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# MEΘEXIS

Journal of Research in Values  
and Spirituality

Values and Boundaries

Guest Editor  
John Farina

Volume II - No. 1, 2022

ISSN 2821-6377 ISSN-L 2810-465X

## **ME@EXIS**

### **Journal of Research in Values and Spirituality**

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*ME@EXIS Journal of Research in Values and Spirituality* is a peer-reviewed journal, open access, printed and online. The journal aims to bring the best in academic research on values and spirituality to scholarly or interested public audience. It seeks to promote informed debate, and is not tied to any one particular viewpoint. The journal presents a range of views and conclusions within cultural and spiritual traditions, publishing invited & not invited papers and reviews. It is a publication of The Institute for the Study of Values and Spirituality.

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Institute for the Study of Values and Spirituality

ISSN 282-6377 ISSN-L 2810-465X

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Journal of  
Research  
in Values  
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Spirituality

Vol. II, No. 1 / May 2022



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## EDITORIAL NOTE

We are most honored to have John Farina as Guest Editor of the second Issue of Methexis Journal. Professor of Religious Studies at the George Mason University, United States, he is teaching courses in religion and law, religion and public policy, and comparative religion. John Farina, as Senior Researcher at Georgetown University, directed the Catholicism and Civic Renewal Program, funded by the Henry Luce Foundation. He was Editor-in-chief of the Classics of Western Spirituality series, and General Editor of Sources of American Spirituality series, Paulist Press, New York. He published a number of books on religion and public policy, including *Great Spiritual Masters* (2002), *Romantic Religion in Ante-Bellum America* (1988), or *An American Experience of God* (1981). In the last decade, John Farina did an intensive and comprehensive field research on the Eastern Christian Spirituality in Romania, Greece, Serbia, Russia. He brought an important contribution to the researches made in St. Gregory Palamas International Seminar (bi-annual meetings starting from 2014), publishing a number on articles on the hesychast practice in Eastern Europe, and producing an excellent documentary, *An American Experience of Romanian Hesychasm*. John Farina is the co-founder of *The Institute for the Study of Values and Spirituality*, conducting, inspiring and sponsoring researches, seminaries or conferences in Romania, Greece, Portugal, and having a major contribution to the Methexis Journal project.





## Guest Editor Introduction

**John Farina**

*George Mason University*

As I write, Europe is again at war. The bloodlands of Eastern Europe burn with nationalist hatreds, ethnic struggles, and economic and political intrigue. This was not supposed to happen. We were supposed to have moved beyond this, thanks to international organizations like NATO, the United Nations, and, of course, the European Union. If we follow Goethe's lead and take the beginning of nationalism to be the Battle of Valmy in September 1792, when a French army held back the assaults of a much superior Prussian army in the name of "*vive la nation*," Europe was supposed to have learned its lesson. This should have come true especially by 1992 and the Treaty of Maastricht. Just as Europe had led in the development of the nation state and a new concept of nationalism in the eighteenth century, so by the end of the twentieth it was supposed to have shown the way forward to a time of a new international order, when borders, language, and culture gave way to the free movement of goods, people, and capital, all in the name of an international rights-based order, a new world order, superior to what it replaced. Europe was supposed to lead us into a multicultural, multilevel polity in which all prospered and none were treated as inferior.

There were signs of trouble in 1999 when Europe could not prevent the war in Serbia, despite the aggressive actions of NATO and the support of the United States in suppressing an intra-European conflict. The citizens of Belgrade, Serbia were bombed, Milosevic was labeled a war criminal, and all seemed well. But apparently not. Russian aggressions in 2008 in Georgia and Crimea in 2014 signaled that the Kremlin was not willing to play the game of NATO expansion to the east. And then in Ukraine, under the justification of protecting Russian populations in the eastern border regions of Ukraine, the Russians invaded with a force that looked like a World War II heavy artillery and infantry campaign. Again,

Europe pulled the US into its conflicts, and again the feckless ruling class of America's uni-party succumbed to the temptation offered by visions of huge contracts to the military-industrial complex and an ever-increasing commitment to global business and sent billions to Ukraine where America has no compelling national interests. The Ukrainians and Russians fight in the name of their nations and of their cultural identities, all while giving lip service to the rules-based international post-1992 order. Hostilities and animosities reaching back to the 1940s feed the current Ukrainian nationalistic spirit and make up the basis for Russian justifications to take action against Ukrainian "fascists" in the West who are threatening Russian-speaking populations in the East. The European Union is again helpless to stop the fighting without the intervention of the United States, as the world continues to need Ukrainian grain and Russian oil, the profits from which sustain the war machines.

So borders do matter it seems, despite the claims that they should not. Real physical borders, not imaginary ideas and made-up fictional communities, but geographically demarcated lines that are policed and enforced.

The struggle is not limited to Europe, it is interesting to note. North America is in the midst of a crisis on its southern border as tens of thousands of undocumented migrants posing as refugees and enter the United States from over one hundred nations, much to the delight of politicians, who see potential voters, and to American business that sees lower-wage employees, no matter the effect on middle-class workers already citizens, or on public services, or the rule of law. Although there is no kinetic war, there is a culture war and a political fight between two opposing ideas. One reflects the new world order, something not limited to Europe in the minds of its advocates, something that would transform North and Central America into a place that resembles the EU more than the United States. The other wants policies that put their fellow countrymen first and see things in the context of American interests. We do not have our Treaty of Maastricht, but we have our two 911s. The second is well known, when after the 2001 attacks on America, George W. Bush formed an international coalition to avenge the attacks by invading Iraq and Afghanistan. The first took the form of a speech to Congress given by his father, George H.W. Bush, on September 11, 1990, when the elder Bush announced a "new world order," which civilized peoples throughout the world would pursue in the name of a cosmopolitanism of nations, one that would assure human flourishing and respect individual national cultures. That new world order would be enforced by American military power but also require, not for military reasons but for

political and economic reasons, the participation of other countries. Bush had formed an international coalition of overwhelming military might to confront the much inferior army of Saddam Hussein a few weeks before in August 1990. In his September 11 speech he made the reasons for that clear.

The concept of borders is, then, under a new and even radical reexamination. In the political order, as I have suggested, it means the end of the nation state as we have known it in the last two hundred years. It also applies to other areas affecting personal identity and empowerment: race, religion, and sexual identity. For that reason, the editors are pleased to present this issue on borders and values.

Oana Cogeanu-Haraga provides a fascinating history of how concepts of race developed and how those notions of value were constructed and validated over time. The complexity of the process is shown by her notion of the somatic norm image. She illustrates this concept by insisting that groups employ it in at least three different ways. First, they develop an idealized notion of beauty and value which they apply to their group. Second, they develop a conception of other groups in opposition to them in body as well as in values and culture. And third, they represent the other as outsider who interacts with them and even may be appreciated as an exotic stranger. Those notions of racial difference apply not only to the body but also to the character, culture, and soul of the group members. Over time a whole system of values, meaning, and comparative worth is developed.

Those historic patterns of racial consciousness have changed more recently, however, as new advances in biology and anthropology have made the traditional concept of race appear antique. Cogeanu-Haraga raises the question of whether or not we are able to move beyond that to a more fluid conception of self-identity that is not based on race.

On one hand, identity politics that emphasize race have never been more popular. We are told by their advocates that we cannot understand the experience of members of a certain race and are therefore not competent to comment on issues affecting them. So real is this identity as a member of a certain race that it can be the basis for political categorization, for legal solicitude, and for economic rewards to right historical wrongs against the racial group. On the other hand, a growing realization that race is a culturally determined category, not a biological one, seems to be widely accepted not only among anthropologists and biologists but among the ordinary persons observing the vast array of human genetic evolution. How can race be both made up, sometimes even

for nefarious purposes, and at the same time embraced by so many political actors as a valuable source of identity that trumps other identities such as the nation, religion, or place? Is the facile Marxist answer that it is all about power really persuasive? So when a dominant racial group uses the concept of race, it is illegitimate because it is only a way of oppressing the powerless; but when members of those groups use the term, it is not only valid, but dispositive, ending all need for critical thinking and argument. Race is so elastic and malleable in the hands of its advocates that people who appear to be members of one race can claim to be members of another victim class, and we are supposed to accept their self-characterization without challenge, as was the case with Professor Jessica A. Krug at George Washington University in Washington DC, who had claimed for years she was an African American and Afro-Latina despite her white skin. In 2020 she was exposed as a fraud.

In speaking about borders and values, we cannot ignore one of the most critical issues in our world today: human rights. The modern conception of human rights, developed in earnest after the second world war, presupposes an Enlightenment view of absolute value and universal significance. Even the title of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights makes this claim. Coming out of the agony of the second world war, where whole groups of people were denied legal protections because they were “stateless persons,” excluded by the power structures of those nations where they lived from legal protection, much the way the unborn are in legal regimes providing women with the right to abortion. Rights that do not depend on what the government says had to be posited as belonging to every person by reason of her humanity and not because of any grant of the state.

William Saunders, in his article, “Human Rights and Borders,” points out the history of this movement, which culminated in the 1948 UN document. From his unique perspective as a longtime advocate for dispossessed peoples and a campaigner for human rights, he realizes the reality that rights that are not enforced are of little effect. We are presented with this paradox: the whole regime of universal human rights depends on their enforcement by governments. We can make all the claims about universal values that we wish, but unless they are enforced, they will be of little value to the aggrieved parties. The Universal Declaration is not a treaty, and so it needed enforceable agreements between countries. The UN quickly issued two such treaties: the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights.

The categories in the two treaties overlap when it comes to some rights such as those affecting the family or education. The UN understood that the rights in the Declaration – civil/political and economic/social – constituted a whole, a unity.

Saunders goes on to point out two contemporary problems that the entire human rights establishment faces. The first is the proliferation of rights. If one compares the United States Constitution to the United Nations Universal Declaration, one sees already a much more complete listing of human rights. Take, for example, the matter of religious freedom. The US Bill of Rights says only that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.” The word “religion” is sparse when compared to the UN Declaration that uses the broad phrase in Article 18 “thought, conscience, and religion.”

The second problem is the politicization of human rights, something that threatens their usefulness and their legitimacy. He concludes with the hopeful sign that the United States Commission on Unalienable Rights issued a report in 2020 making recommendations on what role human rights should play in US foreign policy.

Dr. Victor M. Nemchinov reminds us in his essay, “Spatial, Temporal, Somatic and Spiritual Boundaries,” that boundaries are not only physical, but include the complex interaction of many elements. He offers a virtual reflection of expanding personal selfhood. He traces the intricate ways in which the person moves from the intimacy and closeness of his mother’s womb to a world fraught with fluid boundaries and ever-expanding challenges to his sense of self. The complexity of how we negotiate boundaries and borders in our lives comes into play as we try to imagine how the intimate moments of spatial experience interact with our broader experiences of the world and even with our understanding of our basic values.

A similarly complex analysis of the interaction of values and borders is given a more concrete historical sense by Dr. Yves Solis in his analysis of Mexican history and values, “Mexico and Paradox of Boundaries.” He points out that while so much attention is given today to the northern border of Mexico with the United States, the issue of borders, even when thinking just of political borders, is broader and more complex. While many Mexicans speak out against what they perceive to be the mistreatment of Mexican émigrés in the United States, the same people seem unaware of the harsh treatment that immigrants from Central American countries south of Mexico receive at the hands of the Mexican government. Solis’s concern about borders is much more extensive than that, however.

Mexico, he believes, is a prime example of how interculturality and xenophobia shape self-understanding. He draws insights from Jos Vasconcelos's early twentieth century work, *The Cosmic Race*, and shows how the concept of *Mestizaje* is relevant today.

A crucial question that must be addressed in any analysis of borders and values is: who polices the borders? No matter how borders are set, they must be guarded. The ideas, truth claims, and perceptions that underlie them must be reinforced. Prof. John Hirsh in his essay, "Love, Justice, and Catholic Social Teaching in Pope Benedict XVI's *Deus Caritas Est*," looks at the criticisms leveled against Pope Benedict's 2005 encyclical. Those criticisms came from liberation theology advocates. Ever since the arrival of the Catholic social teachings industry, there has been an insistence on the part of some that the church be more pastoral and less dogmatic or doctrinal. This is, at its root, an example of the age-old conflict between *theoria* and *praxis*, given a moral turn by appeals to the poor and needy. It comes from the very legitimate perception that the church at the turn of the twentieth century saw popes going out of their way to address social issues in an effort to reach out pastorally to the people affected by the economic and social changes brought about by industrialization and new forms of mechanized labor. Pope Leo XIII's famous 1891 encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*, laid the groundwork for over a century of what is known now simply as Catholic social teaching. Several popes wrote commemorations of that encyclical, such as Pius XI's *Quadragesimo anno* and John Paul II's *Centesimus annus*. In order to mitigate the conflict between theory and practice, the church insisted on referring to Catholic social teachings as if they were a consistent part of Catholic theology. More precisely, they are recommended responses, moral and ethical to be sure, but not the results of dogmatic theology. They are hortatory rather than dogmatic, as they try to raise ethical questions about contemporary issues. They do not start with unchanging truths about theology, but with contemporary problems, and work their way back to biblical teachings about the poor or about charity or justice.

Although liberation theology was criticized strongly by John Paul II and Benedict XVI, it still lives on, especially in postcolonial society. It is marred by a simplistic understanding that divides the world into the haves and have-nots. It reminds us that we must follow "the preferential option for the poor" and side with the poor, often good advice, but something that people should be left to come to on their own rather than be hectored into. One particularly vocal critic of Pope Benedict XVI is the once excommunicated priest, Fr. Tissa Balaservia from Sri Lanka.

Prof. Hirsh, whose thirty-year involvement with social service has centered on work with underprivileged children in Washington DC that brings Georgetown University students to the children to tutor them, astutely points out that Pope Benedict insists that the specialness of Catholic, and of course all Christian social work, is that it is generated by charity. Charity is not just a sympathetic feeling for another person, but one of the theological virtues. Justice, by contrast, is not a theological virtue, but one of the four cardinal virtues to which all persons, believers or not, are called. Christians are called to more when they embrace the evangelical virtue of charity. They do not love others because those persons deserve it is a matter of fairness. Love and mercy are not the results of justice. They love as God loves and as Christ loves in his supererogatory self-giving. The implications for this, Hirsh again rightly points out, are that when churches ally themselves too closely with political parties or political policies, they risk losing the distinctive Christian dimensions of service to the poor and needy. Christians are called to serve a suffering world but not to be of the world, not to love the world. Insistence on justice before mercy puts us squarely in the world of political discourse and inevitable conflict. The boundaries of the church dissolve, and Christ's disciples are merely social workers wearing crucifixes.





RESEARCH ARTICLES  
*Values and Boundaries*



# **Borders and Human Rights – A Paradox**

**William Saunders**

*Catholic University of America*

## *Abstract*

The author considers various ways in which the concept of borders is relevant to an adequate understanding of human rights. He examines the role of nation states in human rights. He takes note of how contemporary claims of human rights could endanger the human rights project by violating the borders implicit in the concept of human rights. He examines the modern human rights foundational documents (such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights) and the recent report on unalienable rights from the United States.

