but rather they tend to co-exist. This co-existence is sometimes harmonious but often tension-prone. Life in a society without boundaries will be nasty, brutish and short. On the other hand, societies with a proclivity to maintain boundaries that ignore the pulse of the times will be condemned to stagnation and decay. Thus, boundaries are constantly contested and hence the real challenge is to abolish obsolete boundaries and build desirable new ones which is the essence of pluralism.

Introduction

We live in a world of endisms (end of history, geography, nature, ideology), postisms (post-industrial, post-capitalist, post-modern) and beyondisms (beyond the nation-state, beyond the Cold War), which signify contradictory trends and tendencies. If endisms indicate a world without boundaries, postisms announce the emergence of fresh boundaries and beyondisms allude to the elongation of boundaries. On the other hand there is a set of newisms (New International Economic Order, New Information Order, New Division of Labour) which also envision additions and accretions to the existing boundaries.

In spite of these coinages and articulations, I propose to argue that even when old and existing boundaries are constantly contested and de-sacralised new boundaries are re-created and re-sacralised. The rise and fall, the construction and deconstruction of various types of boundaries – biological, psychological, geographical, cultural, social, political, economic – is the very story of human civilisation and of contemporary social transformation. Put so simply, the proposition is perilously close to being naive; yet I propose to persist with it to unravel the profoundly complex processes at work. In pursuing this difficult agenda, I draw upon a wide variety of themes – stratification, ideology, technology, body, gender, kinship – in the style of an academic amphibian or even an intellectual nomad.

Conceptual considerations

Boundaries are of various types – territorial, temporal and ideological, to mention a few – and they may be hard or soft, permanent or ephemeral, sacred or secular, static or dynamic. The image of boundaries as quiescent entities needs to be questioned. The notion of definite territorial boundaries probably started with settled agriculture. Consequently, the concept of land as a scarce and valuable resource emerged, gradually rendering land disputes endemic in agrarian societies. Similarly, the idea of nation-state is firmly anchored to territory and triggered off numerous boundary disputes; quite a few have terminated but many are still persisting. Although the 'tribes' and 'nomads' of the post-modern world are not territorially anchored, they too create new boundaries, socio-cultural in content, so that they can find new roots and identities to emancipate themselves from the rudderless and chaotic urban milieu; they are rediscovered primary groups. Thus, boundaries are contested but not abolished; the desirability of membership in solidarity groups is still valued.

Boundaries are where one encounters others; they imply the recognition of others' autonomy and specificity as well as the realisation of one's own identity. Annexation of others' territory and assimilation of others into one's culture are forceful erasures of boundaries to the advantage of the strong and would lead to the degeneration and even dissolution of the identity of the weak. 'Protecting' the identity of the weak is maintaining the boundary for them as defined by the strong. Co-option is a process of making boundaries porous by marginalising outsiders and 'accommodating' them. Self-determination is permitting the weak to create a boundary of their choice.

To sustain boundaries is to maintain identity. Formal co-option of a collectivity leads to the obliteration of its identity; informal co-option is a process which may help retain the identities of the co-opted. Thus the co-option of the powerful is often informal; it does not lead to the abolition of boundary or destruction of identity. Formal co-option is usually the mechanism invoked to provide equality to the weak but in the process their identity gets eclipsed. The trade-off is between identity and equality.

A society without the sacred cannot exist. Hence societies without boundaries are not possible. The sacred is not confined nor can it be consigned to the religious realm. The secular becomes significant precisely because it is subjected to a process of sacralisation – civil and 'secular' religions, Holy Wars and national icons are all sacralised secular entities and enterprises. Generally speaking, boundaries are sacralised when they are institutionalised and when contested they undergo a process of desacralisation. However, all boundaries are contested; some readily and others reluctantly. At the initial stage, contestation is sacrilege; later it may be tolerated and finally it may be hailed as innovative and revolutionary. But new boundaries will gradually be created and sacralised.

The private–public distinction is the creation of modernity; its institutional articulation is found in the bifurcation between state and civil society, both of

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which are supposed to guard their respective boundaries jealously. Yet there are several paradoxes. The private rights and privileges the individuals enjoy need to be moderated and regulated; the state often has to enter the scene as the final arbiter between oppressors and victims. Areas which were earlier in the private realm (e.g., health and education) are taken over by the state precisely because of the pressure exerted by civil society; but once the state takes over the welfare functions, there is some unavoidable interference in the private life of the individual by the state. The remedy prescribed by the New Left to keep the state in check is decentralisation, which in effect means shifting the instruments of regulation from the macro to the micro level, that is, to local self-government. The local community and government could be more oppressive regarding the traditionally stigmatised and disadvantaged than the distant Leviathan. On the contrary, the New Right wants to 'privatise' state functions; if this happens, the poor will be acutely disadvantaged. The reduction of the welfare package would necessarily mean endorsing the hegemony of the market. The real issue is how to identify the truly disadvantaged from time to time and not allow 'disadvantage' to be used as a political instrument (Wilson 1987).

