



BORDERS ARE BACK

Evert van de Poll

Since the Russian invasion armies crossed the Ukrainian border, over three and a half million Ukrainian refugees have crossed several European borders, seeking refuge from the destruction of their country. Across Europe people manifest their solidarity with the plight of the people from that beleaguered country whose name, significantly, means ‘Border land’.

Contrast this with pictures from only a few months previously, where North African refugees were freezing in Belarus, only meters away from the Polish border that was kept closed, and the paradoxes of the borders within Europe becomes very real.

Open vs protected borders

To begin with, there is the paradox of open vs protected borders. Within the so-called Schengen area, named after the village in Luxembourg where the Schengen Agreement was signed in 1985, a passport-free zone has been created without border controls, including most of the European Union plus Norway – the United Kingdom and the Balkans being excluded. It is one of the crowning achievements of European integration and encapsulates what this project is all about.

EDITORIAL

“I’m very sorry, Sir”

A friend of mine recently got stuck at a border because he didn’t have a visa. For me, the border barely existed, yet for him it was real and immutable. His pleading fell on deaf ears, and he had to change his flight.

For many years, mission has benefitted from a “borderless Europe”, a Common Travel Area that has permitted frictionless movement between many countries. Yet the 2015 refugee crisis, Brexit, Covid19, and now the Ukraine War, show that borders are back. This issue of Vista reflects on that reality.

Evert van de Poll reviews the fundamental concepts of borders in Europe today and our differing attitudes to them, how they divide yet also protect, and provide places of encounter. Harvey Kwiyani considers the importance of the Jewish diaspora for the mission of the early church to the nations and reflecting on the war in Ukraine, Johannes Reimer challenges the church to live up to its calling to peace and reconciliation. Eddie Arthur writes about the challenge of linguistic borders, and Sally Mann considers the concept of “shibboleth” in Judges 12 and observes how we too use cultural and linguistic markers to politicise difference and establish borders between “us” and “others” in Europe today, and how the gospel can overcome it.

“For God’s word is not chained” (2 Tim. 2:9) and no border can stop the Good News of Jesus.

Jim Memory

RETURN OF THE BORDERS ctd

At the same time, there is widespread feeling that the internal open border zone should be secured by strengthening its external borders. The refugee crisis of 2015 when over a million Syrians found refuge in Western-Europe, the spate of terrorist attacks on European soil and the global Covid-19 pandemic have all put the ideal of the Schengen agreement under strain. Many governments agree that the rules governing the passport-free zone need to be reformed. They also call for a revision of the Dublin agreement, which allows immigrants who cross the external border of the EU in one country and obtain refugee status there, can freely move to the rest of the EU.

“when a sense of national identity and security is threatened, even the internal borders are quickly reinstated”

Moreover, when a sense of national identity and security is threatened, even the internal borders are quickly reinstated. In March 2020, as the pandemic took hold, European countries re-erected border checks that had long been eliminated, closing themselves off from each other in an uncoordinated way that disrupted the EU's internal market, its supply chains and the movement of people. There was an immediate return to national borders policies, as opposed to a unified European approach, which one would have expected after decades of working together in a borderless area. People were not focused on having enough vaccines for Europe, for example, they just wanted vaccines for everyone in *their* country.

European vs non-European

This brings us to the second paradox. In the open economic space of an integrated Europe, many people appreciate the free movement of goods, capital and of persons, as long as they are European. At the same time, there are increasing apprehensions about the influx of investors (and some would add a virus) from China, vaccines from the United States and gas from Russia, making us more and more dependent on outside powers. There is a call for economic sovereignty, food sovereignty, industrial sovereignty and so on, while there is debate whether each nation should strive for its own sovereignty in these areas. Refugees fleeing war and persecution in other parts of the world and seeking asylum in Europe, can still cross Europe's external borders and find refuge. For so-called economic migrants, however, the national governments as well as the EU are putting up more and more restrictions.

Similarly, a growing part of the population fears that an uncontrolled influx of non-European migrants with their different culture and religion will disrupt the social peace, or even endanger the cultural security of the population – all the more so since 'old stock' Europeans are in demographic deficit compared to migrant communities.

Several countries have already restored controls along internal EU borders, and built fences barbed wires and even more than 1000 km of walls along the external borders of the EU, in order to better 'regulate' the influx of immigrants: between Poland and Belarus, at the Hungarian and Slovenian borders with Croatia, along the Evros River and the mountains that separate Greece and Bulgaria from Turkey, and around the Spanish enclaves Ceuta and Melilla in Morocco. Added to that are the even larger maritime 'walls' deployed in the Mediterranean Sea, as well as virtual 'walls' across the seas and control systems at airports. All of this constitutes the so-called Fortress Europe. Since Brexit, the United Kingdom lies outside this fortress, as migrants stuck at the French side of the English Channel are finding out, often to their peril.



Pont de l'Europe: the name is the symbol of Franco-German reconciliation in the aftermath of the Second World War ([PontEuropeStrasbourg.JPG \(2048x1536\)](#))

BORDERS ARE BACK ctd

Two border mindsets

All these recent developments illustrate what is called 'the return of the borders'. They go against the ideal of a borderless Europe, dear to economic liberals in favour of free trade in a globalising market, to progressive liberals in favour of a multicultural society, and to people with a cosmopolitan outlook in favour of a transnational approach to the major problems, such as climate change, that are facing us today.