*Keywords: human rights, borders, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, report of the U.S. Commission on Unalienablgh.*

G. K. Chesterton is widely recognized as the modern master of paradox. He would surely chuckle over what is perhaps today's most interesting paradox – that of the meaning of “human rights.” Is it a chimera, an illusion that changes its content to reflect the political/social preferences of the day? Or, is it an expression of objective truths? Can it be both at the same time? We will return to that question at the end of this essay. However, let us begin by an historical consideration of human rights. While the question of “rights” has a long history – tracing back to the Enlightenment as well as the ancient religious and philosophical traditions that preceded it, the various strands – Eastern as well as Western – were intentionally and carefully brought together in 1948 by philosophers, historians, and political leaders in an international declaration issued by the United Nations (itself created in 1945).<sup>1</sup> The declaration is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It marks the beginning of the modern human rights movement. The

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<sup>1</sup> For the landmark history of this process, see, Mary Ann Glendon, *A World Made New* (New York: Penguin-Random House, 2002).

Declaration was issued by the UN unanimously...with eight abstentions. Those eight abstentions included the Republic of South Africa (which practiced apartheid), the Soviet Union and its satellites (all rich in political prisoners), and Saudi Arabia (where religious freedom did not exist). Given their political systems, it is no surprise that those nations did not vote *for* the Declaration, but what is surprising is that they did not vote *against* it. In other words, the “momentum” to issue the Declaration was too strong to oppose.

To understand why that was the case, one must understand that, though the Declaration made summoning statements about “inviolable rights” that were seemingly *deduced* from lofty principles, the document was, essentially, *inductive*. It was a “bottom up” compilation. The human rights it declared were identified from bitter, lived, and very recent *experience*, that is, the Second World War.

One must recall the utter devastation caused by that war to, literally, the entire world. It was fought on land and sea and in the air, across the globe. It completely devastated the economies of the primary theaters of the war - Europe and Asia. And it cost an unimaginable number of lives, sometimes estimated at around 80 million. What must never be forgotten is that such a number includes 50 million *noncombatants*, i.e., civilians, innocent people, by-standers. Approximately 2/3's of those who died were not soldiers, sailors, pilots, or combat support staff. It was total war, aimed at food supplies and the farmers/workers who supported the warriors. Finally, the war witnessed the unleashing of the ultimate weapon – the atom bomb – whose deadly radiation could kill people for decades. The one thing that any sane person could see was this: there must never be a Third World War because that would likely bring the end of humanity.

Further, the manner in which those noncombatants were killed was particularly heinous - in concentration camps, in targeted bombing, through mass shootings, through torture and brutal experiments, through industrial-scale genocide. It might sound hyperbolic, but it is not to state the following – the leaders of the world were entirely sobered by this war like no other and determined that it would not happen again.

Thus, they formed the United Nations in 1945, the year the Second World War ended. It was formed – with memories of its failed predecessor, the League of Nations, in mind – to preserve peace and resolve conflict. And here is the essential point: the founders did it – they hoped to *do* it - through an *emphasis* on *human rights*. This was new in human history.

Consider the words of the Preamble of the UN Charter – “...to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war...and to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small...[the nations of the world] do hereby establish...the United Nations.”<sup>2</sup> In chapter 1, the Charter states, “[t]he [p]urposes of the United Nations[, in addition to maintaining international peace and security, is] “to achieve international co-operation...in promoting and encouraging respect for *human rights and for fundamental freedoms* for all without distinction...”<sup>3</sup>

However, upon reflection, the founding nations concluded that they had not given enough emphasis to articulating what those human rights were. Hence, three years later, after lengthy consideration by an eminent committee of philosophers, politicians, and historians of the various traditions of mankind, the UN announced the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

### *Borders and the concept of human rights*

The Preamble of the Declaration sets the stage for the enumeration of rights recognized in the articles. In it, the UN left no doubt as to the importance of human rights. In the first paragraph, it states, “recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.” During the Second World War, “barbarous acts” based on “contempt for human rights” have “outraged the conscience of mankind.”<sup>4</sup> Thus, “the peoples of the United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women...”<sup>5</sup> The UN – and its member States – undertake to make “this Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a common standard of achievement for all.” The Declaration contains not an arbitrary list of right, but of a painstakingly compiled list of the essential human rights.

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<sup>2</sup> Universal Declaration of Human Rights, G.A. res. 217 A(III), December 10, 1948, U.N. Doc. A/810 (1948), Charter Preamble 1 & 2.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., Article 1-3. Emphasis mine.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., Preamble 2. It also mentions the “four freedoms” made famous by Franklin Roosevelt. Though the point will not be developed further in this essay, the “four freedoms” are used by the UN as interchangeable with “human rights.” The four freedoms are – freedom of speech and of belief, and freedom from want and fear.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., Preamble 4.

What, then, are those rights? They are enumerated in thirty articles. They range from “life, liberty and the security of [the] person”<sup>6</sup> to “equality” before the law<sup>7</sup>, from the right “to marry”<sup>8</sup> to “freedom of peaceful assembly and association”<sup>9</sup> to the rights “to work”<sup>10</sup> and to “education.”<sup>11</sup> Some of these (such as the right to work) do not seem to be “rights” in the Anglo-American sense of enforceable legal obligations but seem to reflect a Continental European approach to rights. There have long been disputes whether certain “rights” in the Declaration should have been deemed “aspirations” since, to some extent, they depend on contingent matters, such as the existence of sufficient resources within the host State.<sup>12</sup> While these disputes would ensnarl the ensuing treaties, as far as the Declaration itself goes, it may be sufficient to note that Eleanor Roosevelt, a primary driving behind its production and adoption, referred to them as “principles,” not “rights.”

As one would expect, in a world awash in refugees and “stateless persons”<sup>13</sup> in the wake of World War II, the Declaration addresses the concept of “borders” in a number of ways. Article 13 states that “everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state”<sup>14</sup> (i.e., rights *within* borders wherever one is), and then goes on to proclaim, “everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own”<sup>15</sup> (i.e., rights to *cross* borders). A separate article, article 14, says, “everyone has the right to seek...in other countries asylum from persecution” (i.e., rights within borders if you can get there). Let us call these herein, collectively, “the right to movement.”

The Declaration is not a treaty. Only treaties legally bind (and they bind only the nations who ratify them). Thus, it was

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., Article 3.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., Article 7.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., Article 16.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., Article 20.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., Article 23.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., Article 26.

<sup>12</sup> See, e.g., *On Human Rights: On the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights*, Ramsey Colloquium, First Things, April 4, 1998. Moreover, it must be noted that article 22, ensuring “social security,” is expressly subject to “the organization and resources of each State...”

<sup>13</sup> This is addressed in articles 16 (“everyone has the right recognition everywhere as a person before the law”) and 15 (“No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his nationality nor denied the right to change [it]”).

<sup>14</sup> *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, Article 13-IIN.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., Article 13-2.

always intended that the rights enunciated in the Declaration would be protected in, and implemented by, two treaties, one concerning political/judicial rights and one concerning social/economic rights.<sup>16</sup> As we can see from the brief listing above of some of the rights in the Declaration, certain rights fall easily in one category, and some in another. For example, equality before the law (article 7) is a political/judicial right. The right to work (article 23), on the other hand, falls more easily into the category of social/economic. One treaty developed to implement the Declaration is the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (the “ICCPR”), and the other is the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (the “ICESCR”).<sup>17</sup> But these categories in the two treaties should not be taken as ironclad. There is plenty of overlap when it comes to some rights such as those affecting the family or education.<sup>18</sup> Further, the UN understood that the rights in the Declaration – civil/political and economic/social – constituted a whole, a unity; they were indivisible.

In any case, it is the ICCPR, not the ICESCR, that deals with the “right to movement” (as we designated it above). The ICCPR - ratified by nearly every nation on earth – guarantees these rights in article 12. However, article 12 limits the right to move *within* a state to those who are “lawfully within the territory of a State,” but anyone may leave “any country” at any time. Though the ICCPR and ICESCR do not exhaust by a long shot the number of international agreements dealing with crossing borders, they do give us the basic idea, to wit, borders are essential to understanding the extent of rights for it is within borders that rights are realized. While borders are not absolute (i.e., they may be appropriately crossed in certain circumstances), they are crucial in most cases. In a world of sovereign states (and in the absence of an international

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<sup>16</sup> These three documents – the Declaration and the two treaties – are sometimes referred to as the International Bill of Rights. Thus, though there are many “second generation” treaties on particular subjects (such as torture or racial discrimination) and many more bi-lateral or multi-lateral agreements among nations, the International Bill of Rights is the foundation of modern human rights.

<sup>17</sup> The Declaration, the ICCPR and the ICESCR are often referred to, collectively, as the International Bill of Rights

<sup>18</sup> Compare, e.g., ICESCR, articles 13 and 14 on education with ICCPR, article 18-4, which concerns parental rights in education; or ICCPR, article 22, on freedom of association with ICESCR, article 8 on the right to associate in trade unions. Likewise, the right of the family to protection and support by the state is recognized in ICCPR, article 23 and in ICESCR, article 10.

police force), the concrete implementation of human rights is the responsibility of states, that is, *within* the borders of each state. There is irony here. “International” human rights are not, by definition, merely the positive law of a particular nation; human rights is a concept without borders; yet, in our “real world,” the whole concept is meaningless unless particular nations, within each’s border, creates positive law recognizing them.<sup>19</sup>

Summing up our consideration of the basic human rights documents, we may conclude that (1) identifying and (2) protecting basic human rights was the (3) fundamental task of the post-World War II international political leadership; (4) these rights were enumerated in the Universal Declaration, including (5) a right to movement (as we designated it above). (6) Human rights is a borderless concept<sup>20</sup> that can only be recognized within borders.

### *The report<sup>21</sup> of the Commission*

In 2019, U.S. Secretary of State, Michael Pompeo, announced the creation of a commission, the Commission on Unalienable Rights. Its charge was to make recommendations about the role human rights should play in the conduct of U.S. foreign policy. It was to examine two “strands” of human rights - that stemming from the Universal Declaration and that embodied in the U.S. Declaration of Independence.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> One might claim that human rights is not a “borderless” concept – it is a trans-border concept. In other words, human rights transcend borders, rendering borders irrelevant. The answer, however, is that only by observing borders (of and by sovereign states) can human rights be recognized in reality.

<sup>20</sup> Every human being no matter where located has human rights by virtue of being a living member of the human species.

<sup>21</sup> “Draft Report of the Commission on Unalienable Rights,” State Government, accessed April 5, 2022, <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Draft-Report-of-the-Commission-on-Unalienable-Rights.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

Regarding the *American* understanding of rights, the Commission noted that “the 17<sup>th</sup> century British subjects who settled...the eastern seaboard...brought with them a variety of traditions.... Eventually their intertwining gave rise to the core conviction that government’s primary responsibility was to secure unalienable rights – that is, rights inherent in all persons.” The three traditions that “stand out” are (1) Protestant Christianity “infused with the beautiful Biblical teachings that every human being is imbued with dignity...”; (2) “the civic republican ideal,



Some objected that the very idea of the report – that one nation should be considering the effect it would give in its foreign policy - seemed inconsistent with the idea of international human rights. However, this is merely another aspect of the paradox of human rights and borders. Human rights, though trans-border in concept, can only be achieved within borders, though there is the irony that what is being considered in the Report is how America (acting as a sovereign nation within its own borders) can and should emphasize these principles *outside* its borders (i.e., in its foreign policy with other nations).

In any case, the Commission did issue its report in the summer of 2020. The report noted seven “challenges” – (1) the decline of enthusiasm for human rights; (2) the failings of international organizations such as the UN’s Human Rights Council;<sup>23</sup> (3) the autocracy challenge (“the most influential are Russia and China”); (4) new technologies (“these technologies run the gamut from artificial intelligence and cyber/internet technologies to emerging biotechnologies”); (5) the migration of peoples; (6) the global health pandemic; (7) human rights violations by non-state actors (“for example, terrorist groups, transnational organized crime networks, purveyors of child pornography, and organizations engaged in human trafficking”).

The Report concluded with twelve “observations” (rather than “recommendations”).<sup>24</sup> All of them merit attention by anyone concerned with human rights, but five seem to be particularly relevant to our review of human rights and borders.

First, “the universality and indivisibility of human rights do not mean uniformity in bringing them to life.” “The [Declaration] does contemplate...some variation in emphasis, interpretation, and mode of implementation...The universality of human rights and the pluralism necessary to their practical realization are held together by the principle of subsidiarity inherent in the system of international human rights law.” Second, “a degree of pluralism in respecting human rights does not imply cultural relativism.” Third, “nation-states have some leeway to base their human rights policy

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rooted in classical Rome...that freedom and equality...depend on an ethical citizenry”; (3) classical liberalism with its “moral premise that human beings are by nature free and equal”.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 49.

“Given the mandate to include [UN] members from all regions..., it is inevitable that nations that are themselves flagrant human rights abusers – such as China, Cuba, Libya, Russia, Saudi Arabia and Venezuela - ...dominate the Council.”

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 56-58.

on their own distinctive national traditions.” “Though it is sometimes difficult to define the bounds of legitimate pluralism..., the process must begin with the understanding that the basic principles in the [Declaration] were meant to work together rather than to be pitted against each other...[T]ensions...therefore must be occasions to discern how to give each right as much protection as possible....”

Fourth, “national sovereignty is vital to securing human rights.” “Like other international legal obligations, the international human rights obligations of the United States [and of every other nation] must be grounded in those norms to which [that nation] has formally and explicitly consented.” These four “observations” recall to mind the paradox that is the subject of this essay – that of human rights and borders, of the essential role borders play in the protection of human rights, of the role nation states (which are, by definition, defined by borders) play in protecting (trans-border) human rights within their borders (and outside their borders with reference to their foreign policy), rights due to every person no matter within which state he or she happens to be. But the fourth observation (the tethering of states to the precise obligations they have assumed) further points us to the paradoxical “challenge” that is unraveling the entire human rights project.

*If all is politics, all is lost*

“Human rights” is the lingua franca of our age. Nearly everyone believes in, and supports, “human rights.” But what are human rights? They can be defined by philosophy or by theology, by political theory or by history. But human rights in the only sense that matters to real human beings – that is as enforceable protection from the depredations of others or as enforceable entitlements that others must grant – is a legal concept. As with the Declaration of Independence, so with the Universal Declaration – each sets the vision. But in each case, it takes a legal document – the Constitution (with its Bill of Rights) in the first case, the ICCPR and the ICESCR in the other – to guarantee those rights in reality, in practice, backed up by the legal apparatus of the State.

As noted in the fourth observation above, such “norms” require (and logically entail) formal and explicit adoption by the State. That way, the State knows precisely what it is undertaking – and the person within its borders knows precisely what is guaranteed.

The fifth observation from the report<sup>25</sup> notes, “new human rights claims must be carefully considered.” “It must be kept in mind...that it was largely owing to the relative modesty of its reach that the [Declaration] succeeded in launching the universal human rights project on a global scale. The [Declaration] was deliberately limited to a small set of rights on which there was perceived to be near-universal consensus.” The report provides some sensible things to consider when faced with new rights claims<sup>26</sup> – “How closely rooted is the claim in the explicit language of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as it was written and understood by the framers of that document...in 1948...? “Does the new claim represent a clear consensus across a broad plurality of different traditions and cultures...?”<sup>27</sup> “Can the new right to be integrated consistently into the existing body of human rights?”