The continuous differentiation of society and the elaboration of social spheres have telling implications for the individual. The content of citizenship started expanding in the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries to include civil, political and social dimensions (Marshall 1963 [1950]). By the middle of the 20th century, the New Right had started advocating cultural citizenship which emphasised duties against rights (Roche 1992). However, more recently there has been further expansion in the content of citizenship with the advocacy of ecological or environmental citizenship which evidently goes beyond the territorial boundaries of particular states. This in turn also alludes to the breakdown of the old model of the polity (e.g., the nation-state) and the emergence of a new model – multinational polity. For example, there would be French or German nationals but only European citizens once the European Union becomes a multinational state. Further, French and Germans become ethnics outside their cultural homelands even when they are within their legal homeland – the European Union. Thus the fission and fusion of boundaries affect the lives of individuals in terms of their identities, at the micro and macro levels (see Oommen 1993 : 191–6).

Historical boundaries

Historically viewed, the trajectory of breaking geographical boundaries has a fascinating career. Deterritorialisation of religion, starting with Buddhism and followed by the three Semitic religions, was the first major event of boundary-breaking in human history. However, it was colonialism which heralded the beginning of what has come to be designated as a world society. Colonialism not only broke geographical boundaries but also devastated the old civilisations materially and culturally and created the settler-majority New World. Columbus and Captain Cook are the progenitors not only of the New World but also of the Old World; the latter would not have been a cognitive category without the emergence of the former.

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The Hobbesian advocacy of the right of the people living without adequate means of livelihood in densely populated regions of the world to migrate to the sparsely populated regions made colonialism a legitimate enterprise. But the Hobbesian insistence that the migrants are not to exterminate the local people and snatch from them their possessions was observed more in the breach in the New World (Walzer 1983).

If the doctrine was appropriate to Europe then, it does not appear to suit Europe any more. Thus the migration of the poor from the most densely populated regions of the world today to the sparsely populated, well-developed parts of the New World is not only discouraged but virtually prevented through new doctrines. Indeed, it is one of the paradoxes of globalisation that while the free movement of commodities is being advocated, free movement of human beings is being discouraged, even prevented. And those allowed to enter from the over-populated, less-developed regions to the New World are the former's *crème de la crème*; it is done in the 'national' interests of the recipient nations. There is also a general resistance to the increase of population in the New World through migration. In this context, the doctrines invoked are the need for the maintenance of environmental purity and cultural homogeneity. New bases for boundaries are created, invoking new doctrines. Thus, although geographical exploration and the colonisation which followed it changed the boundaries drastically in favour of some, the newly created boundaries are now sought to be maintained to the disadvantage of others. Today we have a variety of societies, not a world society: Old World nation-states, settler-majority polyethnic states, old societies with new states, multinational polities and the new New World. Although the co-terminality between the boundaries of states, societies, economies and cultures has been irrevocably shattered, 'methodological nationalism' has persisted (Agnew 1989 : 19) and nation-states continue to be the ideal. Old boundaries are broken, but a larger set of new boundaries is created.

Following colonialism, capitalistic penetration led to the centre–periphery differentiation through the process of unequal exchange. For a while, socialist states attempted to insulate a part of the world through state protection and a command economy; however, it could not be sustained for long. Consequently, the Three Worlds – first (Capitalist), second (Socialist) and the third (Non-aligned) – and the new boundaries associated with them emerged (Worsely 1984). Today, migration of capital, experts, technology and lifestyles from the Northern hemisphere to the Southern hemisphere goes on unabated and is christened as globalisation: breaking the boundaries between the remaining two worlds. The expansion of the Northern hemisphere's market is said to be heralding the birth of a world society; yet it is a truncated one, because the North is increasingly insulating its borders against labour immigration from the South, as I have noted above. The fact is that globalism, regionalism, nationalism and localism do co-exist, but in different contexts and proportions.

The political boundaries of the Old World were fluid and continuously contested over the centuries. Europe is both the cradle and the graveyard of the nation-state. Between Napoleon, Bismarck and Hitler, its boundaries were re-drawn

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several times over. The idea of the nation-state, internalised and institutionalised through a long-drawn process of genocide and culturocide in the past two centuries, stands demolished today in its very birthplace. The European Union, the emerging multinational polity and the United States of America, the poly-ethnic polity, are now projected as the new model. But the Union of the Indian states, the Republic of India, a new state with an old civilisation, had already been in existence for a few years in 1956 when the European Economic Community, the forerunner of the European Union, was first formed. The Soviet Union, another multinational polity, had withered away after several decades of precarious existence. The point is, the new model is not new at all: it has either been in existence for a few years (e.g., the Indian Union) or experienced extinction (e.g., the Soviet Union). The boundaries are not fixed permanently, they are in flux and constantly contested.

None of the phenomena – history, ideology, geography, nature – pronounced to have ended is ending or is likely to end. History is re-created, mutations of ideologies emerge; geography has not ended in spite of revolutions in transportation and communication. Only the *co-terminality* between geography, economy, culture and polity which existed in the hoary past has ended. For example, even if the political sovereignty of the Mexican State over its geographical territory is intact, its economic boundary has been in flux because of the colossal migration of its population to the USA. However, the Mexican influx may have adverse consequences for the integrity of the US polity if it adheres to its proclaimed commitment to human rights and multiculturalism.