On the contrary, the same developments are welcomed, even promoted, by patriots and sovereigntists of all stripes who consider the European integration as a vehicle of globalisation, and who are keen to defend national economic interests (eg. against delocalisation of industry) and safeguard the traditional cultural identity of their country (eg. against the influence of Islam). And this constitutes another border within Europe: between people with an open border mindset and those with a protected border mindset.

Barrier as well as protection

As Christians engaged in communicating the Gospel and serving churches in various countries in Europe, we have benefited from the ability to freely transit across age-old geographical borders. The mission discourse is in favour of crossing or downgrading borders; we want to be free to cross borders and meet people where they are. The return of physical borders in Europe is therefore seen more as a problem than as an incentive to reconsider our views.

We notice that in mission circles people tend to relativise borders, as if they do not have much significance. Because mission workers have a habit of crossing national borders and communicating the Gospel cross-culturally, they generally view borders in terms of restriction, as barriers. They inwardly resist the very idea of a closed country, so they prefer to speak of 'limited access countries'. This emphasis leads to seeing borders primarily as lines to be crossed over, and as hindrances when evangelistic mission workers cannot easily get into a certain country.

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But this is just one side of reality. At the same time, borders are needed for people to live in security – physically, socially as well as culturally. Borders indicate that there is a limit to what I can call 'mine' and to what I could claim for myself, a legal limit to the jurisdiction of a ruler, a geographical limit to the wielding of power. A fundamental moral and legal rule of society is that one should not trespass the living space of one's neighbour. It is precisely by respecting that space, that people can live together within a country, and that nations can live together in peace.

The Bible emphasises this positive function of borders. The Torah has some pretty strong things to say about those who ignore this. One of the blessings and curses that should be read during the renewal of the alliance of the Israelites with the Lord God says: "Cursed is anyone who moves their neighbour's boundary stone." And all the people should say "amen" to this (Deuteronomy 27:17). This is one of the moral rules that should be respected in order that the people live in social peace.

The Russian invasion in Ukraine has reimprinted in the minds of people all over Europe that borders are needed for security, and that they should be respected as such. Public opinion massively pronounces in a variety of ways the very curse of Deuteronomy 27. The challenge for the peoples of Europe today is to find the balance between protecting borders and open borders.

Borders as membranes

A third function of borders is that they serve places of contact between 'us' and 'others'. That can become a confrontation, and lead to conflict, but not necessarily so, because borders are also areas of exchange and cooperation, places where people widen their horizons. Like any fence or limit, they provoke curiosity to discover how the people on the 'other' side live, a desire to travel and meet them, and learn their language.

Viewed from this perspective, borders are an invitation to go beyond our limits and to receive from others who are different from us. Borders are places of 'liminality', and of exchange, where ideas, goods and people can move in as much as out.

BORDERS ARE BACK ctd

Instead of functioning as impermeable frontiers that serve to keep 'others' away from 'us', we should rather see them as open borders.

Historian Richard W. Slatta describes frontiers, borders and border regions as membranes. Membranes are differentially permeable with respect to what may pass through them and what is blocked. Their permeability is different for opposite directions. That is, some goods are allowed to pass. Other things, such as armies, are not allowed to pass. Membranes have thickness. When viewed from a distance they seem thin, almost like lines. When viewed up close they are zones through which objects, people, and ideas may pass.

The responsible society

In seeing borders as membranes, we discover that we are not the only ones in this world and so borders become a place where the members of the human family discover their neighbours.

This brings in the concept of the 'responsible society', developed in both Catholic and Reformed (neo-Calvinist) social teaching in the late 19th and early 20th Century. This concept is based on the Biblical commandment to 'love your neighbour as yourself'. Within Christian social thinking, which has influenced Christian democratic thinking which in turn

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has had an important influence on the European integration process leading to the current European Union, the idea of neighbourly love has taken on an international perspective. Not only individuals but also countries and nations, are challenged to see themselves as neighbours in the Biblical sense of the term, being

responsible for the welfare and the peace, not only of oneself but also of one's 'neighbour'. This is an invitation to look beyond the national borders, be they long standing or newly imposed, and stand alongside our neighbouring countries. Instead of being the person who asks, 'who is my neighbour', the parable of the Samaritan invites us to ask, 'to whom do I act as a neighbour?' When nations are perceived as neighbours, and when we take this teaching of Jesus as a lead, the question becomes 'to which nations does our country want to behave as a neighbour?'

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FOLLOWING GOD ACROSS BORDERS

Harvey Kwiyani

This article explores the Gospels and Acts to make an argument that the mission of Jesus to make disciples of all nations in the world, is a call for his followers to cross all kinds of borders to bear witness to his name. Focusing on geographical borders, I argue that diaspora people – those who had crossed physical borders – played a significant role in the spread of Christianity right from its inception. This does not call us to cancel the borders but rather to use them to enrich our experience of the faith through cross-border exchange, to invite us to the multicultural reality of the Body of Christ in which God makes a new tribe out of many, one in which each people's identity is just as important as its ability to belong together and exchange with other peoples. In essence then, the borders exist not to enforce any hierarchies of the tribes – Christ flattened those – but to incubate and share the gifts God has given each tribe for the mutual enriching of the tribes to the glorifying of God to whom the earth and everything in it belongs. The Kingdom of God makes the borders porous and calls each tribe to a receiving and sharing posture.

