Interreligious Activities as Arenas of Boundary Work

Alexander-Kenneth Nagel

1 Going Beyond the Essentialist Dilemma: Boundary Perspectives in Research on Interreligious Conviviality

In this chapter, I will explore recent conceptual discussions about boundary work and what they may offer to an analysis of interreligious activism.[1] In my understanding, interreligious activism, such as roundtable discussions or peace prayers, can be understood as specific approaches to fostering conviviality in multireligious and multicultural settings.[2] Similar to "conviviality," the expression "interreligious dialogue" carries strong normative implications of unanimity and peaceful coexistence and thus calls for an empirical analysis of the actual practices and experiences of unity and difference. Concepts of boundary work offer a promising lens for such an analysis and may help to unpack the micro-politics of proximity and distance within interreligious constellations. In doing so, they may help to overcome naïve and utopian notions and to shed light on the messy "engine room" of conviviality (See Bieler in this volume).

In an early critical contribution on "Interreligious Dialogue and Political Religions," the sociologist Levent Tezcan (2006: 26, all translations AKN) raised concerns about an appropriation of interreligious activism for politics of social cohesion. Religion, he held, "has developed into a vehicle of making the multicultural society governable." As matters of social and structural integration are being religionized, the way is paved for an essentialization of religious differences. In this sense, "dialogue creates its own subjects" and the label "Muslim" denotes all those who are considered to be in need of further integration measures (ibid: 31). On a more fundamental level, Tezcan pointed to the "inherently paradoxical" nature of interreligious dialogue: As far as dialogue involves a notion of "self-confident identities facing each other," there can be no "true exchange,"

1 I use the term "activism" to indicate that these activities are more than simply events but reflect specific motivations and boundary perspectives that shape their content, purposes, and outcomes.

2 In this chapter, the terms "interreligious" and "interfaith" will be used interchangeably. Given the normative grounding of the term "interreligious dialogue," I refer to "interreligious activities" as a broader concept for all *organized events* which include participants of at least *two religious traditions* and are based on a *programmatic notion of religious difference*.

but only "some sort of interreligious diplomacy" (ibid: 32). In turn he argues that "felicitous dialogue" would require "imperfected, precarious identities" and "transcend existing boundaries." Consequently, actors would not address each other "in the name of religions, but as human beings who are driven by religious motives" and "willing to venture the borders of their religious identity" (ibid).

Similar warnings about the essentializing quality of interreligious dialogue can be found in attempts to deconstruct the paradigm of "world religions" which has been adopted in dialogue initiatives ever since the Chicago Parliament of Religions in 1893 (Molendijk 2011; Morgan 1995: 160–162). In her pioneering account on "The Study of Religions and Interfaith Encounter," Peggy Morgan considered essentialization as a dimension not only of participation and representation in interreligious dialogue, but as a central pattern of communication, as "believers at such gatherings often try to convey the 'essence' of their religions." As to Morgan, this essentialist mode of self-presentation is embedded in an overarching "eirenic intention," i.e. "the impetus at interfaith gathering is to see only the best in the traditions" (ibid: 164). In effect, the essentialist configuration of interreligious activities (both in terms of participants and modes of communication) may have severe repercussions on the religious communities that are involved. Just like the governance of religious diversity can lead to "religious formatting" in the sense of "putting pressure on non-Christian actors to adapt to (secularized) Christian models of spiritual assistance" (Fabretti 2015: 22), interreligious dialogue may function as a "religio-political and discursive incorporation regime" that may lead to the churchification even of non-religious participants, such as atheist organizations (Schröder 2013: 182–183). In the end, these processes of institutional isomorphism may even result in/resist/reject the essentialization of the interreligious setting itself in the form of an interfaith "Para-Theology" (Morgan 1995: 166–168).

It should be clear by now that the essentializing quality of interreligious dialogue can be criticized as potentially exclusive and intrusive. On a more fundamental level, it may even be blamed for dismantling the basic preconditions of dialogue, such as a level playing field, sincere communication, and accepting counterparts as they are (Swidler 1978). From a social-constructivist perspective, however, it seems important not only to resist the inherent paradox of essentialization, but to work towards a better understanding of interreligious and intercultural encounter as *arenas of boundary work*. In the rest of this section, I will revisit some of the existing debate and argue that research on encounter and conviviality can benefit from recent conceptual discussions of boundary work in general sociology and the sociology of migration.