Spanish-speaking people, whose ranks are bulging in the Californian belt, are inclined to demand the use of their mother tongue for certain purposes – school education, dispute processing in lower courts and local administration. The supremacy of English as the lingua franca of the US may be questioned; a new cultural boundary may be created within the American polity. There is a paradox here: the erosion of the economic sovereignty of one state (Mexico) irretrievably impacts on the integrity of another polity (the US). Boundaries attached to two different entities are causally linked and simultaneously affected.

The story of fusion and fission of boundaries is a widespread one: former Yugoslavia, a mosaic of nationalities that emerged after the First World War and was studiously nurtured by Tito, is balkanised; so is the gigantic Soviet Union. The two Germanys have fused, the elective ethnicity of the German-speaking people who are distributed across the world is a social fact. Every effort made by the Kurds, vivisected between the territories of different states, to unite gets thwarted. If Kuwait is nothing but a cut-piece artificially disengaged from Iraq (its larger whole, according to Iraqi nationalists), then what does one make of Kuwait's claims to an independent and autonomous existence? As Lebanon is splintered, Palestine is created. Paradoxically, the process of fusion and fission of boundaries recurs constantly, erecting a plurality of entities.

The construction and demolition of boundaries is as old as human society itself, as exemplified in the we–they distinction and in the construction of the Other. When societies were relatively homogeneous, the Other was an outsider.

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The usual tendency was assimilation and integration of the Other into the mainstream if it was acceptable and viewed as desirable, usually with a lower status. If the Other was seen as congenitally inferior, different and detested, the boundaries were staunchly maintained. However, with increasing democratisation and the creating and sustaining of a series of boundaries within societies, pluralisation was not only possible but came to be viewed as desirable. Thus many groups, insiders who were disenfranchised earlier – women, youths, lower-classes, blacks, lower castes – as well as newcomers into the system – immigrants, ethnic groups, guest workers – started competing for the same goods and spaces that had been monopolised by a small privileged section earlier. Latterly, even conventionally stigmatised groups (e.g., homosexuals) have won major victories in gaining their right from state and society in spite of their 'deviant' life styles.

Pluralism legitimates new lifestyles and activities. The multiracial swimming pools, the veiled Muslim women, the skull-capped Jewish males, the vegetarian Hindus, the rosary-wielding Catholic priests, the lovers indulging in intimacies on the street, the drug addict who loses his balance in public places, the neo-Nazis who attack aliens – are all rendered visible by pluralism.

The opening or closing of boundaries is a matter of self-interest. In classical political economy, national territory was not recognised as a moral entity; free trade and unrestricted immigration were both advocated. Today, the creation of a common European 'homeland' is not likely to solve the problem; it will persist even within the European Union. Migration by fellow citizens of the Union into others' homeland is not always accepted, as, for example, in the case of the Greeks in Germany or the Portuguese in France. Australia entices Asian students but turns away Asian employment seekers. There is indeed a re-conceptualisation of boundary; a hierarchy of boundaries emerges depending upon who is involved and the purpose at hand.

Boundaries are often a matter of cultural proximity: natives and aliens are constructions anchored to preferred categories. The ethnic Germans whose ancestors left centuries ago are welcomed back to Germany even though their language and lifestyle may vary vastly from that of national Germans; they are not migrants, they are coming home. In contrast, the Turks who may have lived in Germany for decades, learned the German language and adopted the German lifestyle cannot become German nationals or citizens – they are considered cultural aliens. Japanese ethnic migrants from Latin America to Japan have a greater possibility of integration as nationals, compared with Koreans who have lived in Japan for decades but have refused to learn the Japanese language. It is perhaps easier for a Spanish Catholic who does not speak French to be accepted in France than for an Algerian Muslim who speaks impeccable French. However, occasionally the boundaries are 'relaxed' to accommodate outsiders, as in the case of guest workers. At one point in time, 30 per cent of the residents in Switzerland were guest workers from other countries; but when they become dispensable due to automation, or unaffordable due to recession, the boundaries become rigid. Yet it is true that Berlin is the third biggest Turkish city and that

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Melbourne is the second biggest Greek city in the world. The opening of gates and closure of boundaries co-exist.

The rigidity or flexibility of territorial boundary is not simply a matter of cultural similarity or economic need; in some contexts it is a matter of moral necessity. If those who flee to freedom from political or religious persecution are not accommodated, they might be killed. To keep one's boundaries tight in such a situation is tantamount to participating in genocide. Eighty per cent of the world's Zoroastrians live in India; they would have been physically liquidated in their homeland if they had not been given asylum when they came to India a thousand years ago. The survival of many Cubans was made possible thanks to their being admitted to the US as political refugees. Thus to keep the boundaries of a state open or closed often becomes a moral issue.