Crossing Borders from Galilee to All Nations

It is beyond dispute that the mission of Jesus was to the entire world. To fulfil this mission – to reach the world – Jesus had to start somewhere, in the real-life context of the backyard country around the northern end of the Sea of Galilee, in what was called Galilee of the Nations (or, as Luke translates, Galilee of the Gentiles). Jesus came as a Jewish Messiah and on this premise – that he was indeed the Messiah, the Son of Living God (Matt 16:13) – he gathered his disciples (John 1:40), all of whom were Jewish (even though the mission was to touch the ends of the earth). He spent over three years traveling with them up and down the country, teaching them to save “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt 15:24) before they would embark on a mission to save the world. While he was with them, their ministry would be limited to the lost sheep of the house of Israel and nobody else. However, as his ministry drew to a close, Jesus started to talk about reaching the nations. The limited commission was replaced by the great commission in which Jesus sent the disciples to all nations. Matthew tells us that as Jesus prepared to leave them, he said to his disciples, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Mat. 28: 19). This is the telos of the three years of hard work. A new community of disciples was finally ready to take on the nations. But were they?

“the mission of Jesus to make disciples of all nations in the world is a call for his followers to cross all kinds of borders to bear witness to his name.”

Jewish Diaspora as God's People Crossing Borders

The timings of God's work are always multi-dimensional. That is why it is always best to look at the wider context of history to understand some of God's background work that may not seem obvious. Before Jesus showed up, God had been setting up the stage for the world-transforming movement that he would initiate. The event of Jesus' life and mission is of utmost importance, it therefore required thorough preparation. The whole of Jewish history was pointing to the arrival of Jesus as the Messiah. However the two most outstanding ways in which we see God preparing for the mission of Jesus are migration – especially the scattering of the Jews from Palestine to the wider world of the Roman Empire and the Middle East and beyond – and the cultural diversity of the Roman Empire. The birth and spread of Christianity would take advantage of these two factors and because of them, we have world Christianity today.

By the time Jesus was born, Jewish people had gone through series of dispersions from Palestine and many Jewish diaspora communities had emerged in the wider world beyond the Mediterranean basin and the Graeco-Roman territories. For several centuries since the Assyrian Dispersion (722 BCE) and the Babylonian Captivity (597 BCE), there had been a

FOLLOWING GOD ACROSS BORDERS ctd



Diaspora synagogues in the Roman empire (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Image-Diaspora_synagogues_in_Antiquity.png).

constant dispersion of Jews from the Promised Land. While many of them returned in waves from Babylon during the Persian period, a sizeable Jewish population remained in Mesopotamia. By the third century BCE, as Greek influence spread, Jewish communities continued to mushroom across the empire. The Greek diaspora prompted further scattering of the Jews. Both the Greeks and the Romans moved thousands of Jewish soldiers to towns outside Palestine. Large Jewish communities emerged in Antioch and Damascus, in the Phoenician ports and in the Asia Minor cities of Sardis, Halicarnassus, Pergamum, and Ephesus. It was the Jews of Alexandria who translated the Old Testament from Hebrew to Greek, completing the Septuagint in 132 BCE

Devout Jews from Every Nation

By the time we come to Acts 2 when the church is born in Jerusalem, the Jewish diaspora was quite large and influential. Jews lived on most of the islands of the eastern Mediterranean, (such as Cyprus and Crete), in mainland Greece and Macedonia, on the shores of the Black Sea, and in the Balkans, Rome and throughout the Italian Peninsula, Egypt, Libya, and as far west in North Africa as Carthage. Luke takes time to mention that there were present in Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost “devout Jews from every nation under heaven . . . Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs” (Acts 2:9-11). All these diaspora Jews witnessed the event of the pouring out of the Spirit that day and would take the news about it to their towns even before any missionaries arrived. They would tell in their synagogues right around the then known world, of the strange thing that happened in Jerusalem; “we heard them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God.” This would prepare, even in a small way, for the time when the gospel would be preached in their cities.

Within a few decades of Pentecost, there would be more Jews living in the diaspora than in Judah. Even more so after 70CE when the Romans destroyed the Temple of Jerusalem and deported many more Jews to Syria, Asia Minor, Italy and other parts of the empire. Jewish communities sprang up in every large city of the empire, from the Persian Gulf on the east to Spain on the west. With the temple destroyed, there was not much to look back to and so the diaspora became home. This extensive presence of Jewish communities in the diaspora at the time when Christianity was just emerging would play a very significant role in its spread.

