

Civilization Borderlands as Spiritual Diversity Specially Protected Areas

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Abstract

Borderlands are normally taken into consideration only as entities that separate and not as objects of inquiry *per se*. This is the result of the fact that most of researchers fail to recognize that borders are not just abstract lines between two plates; they are ‘immaterial bodies’ that develop according to their own inner logic. Borderland civilization should receive the special status of *Sacred Reserves*, that would imply a set of regulations and policies, both restricting and encouraging, in the same way as it is done with regards to *Nature Reserves*.

Keywords: Borderlands, Spiritual Diversity, Sacred Reserves.

Borderlands as Immaterial Bodies

The Ecumene is not a homogenous entity, but rather a mosaic of civilization plates that create our planet’s cultural tracery in the same way as tectonic plates make up a distinctive portrait of the Earth’s surface. The original design of such plates and their juxtaposition are determined by the natural forces as their existence, formation and development are inextricably linked to the climate patterns and landscape limitations. Draughts and floods, mountain ranges and rivers, forests and deserts shape the face of the planet, and at the same time define those often-blurred borders that separate civilizations from each other. It shall not be forgotten, of course, that besides those natural factors that remain more or less constant throughout time, the actions of humans further shape and reshape the plates. These changes are highly volatile, rarely predictable and sometimes based on incomprehensible logics: war and peace, roads and roadblocks, scientific discoveries and anthropogenic catastrophes erase borders and expand frontiers constantly – a process that we often call ‘history’. The plates are

changing their sizes and shapes as various societies are appearing, developing, mutating, overlapping, dividing, merging and disappearing. And with them the lines that separate those plates change accordingly, those obscure lines that people tend to forget to mention when speaking of the cultural mosaic of the inhabited world.

This is unfortunate, as in reality, although being subjected to frequent changes, those lines tend to harden quite fast and soon turn into distinctive entities of a sort, acquiring their own identities in the same way as ‘corridors’ have theirs, being different from the rooms they are entitled to connect or separate. Borders are not an illusion and not just a pure abstraction; to the contrary, those lines on the maps are real, they do actually exist and perform their functions. Even worse, their behavior more than often leads to global shifts that shape the destinies of plates themselves by making them quarrel or co-operate, sometimes destroying or shredding the old, sometimes giving birth to the new. Quite often those lines are particularly nasty creatures indeed. They can make the Ecumene moving and shaking; even the smallest impulses – those that may look insignificant elsewhere – can gain tremendous momentum as they travel along those lines of separation and pull the trigger of the world equilibrium, making plates collide and crumble. It is true that insignificant changes taking places in those areas can have consequences that much outweigh their original force. This mechanism itself is worth of serious attention, for its understanding can help people to take necessary precautions, manage unpleasant social frictions and avoid performing actions that could damage the existing order.

Borderlands, however, are normally taken into consideration only in respect to the entities they separate and not as objects of inquiry *per se*. This is probably the result of that regrettable fact that most of researchers fail to recognize that borders are not just abstract lines between two plates; they are ‘immaterial bodies’ that develop according to their own inner logic. Any border, in fact, only touches the plates that surround it, but belongs to none of those plates, it remains independent and ‘real’; one can imagine a border as a chain of hollows that are not filled with the social and cultural matter the host plates are saturated with, but with a ‘different kind of matter’, something that for a time being we may call ‘void’. These hollows can be reduced to a minimum, but they nevertheless exist everywhere as the ever-changing jigsaw contours of cultural areas always allow some space in-between two or more plates, where cavities, tunnels and holes

create the bizarrely-shaped continuity that, to our understanding, constitutes the actual borderland.

These inlays of void that grow like 'negative mushrooms' at the surfaces of the structures they separate do have lives of their own; they are objective beings, albeit elusive and slippery. They do have birthdays; they develop careers and eventually pass away. They are hard-to-catch entities that can move, fuse into one another, split, change their shape, size, depth and width; they progress, regress and stagnate. They seem to be embodied in the host object – the civilization plates – but the truth is that, these superficial irregularities are more connected with their filler, an immaterial substance that can turn any hollow into a protuberance or a tunnel into a bridge if observed from a different perspective. As such, borderlands are nothing else but solidified intrusions of a different kind of matter that have struggled its way from beyond the *Ecumene*. The better name that would reflect its opposition to the normal social matter of the host plates should be 'guest-matter'. In other words, borderlands are immaterial bodies filled with a matter different from the one the social fabric is made. For this reason, they deserve serious attention as objects of study in themselves, not only as a derivative of the surrounding entities.