Yet, we frequently hear of claims for new “human rights” (such as “transgender rights) that no one alive in 1948 would have imagined. Such claims, far from representing a cross-cultural consensus, represent something entirely new, created by a “human rights organization,” and, hence, with quite limited support. Finally, such claimed new rights usually cannot be integrated in the existing body of human rights. For instance, if transgenderism is a human right, must it be taught in schools? If so, what happens to the rights of parents to choose the education for their children, which is one of most well-established human rights, one, further, that the drafters of the Declaration saw as essential to prevent the growth of totalitarians that preserve power by indoctrinating those students?

As the report notes, “the power of the universal human rights idea...is weakest when it is employed in disputes among competing groups in society over political priorities. Such political disputes are usually best left to resolution of ordinary democratic processes of bargaining, education, persuasion, compromise, and voting. The tendency to fight political battles with the vocabulary of human rights risks stifling the kind of robust discussion on which a vibrant democracy depends. The effort to shut down legitimate debate by recasting contestable policy preferences as fixed and unquestionable human rights imperatives promotes intolerance,

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<sup>25</sup> Number five of the five particular observations I am discussing, but number ten within the document itself.

<sup>26</sup> “Draft Report of the Commission on Unalienable Rights,” 39-40.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

“These sorts of claims frequently privilege the participation of self-appointed elites, lack widespread democratic support, and fail to benefit from the give-and-take of negotiated provisions among the nation-states...”

impedes reconciliation, devalues core rights, and denies rights in the name of rights.”<sup>28</sup>

“Human rights,” at least in the international legal and policy world, is a “bordered term.” It is not an endlessly malleable. Its borders consist of the International Bill of Rights, i.e., the Universal Declaration, the ICCPR, and the ICESCR. If that border is destroyed, it puts in peril the entire human rights project.<sup>29</sup>

### *Conclusion*

In a four-day span in May 2022, a remarkable thing happened: two major *American* institutions thought it important to publicly address human rights by focusing on the activities of two *Chinese men*.

On May 14, the Catholic University of America held graduation exercises. As part of those ceremonies, it awarded six honorary degrees. While most went to the “usual suspects” - theologians, the head of a religious order, etc. – one went to an individual who was recognized for resisting political oppression and tyranny. His name was Jimmy Lai.

While the other recipients of the honorary degrees were American born, Jimmy Lai was not. He was born in Guangzhou, China. As a child, he was a stowaway on a boat to Hong Kong, where he remained as he rose, remarkably, from child laborer to the head of a media empire. One of his publications, *Apple Daily*, was eventually published in English. In 2020, he was arrested for his role in supporting the democracy movement in Hong Kong, which sought to resist the erosion of political and civil rights under the pressure of the Chinese Communist Party (the “CCP”). In 2021, he was sentenced to prison, and *Apple Daily* was closed.

Several copies of the last issue of *Apple Daily* made their way to the Catholic University, specifically to Chen Guangcheng, a Distinguished Visiting Fellow there. Three days after Jimmy Lai received his honorary degree, on May 17, Guangcheng was honored by the Bradley Foundation with its annual Prize. Guangcheng was recognized because he is a fearless, ceaseless opponent of the CCP, insisting on human rights in the face of a ruthless tyranny that

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>29</sup> Many thoughtful commentators have concluded that is precisely what has happened and urge the U.S. to disengage from the international human rights project. See, e.g., Kenneth Anderson, *Living with the UN – American Responsibilities and International Order* (Hoover Institute Press Publication, 2012).

denies the Chinese people the right to live under their own system of constitutional democracy and the rule of law.

In the report of the Commission on Unalienable Rights, the CCP was identified as one of the greatest threats to human rights. China rejects the integrated nature of human rights by claiming that “an optimal pursuit of development requires restrictions on individual rights and political liberty that far exceed the scope” of anything allowed by the Universal Declaration.<sup>30</sup> Further, “nowhere has the ambition to establish a ‘wholly-surveilled’ society progressed as far as in China. The [CCP] has built an aggressive internet censorship system known as the Great Firewall of China...Beijing’s ‘social credit system’, moreover, is based in large part on emerging AI and cyber software that permit the aggregation and integration of many different data streams about an individual...An authoritarian regime can not only use these tools to track and punish individuals but also exploit them to monitor and control entire groups, such as disfavored religions or ethnicities.”<sup>31</sup> Yet, despite the formidable power of the CCP, Jimmy Lai and Chen Guangcheng stood up to it, insisting on political and civil rights.

The recognition of these two *Chinese* men, Jimmy Lai and Guangcheng, by *American* institutions testifies to the relevance of the human rights project begun by the UN in the Universal Declaration in 1948. It demonstrates that human rights concerns are not narrowly nationalistic, but concern what Guangcheng calls “universal values,” which transcend national borders. This is evidence of the “universal” aspect of, of the trans-border reach of, human rights. But human rights must not ignore its own borders; it must resist the ceaseless claims of novel “human rights;” otherwise, if human rights become a synonym for merely partisan political demands, the entire project will be at risk.

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

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## On the Borders of Race\*

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When one speaks of race, one speaks of borders; these are insidious societal borders, which were assigned value beyond skin deep and came to be integrated into hierarchical definitions of what it means to be human. If one were to summarise the development of the idea of race, it should be noted to have originated in the ancient theories of Plato and Aristotle, spread out during the time of colonialist conquests, and extended in imperialist enterprises during the Enlightenment and afterwards; the concept gained scientific authority on the grounds of evolutionary theories, further developed in the light of Orientalist encounters and reactions, and came to be relativised as a trope in contemporary times.

The existence of the Caucasoid, Negroid and Mongoloid races usually passes as fact and this racial categorisation is casually employed in scientific and everyday discourse. However, before it would gain such wide currency, “the idea of race had to be invented, described, promulgated and legislated by those who would benefit as a group from the concept.”<sup>32</sup> The specific use of race as a marker of essential difference in humanity emerged during the Transatlantic slave trade, which necessitated and supported a definition of blackness as opposed to and lesser than whiteness.

In the dawn of Western civilization and prior to the slave trade, documents of the attitudes toward different skin color highlight the distinction, but do not entail a correlative negative discrimination; quite the contrary, Herodotus described Africans idealistically.<sup>33</sup> This does not mean that the citizens of the Greek world did not maintain narcissistic norms of skin color; to the extent that each group creates its aesthetic ideals to its image and

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<sup>32</sup> Dana Nelson, *Word in Black and White: Reading “Race” in American Literature, 1638-1867* (New York: Oxford UP., 1993), viii-ix.

<sup>33</sup> Frank M. Snowden, *Before Color Prejudice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP., 1983), 57.

\* This work was supported by the Seed Program for Korean Studies through the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea and the Korean Studies Promotion Service of the Academy of Korean Studies (AKS-2018-INC-2230007/Project No. 20180050).

likeness, this “somatic norm image”<sup>34</sup> applies equally to Caucasian, Negroid and Mongoloid representations. Thus, in an African creation myth the black man is said to be perfectly cooked, whereas the whiteman is underdone because of a defect in the Creator’s oven. At the same time, in Asia the ideal of white skin is not race-bound, predating colonialism and the introduction of Western notions of beauty:<sup>35</sup> “dating back to ancient culture, pale, even skin implied a dainty and fragile quality that was associated with beauty, as well as the implication of a higher social stature.”<sup>36</sup>

Nevertheless, as I have argued before<sup>37</sup>, the somatic norm image proves to be a more complex construction. First, it is made not in a group’s own image, but in the group’s ideal self-image, which leads to a desired accentuation or erasure of visible features such as skin colour, eye colour, hair texture, etc. Thus, the ancient Greeks and Romans would bleach their hair and whiten their face with lead to achieve an even whiter beauty ideal. Second, the somatic norm image asserts itself in opposition to the other, e.g. the beauty of whiteness is opposed to black ugliness, to which the “black is beautiful” movement responds by positioning itself against “white trash”. Third, the somatic norm image is able to some extent to incorporate the Other, albeit marginally, e.g., the white stranger venerated in Negroid and Mongoloid communities and the ebony black admired in white groups.

By 1850 however, ideas of insurmountable racial difference appeared to be general truths; when Abraham Lincoln invited a group of black leaders to the, ironically, White House in 1862 to submit his ideas about the return of all the blacks in America back to Africa, his argument was based on racial categorisation: “You and we are different races”, he said, “We have between us a broader difference than exists between any other two races,”<sup>38</sup> which implied some sort of essential human distinction accounting for a radical segregation. While the White House has grown much more

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>35</sup> Hiroshi Wagatsuma, “The Social Perception of Skin Color in Japan,” *Daedalus*, 96.2 (1967): 444.

<sup>36</sup> Liz Grubow, “Marketing Matters: Chinese Culture and its Effect on Skin Care Trends in China,” *GCIMagazine.com*, 5 Sep. 2008, 1.

<sup>37</sup> Oana Cogeanu, “Travelling Ideologies: A Story of Whiteness,” *Linguaculture*. 7:2 (Iași, Romania: Editura Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza”, 2015), 15-33.

<sup>38</sup> Anthony Appiah, “The Uncompleted Argument: Du Bois and the Illusion of Race,” *Race, Writing and Difference*, ed. Henry Louis Jr. Gates (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1985), 3.



inclusive, race continues to be an active concept in mainstream discourse.

It goes without saying that the categories used to construct ideas of racial difference do not serve purely descriptive purposes; they include an evaluative dimension which links body to character; in the Westcentric mind, this privileges the category of white Caucasian bodies over all others. To the West, black Africa consequently becomes the necessary opposite. The meanings attributed starting with the 19th century to racial categories included value judgments about beauty, intellect, morality, emotionality, sexuality, etc., and the pseudoscientific consideration of the physical characteristics of the human body as signs serving as a basis for classification led to epistemic and eventually ontic conclusions. Echoing Hume and Kant, Hegel takes those conclusions to their utmost implications in *The Philosophy of History* (1837) when deducing from Africa's alleged lack of writing systems the absence of reason and memory and, consequently, the lack of history and humanity. Thus Africa comes to signify to the Westcentric mind the Unhistorical, Undeveloped Spirit.

Like the 19th century constructions of difference from which they derive, the more politically-correct contemporary racist images of non-whites continue to employ an essentialist, qualitative assessment. Broadly speaking, such representations may take two main forms<sup>39</sup>: there are those that define difference in purely negative terms and those that celebrate difference from a white norm, most often in the form of primitivism. In primitivist discourse, the non-white other is seen as closer to nature, more authentic and less contaminated by modern industrial society: a noble savage. Like many discourses on women, primitivism as well sees the racial other as more spiritual, intuitive, physical, sensual, as well as less rational and sophisticated. Since such definitions of non-whites are produced via sets of binary oppositions, the counterparts to the qualities attributed to people of color – rationality, enterprise, suppression of emotion – are consequently assumed to be characterise whiteness.

Hence in Westcentric discourses of race white functions as the unmarked category – and the structure of Westcentric discourse “secretes the idea of white supremacy.”<sup>40</sup> The psychological logic of black-and-white binarism operates, as Peter McLaren explains,

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<sup>39</sup> David Theo Goldberg, ed., *Multiculturalism: A Critical Reader* (Oxford UK and Cambridge USA: Blackwell, 1994), 52.

<sup>40</sup> Chris Weedon, *Feminism, Theory and Politics of Difference* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 157.

through the processes of splitting and projection: “the center expels its anxieties, contradictions and irrationalities onto the subordinate term, filling it with the antithesis of its own identity; the other, in its very alienness, simply mirrors and represents what is deeply familiar to the center, but projected outside of itself.”<sup>41</sup> Whiteness, the absence of color, therefore comes to signify the norm of humanity. Yet as one explores racial representations in awareness of their binary oppositional logic, one eventually comes to question the implicit centrality of whiteness, which reveals itself to be a politically constructed category parasitic on blackness.<sup>42</sup>

Blackness as opposed to whiteness (and other human colors) is usually seen as a signifier of race, but it can also function as a reference to ethnicity. In fact, scholars have shown that race refers to the categorization of people, while ethnicity has to do with group identification.<sup>43</sup> This means that the African-American or Asian-American communities, which are basically described from the outside in racial terms, identify themselves from within in rather ethnic terms. While American culture encapsulates the idea of race, its fabrication and its challenges, it can also be described in ethnic terms— in the sense of a “symbolic ethnicity,”<sup>44</sup> defined as a nostalgic allegiance to the culture of the immigrant generation. In fact, ethnic origin renders a sense of the individual belonging to an original community that race fails to convey. Indeed, although the African-American and Asian-American communities were originally distinguished based on a racial criterion, they exhibit several main features considered to be specific to an ethnic group:<sup>45</sup> having a common proper name to signify a presumed essence of the community; a myth (an imaginal, not experiential representation) of common ancestry, including the idea of a common origin in time and place, which offers the community a sense of kinship; more or less contrived memories of a common past, including heroes, events, and their commemoration, providing a sense of communal history; one or more elements of common culture, which usually include religion, customs, language and the arts, constituting the more visible appearance of an ethnic community; finally, a sense of

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<sup>41</sup> Peter McLaren, “White Terror and Oppositional Agency: Towards a Critical Multiculturalism,” *Multiculturalism: A Critical Reader*, ed. David Theo Goldberg (Oxford, UK and Cambridge, USA: Blackwell, 1994), 22.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>43</sup> Werner Sollors, “Who Is Ethnic?” *Ethnicity*, ed. J. Hutchinson and A. D. Smith (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 221.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 146-7.

solidarity within the population, which keeps the boundaries of the group together.

To make a step beyond such racial and ethnic definitions, it is becoming clear in contemporary times that, as a meaningful criterion of human identification, race does not exist. When one speaks of the Caucasian race, the Negroid race or the Mongoloid race, one speaks in metaphors. Thus talk of race can be distressing for people who talk of culture seriously<sup>46</sup> because “where ‘gross differences’ of morphology are correlated with ‘subtle differences’ of temperament, belief, and intention – it works as an attempt at a metonym for culture; and it does so only at the price of biologizing what *is* culture, or ideology.”<sup>47</sup> That does not mean that contemporary language and thinking are no longer imbued with ideas of race deriving from the pseudoscience of the 18th and 19th centuries. Race has become as such a trope of irreducible, qualitative difference between groups which also happen to have fundamentally opposed economic interests, and serves “the ultimate trope of difference because it is so very arbitrary in its application.”<sup>48</sup>

This arbitrariness actually derives from the fact that ethnicity or race do not exist as a signified of cultural discourse. In *Preface to Blackness*, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. highlights a fact so evident that it is often neglected: black literature is ultimately a verbal art like any other and, consequently, its blackness is not a material object or event, but a metaphor,<sup>49</sup> a vehicle for a highly ideologized content. Thus, blackness, like whiteness, is not a signified, but a signifier; it does not have an essence of its own but is defined by a network of semiotic relations that form a particular discourse.

Furthermore, the structure of oppositions on which the concept of race is based is, as Saussure has shown, the mechanism of any language: white opposed to black (but also to yellow and red), Greek opposed to Barbaric, Jew opposed to Gentile (but also to Arab); yet this is a structure the realisation of which is, at best, problematic and, at worst, impossible, notes A. Appiah. As one

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<sup>46</sup> Anthony Appiah, “The Uncompleted Argument: Du Bois and the Illusion of Race,” 35.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>49</sup> Henry Louis Jr. Gates, “Preface to Blackness: Text and Pretext,” *Afro-American Literature: The Reconstruction of Instruction*, ed. Dexter Fisher and Robert B. Stepto (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1979), 66.

comes to understand the workings of the racial concept embodied in this semiotic system of oppositions, one realizes the impossibility of tracing it back to referents. The truth, announces A. Appiah, is that “there are no races; there is nothing in the world that can do all we ask race to do for us. The evil that is done is done by the concept.”<sup>50</sup> Actually, what is missed through a focus on the meaning of race is not exactly reality, as A. Appiah proclaims, but semiosis, the very realization of race as a differential, dynamic sign. The races and ethnicities of the world are ideologized communities of discourse rather than of biology or culture.