FOLLOWING GOD ACROSS BORDERS ctd

As we follow the story further, we learn of Paul's engagement with the Jewish diaspora. Luke depicts Paul attempting to evangelise the Jewish diaspora in the synagogues first when he arrived at a new place. We see Paul first preaching in the synagogue of Damascus (Acts 9:20), Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:14), Iconium (Acts 14:1), Philippi (Acts 16:13), Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-2), Berea (Acts 17:10), Athens (Acts 17:17), Corinth (Acts 18:4-6), and Ephesus (Acts 18:19, 19:8). In Pisidian Antioch, Paul declares that he would "now turn to the Gentiles" (Acts 13:46) because the Jews rejected the gospel, but we see him continue to address fellow Jews first in synagogues (Acts 18:19, 19:8). Thus, people who had crossed borders served as natural bridgebuilders for the Gospel. In Europe, it was Lydia, a border-crosser from Thyatira, who became Paul's first convert to Christianity in Europe in the town of Philippi (Acts 16).

Our mission and borders

Using this precedent, we can see that following Christ in mission will for many of us involve crossing borders. While we will certainly cross geographical borders, more often than not, we will have to negotiate cultural, ethnic, theological, denominational, and many other types of borders. Our mission does not erase these borders. The same Paul who crossed many borders said, "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:22) also said, "I am made all things to all people" and that he was a "Hebrew of the Hebrews." The presence of borders invites us into a multi-tribal fellowship in which we can share whatever God has given us. They call us to be hospitable to strangers as we ourselves once were, or may soon be. This is how the Gospel will reach the ends of the earth. Let us keep crossing them with humility, well aware that God's Spirit is already at work wherever we find ourselves.

"Let us keep crossing borders with humility, well aware that God's Spirit is already at work wherever we find ourselves."

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BORDERS — FRONTIER OR NEIGHBOURHOOD?

Johannes Reimer

Borders divide and borders join neighbourhoods. Some of them are peaceful, some very violent. Crossing borders excites the one and endangers others. Societies build borders or leave them unmarked, green as we say, depending how peaceful the relationship between the neighbours is.

I grew up in Estonia, behind the Iron Curtain, the heavily militarised border between Western capitalist countries and the Communist Bloc led by the Soviet Union. For me a border to the world outside was set in stone or in iron. Crossing was impossible. Forced to leave the country in 1976, I soon discovered how transparent borders in democratic societies were. In fact, border regions often developed into cross-national economic, political and even cultural areas.

I vividly remember visiting Hadrian's Wall at the border between England and Scotland. After hours of walking, we entered a pub for a drink. The owner turned out to be a friendly man. I asked him, who he was, English or rather Scottish. His answer was special. "Neither", he replied, "I am neither English nor Scottish, I am a borderer. Because of guys like me, there is peace and unity among the English and the Scottish." Border as a peace factor! What a concept!

Since meeting the borderer at Hadrian's Wall in Great Britain, I have visited many border regions and found the words of the man in many ways stimulating. Border populations very often determine whether the border shuts down or conversely establishes peaceful relationships between neighbours.

East Ukraine - on the border of violence

One of the most endangered borders in Europe is that between Russia and Ukraine. Since Russia invaded parts of Eastern Ukraine, the danger of war has dominated Western diplomacy. The orientation of Ukraine to Western Europe, and their desire to join NATO and the European Union, worries Russian politicians and especially its president Vladimir V. Putin.

On February 24th 2022, Russian troops invaded Ukraine. An aggressive war started. Officially declared as a "special military operation" in support of the two rebellious provinces Luhansk and Donetsk, which just hours before declared



The fence of a construction site in Kyiv as a sign of Ukrainian patriotism by Tina Hartung (unsplash.com)

BORDERS — FRONTIER OR NEIGHBOURHOOD? ctd

their total independence from Ukraine and signed an agreement of military cooperation with the Russian Federation, the war clearly is aimed at a total control of Ukraine by Russia, the dismissal of the elected president of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky and his government, and the establishment of a pro-Russian administration. This would mark the end of Ukrainian independence.

Needless to say, this war cannot be justified, and Putin is the only one to be blamed for it. The horrible brutality of Russian soldiers killing innocent Ukrainian citizens and destroying cities and villages, marks the madness of the Russian leadership. Putin might have expected the Russian speaking minority of the Eastern provinces to welcome his soldiers as liberators from, what he called, a Nazi regime in Kyiv. But the opposite was true. Not only the ill-equipped Ukrainian army, but the vast majority of Ukrainians stand against the aggressor. What was considered a blitz-war of 2-3 days, is developing into full-scale brutal fight for every village and city. Putin obviously miscalculated the Ukrainian unity and readiness to protect their territory.

But why all of this madness? Let's look back to the last 10 years since Ukraine declared her independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. Overnight this great country became a bordering country separating the European Union from Russia.

Neutrality of Ukraine was less a problem to Russia, but the integration of Ukraine into Western European power structures opened a potential danger for Russia at its western border. In fact, the border would change its nature from being a border between two Slavic nations with a long history of fruitful relationships, to a border between two different political systems: Russia and the European Union.

According to the rulers in Moscow, this was a dangerous and potentially aggressive change which could not be tolerated. Therefore, there was pressure at the border and eventually the war.