On the other hand, the very same polities which are soft in terms of their boundaries towards political or religious refugees and which flaunt this softness as a proof of their human rights record, may have very hard boundaries for victims within the system. The blacks and the native-Americans in the US and the untouchables in India are victims of structural and physical violence. The difference between those who are persecuted and have to flee their homeland and those who are oppressed within their ancestral or adopted homeland may be precious little, viewed in terms of equality. If the asylum seekers are legally banned from seeking employment in the country of refuge, the underclass and the lower castes within their own homeland are structurally incapacitated to avail themselves of employment opportunities – the former are alien residents, the latter are resident aliens; neither constitute fully-fledged citizens.

Hierarchical boundaries

Boundaries are inter-societal as well as intra-societal. An important manifestation of boundaries is stratification. All societies are stratified; some have hard and others have soft boundaries. Societies with hard boundaries are hierarchical and their boundaries are difficult to break. In the traditional Indian caste system, the possession of goods and services was hierarchically conceived; it was worked out in meticulous detail who could own or possess what goods, who could have access to what service and from whom. Even cloth was not a commodity – clothes indicated the rank of the wearer, and some were not even allowed to wear them. However, hierarchy conceived in terms of rigid boundaries was not confined to caste society. In the 'plural society' created by colonialism, different races lived side by side, exchanging goods and services but proscribing legitimate transaction of blood and transmutation of culture (Furnivall 1948). The description fitted well not only the situation in Netherlands India, which Furnivall studied then, but also South Africa – at least until recently. And the same pattern is found across the inner city and suburban neighbourhoods of the US, as well as in the residential segregation of untouchables in Indian villages, in spite of the value of equality proffered by the US and the Indian constitutions.

Weber's notion of *Stande* (status groups) identified groups in terms of lifestyles, be they patricians or plebeians, feudal lords or vassals, Brahmins or

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untouchables. The traditional boundaries between these groups have collapsed at least partly and uniformity in lifestyles has increased. Yet, the 'tribes' and 'nomads' of the urban centres of the contemporary world are voluntarily constituted identity groups that flaunt their specific lifestyles as their distinct mark of identity; they are precariously perched between the international MacDonalds and the national swastika. That is, if market, technology, human rights and democracy are de-sacralising some of the old boundaries, nationalism, statism, racism and ethnicity are re-sacralising others. The story is not a unilinear one.

Even in non-hierarchical societies there existed relatively hard boundaries. In several European languages the same word was used to refer to strangers and to enemies. On the other hand, not only were strangers entitled to hospitality in particular situations, they were even counted as 'safe' in some contexts, compared with friends and kin, because one could confide in them (Simmel 1964). Similarly, breaking the boundary with the stranger and extending help and succour was a matter of moral triumph in ancient Jewish society. The good Samaritan had a higher moral stature than a good neighbour. In the contemporary world, breaking boundaries across race, religion and nationality has a moral tone. In the context of intergroup violence the mass media studiously comment on such instances. If a white protects a black in the US, or a Hindu takes care of a Muslim in India, it is believed to have a higher moral virtue than a case of one protecting persons from one's own race or religion. That is, breaking boundaries may be a deviant, revolutionary or a moral act – depending on the context.

The distinction between pleasant and unpleasant, light and hard, prestigious and stigmatised work existed and exists in all societies. The lowly placed persons – slaves, blacks, immigrants, guest workers – are compelled to do the work which the citizens/nationals do not want to do. In some of the premodern societies, the privileged did not work at all, but spent their time in leisure pursuits; in most modern societies the affluent decide what work they should do. Therefore, to have leisure and to do the work of one's choice are the same; both are voluntary options. In contrast, constrained hard work for long hours and denial of leisure go together. Slaves, blacks and untouchables were subjected to these conditions in earlier times.

Perhaps the most important societal element which has created *new* boundaries in modern societies is occupation. This has been possible partly due to the implosion of knowledge and the consequent creation and application of technology. The occupational specialisation and professionalisation which follows it are important features of modern societies. And it is well known that those in occupations make constant bids to professionalise, even if some of them do not succeed in their efforts (Wilensky 1964 : 137–58). However, professionals have a vested interest in inventing and maintaining new specialisations which in turn create new needs for the hapless client. Thus, over time, professions which were meant to serve and help have become a modern nemesis (Illich 1975). New occupations and professions create new boundaries not only between professions and their clients but also among the professionals

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themselves. This veritable multiplication of boundaries has serious consequences for life in modern societies. Efforts to abandon and/or soften these boundaries manifest themselves in the form of recourse to alternatives, such as appropriate technology, barefoot doctors, indigenous medicine, people's courts, public-interest litigation etc. However, these have not displaced high technology or overprofessionalism but have led to an elaboration of choices. Boundaries have multiplied, making a wide variety of personal choices possible, leading to a plurality of lifestyles.