While one may have gained an awareness of the ideological inscriptions of racial and ethnic boundaries and may have come to see their permeability, racialised subjects did not take on to obliterate these inscribed differences; quite the contrary, the inscription of the African or Asian voice in American and, by extension, Western culture has preserved those cultural differences and has undertaken to re-signify them. If authors accepted, more or less voluntarily, the challenge of Westcentric discourse, they also took on the weight of its premises, as illustrated by the following anecdote: in 1915, Edmond Laforest, a member of the Haitian literary movement *La Ronde*, stood upon a bridge, tied a Larousse dictionary around his neck, and jumped off.<sup>51</sup> This tragic gesture plays in reverse the initial move of the Other, jumping out of the ocean of Westcentric discourse with a Larousse around their neck. In the end, the heavy weight of the prescriptions of race and ethnicity inscribe boundaries that our current physical and mental mobility might be expected to surpass. As nowadays one is increasingly aware of the relativity of such inscriptions and free to change one’s place at ease, borders are presumed to be erasable. In a world where one’s identity has become less centric and more mobile, racial and ethnic boundaries could potentially melt into an all-accepting awareness of our heterogeneous shared humanity. Yet mobility tends to re-establish boundaries by continuously signifying on the domestic and the foreign, home and abroad, self and Other; thus, the same or other borders are highlighted, repositioned, multiplied, reinstated and/or crossed. Nevertheless, in a world of mobile selves, any category of human identification, including race constitutes just one boundary among many.

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<sup>50</sup> Anthony Appiah, “The Uncompleted Argument: Du Bois and the Illusion of Race,” 35.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

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# Mexico and Paradox of Boundaries

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## *Abstract*

As a sovereign country, the Federation of the United Mexican States was born 200 years ago. With a history under the sign of national pride, Mexico is a true example of interculturality, but at the same time of xenophobia. One of the key elements in understanding contemporary Mexico resides in the idea of *Mestizaje* (the Spanish term for ‘miscegenation’) as expressed by philosopher José Vasconcelos. Almost 100 years after the first publication of his book *The Cosmic Race*, many of its topics still require more accurate and thorough research. In dealing with such a complex subject, one needs to take into consideration multiple levels of analysis like the physical and national boundaries, but also the cultural and social ones. In 2021, the government decided to commemorate the fall of the city of Mexico-Tenochtitlan as proof of 500 years of Indigenous Resistance.

In today’s Mexico, social and economic inequalities seem to be a heritage of the New Spain’s initial organization which was based on the caste system. That is why there are paradoxes and seemingly contradictory actions whenever Mexican state tackles issues such as borders, migration and identity. This is actually what I would like to address in this paper.

Therefore, if we want to understand current moral problems linked to migration in Mexico, we need first of all to grasp the complexity of the border history and cultural limits of the Mexican self-perception as well. Mexico denounces the abuses that Mexican migrants suffer in the U.S., but treat migrants from Haiti and Central America in a cruel and inhuman way, demonstrating the live Mexican Boundary Paradox.

*Keywords: Boundaries, Mestisaje, Migration, México, Xenophobia.*

*For with whatever judgment you judge, you will be judged.  
Matthew, 7:2.*

Interculturality and boundaries are apparently the essence of Mexico. As a 200-year-old sovereign nation, Mexico has given rise to José Vasconcelos’s concepts of the *Cosmic Race*. In an essay on

race and the future of Ibero-American people, Vasconcelos discusses the ideas of Race and Nationality. Almost 100 hundred years after the first publication of his book, there are still several topics on which we should reflect upon. One of the main problematic aspects is the issue of physical and national boundaries. In contemporary Mexico, many Mexicans still “miss” those lands that were once part of the First Mexican Empire even if the Mayan area represents a different Mexico from that territory once conquered by the Mexica (Aztecs) or from the northern territories that Mexico aspires to win back someday. In 2021, the government decided to commemorate the fall of the city of Mexico-Tenochtitlan as proof of 500 years of Indigenous Resistance. Today’s social and economic inequalities seem to be a heritage of the New Spain’s initial organization which was based on the caste system.

This article shall address the current issue of migration and xenophobia using a socio-cultural approach. Mexico denounces the abuses suffered by Mexican migrants in the U.S., but treats in a cruel and inhuman way the migrants coming from Haiti and Central America. There are paradoxes and seemingly contradictory actions whenever Mexican state tackles issues such as borders, migration and identity. Xenophobia and malinchism<sup>52</sup> coexist in the present-day Mexican reality. Some migrants are very well received, but others are treated as criminals and being denied their human dignity, the foundation of all rights. While European migrants find Mexicans a very welcoming, hospitable and generous people, migrants from Africa, Haiti or Central America see this land as a country full of hatred. I sincerely hope that this reflection will really help us explain at least a part of the live Mexican Boundary Paradox.

The first part of this essay will question the ideas of physical and national boundaries as reflected in the Guillermo Bonfill and Edmundo O’Gorman’s thinking. The second part will discuss the importance of Mestizaje in Mexico and will apply the metaphor of Axolotl in order to further explain the core beliefs and attitudes of Mexicans. This chapter also takes up the ideas contained in Roger Bartra’s *Cage of Melancholy: Identity and Metamorphosis in the Mexican Culture* and in José Vasconcelos’s *Cosmic Race*. Finally, I will insist upon the key concepts of malinchism and xenophobia as perceived in, from and outside Mexico relying on Zefitret Molla’s *a*

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<sup>52</sup> Called *malinchismo* in Spanish, it is a form of attraction that a person from one culture develops for another culture, a particular case of cultural cringe.



*Treacherous Journey Through Latin America: The Plight of Black African and Haitian Migrants Forced to Remain in Mexico.*

*Physical and National Boundaries*

Since its independence in 1821, Mexico aimed to be a national state. Constituents used thus the concept of Nation without discrimination. The new state pretended that the concept of nation/homeland expressed and promoted the very idea of Mexicanism, developing this way a pro-Mexican cultural practice. During the post-classical period (900-1521), the two major –Mayan and Aztec – civilizations dominated through their imperial structures the various peoples of Mesoamerica, Oasis America and Arid America. Mayans developed a system of independent state cities, while Aztecs had a centralized organization. These cultural areas created by anthropologist Paul Kirchoff<sup>53</sup> are still used today to explain pre-Columbian history and the geographically defined common characteristics of Central America and southern Mexico. When it was created in 1821 within the continental New Spain administration and General Captainship of Guatemala, the Mexican state was a mix of three cultural heritages, but represented also a new administrative proposal that actually transformed the existing Spanish organizational structure. Back then most waves of migration came from North Arid America and Oasis America as many people wanted to come and settle in wealthy Mesoamerica. “Historical contacts included those with the peoples who inhabited the areas north of Mesoamerica, in so-called Arid America. It was an unstable and fluctuating frontier. [...] Some Mesoamerican peoples originated as northern hunters and gatherers who migrated to and assimilated the agricultural, urban civilization of the south.”<sup>54</sup> It is vital to understand the aforementioned process: even if most of today’s waves of migration come from south to north, we can see it was not always that way, and the technological transformation of the XVIII and XIX centuries is what stands behind this phenomenon. It was a time when Mesoamerica was the economic and political heart of North America, but nevertheless I do not intend to elaborate here on that.

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<sup>53</sup> Paul Kirchoff, “Gatherers and farmers in the Greater Southwest: a problem in classification,” *American Anthropologist* 56, no. 4 (1954): 529-550.

<sup>54</sup> Guillermo Bonfill Batalla, *Mexico profundo: Reclaiming a Civilization* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), 98.

I would rather instead show the challenges that Mexico had to face once it achieved its independence from Spain.

The new state pretended to be a nation even with its intercultural, multilingual and multiethnic reality in which the population from the largest area of the newly autonomous state lived (from actual California to Costa Rica and from actual Texas to actual Baja California). The first challenge was the definition of territory and its defense. Guillermo Bonfill Batalla explained as an ethnologist and anthropologist that the territorial definition of the new nation was an overriding concern for its first citizens. In principle, they inherited a land which had been divided into five provinces during the last years of Spanish domination. The riches and potential of all these lands could have been the patrimony of Mexicans, yet very quickly this was reduced due to the newly proclaimed independence of Central America, and a few years later by the loss of more than a half of the remaining territory to the greedy and much more militarized United States of America. The defense of the borders, especially the northern border, was a constant headache and led to measures which are reflected in many characteristics of modern Mexico.<sup>55</sup> It is also important to take into account the inefficiency of the Mexican state coupled with the lack of identity of the relatively few inhabitants of these northern territories given the fact that the capital has not been in contact with them and actually considered this population of no real value.

The political construction of modern Mexico can also be seen as a series of territorial reductions and military defeats. The Central American territories and the northern part of the new state opted rapidly for secession from the newly formed Union. This topic interested one of the most influential historians of the twentieth century, Edmundo O’Gorman. In one of his first books, *Historia de las divisiones territoriales en México*<sup>56</sup>, he explains how national boundaries were a fundamental part of Mexico’s Nationhood. So, this aspect is extremely relevant. Even today, in the twenty-first century, many Mexicans think that the U.S. invaded Texas, and forget that Texas was initially an independent state, for ten years, and then its government decided to be a part of the Northern Union. O’Gorman’s main idea is that it is not just about politics and territorial control, the formation of the Mexican identity should be regarded not only from the perspective of the new country, but also from the nation’s point of view. O’Gorman and Bonfill Batalla agree

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>56</sup> Edmundo O’Gorman, *Historia de las divisiones territoriales en México* (Mexico: Porrúa, 1985).

upon the importance of the country's construction and territorial control.

In reconstituting the state and defining the acknowledged sociopolitical units, which are a legitimate part of it, it is not enough to reorder the territory to make it congruent with the borders of historically defined local societies. Broader social structures must be created for providing with its needed framework the civilizational impulse, which can survive on remnants confined within the local communities. [National collective] memory does not have to go back very far to recollect that in most cases the creation and current borders of the constituent states of the federation have been the result of recent historical decisions and negotiations. With only a few exceptions, these divisions cannot claim any historical continuity and are not based either on the real distribution of the population.<sup>57</sup>

And this issue still prevails in XXI century Mexico. In 2021, the government changed the narrative regarding the 500-year commemoration of the fall of Tenochtitlan and promoted a “new” historical vision, namely an account of victory from the perspective of the defeated. In Mexican history, this vision has already been promoted seventy years ago by Miguel León Portilla,<sup>58</sup> but Andrés Manuel Lopez Obrador's government chose to insist on these 500 years of Indigenous Resistance, which is a very significant subject for understanding the actual attitude that the government and some of the social sectors have towards migration.

In fact, the notion of Indigeneity does not really exist in Mexico. Otomí, Nahuas, and Mixes do not see themselves as indigenous. An Otomí does not share his/her cosmovision, language or cultural and social practice with a Tarahumara or a Huichol. “There is not a Huastec state, nor a Maya one, nor an Otomi one, although all would have ancient reasons for existing. All would constitute necessary levels of social and political organization for those peoples to modernize their own particular civilizational projects.”<sup>59</sup> Mexico as a national state still has difficulties engaging with some parts of its history, and this may be viewed as a historical (multigenerational) trauma. This concept was very analyzed by lawyer and historian Edmundo O’Gorman.<sup>60</sup> In his *México, el trauma de su historia*, O’Gorman asserts that the historical-

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<sup>57</sup> Bonfill Batalla, *Mexico profundo*, 173.

<sup>58</sup> Miguel León Portilla, *La visión de los vencidos* (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1959).

<sup>59</sup> Bonfill Batalla, *Mexico profundo*, 173.

<sup>60</sup> Edmundo O’Gorman, *México, el trauma de su historia* (México: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1977).

geographical entity called America did not enter the realm of western culture as a result of a discovery, but was an absolute invention. The invention of America actually made the update of a renewed idea of Europe possible in the *New World*, which involved the transplanted of two diverse major European civilizations in these new lands. That was also the reason for the foundation of the two Americas, the Saxon and the Latin, and that led to the great dichotomy in the American history.<sup>61</sup> This very idea has important consequences in today's Mexico. For O'Gorman, the key actor within the independence movement was the *Criollo*. For him, the figure of the colonial criollo was the one who saw the New Spain as his homeland.<sup>62</sup> An interesting question for O'Gorman would be that the *Criollo* lived in a kind of cultural and intellectual island (isolation), while the motivation for his independence from Spain was not inspired by the Independence of the Thirteen Colonies, but by the European political turmoil stirred by the French Revolution. Once Mexico was declared independent, everything changed and the *Criollo* was suddenly exposed to Modernity. "By highlighting the urgency in which the new nations were seen in attending and resolving the problem of their identity, we indicate the reason for being and the beginning of the historical-ontological process that constitutes the central theme"<sup>63</sup> of nationalism in America and more precisely in Mexico. The contact with modernity provoked a clash between two visions: *the conservative* and *the liberal*.

During the nineteenth century, Mexico entered a new and very conflictive era. It took almost sixty years to stabilize and pacify the country politically, and during that time, as said, Mexico lost half of its territory. By the end of the nineteenth century, the government of Porfirio Diaz intended to modernize Mexico and established a 30-year "peaceful" environment. Part of the *Pax Porfiriana* was made possible by the incorporation of foreign investment and the migration process. The development assistance or cooperation was no longer received exclusively from European countries as Spain, France or England, but came now also from the United States, the new dominant nation in America. The government had no more rivals, and the tension between conservative and liberal forces was suppressed and united within this new political era. The conflicts of the first years of the Mexican nation ended, and by the end of the nineteenth century a peaceful climate was instated. At the same time, new waves of migration began: Europeans, Canadians,

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 11-15.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 17.

Americans, Chinese and Lebanese saw Mexico as a land of opportunity. Modernization brought a shift in mentality, and so the Mexican society began to be oriented towards modernity, and one of its most complete expressions was the development of positivist scientism. Doctrine was of course important, but now more important became all the wishes and aspirations linked to the promise of a better world included technical industrialization, science and progress. This project was inevitably a foreign one in the broad and double sense of influence on the education and habits of Mexicans, and impact over the technical and economical areas as well. The exploitation of resources and the development of infrastructure triggered the march of Mexico, but also allowed foreigners to control the resources of the young state. (As we can see in the debates held recently concerning a possible Electricity Reform in Mexico and the exploitation of Lithium, the issue is still under discussion.) All these and a common standard of living for most of the population would eventually be the right way of attack against the *Porfiriato*, presented of course as an elitist dictatorship and involuntary builder of new colonialism.<sup>64</sup> Like everywhere else there are pros and cons, but submission to outlanders, and political and social inequalities have sown disturbance and confusion among all those left out of this scientific-progressive project. For us that was also an explanation of that dual feeling towards foreigners, of racism and xenophobia on one side, and admiration and malinchism on the other side. National and physical boundaries are inexorably generating cultural and social boundaries that we also need to understand if we want to comprehend our paradoxical attitude toward migration and migrants.