There are two newer strands of research which deal with interreligious encounter and boundary work. The authors of the *first strand* analyze boundary work in organized forms of interreligious activism: In a recent article on "Interreligious Dialogue as Boundary Work," Gritt Klinkhammer embraces the critique of an "inherently paradoxical structure of interreligious dialogue" (99) and advocates a boundary perspective which is based on Gerd Baumann´s distinction of three "Grammars of Identity." According to Klinkhammer, interreligious dialogues are primarily marked by a "Grammar of Segmentation," i.e. a dynamic and context-specific process of boundary extension. Moreover, she identifies a "Grammar of Orientalization" vis-à-vis Muslims which may impede the search for common narratives and hence promote an exclusive boundary discourse within the

dialogue group (89). Finally, she illustrates how processes of boundary blurring within longstanding dialogue groups were thwarted by programmatic interventions of the established churches which led to increasing tensions between the ecclesiastical hierarchy and interreligious grassroots initiatives (97–99). In a similar vein, I have made two attempts to study the cultivation and transgression of boundaries through organized interreligious activities. In one article, I used the concept of "boundary interventions" in order to identify and systematize different patterns of boundary work in the actual performance of interreligious interaction (Nagel 2019: 116). In another article, I investigated how the involvement of public authorities in interreligious activities blurred the boundary line between religion and politics. I found a strong connection with boundary blurring, that occurs between religion and politics, and boundary work within the local religious field. There was evidence that interfaith governance made religious and confessional boundaries more salient as it provided a new, official stage for interreligious collaboration (Nagel 2020: x). Finally, and in a similar vein, Heidi Swarts (2011) has made use of Lamont and Molnar´s distinction between symbolic and social boundaries to analyze congregation-based community organizing in the US and identified a "strong boundary" between organizers and politicians which "helps members feel morally justified in challenging authorities" (ibid: 47).

The *second strand* of research looks at boundary work in more spontaneous and informal settings of encounter. For instance, Inger Furseth (2011) has analyzed "Boundary work and identity negotiations among immigrant Muslim women." She also adopted the concept of "symbolic boundaries" by Lamont and Molnar (see section 2) and investigated how the (veiled and unveiled) women in her sample used "strategies to draw distinctions between their identities as religious active women and 'other' women outside their religious communities" (ibid: 366). In doing so, she emphasized the discursive nature of the formation and negotiation of symbolic boundaries and concluded that "despite the fact that the hijab is a symbol that draws lines between different groups of women, the engagement in boundary work does not produce sharp conflicts" (ibid: 382). In a similar vein, but in historical perspective, Iryna Klymenko (2022) looked at the construction of interreligious boundaries through bodily practices, such as fasting. Although her analysis does not explicitly tie into the distinction by Lamont and Molnar, she is also interested in "semantical constructions of religious collectives," namely Roman Catholics and Orthodox Christians (ibid: 60). Other authors have used boundary concepts in the context of interfaith marriage and intimacies (Seamon 2012; Jørgensen 2015). In her account, "Middle Eastern Christians' Narratives on Intimacy with Muslims," Anne Jørgensen looked at strategies of "boundary maintenance" and "boundary crossing" between Christian women and Muslim men from the Middle East in Denmark. She points to different scales of boundary crossing from the merely platonic to sexual relationships (ibid: 32). Unlike Furseth, Jørgensen underlined the "problematic" consequences of boundary crossing in her field which "causes a threat to the individual, family and MEC community already at the stage of dating" (ibid: 43).

Even though this collection of research on boundary perspectives in the domain of interreligious conviviality is far from exhaustive, it does show certain trends: *First*, there appears to be an increased interest in boundary concepts and a sense that they may shed light on the significance of interreligious encounters for processes of social identity for-

mation, inclusion and exclusion, and participation and representation. *Second*, we see different perspectives on intra- and interreligious boundaries as well as boundary work between religion and other social fields, such as politics. At the same time, empirical analyses of the interplay of these internal and external arenas of boundary work appear to be rare. *Third*, while some authors explicitly refer to sociological contributions, such as Lamont and Molnar, others adopt a more metaphorical use of the concepts and put forward their own distinctions (e.g. "crossing" vs. "maintenance" or different degrees or "stages" of boundary crossing). Yet even those who do relate to the sociological discussion tend to pick single concepts and move quickly towards operationalization without really reflecting on their theoretical implications or considering alternative debates. And just to be clear: there is nothing wrong with such a *pragmatic adaptation* of concepts. However, an informed decision for or against a given theoretical distinction may not only enhance the validity of the investigation, but also add to the plausibility of the argument in question. Therefore, I will use the following section to discuss three major sociological accounts of boundary work and reflect on promising research avenues in the domain of interreligious and intercultural conviviality.

2 Three Strands of Boundary Research in Sociology: A Comparative Review

In this section, I respond to the pragmatic adaptation of sociological boundary concepts in the interdisciplinary debate on interreligious conviviality and offer a) a brief reconstruction of the guiding distinctions, b) a comparative discussion of their theoretical vantage points and their implications for empirical analysis, and c) some preliminary considerations as to their applications to interreligious dialogue and encounter. For reasons of clarity, I will first discuss the three main approaches, reflect on their potentials for research on conviviality, and conclude on a comparative note.