Knowledge Sanctuaries

It is argued here that because inhabitants of those lands happen to be exposed to such intrusions of guest-matter, they are able to see things from radically different perspective. As such, those of them who are blessed, or maybe cursed, with talents to feel, to see, to touch and interpret the messages from the realms lying beyond rationality and elaborate them conveying their energies to ordinary people, can indeed become the ones whom we shall look for. Prophets, mystics, preachers, shamans, writers, artists, musicians living and working in those twilight zones along civilization contact lines have the ability to tap wires from the depths of unknown and transform the unborn images of the 'elusive Other' into something more stable, perceivable and understandable by ordinary people. The one who dares to venture in discovering the spiritual life of people inhabiting such areas and their inner world, the one who will be able to feel deeply their worries and hopes, to read carefully and interpret diligently their dreams and visions, will be the one who could come closer to discovering the true diversity of reality.

As such, those lands in-between where guest-matter makes its way into our world shall be taken into consideration not only for

security reasons as it is the case now and shall not be just feared for the disorder they can bring, but shall be also valued and studied as the priceless depository of human creativity. Their unique culture can impregnate the world with ultimate productive force, and as such these wells of cultural energies shall be explored and protected rather than being clogged up and buried. The policy of the enforced development here is suicidal as it causes humanity lose the source of its creative energy. The importance of those places for the humankind and the need to save and protect those cracks through which the guest-matter can be experienced shall be understood by everyone. Borderlands are indeed too special to be reduced to the level of the surrounding lands, they can work as workshops of humanity; they are laboratories of the future, and as such the policy towards them is ought to be special. As a matter of fact, caring of hollows that constitute borderlands is necessary not only for philanthropic reasons, but for practical purposes as well, as their existence is the indispensable precondition for the existence of the world-as-a-system. Indeed, we can note that if there is no clearance left between two plates, they start struggling up onto each other causing conflicts and blocking movement, while emptiness allows sliding and rotating and eventually harmonious development. Borderlands can indeed be either destructive or creative, with the final outcome depending largely on how people handle them, and ignorance and eradication do not look like the best strategies in this case. If treated with care, those hollows can become important centers of power – reference points that would link worlds and make them rotate. They would create axes, provide landmarks and generate energy for heating and lighting our world up.

Unfortunately, with the current centrist development paradigm fueled by traditional fears and disdain for everything that fall in-between and with the new distance-killing technologies that facilitate unification and make it easily achievable, these people have little chance to avert destructive outside influence, cultural persecution, homogenization and taming in the name of progress; not only their talents and wisdom can be lost, they too soon can easily found themselves on the breach of extinction. To avoid this, we now need the change in approaches that could benefit both people living in the borderlands and in the centers. Provided that the policy towards these unique areas changes getting aimed at protection, careful study and cherishing their culture instead of enforcing modernization and unification processes, frontier people will be saved from indignity and inferior complex as they would restore self-confidence and will have reasons and resources to develop their own culture from within. This will not only prevent

them from becoming marginalized and seditious, as only those who are firmly rooted in their own culture can live a peaceful and harmonious life, but will benefit us all as their knowledge becomes universally available. Generally speaking, civilization borderlands shall become specially protected territories where spirituality is welcomed, nurtured, studied, emphasized, encouraged and given priority over economic development. Due to their proximity to the inlays of guest-matter people that inhabit these special places of the Ecumene possess skills, knowledge and wisdom that can benefit us all. In turn, mainstream societies should recognize them by granting them dignity and honor.