### *Mestizaje and the Metaphor of the Axolotl*

Racism and xenophobia in Mexico should not be confused with the way Anglo-Saxons conceptualize racism because they entail a cultural challenge of attraction and hatred at the same time. For example, “gringos”, one of the names used to define Americans, shows how foreigners can inspire in Mexicans both awe and spite. Some historians see *la Malinche*, the interpreter and woman of Cortés, as a symbol of the complex relationship between Mexican culture and otherness. But as historian Ursula Camba Ludlow states: “One of the most absurd myths, but one that has gained more strength thanks to the recently imported guilty Anglo-Saxon discourse, is that the Spaniards were white and racist, as if

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<sup>64</sup> O’Gorman, *México, El trauma*, 64-65.

they were the very same Mayflower pilgrims.”<sup>65</sup> An essential key to understand racism in Mexico is the concept of *Mestizaje*, the miscegenation, an idea that exists only within Mexico’s cultural and social boundaries. José Vasconcelos invented this idea in his famous book, the *Cosmic Race*, in other words the summum of his “lifelong battle against feelings of Latin American inferiority vis-à-vis the mighty Anglo-Saxon neighbor.”<sup>66</sup> Vasconcelos tried to boost Latin American self-confidence and self-awareness using the idea of Race as a key element to explain how Latin America was more than a copy of Anglo-Saxon America or Spanish cultures. In his view, self-consciousness was only possible through this notion of miscegenation, that he opposed to the notion of *blanqueamiento*, whitewashing. So, he chose instead to promote the idea that the Cosmic Race, the bronze race, was the foundation of a higher form of civilization. He defended that way the idea that a new man was possible and that new man could be created in Latin America. This concept was truly transcendent for the men who fought for the ideal of the Mexican Revolution. But even if a new self-awareness did emerge, it has not sufficed to give to the Mexican people a new way to think of foreigners as their equals. New emancipation from the U.S. is still promoted by philosophers like Enrique Dussel, for example. The first emancipation has finally been achieved and Mexicans do not think that they are a colony of the *Madre Patria*, their once Motherland Spain. The explanation provided by Vasconcelos is fundamental in order to understand the Mexican Character, but it is not enough. Four years after the publication of his book, Vasconcelos participated in a political election and was confronted with the political reality of Mexico. The experience was so strong that he truly began to question his own theory. He was “deeply disappointed with the social and political reality in Mexico [... and] referred to mestizos as the ‘comic’ instead of ‘cosmic’ race.”<sup>67</sup> The national character of Mexico and the Mexican idea of self-consciousness will be definitely challenged in the late eighties by sociologist Roger Bartra. In his 1987’s book, *The Cage of*

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<sup>65</sup> Ursula Camba Ludlow, “Los españoles eran blancos y racistas,” *Relatos e historia en México*, November, 2021, <https://relatosehistorias.mx/nuestras-historias/los-espanoles-eran-blancos-y-racistas>.

<sup>66</sup> Jeroen Dewulf, “Miscegenation,” in *Transnational Modern Languages: A Handbook*, ed. Jennifer Burns and Derek Duncan (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2022), 211. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2fjwpw7.27>.

<sup>67</sup> Dewulf, “Miscegenation,” 215.

*Melancholy: Identity and Metamorphosis in the Mexican Culture*,<sup>68</sup> he proposes a new way to understand Mexicanism. He assumes the Baroque past and present of *Mexico* (emblematically represented by Bolívar Echeverría<sup>69</sup> and Samuel Arriarán<sup>70</sup>) and offers a new understanding of the Mexican cultural and social nature by comparing it to the Axolotl, an endemic species of Mexico, which now survives only in Xochimilco, in the southern part of Mexico City.

An axolotl is an actual larva-like aquatic amphibian, swimming in the waters of Mexico, which never metamorphoses into a salamander, as expected, fact that is misunderstood by both Europeans and Mexicans as they keep this peculiar species as subject to constant scrutiny. For Bartra, the axolotl is the Mexican, always on the brink of change, always misunderstood and melancholic. The axolotl is a mirror of the entire Mexican national culture.<sup>71</sup> Roger Bartra realizes the problem of using the Axolotl as a way to illustrate mexicanness. In the presentation of his book he directly addresses the topic explaining his choice to the reader: [...] Developing the metaphorical theme of the axolotl, that most Mexican amphibian which inhabits the lakes “where the air is clear.” The Nahuatl word *axolotl* has been translated as “water game,” and it is evident that its mysterious dual nature (larva/salamander) and its repressed potential for metamorphosis are elements that facilitate the use of this curious living thing as a figure to represent the Mexican national character and the structures of political mediation obscures. I am aware that by engaging the metaphor of the axolotl I am violating reality: it is my admitted intention to force the introduction of the Mexican imagery of the national character into a canon or set of stereotypes and to observe, afterward, that the canon appears in Mexican political culture as a tragicomic representation of the everyday life of the mass of the people. I shall call this the canon of the axolotl. As will be shown, the use of the axolotl as a metaphor of political culture

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<sup>68</sup> Roger Bartra, *The Cage of Melancholy: Identity and Metamorphosis in the Mexican Culture*, trans. Christopher J. Hall (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992).

<sup>69</sup> Bolívar Echeverría, *La modernidad de lo barroco* (México: Ediciones Era, 2013).

<sup>70</sup> Samuel Arriarán, *Barroco y neobarroco en América Latina, Estudios sobre la otra modernidad* (México: Editorial Itaca, 2007).

<sup>71</sup> Steven Joseph Loza and Jack Bishop, *Musical cultures of Latin America: global effects, past and present* (Los Angeles: Department of Ethnomusicology and Systematic Musicology, University of California, 2003), 22.

provokes certain associations between the social facts and the biological phenomena, associations of ideas that have traditionally been located at the root of nationalistic belief. The recapitulationist ideas of Ernst Haeckel (to which the axolotl is very relevant) had their correlates in sociology, politics, and psychology. The belief that the development of the individual recapitulates the evolution of the species has its parallel in the idea that nations, like people, pass through a complete life cycle (infancy, youth, maturity, old age, and death). Jung's ideas on the collective unconscious and archetypes are also an expression of this parallelism.<sup>72</sup>

I find this explanation extraordinary, and I think that even in his fundamental work, Bartra did not really address this crucial matter of how Mexicans relate to foreigners or migration. In fact, the metaphor allows us to better understand the way Mexicans are at the core of their being, and then implicitly the way they treat others. *Mestizaje* is no longer the concept that provides us with a sufficient understanding of the Mexican true identity or the reason why Mexicans behave the way they do towards migrants. There is, as we have seen before, a duality in the relation with the other one, the stranger, characterized by admiration and malinchism, but at the same time by hatred and xenophobia.

### *Malinchism and Xenophobia*

A key figure in understanding the attraction Mexicans have for foreign cultures is Malinztin, also known as Malinche or Marina, all in fact different names of one and the same person, i.e. the interpreter and American woman of Hernan Cortés. This enigmatic character, Malintzin, an enslaved woman, was in truth a very gifted one, being not only a translator, but also a cultural advisor and negotiator to Cortés. This feminine figure is so complex that even in contemporary Mexico she is regarded as heroine and traitor. Her role is so important that she has been the main figure of various mass-media projects. On a social or cultural level, she is seen as the epitome of both *Mestizaje* and Ethnonationalism.

Like many key historical agents, Malinche/Marina has acquired importance as a mythic figure. From the time those first messengers reached Moctezuma, down to the very present, she has remained a site for the ongoing negotiation of meaning and self-understanding in Mexican America. [...] Her very presence

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<sup>72</sup> Bartra, *Cage of Melancholy*, 7.



contradicts, for example, canonical ideologies of the conquest as a straightforward relation between victimizers and victims.<sup>73</sup>

Her impact is so powerful that nowadays when some Mexicans admire and welcome foreigners, people who do not share their views insult them calling them “malinchistas”, and this is because in “Mexican popular mythology [she] is remembered as a traitor, the indigenous woman who sold out to the Spanish conquistadores. She plays a negative role opposite two powerful positive symbols from Mexican history: Cuauhtemoc, the last Aztec ruler and a symbol of heroic resistance to the invaders, and the Virgin of Guadalupe, the national saint created out of the intersection of Christianity and Aztec religion.”<sup>74</sup>

Being at the same time Cortés’s woman, she gives birth to the concept of *Mestizaje* as well. Malintzin and Cortés had a boy, Martin, who is known in Mexican history as *the Mestizo* and is believed to be the first case of Latin American miscegenation.

I do not intend to explore more deeply the relevance of this character that is why I limit myself to present him only as the prototype of *Mestizo*, or an example of how *Mestizaje* can be a new possibility of development. Not all thinkers believe that *Mestizaje* is a concept of union, inclusion and harmony. Some of them, such as historian Federico Navarrete, think that this concept is problematic: “This supposedly inclusive concept excludes since it defines who can be integrated and who cannot, and leaves aside important population groups such as indigenous people, people of African or Asian origin, or Jewish immigrants and other supposedly incapable groups to assimilate.”<sup>75</sup> The way Mexicans treat migrants changes radically when they are originally from Argentina, France, Russia or Ukraine (even in these complicated times) or when they come from Africa, Haiti or Central America.

Migration is a problem that has worsened lately in the world. This is not a new phenomenon, there have been migrations throughout human history due to different causes, mostly related to the pursuit of survival. At the present time, migration is nevertheless simultaneously recorded on a global scale, and is constantly and gradually increasing. “In 2019, the number of international migrants worldwide [...] reached almost 272 million

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<sup>73</sup> Mary Louise Pratt, “‘Yo Soy La Malinche’: Chicana Writers and the Poetics of Ethnonationalism,” *Callaloo* 16, no. 4 (1993): 859-860. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2932214>.

<sup>74</sup> Pratt, “Yo Soy La Malinche,” 860.

<sup>75</sup> Federico Navarrete, “La idea del mestizaje es excluyente y origen del racismo en México,” UNAM Global, 9 de agosto de 2017, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=goZmDE\\_KEcg&t=14s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=goZmDE_KEcg&t=14s).

(from 258 million in 2017). Female migrants constituted 48 per cent of international migrants. There were an estimated 38 million migrant children, three out of four international migrants were of working age, meaning between 20 and 64 years old. 164 million were migrant workers. Approximately 31% of the international migrants worldwide resided in Asia, 30% in Europe, 26% in the Americas, 10% in Africa and 3% in Oceania.<sup>76</sup> The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)<sup>77</sup> reported that, in 2017, Latin America had 1 out of every 7 migrants worldwide, approximately 37 million people. In recent years, this continent has experienced constant and increasing migration, caused by the ongoing crises from the countries it comprises. In 2015, for instance, 3.7 million Venezuelans fled their country: “80% of them resettled within the region. According to UN projections, by the end of 2019 the number of Venezuelans who will have left their country will reach 5.4 million, exceeding the sum of the populations of Madrid and Barcelona.”<sup>78</sup> As historian Amílcar Carpio Pérez explains, the United States has been a pole of attraction for migrants due to the enormous economic disparity it has with other countries in the region. The Mexican migration flow has been the largest regional one and Mexico remains the main migration corridor worldwide:<sup>79</sup> “in 1990 there were 4,395,365 migrants, in 2000 the number increased to 9,562,929, by 2010 it rose to 12,414,825 migrants, by 2017 there were 12,964,882 and in 2019 there was a slight decrease when 11,796,178 Mexican migrants were deported.”<sup>80</sup> About 98.5 percent of Mexican migrants go to the United States and Canada.<sup>81</sup>

But recently, as Carpio Pérez noted, the phenomenon of Central American migration is the one having the most accelerated

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<sup>76</sup> “Global issues, Migration,” United Nations, Peace, dignity and equality on a healthy planet, last modified May 2021, <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/migration>.

<sup>77</sup> Also known as CEPAL for its Spanish name: *Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe*.

<sup>78</sup> Antonio Estevadeordal, “América Latina: la oportunidad de la migración,” *esglobal*, 3 de junio de 2019, <https://www.esglobal.org/america-latina-la-oportunidad-de-la-migracion/>

<sup>79</sup> Carlos Serrano Herrera y Rodrigo Jiménez Uribe, *Anuario de Migración y Remesas México / Yearbook of Migration and Remittances México* (México: Fundación BBVA Bancomer/ CONAPO, 2021), 16.

<sup>80</sup> Amílcar Carpio Pérez, “Make your fear a prayer: affective life in migratory processes (fear and feeling of security),” *Revista SOMEPSO* 6, núm.1 (2021): 132.

<sup>81</sup> Carlos Serrano Herrera y Rodrigo Jiménez Uribe, *Anuario de Migración y Remesas México / Yearbook of Migration and Remittances México*, 44.

growth. The so-called Northern Triangle of Central America (TNC) made up of Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador is the region with the greatest increase in migrants at the moment. “In recent years, irregular migration from the region has been on such a scale that it has surpassed migration from Mexico, traditionally the leading source of migrants across the US southern border.”<sup>82</sup>

The economic issues raised by these phenomena are very significant for this region: “remittances have become a key element of the Northern Triangle’s economic activity, accounting on average for 18 percent of the countries’ GDP.” The lives of these migrants continue to be complicated and unstable because of their undocumented and irregular status. “Half of migrants from the Northern Triangle in 2017 were irregular (750,000 Salvadorians, 600,000 Guatemalans and 400,000 Hondurans).”<sup>83</sup> Migration ratios have increased significantly in the last four decades. “The total Central American-born population in the United States has grown more than tenfold since 1980, and by 24 percent since 2010. The 3.8 million Central American immigrants present in 2019 accounted for 8 percent of the U.S. foreign-born population of 44.9 million.”<sup>84</sup> The cases of Venezuela, Mexico and Central America are just proof that this is a ubiquitous problem all over the continent with various nuances and particularities.

Beyond the demographic and economic data from the immigration sphere, this problem also has social, psychological and emotional consequences, which are recorded from various testimonies all around the world. There are a few hazards stemming from the undocumented migration. This phenomenon represents undoubtedly one of the most pressing issues in Latin America. People who are forced to migrate seek in some way to be as protected as possible on their journey, and faith and devotion<sup>85</sup> are as a

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<sup>82</sup> Emmanuel Abuelafla, Giselle Del Carmen and Marta Ruiz-Arranz, *In the Footprints of Migrants: Perspectives and Experiences of Migrants from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras in the United States* (New York: Inter-American Development Bank, 2019), 4. <http://dx.doi.org/10.18235/0002072>.

<sup>83</sup> Abuelafla, Del Carmen and Ruiz-Arranz, *In the footprints of migrants*, 6.

<sup>84</sup> Erin Babich and Jeanne Batalova, “Central American Immigrants in the United States,” The online journal of the Migration Policy Institute (2021), <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/central-american-immigrants-united-states/>.

<sup>85</sup> In this context, Faith and devotions seem to be the only moral support for migrants. Saints and other spiritual figures give migrants some protection. Different Faith Based Organizations and other human rights organizations also support them in their journey and many times enter in conflict with the State’s organization.

matter of fact their main support because most of the legal institutions regard them as a threat. These migrants wish to find, of course, protection before leaving on their journey, and they would like to be able to count on social institutions that could take care of their families in their absence, provide them with the necessary help at the border, keep them out of any harm and violence, etc. but in reality even countries with a similar problem and with a significant percentage of their population migrating, do not treat them with dignity and respect. This question of human dignity is linked to political and cultural issues, too. During the first month of Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador's government, great expectations arose within the migrant communities and human rights activists' groups. But soon enough, as in so many other Latin American countries, Mexico has begun to be an "unofficial" third-secure country, and we can all witness the fact that the government actually aligned once again with the U.S. public policies regarding migrations.