Finally, if hierarchy differentiates people by sustaining rigid boundaries prescribed for them, equality leads to the crystallisation of boundaries resulting from their voluntary choice. Citizenship in a democratic polity is the very antithesis of hierarchy; it necessarily implies equality. But equality in most democratic societies is individual-based and ignores group rights and identity. Conceding collective identities entails recognition of differences and/or inequality between groups. The real dilemma therefore lies in reconciling collective identity and individual equality. The way out is to recognise groups as repositories of vital resources capable of self-management and as co-shapers of their polity, as forcefully argued by Elsie Boulding (1993 : 349–60).

The social class boundaries will not disappear even from the post-information society. As projected recently (Janin 1994), the post-information society of the 21st century will have a diamond-type structure instead of a pyramidal one. At the top will be a small creamed-off layer of intuitors and lineals, the 'what–when' workers, highly competent, fully employed and excessively paid. In the middle will be a vast 'idle but not poor' central class involuntarily unemployed. And at the bottom, a small underclass constituted by individuals who are unmotivated and largely deviants (Janin 1994 : 38–50). Whether the projection is right or wrong, whether the imagined structure of society is desirable or not, the point of interest for the present analysis is that even in a post–capitalist, post-information society, social boundaries are likely to emerge and exist. And since Janin's analysis is confined to the developed world, we may legitimately assume that a different set of boundaries will exist in less-developed societies.

We may thus distinguish between three types of societies: hierarchical societies which differentiate people, egalitarian societies which are characterised by simple equality in which one dominant good is widely distributed and societies characterised by complex equality which '… establishes a set of relationships such that domination is impossible … no citizen's standing in one sphere with regard to one social good can be undercut by his standing in some other sphere, with regard to some other good' (Walzer 1983 : 19). However, even complex equality calls for the defence of boundaries and hence one '… can only talk of a *regime* of complex equality when there are many boundaries to defend; and what the right number is can not be specified. There is no right number' (Walzer 1983 : 28).

Ideological boundaries

Ideologies of all hues tend to create, maintain and demolish boundaries. It is useful to distinguish between two types of ideologies: those which tend to fuse

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boundaries, leading to absolutisation, and those which tend to differentiate and elaborate boundaries. Absolutisation is the process through which one or other dimension is assigned centrality in society and all other dimensions are subordinated to it.

Religious fundamentalism and secular totalitarianism are examples of absolutised ideologies: they ignore the boundaries between different dimensions of life. Religious fundamentalism aims to encapsulate the totality of human life within the rubric of religion, to be regulated by the 'church' and the ecclesiastical personnel. Secular totalitarianism insists on regulating all aspects of life by the state and the political party which controls the state. The religious sacred is perceived as indivisible by the former, secular sovereignty is defined as indivisible by the latter. Inevitably, conflict triggers off when two absolute ideologies – be they two religious fundamentalisms, two secular totalitarianisms or a religious fundamentalism and a secular totalitarianism – compete for hegemony in the same space and context. Sometimes conflict between state and church is sought to be avoided through a merger of the two, as in the case of theocratic states. This makes even dissent and protest impossible.

Absolute ideologies attest the doctrine of terminal loyalty, which poses irresolvable dilemmas. How can a citizen of the United Kingdom who is a Catholic or a citizen of India who is a Muslim have primary loyalty in religious matters to their respective states? Similarly, how can an Italian-speaking citizen of Switzerland or a Spanish-speaking citizen of the US have primary loyalty to their respective states, in matters cultural? The moment boundaries collapse and one dimension is made superior to all others, freedom and justice both become endangered species. Therefore, the acute observation of Walzer that 'good fences make just societies' ought to be endorsed in its entirety. The real issue is where to put the fences and who should adjudicate on that, and hence the dilemma: 'Boundaries are vulnerable to shifts in social meaning and we have no choice but to live with the continual probes and incursions through which their shifts are worked out' (Walzer 1983 : 319). When a shift of boundary is brought about abruptly, it is called revolution; when it takes place gradually, it is termed evolution or at best incremental revolution. But history teaches us that neither revolution nor evolution leads to the end of struggle for justice and equality (Wertheim 1974). New forms of injustice and new varieties of inequalities are identified and contested.

Can liberal ideologies which respect different boundaries solve the problem? In theory they may; but in reality it is doubtful precisely because of the tendency to invest one or the other dimension – civil society, market, environment – with omnipotence by their respective spokespersons and the proclivity to cross boundaries. The bifurcation of societies into different spheres and conceding of relative autonomy to each of them is nothing new. The spheres for the king and the priest, the emperor and the pope, the church and the state were the first to be demarcated with an agreed division of labour. However, the boundaries were often violated. Perhaps the contest between state and church is settled for the West; for the rest of the world it is still a live issue, with varied manifestations.

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Even though the state is invested with secular sovereignty, those who exercise authority on behalf of it are expected to do so with restraint. This does not always happen. Thus the contest between the state and civil society persists in most societies. The market has claimed its own autonomy and a recent contender is the concern for environment. There is a constant elaboration and buoyancy of different spheres: church, state, civil society, market, environment, etc. It is necessary and important to arrive at a consensus to *share sovereignty* between the different spheres. Any effort on the part of one of the spheres to establish hegemony over other spheres is likely to be contentious; the solution lies in evolving an equipoise. Conceding autonomy to different spheres of society is the core of pluralism. The real issue is whether pluralism and equality can co-exist.