Sacred Reserves

During this battle for borderlands spiritual intactness, we should consider borrowing methods from the environmentalists, especially their public relation strategies and campaigning techniques aimed at delivering their message. We should provide carefully selected, nicely presented and thoughtfully formulated concepts that are characterized by both scientific depth and emotional impact that ensures that people not only realize the need to protect the fragile environment of the borderlands, but get emotionally addicted to the cause of their preservation. Not only those PR and education techniques, however, should be borrowed, but the technologies of creating national parks, national reserves and other specially protected areas too, as they proved to be tremendously effective in securing biodiversity. The idea of extracting territories crucial for planet's well-being is indeed reasonable in the case of civilization borderlands, and spirituality and cultural diversity require the same level of protection, as their uniqueness is threatened now by both rampaging materialism and homogenization now. In fact, although dispersed, evasive and evanescent, it is spiritually that dwells in these specific places, and, similarly to nature parks, such territories shall be freed of aggressive development that harms their integrity and as such infringes the well-being of humanity. Due to this, they should be given as much attention and care as global biodiversity.

As such, it is necessary now to start promoting *Sacred Reserves* concept into global legislation so that it becomes available for the lawmakers worldwide. Civilization borderlands fall perfectly into that category, as such territories of guest-matter intrusions have been detected and signposted by the ancients, who treated them as holy, and those monuments and legends that they have attached to them can now work as pretext for including them in the

list of lands requiring protection. For providing such arguments, however, we should borrow knowledge of the landscape from the ancients as they had worked out effective methods for mapping these areas of special spiritual importance. Many of those altars have been forsaken or demolished, but even now their debris can guide those who would dare to sort out the Augean stables of our ancestors' cultural heritage and separate the wheat of timeless wisdom from the chaff of petty superstitions. Despite many of those signs and rituals have been abandoned and plunged into obscurity, overgrown with nihilism and fell into oblivion they can be re-discovered and revitalized now.

Once defined, described and designated, civilization borderlands can be granted special status as *Sacred Reserves* that would imply a set of regulations and policies, both restricting and encouraging, in the same way as it is done with regards to Nature Reserves. Borderlands of civilizations are often remote, inaccessible and already well-guarded by the natural obstacles that makes the process of their delineation easier. The authorities need to realize, however, that the real resource of such lands is neither timber, nor coal, but local people and their knowledge that they cherish, long for and possess, because this knowledge is truly unique and, if shared with outside world, could benefit both humankind as a whole and borderlanders people in particular. Important to note that, unlike nature protection, where outsiders are normally taking the leading role, spiritual protection shall be characterized by the direct involvement of local people, while help from outside shall be reduced to minimum and confined to providing those with opportunities to take things in their own hands and start caring of their culture themselves. Culture policies can't be enforced indeed, they can only be implied.

In general, people of these lands shall be given freedom and supported to do what they are best at – that is at dealing with holistic knowledge of the complexity of the Universe that they can acquire through the surface discontinuities of the social fabric. This will not only let them realize their missions that will in turn boost their dignity, that will also help borderlands to take proper place among others and perform functions they can and they should perform. Any community, big or small, needs museums, libraries and laboratories; in the same way the Earth needs borderlands as the gates to the knowledge that lies beyond it. Some of them can work as perfect libraries of human thought that not only conceal treasures of ancient wisdom that is kept there intact and alive, but are also staffed with skillful local “librarians” that know how to handle the archives of the humankind. Some will work as

workshops of future, boiling cauldrons of ideas, concepts and visions, think-tanks that will be shaping the future of the planet. They indeed shall remain as such – a tranquil towers of knowledge, a place where the wise and sensitive are doing their job, undisturbed and respected.

These sanctuaries shall not become reservations for certain ethnic groups, however, but rather work as refuge areas for those committed to knowledge, regardless their nationality. Sacred Reserves shall be modeled after inclusive Special Economic Zones rather than after exclusive Aboriginal Lands. China's Shenzhen was designed as an artificial economic enclave where rules and regulations were completely different from those in the surrounding territories and it could leverage on its proximity to Hong Kong, itself an enclave of economic guest-matter in the discontinuity of China's surface. Such special status and special policy introduced for Shenzhen drew to its construction sites those people from the hinterlands who valued money above all, and as a result it became their Mecca, their *Territory of Gold*. In the same way, for those to whom Spirit and Knowledge represent their biggest values, specially protected border areas would become Special Zones. They would be able to enjoy different regulations there and benefit from the proximity of enclaves of spirituality inside the discontinuities of the society surface. Generally speaking, those lands in-between, those workshops of the humanity must and should become specially protected *Territories of God*, refuge areas for those who seek Spirit rather than Wealth.