“The integration of Ukraine into Western European power structures opened a potential danger for Russia at its western border”

Russian military pressure is, speaking honestly, is not really centered on Ukraine. It is aimed against NATO and the expansion strategy of the European Union. But Ukrainians are suffering, as they have suffered in centuries of their existence. Even the very word Ukraine, translated into English, means “at the border”.¹ For centuries, it marked borders of empires – the Russian in the East and the Polish-Lithuanian and later Hungaro-Austrian in the West, and large territories of modern Ukraine were occupied and ruled by the one or the other. This is best reflected by the differences in terminology used by the Eastern and Western variations of the Ukrainian language until now.

Is neutrality a solution?

Border states flourish best by staying politically neutral. In this regard Ukraine is no different. Living in good relations with Russia in the East and the European Union in the West opens many opportunities for being a connector between East and West. True borderers are, according to the Scottish/English borderer at the Hadrian's Wall, a warrant of peace. Switzerland is since 1648 the best example of this². And other European nations such as Sweden, Ireland, Austria and Finland, just to mention some, support the theory.³

Neutral states are easily identified by certain political factors.

- a. Neutral states value ethnic and linguistic diversity over mono-ethnic national ambitions. Switzerland has proved over the centuries how effective their Cantonal System is, keeping the country united and economically highly efficient. The German, Francophone, Italian and Romanic people live together appreciating the other's culture and language.
- b. Multi-ethnic neutral states implement a federal system, controlled by decentralised power structures and therefore supporting every minority group regardless of its numerical strength.
- c. Neutral states support international cooperation instead of enlarging their own power influence. In fact, neutrality is widely used in conflict resolution.

Ukraine is predestined to stay neutral, but Ukrainian neutrality is endangered by political forces inside and outside the country. On the one hand it is the aggressive search for a national identity, which seeks to constitute a Ukrainian nationality based on one language over and against the other ethnic minorities in the country, such as the Russians,

BORDERS — FRONTIER OR NEIGHBOURHOOD? ctd

Hungarians, Polish, Tatar, Romanian, Moldovans, Gagauzians and a number of others. Especially deadly, in my view, is the attempt to “upgrade” some Slavic nations such as the Russins and Hutsul into a Ukrainian ethnicity.⁴

The “one language, one nation, one culture” politics follows the exact pattern of the Russification philosophy of the Russian Empire and its successor, the Soviet Union, and all other empires of the world such as Great Britain, Spain or the USA, for instance. A melting pot unifying all ethnic identity under one is in many cases problematic. And just as the Ukrainians revolted against Russification, many ethnic tribes in Ukraine revolt against the politics of Ukrainisation. The very essence of a peaceful and neutral state is contradicted by a search for a unified national identity. This is not to say that such a search is in itself nationalistic, but it is potentially problematic, especially for larger minorities, who fear being marginalised. And the ethnic Russians in Ukraine, especially in the Crimea and the Donbass, certainly felt that way.

Alongside the intensive search for a national identity, there was the declared decision of Ukraine to join the European Union where so many nations live in peace with one another. All Ukrainian governments since independence in 1991, have expressed their desire to belong to the European family of nations. This alone questions all possible nationalistic tendencies. Putin’s accusation of the “Kyivan regime being Nazi” lacks any basis.

On the other hand, the power structures of Europe are still guided by Russophobic tendencies, especially in North America. Russia’s attempt to join Europe and build “a united European house”, as Mikhail Gorbachev and later Vladimir Putin once put it, have been bluntly rejected.⁵ Instead, NATO permanently expanded its influence to the countries in Central and Eastern Europe, isolating Russia as a potential enemy.

All the states in the Baltics and Central Europe joined the EU and NATO of their own choice. Yet it is also true that some of them did so in fear of their Russian neighbour under whose rule they suffered for centuries. The opportunity to hide under the roof of NATO, the most powerful defence structure in the world, was very attractive to them.

It is this politics of permanent alienation that has led to harsh Russian reactions in the annexation of Crimea and support for the rebellious regimes in Donetsk and Luhansk in Eastern Ukraine, and now to a full war between the two countries.

Chances for peace – becoming a border of tolerance and peace.

Ukrainians, as well most Russians, dream of a peaceful and free life in Europe with borders which connect and not separate. And Ukraine has all the elements of becoming a country of peace in the heart of Europe. It is a multiethnic, multireligious, and multicultural country at the border of Western and Eastern mindsets. Instead of dreaming of joining the powerful in Western Europe by establishing a one-language one-culture nation, Ukrainians should follow the many examples of European multicultural and federatively organised societies.

This European model was rejected by the current leadership of Ukraine soon after the independence declaration, but the implemented national philosophy has not brought any positive development to the country either. Whether NATO and the EU ever welcome Ukraine as a full member, has for years been no more than a project. Living in good relationship with both the EU and Russia, however, could establish prosperity.

Ukrainians, as well most Russians, dream of a peaceful and free life in Europe with borders which connect and not separate

The strong Christian church in Ukraine might play a crucial role in such a future. Christians are never called to enroll in partisan politics.⁶ They are called to establish God’s Kingdom and not a nationalistic state. The very heart of their missionary enterprise is to cross borders instead of erecting them. They should never ever fight for any dominion of one nation over the other. Christians are messengers of reconciliation (2Cor. 5:18-19). Sure, Christians can never name evil as being good. They will stand at the side of the persecuted and attacked. But they will do this in peace.