One of my students, Zefitret Mola, conducted a quite interesting study regarding the current situation we are living here in Mexico. She conducted the investigation for her thesis in 2020. Her thoughts on this phenomenon are fundamental to understand the complex xenophobia that exists in Mexico.

The growing presence here of African and Haitian migrants poses a new set of challenges to a country which is already struggling to acknowledge the existence of Afro-Mexicans, and where Mestizaje still dominates the national discourse on race. Due to the restrictive U.S. and Mexican immigration policies since 2016, many migrants have found themselves forced to remain in a country they had only intended to transit through on their journey northward to the United States. Mexico has only recently taken a few necessary steps to recognize its Afro-Mexican population which had been so far marginalized and erased from history. But all these have only been taken at declarative level and even so to a quite small extent. By drawing on in-depth interviews conducted with Cameroonian and Haitian migrants in Tijuana and analyzing the U.S. and Mexican immigration policies affecting these communities, this paper aims precisely to shed some light on the specific problems that are besetting Black, generally non-Spanish speaking migrants in Mexico, because of their interlacing identities. African and Haitian migrants face particular challenges due to their status and their in a country where the majority of the population is not Black, and their lack of Spanish-speaking skills, which obviously hinders their access to services, making their life in Mexico harder. Appropriate measures should be adopted by the

Mexican government to provide assistance and support to these African and Haitian migrants, whose intersecting identities increase their vulnerabilities.<sup>86</sup>

### *Conclusion*

The migration issue is wide-ranging and therefore needs to be delimited. In this article, I was interested in rescuing a vision which is part of the beliefs, practices and attitudes that Mexicans have in their country towards migrants. That is why I firmly believe the cultural elements directed against migration and expressed via xenophobia or malinchism need to be addressed. Similar things happen in different parts of the continent, and it is clearly not a South-North problem, but a more horizontal one. At the same time, the Mexican government asks the U.S. government to respect the human dignity of Mexican migrants without thinking that the Central Americans, Haitians and Africans living in Mexico are equally human individuals.

My goal was to build the argument on a three-story thesis in order to show the complexity of the topic. The first point discussed in my paper was therefore the construction of Mexico as a national state, and how boundaries and frontiers play a role that goes beyond the political and administrative matters. The historical construction of the Mexican nation is founded upon hatred and admiration at the same time for foreigners. The second point I considered was the importance and limits altogether of the idea of Mestizaje, and in this spirit I saw fit to present the key figure of Axolotl used as a metaphor for the Mexican culture and behavior. The axolotl is a larva-like aquatic amphibian, a living creature that wants to but will never grow up. My final point was to show both sides of migration in Mexico: xenophobia and malinchism (hatred and idealization of foreigners). My sociocultural analysis was the guide meant to provide uniformity to the present paper enabling thus a better understanding of the context, the socio-cultural implications, the roots of the problem and the actuality of this phenomenon, as well as the reason why it has persisted for so long and is still a very pressing matter. This article envisages quite a broad time frame, although due to the constant increase in

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<sup>86</sup> Zefitret A. Molla, "A treacherous journey through Latin America: The plight of Black African and Haitian migrants forced to remain in Mexico" (Master Thesis, University of San Francisco, 2021).  
[https://repository.usfca.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2468&context=the\\_s](https://repository.usfca.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2468&context=the_s).

migration in recent decades, I consider that the assessment, as reflected in different regions of the continent, should be limited to the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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## Love, Justice and Catholic Social Teaching in Pope Benedict XVI's *Deus Caritas Est*

Dedicated to the Memory of Bishop Walter Edyvean of  
Boston, Massachusetts

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### *Abstract*

In 2005 Pope Benedict XVI proclaimed the Encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* that powerfully addressed the importance of the Roman Catholic Church's teaching on social justice, and taught that it is rooted in *Caritas*, the love that binds all human beings together in respect and in love. In 2007 the encyclical was attacked by the Asian liberation theologian Fr. Tissa Balasuriya (1924-2013), who argued carefully that the teaching Pope Benedict had proclaimed, as was indifferent to the claims of justice. Such practices as emerge from Catholic Social teaching are rooted in justice rather than in love, he insisted, and it is a mistake to confuse one for the other. Speaking from the point of view of one who has engaged for more than thirty years in the sort of social justice work that both theologians address, I argue against identifying Catholic social justice with the politically based practices that Fr. Balasuriya championed, and point out that the historically and theologically based teaching that Pope Benedict taught is vital in sustaining the continuing, informed, and often one-on-one work that such programs undertake. I conclude that to identify the practice of Catholic social justice with politics, whether of a left-of-center inclination or any other, is almost always harmful to its practice, and that both Love and Justice are necessary for its success.

*Keywords: Pope Benedict XVI, Fr. Tissa Balasuriya, Catholic Social Justice, Caritas, Justice, Asian Liberation Theology, Deus Caritas Est.*

The Encyclical Letter *Rerum Novarum* of Pope Leo XIII, published on May 15, 1891, has had such a powerful effect on the discussion of the principles involved in the definition of Catholic social justice that it may seem ungrateful to suggest that its effect has wanted nuance, but in some ways its influence, descending from

a great height, has been more invested in ‘what it is to be’ than in ‘how it should function’. Recent examinations of Catholic social teaching regularly take up economic and social issues, the relationship between church and state, the role of the family, and now thanks to Pope Francis, the care of creation, and the extent to which human ecology can be understood in terms of social justice, but less often do they turn to the ways in which such teachings can actually be enacted, or what is to be expected of those who take part in them.

On Christmas Day 2005, however, Pope Benedict XVI published his first Encyclical Letter, *Deus Caritas Est*, which spoke directly to some of the issues of which his great predecessor had fought shy one-hundred-and-fourteen years earlier, and did so from the vantage point of a faith rooted in scripture and in love, one that involved not only the matters of social justice that had engaged Pope Leo, but also those concerned in its practice, a consideration that had not received the emphasis or the focus he now employed.

That the practice of social justice has often escaped attention, however, is no doubt understandable. The circumstances that lead to its consideration often begin with assumptions of evident inequality and a need for redistribution, whether of things or of power, though such considerations rarely estimate the nature of the relationship that can or should exist between the endowed and the disadvantaged who, for whatever reason, have been neglected or deprived. But these are important considerations in Benedict’s encyclical, which addresses social justice through a consideration of church history and *caritas*, an approach that was subsequently criticized, no doubt in part as a reaction to a much misunderstood speech Pope Benedict gave in Regensburg, Germany, the following year. I shall return to one such critique shortly.

But on the subject of *caritas* itself, Pope Benedict is quite uncompromising. Arguing for “The distinctiveness of the Church’s charitable activity,”<sup>87</sup> for example, he finds in *caritas* a “simple response to immediate needs and specific situations,” but adds that: “Individuals who care for those in need must first be professionally competent: they should be properly trained in what they do and how to do it, and committed to continuing care. Yet while professional competence is a primary, fundamental requirement, it is not of itself sufficient. We are dealing with human beings, and human beings always need something more than technically proficient care. They

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<sup>87</sup> Pope Benedict XVI’s, *Deus Caritas Est* (London: CTS, 2006), para. 31.

need humanity. They need heartfelt concern.”<sup>88</sup> Although such statements appear not only unexceptional but even obvious, there are circumstances in which they are anything but. Many Catholic universities, for example, both in America and elsewhere, offer what can best be called “outlets” for social justice, programs initiated by the university, usually for its undergraduate members, so as to introduce them to the importance of working with disadvantaged persons, in many cases with disadvantaged children. And it is with these, among other places, that Pope Benedict’s strictures can still have a salutary effect.

I address this issue as a Professor of English and American literature at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., where my main area of interest is in European medieval literature, but for the past thirty-two years, I also have been effectively the director of a program in which Georgetown undergraduates tutor, one-on-one, in literacy and the language arts, a group of often disadvantaged primary-school children aged 6 to 10, in Washington D. C. and living in two separate urban communities. Our project, anchored in an appreciation of social justice as it is, originated in a community named Sursum Corda Apartments in 1970, and then when Sursum Corda was razed by developers, moved over to nearby Golden Rule Apartments in 2017. The schools that lie closest to their apartments, and that many of their children attend, are not the best in the city. Many live in accommodation that is supported by rent subsidies of up to seventy-percent by the federal government. Many are one-parent, and some without regular income. But there is too a self-reliance and a sense of fairness and concern for others that I have not space here to describe, but that are frequently apparent in our interactions together. Although I shall draw examples from my work with both communities, I am concerned here with the implications that I believe our work may hold out for an understanding of Catholic social justice in more general terms, particularly those that appear in a setting informed by a university context. To this circumstance I add two caveats: first that the putatively Catholic distinctiveness of some projects involving social justice is not particularly apparent in practice. Such projects may indeed be intrinsic to Catholic identity within an institution like a Catholic university, but it is probably mistaken to claim them as uniquely Catholic. Indeed one of their many advantages is the opening they supply for a dialogue with other religions, particularly in a university context like the one I am concerned with here.

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<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 31a.

The second caveat is that, contrary to usual practice, I am alluding to specific programs that involve social justice in a study that is not about such programs, but rather about the practice of Catholic social justice itself. This is a surprisingly unusual circumstance, but discourse concerning social justice rarely concerns itself with particulars, a circumstance for which current academic discourse is probably as guilty as any direction given to such discourse by Pope Leo, who certainly made allowance for the role of *caritas*. But rarely have I seen much discussion of the specific circumstances concerning such programs in the literature concerning social justice, and though it is easy to believe that the author whom one has in hand may have been much concerned with such matters in the past, it is less easy to believe that he or she is going to address these circumstances now, however eloquent his or her exposition may initially appear. Indeed, I have a memory of once having invited a distinguished Catholic ethicist to visit our program at Sursum Corda during its final years, only to be told that he was far too occupied with a book he was writing about Catholic social justice to do so. But one reason I find Benedict's observations as attractive as I do, is his specific reference to such programs as the ones to which I have been referring, even to the extent of offering "a special word of gratitude and appreciation to all those who take part in these activities in whatever way. For young people, this widespread involvement constitutes a school of life which offers them a formation in solidarity and a readiness to offer others not simply material aid, but their very selves."<sup>89</sup>

In chapter one of my forthcoming book, *Inventing Education: Georgetown Students and D.C. Youth Learn from Each Other* (2022), my account of the two programs I have been referring to, I identified the two chief characteristics of both, characteristics that carried with them unexpected but real challenges relevant to our topic. First of all, it was necessary to ensure that, as far as possible, the students who took part were "professionally competent," at least as far as having been "properly trained" in the work they were to undertake would allow. But although Georgetown had sponsored several like programs in the past, sustained training had never been a priority. Some of these had been effectively "homework programs," intended to ensure a young learner's homework was completed and correct, and in these programs subject area competence, but not necessarily the ability to teach it, had been assumed. But another consideration involved

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., para. 30b.

a belief still held by some who oversee such programs, that it is best to leave the undergraduate students who take part in such programs largely on their own, since not to do so might constrain their inventiveness and limit their ability to come up with a different way of proceeding than what had worked in the past. But such a proposition places the apparent interest of a neophyte student tutor ahead of that of the learner whom he or she intends to serve, though it has, of course, the further property of shielding from responsibility anyone else involved in oversight, who can simply claim that whatever may go wrong is simply the student-tutor's doing. Apart from such dubious advantages, it goes without saying that such instruction as the tutor actually does receive, should not come simply in a brief burst at the beginning of the project, but continue throughout the academic year, and that the student tutor should be personally involved, by discussion and report, in its operation. At least such has been our experience.

But there are cases where the instruction of student-tutors has gone even further. At Boston College, a Jesuit university in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts, for example, the Philosophy Department, and some other departments, have instituted courses specifically intended for students involved in the work of social justice, after such courses were called for by the students themselves. But if the instruction of student-tutors is attended to effectively, then Pope Benedict's injunction concerning the need for "properly trained" participants has been answered, and the work of social justice can proceed with some depth. It can even become part of the academic and intellectual life of the university, and not be banished to its "extra-curricular" suburbs, as has so often been its fate.

But if the first requirement for programs concerned with social justice is that its participants, in Pope Benedict's words, be "properly trained," the second concerns the nature of the relationship – sometimes friendship is not too strong a word – that comes to exist between the undergraduate tutor and the *Sursum Corda* learner. This is not entirely surprising, since both are, in very real sense, being instructed, in some ways by the other. In some programs it is difficult for a relationship of any depth at all to develop, since elsewhere there are programs that intentionally fracture the connection between tutor and learner by frequent changes of participant, instructional interruptions and cancellations, or simply not arranging for the same tutor to instruct the same learner over a given period of time. Since the safety and security both of the young learners and their tutors are of paramount importance, this practice is understandable, even if it is

not undertaken for that reason. But whatever its motivation, it is not particularly helpful in ensuring the success of tutorial instruction.

But there are other ways of addressing safety issues depending upon the circumstances of the tutorial sessions, and these of course must be addressed attentively, if usually in a case-by-case basis. In many American states, for example, there are relevant laws, and as a general rule universities, in America and elsewhere, are nothing if not responsive to them. In this connection some programs are arranged so as to accommodate whomever comes to help, so that the same learner will work with a variety of tutors in the course of a term. But other programs, like ours, are rooted in a specific disadvantaged community, and so reach out to learners who would not otherwise be willingly engaged. This circumstance requires a higher degree of commitment on the part of those who are involved, along with a higher degree of oversight by competent authority, support from the community, and particularly from the learners' care givers – my experience has been that mothers and perhaps especially grandmothers often knew our learners best of all – though other care givers, where they existed, could be every bit as effective.

Without the discipline imposed by tutoring inside a school building, however, the effectiveness of the tutor's tutoring often depends, to a greater or less degree, on the nature of the relationship that develops, and that raises the question as to why it is that tutors in particular take part in the work they have undertaken to do – given their age, learners usually have the choice made for them, though to put it in such terms somewhat simplifies the matter. But this second consideration, after those in authority have seen to it that the tutors have been properly instructed, lies in the hands of the tutors themselves. Here I am going to argue that Pope Benedict has again anticipated what is central: it is not only a sense of justice, but also of love, that will direct the tutors, and cause them both to do what they do, and gradually to understand their reasons for doing so. To be sure, the first and easiest reason that they engage in the work they do is that they have become aware of, and responsive to, the goodness and the necessity of human justice. If the earth has ever sustained a totally just society it has not done so recently, and the economic systems that now prevail seem to guarantee that we will not see one anytime soon. But hope, moderated as need be by reason, seems to find a place in many a young heart, and justice is indeed the first motivator for many who take part. But my own experience has been that, attractive as a sense of justice may be, the second, and very often the most

powerful reality, is that of love, a more personal virtue than justice ever was, and one that lies closer to their day-to-day practice. Just as it is justice that indicates that they have an understanding of the larger social purpose to which they have put their hand, so it is love that gives birth to the nature of the relationship, overseen and conditional though it may be, that can, and often does, come about.