I have noted earlier that religious fundamentalist ideologies and secular totalitarian ideologies attempt to merge different spheres of society into a single one-dimensional reality. In this process the individual becomes a mere spark in the collective current of social life, as in societies of mechanical solidarity described by Durkheim. In fact, the distinction between the private and the public is sought to be obliterated and collective orientation becomes the real ethos of society. In contrast, capitalism, which is the preferred economic arrangement of liberalism, marginalises the weak and the unsuccessful. The capitalist market invades all aspects of human life by establishing its hegemony through production, processing and packaging of goods and services. Consequently, the home is transformed into a firm which receives its share of goods and services, be it food or entertainment, from the market and family relationships are rendered instrumental. The economic expansionism of capitalism is as debilitating as the political expansionism of totalitarianism and the theistic expansion of religious fundamentalism. The styles of their functioning vary, but the end result seems to be the same. Herein lies the importance of creating and sustaining the autonomy of different spheres of life.

Finally, breaking boundaries can have negative as well as positive consequences, depending on the nature of context and ideology. At the basic level, boundaries involve the human body. Conventionally, people of different races were not expected or allowed to have sexual union, and this proscription continues even today in some societies. Breaking the boundaries in this context by the colonising male with the native female was tolerated (though not approved), but gave birth to stigmatised human groups, like the Anglo-Indians in India or the mixed-blood groups in Australia. In contrast, when inter-racial union was projected as a positive ideology and promoted as a desirable policy, it was believed to have created a 'racial paradise' – as in Brazil. The fact that inter-racial union has elaborated the racial hierarchy should not deflect our attention from the fact that it was viewed as a positive step in breaking the rigid boundary between whites and blacks (Worsely 1984). It is a long way from apartheid to racial democracy; if in the former interaction between the races is banned, in the latter it is encouraged and promoted.

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Technology and boundaries

Technology is a potent instrument for abolishing unpleasant, hazardous, monotonous and stigmatised work. To take an extreme example, scavenging was not a respectable occupation in any society, although it was particularly gruesome in some societies because of its hereditary association with the lowly placed. With improved sanitation technology, the stigmatisation associated with scavenging has been eroded considerably, even if it has not disappeared entirely. But technology cannot abolish the boundary between prestigious and non-prestigious work in that the status attached to work is constantly re-evaluated. The only way out of the impasse is to rotate all types of work between the rich and poor, men and women, young and old, native citizens and immigrants. The prospect is bleak, given the current importance invested in the market principle according to which those who can afford to should avoid unpleasant work and their time and energy should be used to do work appropriate to their competence and inclination.

Even when the logic of the market was rejected by the 'utopian communities' (e.g., the Israeli *kibbutz*), a satisfactory solution to the division of labour was not found (Spiro 1956). Furthermore, when gender disparity was sought to be reduced by abolishing the sexual division of labour, the mode of functioning of the household itself changed. Thus, instead of unpleasant work being shared between men and women it was simply shifted to the machines (e.g., washing clothes) or to the market (e.g., eating in restaurants). The notion of bread labour which Leo Tolstoy enunciated and Mohandâs Karamchand Gandhi endorsed and practised at best remains an ideal. The affluent avoid manual work whenever possible and accept it only as a compelling need for survival due to acute shortage of labour. Who will do the 'dirty work' is a real problem in societies without rigid social boundaries, i.e., in societies of equals. The solution of importing immigrants to cope with the situation immediately creates new social boundaries.

Modern communication technology has created new boundaries as well as broken old ones. It is believed to have eliminated the need for conventional face-to-face interaction within one's neighbourhood and community. It has created a unity in mutual avoidance and co-silence providing for ample private space to individuals and households. At the same time it made possible a new type of face-to-face 'interaction' providing for 'parasocial' experience (Horton and Wohl 1986 : 198) with distantly (physically and culturally) placed personalities and groups – political leaders, religious preachers, sport heroes, film stars and fashion paraders – as well as the grief-stricken, the prosperous and the famished. Finally, it has created 'communities' which follow the same lifestyle (Schudson 1984) but do not interact. Because '… the new heroes of consumer culture make lifestyle a life project and display their individuality and sense of style in the particularity of the assemblage of goods, clothes, practices, experiences, appearance and bodily dispositions they design together into a lifestyle' (Featherstone 1991 : 86).

However, the breaking of boundaries through communication technology does not lead to actual interaction. One can listen to and watch one's preferred

set of heroes, heroines and reference individuals but cannot communicate or interact with them; the viewer/listener is permanently relegated to the receiving end. Articulating protest or appreciation through a personal communication is not an interaction; even if one succeeds in communicating one's viewpoint through the print or electronic media, it may remain a one-sided flow of communication. There is no reciprocity in such communication which is the essence of interaction. Hence the social boundary between those who communicate and those who receive communication remains intact. In parasocial experiences, 'the interaction characteristically is one-sided, non-dialectical, controlled by the performer and not susceptible of mutual development' (Horton and Wohl 1986 : 186).