The situation as it is in Ukraine today, where the Ukrainian Orthodox church of the Kyivan Patriarchate, after having received the status of a national Orthodox church in 2019, violently takes over church buildings and raids worship services of churches under the Moscow Patriarchate in the name of national identity, is unbearable and finds no justification. And

BORDERS — FRONTIER OR NEIGHBOURHOOD? ctd



(Image: Evgeniy Maloletka) A Ukrainian soldier photographs a damaged church after shelling in a residential district in Mariupol, Ukraine, (www.christianitytoday.com)

the same is true for what the separatist regimes in Luhansk and Donetsk do to the Protestant and Roman-Catholic churches.

It is war in Ukraine now. A horrible war. Ukrainians have amazingly united around their country and seek to protect it from the Russian aggression. The whole world supports them. And all European countries have opened their borders for Ukrainian refugees fleeing the fighting. We welcome them and we try to care. And among those who love and support Ukrainians are many Evangelical Christians.

The war will be over one day. And then the Ukraine-Russia border will be reestablished again. Will it be a line of division or rather a border of peace? The answer to this question largely depends on what Christians in Ukraine and Russia will do. They are called to a mission of reconciliation and we in the rest of Europe must support them.

The Evangelical church in Ukraine and Russia should be involved in a mission of peace. There is no other country in Europe with an Evangelical church as strong as in Ukraine. Yet, at the same time, there is no other Evangelical movement in Europe as divided on theological, political, ethnic and cultural issues as the Ukrainian and Russian. Healing this divided body must be of high priority to everybody interested in peace in Ukraine.

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Endnotes

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4. According to the Ukrainian constitution all people living in Ukraine constitute together the Ukrainian nation
5. See more: Andreas Zumach: Der entauschte Traum vom gemeinsamen Traum Europa. In: <https://taz.de/!5315226/> (29.01.2022)
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LANGUAGE BORDERS

Eddie Arthur



The Tower of Babel Alexander Mikhalchyk

The start of the book of Genesis, and the story of the church from Acts onwards, are about humanity as a whole. In between, through the Old Testament and the Gospels, the focus is tightly on the nation of Israel. It is interesting that at the two transition points of Genesis 11 and Acts 2, we have stories about language: the tower of Babel and the day of Pentecost.

At Babel, God confused the languages and scattered people around the world because of their rebellion. At Pentecost, people from around the world were astonished as Peter shared the Good News of Jesus, and they could understand it in their own tongue.

Accepting, Communicating and Dominating

It is often said that the day of Pentecost reversed the events of the tower of Babel because one brought confusion whereas the other brought comprehension. While this is true, Pentecost didn't so much reverse Babel as reinforce it. The languages which came into being when God confused human speech all found new reality and new meaning on the day of Pentecost when they became potential vehicles for the Good News of Jesus. The day of Pentecost points to the fact that there is no sacred language for Christians, all languages can be used for evangelism, for liturgy and for prayer. As Lamin Sanneh says, "Christianity is unique in being the only religion which is spread without the language of its founder." The importance of every language is underlined in Revelation 7 where we find people from every tribe, tongue and nation gathered around the throne worshipping the Lamb. You don't have to learn a special way of speaking to get into heaven.

The miracle on the day of Pentecost was the first miracle of the church age and it gives an important picture of God reaching out to different groups. However, it was also a one-off. Through the book of Acts and the Epistles, we see the

LANGUAGE BORDERS ctd

Apostles preaching and teaching in *Koine* Greek, the language of the Eastern Roman Empire. All languages can be used in Christian teaching and worship, but this does not mean that every language will be used at all times.

“Christianity is unique in being the only religion which is spread without the language of its founder”

Pentecost, and the Apostles’ use of *Koine*, point to two ways in which the church can relate linguistically; firstly, accepting one another’s differences and secondly, communicating across language borders.

Before moving on, we need to briefly return to Babel where people speaking one language arrogantly attempted to take the honour that belonged to God alone; their attitude was one of domination. This principle of domination of large Empires on nations around them is seen in the Bible (for example Egypt, Babylon and Rome) and throughout history, with imposition of the Empire’s language as a tool of domination.

Language Borders

I started my ministry as a Bible translator working among an isolated people group in Côte d’Ivoire. Language borders are a part of my life; they are used to identify people groups that don’t have access to the Bible, or those who have never encountered the Gospel in the first place. There are plenty of maps or lists of “Bibleless” or “unreached” people groups that you can find online, although it is worth noting that the reality on the ground is generally far more complex than simple maps or lists indicate.

In Europe, these language borders are not our primary concern. For the most part, Europe’s language communities have been evangelised for a considerable length of time and most European languages have had a Bible available to them for hundreds of years. While we would agree that Europe remains in need of further evangelism, simply crossing language borders or providing the Scriptures for the first time is not a major concern in the way that it is in other parts of the world¹.