Earlier in this article I mentioned that Pope Benedict's *Deus Caritas Est* had been criticized for its emphasis on what constitutes its main contribution to the discussion of Catholic social teaching, its emphasis on the role of *caritas*. One telling attack appeared in a contribution to a multi-author collection of articles called *Catholic Social Justice, Theological and Practical Explorations* (2007) written by the late Sri Lankan priest and philosopher Fr. Tissa Balasuriya (1924-2013), a well-known, very effective, and highly controversial proponent of Asian liberation theology, who had established the Center for Society and Religion in Colombo in 1971, and the Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians in 1975. He had also been excommunicated from the Roman Catholic Church for one year in 1997, a time when then Cardinal Ratzinger was Head of the Congregation for the Direction of the Faith, and was thus involved both in rejecting as "defective" a compromise statement that Fr. Balasuriya had proposed, and in arranging for his subsequent reconciliation.

In his examination of now Pope Benedict's 2005 encyclical, Fr. Balasuriya pointed out, *inter alia*, that whatever its strengths, its reading of Church history – Pope Benedict had cited examples from the past to illustrate the Church's care and concern for the poor and the disadvantaged – was far too one-sided. For centuries the Church had worked in close association with such regressive and reprehensible institutions as Colonialism, he insisted, ones that effectively stood against much modern Church teaching. The Church not only tolerated, but also benefited, from the unjust structures of society that such institutions both established and perpetuated, he argued. Nor did Fr. Balasuriya's examination lack for *ad hominum*. He insisted that both Pope Benedict and his immediate predecessor, Pope John Paul II, never enjoyed "close live contact with other religions in an ongoing manner. They have lived their lives almost entirely in a world dominated by white racism, whether under capitalism or Communism....Both popes implicitly accept the world of neo-liberal domination but also the global world system of land distribution in which the European peoples have taken over the main habitable areas of the world in the Americas

and Oceania.”<sup>90</sup> Under such circumstances, his argument continues, it is hardly surprising that pope Benedict, “does not speak for mass movements for human liberation and structural changes in favor of justice ... From my part of the world, one is inclined to ask for whom is the encyclical written, and by whom? Should not *Deus Caritas Est* necessarily imply that God is also the God of justice?”<sup>91</sup>

It should indeed, and given our author’s well-known beliefs and commitments it is not difficult to sympathize, at least in part, with the strident tone of “let’s have a little more discussion of justice and a little less about all this love,” that runs through his examination as a whole. He paints with broad strokes, with an understanding of history that is perhaps not overly-nuanced, and with a clear and certain grasp of past injustices. He gives what he takes to be the largely Western tradition of *caritas* a nod, but whatever advantages it may hold out, Fr. Balasuriya thinks its embrace part of the reason for Pope Benedict’s evident short-sightedness. His analysis is certainly *ad rem*, but somewhat unhelpful in discussing the circumstances in which the practice of social justice can actually take place, particularly, but not only, in programs like the ones I have been describing.

The difficulty with an approach to social justice that privileges justice over love is that, even in a considered analysis, it easily turns away from philosophical or theological discourse, and to the world of partisan politics instead. But the purpose of maintaining or working in such programs as are informed by a sense of Catholic social justice, is not to produce votes for the Democratic or for the Labour Party, for the Greens or the CDU, even though in some cases it is possible that such may be one of the unintended effects. As I have already indicated, my students are certainly aware of the presence of social injustice, which they sometimes call unfairness, but not wishing to seem to claim a spurious sense of personal accomplishment, only rarely discuss. Still if justice was the only thing that drew them to do the work they do, their teaching would probably be a good deal less engaging than it usually is, and their commitment might not last as long as it often does. At its best, our work is a joy for tutor and learner alike, one that, sometimes at least, effects a connection and a communication

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<sup>90</sup> Tissa Balasuriya’s, “Benedict XVI’s *Deus Caritas Est* and Social Action,” in *Catholic Social Justice: Theological and Practical Explorations*, ed. Philomena Cullen, Bernard Hoose and Gerard Mannion (London and New York: T&T Clark and Continuum Books, 2007), 47.

<sup>91</sup> Tissa Balasuriya’s, “Benedict XVI’s *Deus Caritas Est* and Social Action,” 50.



that might not otherwise have come about. But even though good learning – in our case in literacy and the language arts in general – is the stated and real purpose of our work, the terms of the interaction between tutor and learner is more than a detail, and can even become, according to circumstance, a kind of necessity, even though it is not usually understood as such by either tutor or learner, who often come to take it for granted. I have already complained about accounts of Catholic Social Justice that are long on precept and theory, but short on the details of practice, and so, for all of its compassion and commitment, Fr. Balasuriya's seems to me. To think Pope Benedict's encyclical not sufficiently invested in an examination of justice simply because it privileges the place and role of love seems to me to all but intentionally misread it, and to set aside as irrelevant the less social, more personal, virtues that it seeks to privilege instead.

It would be a mistake to deny to love social meaning, even social significance, particularly where matters of social justice are concerned. Increasingly, both in America and elsewhere in the world, it has become apparent that many of us form not only many of our political opinions, but also many of our social practices, according to what we hate, rather than by what we love. But engagement with social justice is a welcome practice, particularly, *pace* Fr. Balasuriya, if its practice offers a bridge over the only apparent division between justice and love, one that finally privileges neither one. The great accomplishment of *Deus Caritas Est* is to reconcile, without giving advantage to either one, two of the most powerful Christian virtues, and to offer them to us as the best way forward in an increasingly divided and fragmented world.

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This study has been a consideration of three texts in particular, Pope Benedict XVI's *Deus Caritas Est*, cited by paragraph from the edition of the Catholic Truth Society (CTS: London, 2006); Pope Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum*, cited from the edition of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (Washington, D.C., 1991); and Fr. Tissa Balasuriya's essay "Benedict XVI's *Deus Caritas Est* and Social Action," cited from Philomena Cullen, Bernard Hoose and Gerard Mannion, eds., *Catholic Social Justice: Theological and Practical Explorations* (London and New York: T&T Clark and Continuum Books, 2007), pp. 41-62; my references above are by page number. Papal encyclicals are available online at [Vatican.va](http://Vatican.va). The literature on Catholic Social justice is extensive though not always taken with the seriousness that it deserves, even in Catholic universities where it should be particularly relevant, and although

I have taken exception to certain of its current practices, I should point out two particularly interesting examples, Edward Hadas, *Counsels of Imperfection: Thinking Through Catholic Social Teaching* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2021), and Rodger Charles, SJ, *An Introduction to Catholic Social Teaching* (Oxford and San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999, 2001), for their differing approaches and ultimately, differing positions. My own are apparent in accounts I have given of the programs I have referred to above, and explicitly in my forthcoming book, *Inventing Education: Georgetown Students and D.C. Youth Learn from Each Other*, as earlier, in a related account focused on the community of Sursum Corda itself, *Power and Probity in a D.C. Cooperative: The Life and Death of Sursum Corda* (Washington, D.C.: New Academia Publishing, 2018). A third study focused upon certain English programs that took place in London: *Vygotsky's Children: Georgetown and Oxbridge Students Meet Urban Youth* (Washington, D.C., New Academia Publishing, 2017).

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# **Spatial, Temporal, Somatic and Spiritual Boundaries. Seen as Virtual Reflection of Expanding Personal Selfhood**

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## *Abstract*

This paper represents an attempt to understand how could boundaries of values be tentatively outlined, described and addressed. Universal natural categories are observed, experienced and interpreted in the second reality of human mediated understanding. These circumstances are introduced in the discussion about various boundaries delimiting real world domains imbued with values that have been influencing the behavior and giving meaning to human existence throughout our history. The author ranks some spatial and temporal boundaries to indicate examples of their correlation with somatic and spiritual manifestations of what is understood as viable human values.

*Keywords: value changes, spatial boundaries, cultural landscapes, time frames, personality development, spiritual manifestations, negative socialization.*

## *Introduction*

This paper was initially conceived in rather serene conditions before the New Year, but time has got out of joint and author's value system had been suddenly completely scattered. When personal selfhood drops to ground zero and you have to supplant helpful seclusion for depressing solitude of a hermit, what values may retain their residual aftershock retrospective meaning? These lines are written in a hectic attempt to reflect on ranges and limits of human value motivations. In everyday life we seldom recognize multiple boundaries surrounding us that give shape to our multiple value systems. They are perceived almost automatically as an intrinsic part of the culture that people belong to, so far as they stay on their own soil in both physical and spiritual

sense of the word. In this essay culture as a vestige of functioning values is defined as the ground on which humans settle, live, evolve and move around. Habitual culture can be viewed as an array of ready-made meanings that bring sense to the ways we are interacting, existing and journeying through all walks of life. Things change with passage of time and with the shift of location. Stepping off the accustomed trail one encounters another terrain, adjusts the focus of vision, notices unfamiliar horizons and faces existential choices of acceptance or denial. These terrains may be perceived quite differently. Some may see there rather attractive untapped opportunities that will open new vistas. Others will stop at the borderline anticipating insurmountable challenges that are fraught with doom. This term is not here due to misuse. It introduces the fourth individual and public psychological area – the zone of trauma that follows the zone of danger. There are multiple spatial, temporal, cognitive and moral attributes to human capacity of retaining piece of mind and remaining in one's static zone of comfort or dynamic zone of learning. Zone of comfort is one such area that usually keeps humans free from concerns about values. It would be relevant to outline the boundaries that encompass values. All the physical, psychological, somatic and mental domains of multiple values have their border fences delimiting the red lines not to be crossed and the road maps that operate within the safe range of each and every bounding space. Value borders are mental constructs but they are intrinsically connected with material objects and quite real artifacts. Let us begin their description by trying to range physical areas that embrace values.

### *Spatial boundaries*

It seems natural to start reflecting about various humane spaces from the very beginning. The first cradle an infant feels secure and protected is mother's womb. The value of being safely encapsulated represents for a human in fetal position the whole universe that at postpartum either shrinks or expands to mother baby bonding. Attempting to differentiate initial borderlines of experiential patterns S. Grof introduced the concept of four basic perinatal matrices.<sup>92</sup> Building blocks of uterine fetus attachment to external world form the stable value set imprinted in human subconscious even at perinatal period and has life-long effect. In infancy the space of secure domestic circles gradually expands.

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<sup>92</sup> Stanislav Grof, *Spiritual Emergency: When Personal Transformation Becomes a Crisis* (New York: Tarcher Putnam, 1989).

During the early development stages family domain is usually associated with invulnerable safe haven. With the gained ability of unrestricted physical movement available territory expands and according to L. Karsavin's triple identity theory<sup>93</sup> it is the first independent encounter of a child with an expanse of wild nature that forms our primary stable personal identity. It manifests itself in fearless and flamboyant puppy curiosity that connects individual with the world and provides the open lasting nexus to a growing and expanding individual value system. The two other equities are more malleable. The second side of personal identity can be called *hic et nunc* because it is being constantly shaped and evaluated by the changing social circumstances.

Next to the locus of home an individual will come across an array of civilized entities. Once inside each of them, the value of present moment impact would be experienced by every child. They flock to all kinds of places of attendance, to outdoor yard spaces and recreation areas. It is on these territories where all children align. Personal values are being shaped here in primary live socialization experience (the question arises: will these newly acquired values be mostly palpable, physically experienced, virtual, or all together?). Play ground is the only location where adults do not dominate and are either excluded or shifted to the periphery of children's coaction. Meeting and directly interacting with other kids, encountering someone else similar to you, but at the same time quite different, implies that initial positive and frequently negative toddler's enculturation takes place here. Concerted, unsettled or hostile attribution of effective modes of behavior shape up the new attitudes that differ from domestic ones. This allows trying on various new roles, gives rise to mental make-ups and sets up new self-reinforcing values. Later in regular school attendance earlier acquired predispositions will become socially prevailing and would lead to friendship, domination, submission, bullying, and other social effects and defects of public education, to peer role group interaction and extra-family mediation.

In public sphere there are many overt and covert interactions that have direct impact on values. For instance, largely neglected and widespread traumatic effect of being forced to attend toxic classrooms can hardly be cured even at early stages. The vicious circle can be broken by brisk change of location, by

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<sup>93</sup> Dominic Rubin, "The Life and Thought of Lev Karsavin: „Strength made perfect in weakness...," in *On the Boundary of Two Worlds: Identity, Freedom, and Moral Imagination in the Baltics* (Amsterdam–New York: Rodopi, 2013), 480.

transferring a pupil to another school. This palliate may stop but it does not cure the widely spread tacit social ill. In adult world offices and institutions in many countries are contaminated with plethora of power-domination relations.<sup>94</sup> In fact this phenomenon is an indicator that the term “values” has besides its noble halo a dirty shadow of segregation. Comprehensive humanitarian analysis shall therefore include the acknowledgement and the study of the negative values’ destructive impact on the quality of human life. And in the 21<sup>st</sup> century modern societies are becoming much more sensitive to similar anomalies. Getting further down the negative social slope we may register the existence of functionally inverted meaningless institutions that retain the faade and keep seemingly working formal practices within inner office boundaries. Failed state is one such big spatial example of a case where external attributes of public institutions can be deprived of the much-needed substantial valuable content. We step here in the domain of bad fighting games. The most detrimental of them is zero-sum-game that excludes win-win situation.<sup>95</sup>

Back to neutral waters. Larger interactive spaces will encompass compact urban and rural areas or scattered settings – neighborhoods, communes, kibbutz, mahalla, fraternities, fellow-countrymen connections, clubs, societies, constituencies, settlements and municipalities. These larger physical spaces have clear-cut spatial borders and are characterized by ranges of deep-rooted value sets. Can differences in values be also legitimated by being placed by birth or by chance in such a location? Will the mere spatial fact of living in the capital or in a small town, in a village or on a farm, being a local or newly arrived become instrumental in predetermining the volume and limits of one’s values? Spatial value boundaries in many ways do depend on the shapes of cultural landscapes. Living at the sea shore, say, in Alexandria, or at the banks of the Nile in Cairo makes a difference at least in terms of flight of imagination in perceiving the line of horizon. Highlander meeting with a lowlander would immediately feel the dissemblance in intrinsic choice of even mundane priorities. It is not so much the matter of altitudes but rather an expressed difference in attitudes towards the value of mountain valleys as such. However small their size might be, these spaces are turned into seats of distinct local

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<sup>94</sup> Alexandra Woodall museum worker from «Sticks and Stones» project team presents UK Museum Association survey results of the 2019 study: “Bullying in museums.”

<sup>95</sup> Yves Lacoste, *La géographie, ça sert, d’abord, à faire la guerre* (Paris: Editions La Découverte, 2012).

cultures and their autochthonous language purview. For instance, language and folklore expeditions to central Viet Nam mountain areas have in recent decades discovered about forty hitherto unknown languages and dialects still spoken by people living in the nearby valleys and gorges.<sup>96</sup> Their spatial divisions and connections may actually remain same in the time span between the Internet and ancient Roman advances as had been shown in the discourse about ultra-stable traffic lines in the Alps and the corresponding communicative routes by Graf V. at her recent IFK lecture.<sup>97</sup> The single best road once selected remains valuable route to many generations. On the other side of the world cognitive linguistic studies have allowed to discover that, for instance, being an Islander in the Pacific makes one's points of reference and the system of orientation quite different from those habitually used on the continental expanses.<sup>98</sup> Examining Eurasian intermediate region endless expanses we will find there the "culture of big tolerances" that will be at odds with the range of value limits in the very compact European landscapes.