Technology, even as it increases the scale and variety of communications, creates new boundaries and consequently inequality, as not everybody can afford the new technological devices. New boundaries emerge between the privileged and the deprived. This is the context of the advocacy of the right to information and the New International Information Order (NIIO) as a prerequisite for a just world order. This, however, does not mean that face-to-face communications, town meetings, community press, local radios and televisions and the like have disappeared or will disappear. If the tyranny of the primary group can be partly offset by modern communication technology, the possibility of it being converted into an instrument of domination ought to be recognised as well. The way out is to develop a plurality of communication patterns in terms of levels, contexts and contents.

Boundaries of micro-dimensions

If I have given the impression that contestation of boundaries is a macro-phenomenon, it is far from my intention. Let me therefore shift to the micro-dimension, particularly with special reference to the human body, gender and kinship.

Once, the body was believed to be only the locus of the soul, then of needs and now an instrument of human emancipation. Human reproduction was believed to take place due to divine benevolence and humans were proscribed from interfering with its integrity. The Catholic Church does not endorse intervention in the reproductive process even today. Gandhi approved of copulation only for reproduction. At the other end of the continuum the integrity of the act of human reproduction is violated with the onset of genetic engineering and the arrival of test-tube babies. Once, women bore children as long as they were fertile and in some societies were consecrated as 'hero-mothers'. Today not only has planned parenthood come into vogue, but some perceive reproduction as a burden. Consequently, 'pure relationships' and 'plastic sexuality' are possible options wherein reproduction and sexuality are bifurcated and intimacy in relationship is emphasised (Giddens 1992).

Today there is a plurality of choice between sexuality and reproduction and reproduction and sexual union, thanks to *in vitro* fertilisation, the possibility of surrogacy, ectogenesis (creation of human life outside the body) and so on.

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Even the creation of genetically identical individuals (Siamese twins), once believed to be nature's mystery, is possible by cloning (see Suzuki and Knudtson 1989). Thus, sexual intercourse only for reproduction (the Gandhian belief), the restraint on family planning (the Catholic prescription), reproduction without sexual union or even without the human body, and the severance of sexuality and reproduction all represent a wide range of choice. Although the traditional sacred boundaries and biological barriers are broken, they are not simply ignored or abandoned. What emerges over a period of time is a plurality of reproductive styles and sexual mores.

In today's world the body itself provides the possibility of a new identity; the modern advertising industry operates as if it is actually committed to invest each individual with a distinct identity. And yet, no dress pattern or hairstyle can remain exclusive to an individual: that will defeat the very purpose of the advertising enterprise. While imparting a feeling to the individual that it is specific to him or her, the style has to become a collective phenomenon when it is marketed. Hence the paradox on which Melucci (1989) comments:

> The body appears as a secret domain, to which only the individual holds the key, and to which he or she can return to seek a self-definition unfettered by the rules and expectations of society. Now-a-days the social attribution of identity invades all areas traditionally protected by the barrier of 'private space'. (p. 123)

Gender boundaries are getting loose as well as hard. The unisex dress pattern is in vogue, yet (a) most women have not shifted from the gender-specific to gender-neutral dress pattern; (b) even those who did shift, retain the gender-specific dress for special contexts, be it evening dress or bridal attires; and (c) this boundary-breaking is largely a one-way invasion in that men rarely take to women's dress. Thus what really happens is the masculinisation of women's dress. However, one cannot deny pluralisation of life patterns, dress being only one item in this. Alas, it is often a one-sided pluralisation. This is so because:

> The gap between human needs and individual desires is produced by market domination; this gap is, at the same time, a condition of its reproduction. The market feeds on the unhappiness it generates: the fear, anxieties and sufferings of personal inadequacy it induces release the consumer behaviour indispensable to its continuation. (Bauman 1989: 189)

Which is to say that the unbounded desires created by the market trap the individual within the boundaries of consumer behaviour; human beings are rendered incapable of looking beyond the bounds of material needs and aspirations created and promised by the market. And yet, accessibility to the promised goods and services becomes more and more difficult, particularly for the poor.

The collapsing gender boundaries have negative as well as positive implications for the institution of marriage. Stable marriages and associated symbols (e.g., family albums) and events (e.g., anniversaries) are a rarity, although they have not completely disappeared even from those parts of the world where family is no more a stable institution. In other societies, arranged marriages are giving way to supervised dating and advertising for brides and bridegrooms – largely

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from one's own 'community', although minor concessions are often made. What we have in the 'advanced' countries today are advice books. These books provide not only advice on how to sustain a marriage but also enlighten readers as to how 'second chances' (subsequent marriages) can be made into a thumping success (see Wallerstein and Blakeslee 1989). Earlier, the sexual division of labour was believed to have provided conjugal solidarity and sustained peace in domestic society (Durkheim 1883). Today, participation in the 'second shift' is posited as the clue to family stability and solidarity (Hochschild 1989). While there is increased sharing of the domestic work by at least a section of the working couples, for quite a few (the unemployed husband and the 'mere' housewife) there is only one shift or no shift at all. In still other cases the obduracy of the 'working husbands' is as impenetrable as the 'iron curtain' when it comes to sharing domestic work. Once again, there is no uniform pattern; boundaries of the traditional sexual division of labour have been contested, but a plurality of family lifestyles has emerged.