Despite this, languages and language borders do not play an important role in European mission. First of all, we have to recognise that language borders and national borders are not the same thing. Indigenous European languages are often spoken in more than one country. German is an official language in Austria, Lichtenstein, Italy and Switzerland in addition to Germany, itself. Likewise French is spoken in Belgium and Switzerland as well as France, and the list could go on. There are also indigenous language communities within countries, such as the Bretons in France and the Catalans in Spain, not to mention significant communities of immigrants from Africa and Asia now established in many European cities. Language communities migrated across Europe before our current national boundaries were drawn and they continued to do so. In many places, you are as likely to encounter a language border when you cross the street as when you cross a national frontier.

But what has this got to do with mission, apart from implying that sometimes missionaries will need to learn a new language and culture? To answer this question we need to consider the ultimate goal of mission. Revelation 7 paints the picture of an eschatological community drawn together from every tribe, tongue and nation. This is not a picture of a uniform gathering with all racial, linguistic and national characteristics erased. It is a vision of incredible diversity as people worship The Lamb in their own tongues and music styles. The people are united, but they are not identical. Here, right at the end of the biblical narrative, the people groups who were dispersed at Babel are united with a common purpose; to bring glory to Jesus.

There is a clear missional imperative to cross language borders with the gospel, be that to unreached groups in the Muslim world or to European minorities that may be looked down on by wider society. Ideally, we will do so in the manner of Pentecost: *accepting one another’s differences* (though we will probably have to do the hard work of actually learning languages, rather than receiving a supernatural gift). However, like the Apostle Paul, we might also use a trade language in order to reach people: *communicating across language borders*. What we should never do is *dominating*: forcing others to speak our language as part of their discipleship; whatever our language is.

LANGUAGE BORDERS ctd

In addition, we must build bridges across these language borders in anticipation of the eschatological community of Revelation 7. This can sometimes be straightforward; though it almost always takes an effort and rarely happens spontaneously. However, in many cases building such bridges involves overcoming suspicion and prejudice and is far from easy. There are times when bridging language borders can actually be hazardous, as in the need to show unity between Russian and Ukrainian believers in the current context. However, when believers in these situations show unity, it is a powerful witness of the truth of Jesus' message. Like the miracle on the day of Pentecost, this sort of event can only occur when empowered by the Spirit.

As Europe becomes increasingly diverse and divided, the need for believers to accept and communicate across language borders becomes ever more pressing. We need to learn to appreciate the richness of the language communities in our churches and neighbourhoods, and to build bridges over those borders. This involves welcoming strangers and refugees, but also the more mundane task of getting to know the people across the road who speak a different language and making space in our worship services for songs from other languages and cultures.

I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one, I in them and you in me, so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me. John 17:22-23

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Endnote

1. It is important to note that there are still groups in Europe where it is still necessary to cross language borders in order to reach them with the gospel; these include immigrant and diaspora groups as well as minority indigenous and sign language communities.

SHIBBOLETHS WHICH DIVIDE

Sally Mann

I remember going to the Tate Modern to see a striking art installation by Doris Salcedo in 2007. It was a long crack in the ground, deepening and widening in places, running the length of the massive Turbine Hall. I was intrigued by how visitors interacted with it (I'm clearly more of a sociologist than an art critic). Some people followed its banks letting it direct them along the length of the hall, children seemed to love jumping over it, others straddled it and were split in the moment of being both one side and another. A great fissure which prompted responses and was hard to ignore. It had an intriguing title "Shibboleth I-IV".

I am a jobbing sociologist, and the word Shibboleth has found a home in my discipline. It is used to describe the cultural markers which groups use to define who they are – separating "Us" from "Them". It's part and parcel of Othering; fostering group solidarity by exclusionary practices. There are many effective shibboleths. The word most often describes language codes but there are broader applications and a plethora of cultural practices which politicise difference.



SHIBBOLETHS WHICH DIVIDE ctd

Observing the Tate installation, I was not then aware that the word Shibboleth is a Biblical one. The word appears only once. It is a strange ancient word meaning 'ear of corn' or possibly 'river' and comes from a story in the Book of Judges chapter 12, verses 1-15. But it's not the literal meaning which has given this ancient word currency in sociology and art today – it's the strange narrative it comes from. It's a story about borders and hostile environments, about the lethal effects of Othering. It's a story to interrogate missional practice today and one which, for me, brings together sociological imagination and lived experiences of mission in Newham, the multi-everything London borough I live in.

“The story in Judges 12 is story about borders and hostile environments, about the lethal effects of Othering.”

The Biblical story is set in the aftermath of war. The Israeli tribes of Ephraim and Gilead were physically divided by the Jordan River. A recent war with the Ammonites led to inter-ethnic conflict. Gilead were led to victory by Jephthah, a ruler with a traumatic past but

clearly a head for warfare. After the Ammonite defeat, some Ephraimites, who had backed the wrong side or had crossed the river to scoop up some of their neighbour's plunder, were left stranded on the wrong side of the Jordan. As they attempted to cross home, Jephthah's men guarded the bridges and fords, demanding travellers pronounce the word "shibboleth" for safe passage. Western Ephraimites did not have the "sh" sound in their language and so their Otherness was revealed. "Jephthah's men caught forty-two thousand men and put them to death that day" (Judges 12:2-6); an almost throwaway verse depicting the carnage of war. I stall at this verse and its casual depiction of military slaughter. The Bible does that to me sometimes.

