SIAMESE TWIN TOWNS AND UNITARY CONCEPTS IN BORDER INEQUALITY

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Where there is no inequality there is no need for borders.¹

Introduction: borders out of Africa

Border studies, however termed (anthropology has of late preferred the less terrestrial notion of ‘borders and boundaries’) is by now a well-established scholarly field, and for many reasons the nearly 2000 miles of the United States—Mexico border has always been at its centre. These reasons include the early prominence of such founding fathers as Texans Ellwyn R. Stoddard (1983, 1989) and Américo Paredes (1993). Indeed the very term ‘borderlands’ was coined back in 1921 as part of the title of Herbert Bolton’s study, _The Spanish Borderlands: a Chronicle of Old Florida and the Southwest_ (Bolton 1921). In the 1980s, when issues of political economy, immigration law, and international relations came to the fore, the US-Mexico border and its problems again took centre stage. By that time, border studies was itself sufficiently advanced as a field to influence public policy, as those who shaped such policies had come to recognize that border networks function as sites of strategy and problem solution. This helped to shift at least some attention away from the rhetoric of ‘sovereignty’ to the realities of social frameworks and economic strategies in distinct border locations (Stoddard 1989:409). In Europe as well, Strassaldo argues that political geography and geopolitics were the borders disciplines up to the end of the 1980s, but that more recently border studies there have been ‘characterized by a new emphasis on the socio-economic aspects; focussed on integrative, rather than conflictual processes, and on the problems of border people, rather than nation states…’ (Strassaldo 1996: 385). This is due in part to the recognition that borderlands, as opposed to borders, are about border communities, not

¹ Thomas Torrans, _Forging the Tortilla Curtain_. 
the management problems of national states, and that ‘Neighbouring
relations between border communities are not international relations’
(ibid.: 393) necessarily.

In anthropology, the quintessentially multi-disciplinary discipline,
the great leap forward in border studies began perhaps two decades
ago when critical scholars and practitioners, venturing forth from
the address to economic and cultural interchanges in the south-
western United States made by ‘Chicano’ (Mexican American) eth-
nic/area studies, staged a revolution in creative bi-cultural literary
work (Anzaldua 1987; Gómez-Peña 1993, 1996, 2005). Thus inspired,
a range of new scholarship has moved to make significant theoreti-
cal contributions to anthropology, cultural and ethnic studies, and
the re-examination of ‘national’ identities as well as to social history
and literary criticism. Perhaps in no other intellectual landscape have
scholars working in two languages and academic traditions estab-
lished such equal and extensive partnerships in research and author-
ship. Further, they have in practical ways crossed the borders and
elided the boundaries of academic territories to create an indivisible
cross-disciplinary territory named ‘border theory’. To sense this one
need only peruse the multi-disciplinary bibliographies of the con-
tributions to such recent work as Michaelsen and Johnson’s (1997)
volume of that name.

In recent decades, coinciding with the expansion of the European
Union, European border studies have made perhaps an almost equal
contribution to the field. That gratefully acknowledged, what then too
of the continental focus of this discussion, Africa, the peripheral poor
relation of the area studies’ imperial family? It might have been pre-
dicted that Africa would serve primarily to provide empirical grist to
the American and western European mill. Publications by such leading
scholars as Paul Nugent and A.I. Asiwaju (Nugent and Asiwaju 1996)
and P.O. Adeniyi (Asiwaju and Adeniyi 1989), however, demonstrate
that such is not the case. But what is most significant regarding Asiwaju’s
semen contributions is his singular interest in comparative cases and
analysis. Border studies research, wherever conducted, tends to focus
on particular locations: you study the border in your ‘own’ geographical
purview. Perhaps borders are viewed as odd couplings between coun-
tries; no two relationships, seen ‘close up’ at the directly comparative
level, appear particularly comparable. Yet the leading scholars in the
field do not hesitate to generalise, often successfully, on the basis of a
single extended case, or on that of all putative cases viewed together.