There are two irreducible critical minimum institutions for any functioning society: kinship and polity (Fortes 1969 : 309). The boundaries of kinship were intact for quite some time, but are no more. This is not simply because the boundary of the family shrank from the joint or extended type to nuclear, but because the very concept of family has undergone a sea-change. Certain types of kin, believed by some to be imperative for the very existence of a 'legitimate family' (i.e., father) are absent from single-parent, women-headed households. Living-in mates are not 'affinal kin'; although both may have children, they are not siblings. When persons with children from previous unions marry or live together and beget children, the notion of siblings undergoes a substantial change. In such families, the possibility of committing incest – i.e., crossing the sacred boundary which made family possible – increases not only between 'affinal' siblings but also between step-parents and children. And yet it is not true that the family has been completely destabilised and crushed. Rather, there is a long continuum on which a wide variety of 'families' are located.

In premodern societies, kinship provided an important boundary; social anthropologists have classified kin based on the degree of relatedness – primary, secondary, tertiary (see Murdock 1965). However, with urbanisation and substantial migration from rural settings, the salience of degree of relatedness has diminished. Consequently, the degree of intensity of interaction, rather than degree of relatedness, has come to be invoked as the basis of classification of kinship. Thus Bott (1957) categorised kin as being intimate, effective, non-effective or unfamiliar and Desai (1964) as very intimate, intimate, formal or insignificant. Even the perception of who is in the family or outside it has changed over time (Young 1969) and varies contextually. Even when a new criterion of classifying kin emerged, the old pattern did not disappear, precisely because the two patterns co-existed in varying proportions in different societies and situations – industrial/agrarian and rural/urban. A most important boundary-breaking occurred when the bifurcation between the home and work place and the consequent reinforcement of sexual division of labour and the 'invention of motherhood' came about (Shorter 1975).

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Conclusion

Would a continuous contestation of boundaries culminate in the emergence of a new world without boundaries – a world society? A world society conceptualised in terms of equality of opportunity, accessibility to justice and institutionalisation of democracy and human rights is certainly desirable but remains a distant dream, if not a mere utopia. But a world society discerned in terms of one culture, one civilisation, one communication system and the like is not only not possible but also not desirable. It is not possible because world society is an aggregation of state-societies, the effective operational units. Specificities of particular societies and civilisations emanate from geography, history, culture, political arrangement or levels of economic development. Pluralisation encapsulates the very conception of world society. Viewed as a totality, world society is plural and heterogeneous; were it to be constituted by homogeneous, that is, monoracial, monoreligious and mononational societies it would not have posed much of a challenge for co-existence of a variety of identity groups – within particular state-societies.

To accept pluralism as the very nature of societal reality is to concede the existence of a variety of identities and boundaries. The issue is not, as some might suggest, which of the identities are desirable, because the nature of identity is only contextually relevant. A person's identity as a believer or as an atheist has a context, and the identity becomes irrelevant when the context changes. The problem arises precisely because the tendency to retain identities persists irrespective of the change in context.

There is yet another reason why a world society is an impossibility. A 'modern democratic' state-society, be it mono- or multinational, necessarily promises equality only to its citizens. Citizens belong to particular state-societies and no constitution guarantees or can guarantee equality among the citizens of the world. Equality guaranteed by the French constitution or the 'constitution' of the European Union is applicable to France or the Union, respectively, and both of these entities denote boundaries.

Modernity, secularism and rationality mean nothing if they do not help in creating and sustaining individual and collective choices, which is another word for pluralism. However, pluralism creates considerable anxiety for individuals and collectivities as they have to choose from a wide variety of goods, services and ideas and negotiate constantly a multitude of identities. In turn, identities, i.e., specified, prescribed and chosen boundaries, raise the issue of equality. The larger the number of identities, the greater the challenge faced in the realisation of equality. Contesting established boundaries is a prerequisite to bring about equality, yet that very process erodes identity. To put it succinctly, issues of contested boundaries can be authentically resolved only by creating and sustaining an equipoise between equality, identity and pluralism.

Societal boundaries are constantly contested and yet a society without boundaries will be nasty, brutish and short. On the other hand, societies with a proclivity to maintain eternal boundaries will be condemned to stagnation and decay. The essence of the challenge we face as human beings, citizens and

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sociologists is how to de-sacralise obsolete and re-sacralise desirable boundaries based on our understanding of reality. The task is daunting because:

'Reality' is what we take to be true. What we take to be true is what we believe. What we believe is based upon our perceptions. What we perceive depends upon what we look for. What we look for depends upon what we think. What we think depends upon what we perceive. What we perceive determines what we believe. What we believe determines what we take to be true. What we take to be true is our reality. (Zukav 1979 : 328)

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