I put down the Bible and turn on the news and am acutely aware that our context cries out for its own eisegesis. Europe has been plunged into a new war. Not that we ever shock off our commitment to militarism. This war is close at hand and recasts this discussion of borders and Othering. I am aware of the privilege of having a safe place for reflection, and how crass theoretical discussions sound as thousands of others in Europe are displaced, lose their homes and their lives. We reel at the horror of weapons aimed at those attempting to find safe passage. These scenes tell us of the human cost of national borders. They are places where the "banality of evil", as Hannah Arendt describes, is manifest. Attempts to redraw and reinforce shibboleths are carried out with the destruction not only of human lives, but of the very things which define our humanity. And, thank God, we also see there those who are willing to journey across the borderlands of difference and welcome and heal and feed and host.

Beyond the theatre of war, the rise of populism and the disruptive effects of globalisation have left the European landscape riven with physical and cultural borders. The Indian commentator Mishra described our society as the "age of anger", disturbed by geopolitical uncertainty, where politics is driven by a relentless focus on "logic" and "liberal rationalism" at the expense of emotional responsiveness.

Shibboleths dividing Us from Them are international, intranational and local. They are expressed in the polarisation of political discourse, the echo chambers of social media and the dehumanisation of all who cross or blur borders: from migrants to the queer. What is the Jesus-shaped response? How can we express the kenarchy of God, the rite of love, in such a landscape?

“Shibboleths are expressed in the polarisation of political discourse, the echo chambers of social media and the dehumanisation of all who cross or blur borders: from migrants to the queer.”

I live in a city where the spoils of Empire are built into its architecture, within a culture rife with colonialism. My corner of London is a multi-cultural landing bay for the world, shaped by waves of migration. Newham has the lowest percentage of White British residents of all of London's boroughs. The White British proportion of the population fell from 33.8% in 2001 to around 15% today, the largest shift in any local authority in England in this timeframe. 'Race' matters here. Newham is also the most religious Borough in the UK (according to the 2011 Census). 40% of Census respondents identified as Christian (reflecting the heritage of recent migrants), 32% Muslim (which is the fastest growing religious group) and 8.8% Hindu. There are small Buddhist, Sikh, and Jewish communities and, at 9.5%, we have the lowest rate in

SHIBBOLETHS WHICH DIVIDE ctd

the UK of “No Religious Affiliation”. Many of the Christian churches are independent, a significant number are branches of international, especially African, churches. (<https://faithinnewham.co.uk>)

I am ethnically White and culturally a “Cockney”, from an East-End working class community, the fourth of six generations of my family to live in the same four streets. I worship in the same church that my grandmother found salvation as a child in an East-End slum community. I am one of the ministers of the same church. (www.bonnydownschurch.org). My sense of vocation has been expressed through a call to stay and be a faithful Christian presence within a fast-shifting landscape; to be a familiar person to my neighbours, to be open and hopeful. Our main missional practice has been community organisation and faithfully gathering to worship in the multi-everything community we love. And so, my life and faith would be represented at the Tate installation as that person jumping the shibboleth, crossing and recrossing, seeing what happens to myself and others in liminal spaces. In my neighbourhood, every day is an opportunity to encounter the Other in a transformative way. It has been a way of life and I believe that “staying put” has offered an incredible spiritual journey.

So how do the missionally-minded navigate this landscape of shibboleths?

For me, the Gospel involves finding Christ in moments of alterity; of encounters with the stranger. I find myself drawn to the blurry edges of church life and seeking missional practices which bridge divides. In my church at Bonny Downs we have found many ways to work for the common good with our neighbours: bringing a community centre and garden to life; organising sports activities and working together in youth provision. Being here for almost three decades has given us time to create structures around these efforts. We partnered with others to set up a local community association (www.bonnydowns.org). As Jesus-followers we gather for worship in the community garden in the summer and in the community centre in the colder months.

We have taken up the challenge to journey into worship that is more “tables than stages”. We seek multi-voice gatherings to reflect our flatter model of leadership. Our single minister’s stipend is divided among four missional leaders, of which



SHIBBOLETHS WHICH DIVIDE ctd

I am one. We are all bi-vocational, with roles in local community projects. Our future vision is to rebuild our church site as an “urban abbey” where we can live intentionally and invite those transitioning from homelessness to join us (www.bonnydownschurch.org/urbanabbey).

We find hospitality matters, both giving and receiving it. Being a neighbour can be expressed through having a bench in your front rather than back garden – here is mine. It’s a place to become known and to get to know neighbours.

My church seeks to be a place of welcome for recent immigrants in a hostile environment. The bread and butter of urban ministry is to provide bumping spaces for neighbours and justice projects which bring people together.

“We have found tables, benches, gardens and justice-seeking adventures dismantle shibboleths”

We adopt Asset-Based methods to draw out the gifts of those in limbo in our asylum processes. This had led

to a gardening social enterprise and conversational English groups around cooking meals. None of this is especially unique in urban mission. It is nonetheless beautiful, messy and makes my community the best place in the world to be discipled.

In short, we have found tables, benches, gardens and justice-seeking adventures dismantle shibboleths, and help us to find our primary identity as sojourners through a shifting and unravelling culture, safely held within the expansive and cosmic kenarchy of God.



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