The idea of ranking territories according to their semantic and spatial connectedness underlies the concept of cultural landscapes. Their borders can be described with different degree of approximation. Formal bipolar scheme contrasts the opposition in "Center-Periphery" model laying emphasis on aspects of domination and subordination. Another model "Central-Non-Central" would be more appropriate to describe City-Suburb correlation. "East-West" and "West- Non-West" would be similar evaluations extended to the global scale. Adding the Third, Fourth and the Fifth World helps to present a richer more volumetric picture. (Similar differentiation is valid, say, for lead and wingman. In literary analysis of characters, in-depth description also involves the first, second, third and fourth man taken as protagonists' self-evaluation).<sup>99</sup> These examples help to validate the need for a thorough observation in dealing with

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<sup>96</sup> Samarina I.V., "Ethnolinguistic situation in the North of Central Vietnam: Vietnamese ethnic groups and Vietnamese languages," in *Language policy and language conflicts in the modern world*, eds. A. Bitkeeva, V. Mikhachenko (2014), 486-498.

<sup>97</sup> Graf V. Head in the cloud. Tracing the internet as embodied media in the Alps. IFK lecture.

<sup>98</sup> Bill Palmer, "Absolute spatial reference and grammaticalisation of perceptually salient phenomena," in *Representing space in Oceania: Culture in language and mind*, ed. Giovanni Bennardo (Australia: Pacific Linguistics, 2002), 107-157.

<sup>99</sup> A. Grigoryan, "The first, second and third personality," *Languages of Slavic culture* (2014).



notions of borders and the requisite dividing lines. This in cultural landscapes we would see a variety of zoning and neighboring - main areas, their foci points, places of power, areas of growth and zones of decay, the cores of typicality and basic areas, the kernel and the soft core, and then come perimeters, frontiers, transitory edges, and even the nucleus and protoplasm. In zoning fan type matrices will give at least 16 types of distinct spatial options with a distinct set of meaningful facets. And the complete set of national spatial options has to include 256 cells.<sup>100</sup> These spatial distribution of distinct meaningful indices gives a clue how both deep and broad should be the proper study of the role and boundaries of values today. How different may be the approach to boundaries of values can be illustrated by an absentee dispute between two great Russian writers, masters of public mind. First, Leo Tolstoy in his short story "How Much Land Does a Man Require?" gave a rigid moral response: "7 feet of land" describing a man who, in his peasant greed for maximum land, forfeits everything but dies as he finally grabs all the land that he wanted<sup>101</sup>. In his story "Goosebery" Anton Chehov responded: "He was a gentle, good-natured fellow, and I was fond of him, but I never sympathized with this desire to shut himself up for the rest of his life in a little farm of his own. It's the correct thing to say that a man needs no more than six feet of earth. But seven feet of land is what a corpse needs, not a man. And they say, too, now, that if our intellectual classes are attracted to the land and yearn for a farm, it's a good thing. But these farms are just the same as six feet of earth. To retreat from town, from the struggle, from the bustle of life, to retreat and bury oneself in one's farm – it's not life, its egoism, laziness, it's monasticism of a sort, but monasticism without good works. A man does not need seven feet of land or a farm, but the whole world, all nature, where he can have room to display all the qualities and peculiarities of his free spirit."<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> V. L. Kagansky, "Center - Province - Periphery - Border. The main zones of the cultural landscape," *Cultural landscape: issues of theory and research methodology* (1998): 73-99.

V. L. Kagansky, "Cultural landscape and Soviet habitable space," *Collection of articles* (2001): 576.

<sup>101</sup> Leo Tolstoy, "How Much Land Does a Man Need?" *Wiki 2*, January 15, 2022, [https://wiki2.org/en/How\\_Much\\_Land\\_Does\\_a\\_Man\\_Need%3F](https://wiki2.org/en/How_Much_Land_Does_a_Man_Need%3F).

<sup>102</sup> "Kryzhovnik. Anton Pavlovich Chehov," Russian Livelib, accessed January 15, 2022, <https://www.livelib.ru/quote/1070908-kryzhovnik-anton-pavlovich-chehov>.

### *Temporal boundaries*

Human free spirit is not confined to continuous streamlined chronological time flow. It has its origins rooted in what is called historical time, but singles out only the gnostic aspects of events that have viable moral charge. Its present is not entirely determined by situational time. Moreover, we have a unique quality of stopping time and memory tool can revert the flow and bring the emphatic mementoes back. The spirit is positioned in the domain of the absolute time. That is why in Chronos it belongs to the cultural heritage of humanity where it resonates with the values that in Kairos have no temporal boundaries. Such resonances are not trimmed to the Procrustean bed of externally imposed consoling pictures of the world. Weltanschauung that shapes dignified personal image of the world is painful to be attained as it has to go against the grain of mundane values struggling for veracity in the continuous flow of everyday events.

Internal and external deictic time perceptions would yield a range of frameworks in the conceptualization of time flow values. Being within the temporal flow and in the constant “now” point the most widespread view, the so called “time arrow”, will place the future in front of us and the past would be left behind. There are other spoken secular references for inner evaluation of time flow, when future would be sensed as located above and the past viewed below the person being situated somewhere in the bottom. If the narrator steps out of the time line, the mode of writing would determine perception of the time line. Writing in English left to right we will feel that the past is remaining on our left and the future is then to be to the right. Writing in Arabic, Hebrew or Farsi from right to left time flow would be reversed, with the future approaching from the left and the past will remain detected on the right side of the room premises. Writing in classical Japanese or Chinese top to bottom we will imagine the future below and the past above us.<sup>103</sup>

Human life time value is presumably linear as indicated by the hyphen between dates of birth and death. It encompasses a range of time related phases that have physiological, somatic, psychological and spiritual boundaries. The stages of human development and growth have their specific time rhythms that are vital not only in upbringing, rearing and maturing. Functional rhythms of organisms physiologically operate with vibrations that

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<sup>103</sup> C. Fillmore, “Frames and the semantics of understanding,” *Quaderni di Semantica* 6 (1986): 222-254.

have their own distinct wave-lengths. They are mostly related to factors beyond our conscious control. Take the biological time daily rhythms, circadian rhythms, Tanner stages of puberty and a host of other characteristics with definite time constraints. They all have functional time spans and boundaries that are best described as static or fixed, though they will change with aging. Let us leave automatic time related boundaries at this point and come a bit closer to the consciously controllable life choices and actions that form the essence of what one is into in the course of living.

This is always a reflection about meaning and the essence of lived-up life. There are two ways to address the issue. Seen *de Profundis* or from the vantage point of life achievements, the individual manifestations of professed values show us examples of mental borders that were actually achieved, observed or transgressed during one's lifetime. Personal well-being has different temporal values separately registered by an individual in her or his two selves – an 'experiencing self' and in the 'remembering self'. The latter is what sociological polls in fact measure.<sup>104</sup> Non-secular criteria of evaluation in the Christian world remain practically unmeasured as they are rooted in an endless imaginative circle between the Fall of Man, original sin repentance and the anticipation of the Last Judgment in front of the coming Kingdom of God. The value and power of prayer defines in every single case the effect of timelessness of human predicament. In many civilizations and in different religious domains the value boundaries are defined and described by means of different time and space related narratives.

In Hindu cosmology the temporal boundaries of great values are originated in the cyclic time line that encompasses four yugas. This time line is not homogeneous. Affected by the entropy of human moral decay eternity wraps itself up in a dwindling time spiral. This cognitive model is just the opposite of contemporary secular Western business models practice in their incremental development spirals.<sup>105</sup> Value boundaries belong to the different worlds and in such cases, they will not be even contrasted on equal footing. But where does humanity find the benchmark for proper behavior and for representation of the world value structure?

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<sup>104</sup> D. Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2013), 513.

<sup>105</sup> "What the Spiral Model," *The Economics Times*. India Times, accessed January 25, 2022, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/definition/spiral-model>.

Throughout human history temporal boundaries are traditionally linked to observation and calculation of celestial movements and planetary phasing. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century the solar 11 year cycles of Sun activity have been found to affect both human health and man-made infrastructure. Same cosmological interest and exact time limit cycle calculations were of paramount value for the Nile irrigation infrastructure in ancient Egypt 45 centuries ago, and not only to that pragmatic end. (A note of personal observation). Staying as a young man in Cairo for a year I once decided to meet the New Year on top of the Khufu pyramid. Having climbed to the 147 meter high platform on top, the night sky full of vibrant stars suddenly opened to my baffled eyes. I was amazed to see fantastic similarity of the three brightest Orion belt stars shining right above my head in the midnight sky with the same linear disposition of the three colossal artifacts on the Giza heights. Glittering pyramids were vital for connecting the shining vault of heaven with its earthy artificially replicated cartography. Both entities functioned as collective *alter ego* to the divine star promise of eternity opened in this endeavor both to the ruler and the ruled. How come that paramount life value was open to all? Because, each countryman possessed a glittering ceramic anthropomorphic figurine, a living duo Ka, that like a star in the sky was a pass from the final life breath to the eternal posthumous life in the image of Ba.<sup>106</sup> How powerful is such a belief in eternity of time and life continuity in comparison to our shallow set of primary school values that connects the colossal size of Khufu pyramid only with the vanity of a single despotic pharaoh. The imaginative link between a tiny polished figurine, available to every man, and the vision of absolute time is in my humble opinion evidence of how important tactile sensations were for somatic feeling of the promised unlimited life to the honest people in the ancient world.

### *Somatic boundaries*

It has to be stated that neither sense nor senselessness are present on their own in the surrounding natural world on our planet. Meaning does not just appear out of the blue, unless we do not aspire for the celestial connection. This human link with cosmos is of paramount value both to individuals and to societies even if they forget to reflect on that. Deriving the meaning in movement or

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<sup>106</sup> V. Nemchinov, "Comparative cultural study of 3D artifacts perception," *Role of Material Sources in Information Support of Historical Science* (2020): 623-639.

in stillness and ascribing values requires comprehensive somatic human mediation that is vital for any comparative body-mind-soul time-space orientation. Types of thoughtform constructs frequently fall out of the range of our awareness, but as human organism has multiple streams of consciousness operating sub Rosa, such negligence does not hamper the work of intuitive feeling and situational evaluation. It is hardly possible for us to perceive any nonverbal construct of values as the thought only works with the mind. Other bodily control centers and our subtle bodies operate nonverbally on their own functional levels. If one would still opt to define any nonverbal domain for the category of value judgment, then the closest extralinguistic concept to look for would be with the state of thoughtlessness. We cannot arbitrarily grasp the meaning even wholeheartedly believing that it is possible. Why? Because, eluding unambiguous definition, the problem of sense-meaning-value is directly unresolvable in principle. Yet there is a somatic-spiritual feeling that it had already been encountered and resolved before. What stands behind this certainty?

Mindfulness precludes us from completely ignoring the value imperative, but it may be slyly bypassed relying on similar notions that have evasive semantics and noumenal closeness. If straightforward, simple-hearted literal understanding of direct meaning can come along with its indirect sophistication then as A. Pyatigorsky argued: “if I can allow reflective transformations of the basic semantic state of consciousness, then any meaning can be experienced with any reflexive status.”<sup>107</sup> And this explains the internal speech tension and the need for imperative statement when an objective value is under consideration.

So in order not to stay dumb in stupor or speechless we do need to possess the feature of internal vocalization to constantly let go off our inner speech and to think for ourselves. But once the value notion has bent verbalized, got under the skin and managed to reach into the heart it grows into real feeling. Such an emotion evolves into the mood. It may become nonverbal when one hums a tune that sounds in the head, hears the inner music or visualizes a mental image that does not present itself in front of our face. Their value is as real within our somatic boundaries as would be the talk, the concert, the picture on the wall or any other external physical artifact that belongs to the cultural heritage of humanity.

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<sup>107</sup> A. M. Pyatigorsky, “Languages of Slavic culture,” *Selected Works* (2005): 192.

### *Spiritual boundaries*

Coming last but definitely first in their essential features spiritual values are easy to distinguish but hard to describe. Let us start approaching them by charting a few things that should stay outside their boundaries. Spirituality is incompatible with egoism and preoccupation with one's own self. Hence seclusion may finally not be the shortcut to spiritual being. At the same time it is doubtful if the intent to attain spiritual life can be set up as a conscious task. Such a requirement would probably encounter a number of insurmountable opportunities and lead in the wrong direction. And it will not at all help buying into someone's shoes on the pilgrimage to spirituality. This state of spirit cannot be practiced by good deeds and good intentions. It may simply happen or not happen. After all, spirituality is not something external. Internal spiritual boundaries are built on the feeling that precisely this, and not anything else, would be right to do now. Spiritual boundary is the feature of wisdom. Wisdom is curative. It cures the soul in need with the word. Wisdom comes with age. Spirituality is ageless.

But it starts at a very early age. Then, how a toddler can cope with such a challenge? Going on with what your surrounding insists is "right" to do, is not right. It is not about obedience or discipline. Quite the contrary. Bending and denigrating social pressure is the first step to the status of slavery, because one's own internal spiritual boundary is violated by such submissions. Perhaps this is the first failed crisis in personal development that deprives a child from spirituality. It is superimposed by negative socialization and the resultant social fear forces the victim to build up a protective shell around one's personal well-being. The self-supporting walls of this shell consist of clichés, stereotypes and stale platitudes that would at best secure mere physical safety zone, not more than that. The second developmental crisis occurs at the school-age, and if the role of a slave had been somehow overcome, it will turn a teenager into consumer. The worldview on that stage is predominantly focused on all possible ways of deriving pleasure and pursuit of entertainment. Needless to say, that this mode of living also cuts out the boundaries that lead to spiritual values.<sup>108</sup>

Getting in the domain of spirituality implies that we are still in the realm of culture, though these areas frequently stand quite apart. Spirituality is a constant challenge to human trinitarian identity. To remain faithful to your own first identity, to

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<sup>108</sup> I. Akimov, V. Klimenko, "On the nature of talent," *Student meridian* (1994): 209.

keep clear your child's gaze and the innocence of vision means that hidden motives are not let in to creep into the heart and whirl in the head. That is the principal psychological borderline to be protected by all means and shall be regained if challenged. "Truly I say to you, if you are not converted and become as the little children, you shall never enter into the Kingdom of the heavens."<sup>109</sup>

Keeping your innocence in the face of evil is the ultimate spiritual boundary to be protected. It requires courage to maintain allegiance to your moveable current identity. Courage and determination are needed just to keep your own heart pure. Wide open eyes will let you stay innocent in your heart without sliding to being naive. That is where your third identity renders its powerful support. You will actively deal with it reading a good book, attending a concert, seeing a meaningful movie, a powerful theatrical performance and inspiring pictures by sincere artists. This third noospheric identity opens up the whole world of cultural heritage achievements and make its owner a true citizen of the whole planet. It will not let any mundane evil rub on into the consciousness.

### *Conclusion*

It seems pretty clear that personal selfhood is maturing among values that evolve with time but still have the clear-cut boundaries that help us keep afloat as human beings. Belonging to virtual second reality of human culture, values are real phenomena, though they are predominantly happening in the mind, they touch the soul, they reinforce and elevate the spirit. Value boundaries are not only where the person is looking, but they are also in how the person is being looked at. Hence, value boundaries emanate perceptible vibrations. Those vibrations may be subtle, but they are there. Their energy is real and it helps us remain truly human.

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<sup>109</sup> Quoted from Berean Lateran Bible. Matthew 18:4.

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