2.1 Symbolic and Social Boundaries (Lamont and Molnar)

In an often-cited review article from 2002, Michèle Lamont and Virág Molnár take on the task of providing a comprehensive overview of "The Study of Boundaries in the Social Sciences" (Lamont/Molnár 2002). At the very beginning they state that "the idea of 'boundaries' has come to play a key role in important new lines of scholarship across the social sciences" and offer a vast enumeration covering many branches from the sociology of migration to cultural and political sociology to the sociology of law, science, and gender relations (ibid: 167). They call for "greater integration" and express their hope that boundary perspectives will become a new hub for sociological theory building. Departing from theories of social inequality and its reproduction, Lamont and Molnár underline "the role of symbolic resources (e.g., conceptual distinctions, interpretive strategies, cultural traditions) in creating, maintaining, contesting, or even dissolving institutionalized social differences (e.g., class, gender, race, territorial inequality)" and hence advocate for a guiding notion of *symbolic and social boundaries*. Whereas "[s]ymbolic boundaries are conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize objects, people, practices, and even time and space […] [s]ocial boundaries are objectified forms of social differ-

ences manifested in unequal access to and unequal distribution of resources (material and nonmaterial) and social opportunities." (ibid: 168) Even though social boundaries are more tangible, the authors emphasize that both types of boundaries are "equally real" and consider symbolic boundaries "as a necessary but insufficient condition for the existence of social boundaries" (ibid: 169).

It should be obvious that the distinction between symbolic and social boundaries borrows from older discussions about being and consciousness, semantics and structure as well as content and form. Hence, the innovative twist is not so much to acknowledge that social life unfolds in a complex field of ideas, interests, and observable action, but to move on from overarching (macro) debates between idealists and materialists towards a (meso) perspective on the situational and man-made quality of human interaction. In this vein, this perspective lends itself to events or situations of interreligious and intercultural conviviality and it is no wonder that previous research on interfaith dialogue and encounter has borrowed from Lamont and Molnár. At the same time, it is noteworthy that existing adaptations concentrate on the symbolic dimension of religious boundary work rather than analyzing the nexus between mental schemes of social classification and the actual groupings. While Furseth highlights symbolic practices, such as discourse and negotiation (Furseth 2011: 366–367), Swarts traces shifts in symbolic boundaries while holding social boundaries constant (Swarts 2011).

Why is it so difficult to analyze the actual translation of symbolic into social boundaries in research on conviviality? One reason may be *methodological*: Both Swarts and Furseth rely on interview data which offer nuanced impressions of subjective classifications and rhetorical positioning. Even though respondents may share their perceptions on the symbolic dimension of their social formations, these data do not yield direct insights into actual processes of social closure or opening. Hence, in my view, social boundaries call for methods of observation or network analysis in order to reveal the structure and internal fragmentation of a given setting of conviviality: who does or does not interact with whom? Are there notable subgroups? And finally: how do these situational interaction patterns match the subjective schemes of classification? And yet, there is another reason why an analysis of the interplay between symbolic and social boundaries is challenging. Even if we have data on individual perceptions and the social structure of a given situation, it is difficult to infer that certain symbolic markers are, indeed, an effective condition for a given social formation.

This being said, Lamont and Molnár's distinction may work best for settings with a more clear-cut social structure, such as organized interreligious events. Here, symbolic boundaries may refer to categorizations of "proper" or "legitimate" religions (e.g. the "five world religions" or "the Abrahamic traditions"), which are contrasted with "improper" or "pseudo" religions (Dick/Nagel 2016: 42) or more overarching "grammars" of interreligious identity (Klinkhammer 2019: 86–88). On the other hand, social boundaries reflect the organizational consequences of these categorizations in terms of the admission or exclusion of certain religious communities to an interfaith initiative or event. Another approach might be to look at – what I call – boundary interventions. If we assume (with Morgan) that interreligious dialogue is driven by an "eirenic intention" (see above), boundaries are likely to become most salient in situations of disagreement or "ritual infelicities" (Moyaert 2017: 324). Consequently, we may want to sample "incidents of

embarrassment" (Nagel 2019: 116), observe verbal and non-verbal communication, and conduct single interviews with participants afterwards.

2.2 Bright and Blurry Boundaries (Richard Alba)

In the year 2005, the US-American sociologist Richard Alba published a programmatic article entitled "Bright vs. blurred boundaries: Second-generation assimilation and exclusion in France, Germany, and the United States" (Alba 2005). His basic argument is that processes of immigrant assimilation depend on the quality and institutionalization of ethnic boundaries (ibid: 21–22). Referring to Lamont and Molnár, he conceives of ethnicity as "a boundary with symbolic and social aspects" and defines it as "a distinction that individuals make in their everyday lives and that shapes their actions and mental orientations towards others; and it is typically embedded in a variety of social and cultural differences between groups that give an ethnic boundary concrete significance" (ibid: 22).

In a second step, Alba reconstructs a typology of boundary-related changes from earlier literature (namely Bauböck 1994: 12–14 and Zolberg/Long 1999: 8–9): *boundary crossing* means that an actor "moves from one group to another, without any real change to the boundary itself." *Boundary blurring* means "that the social profile of a boundary has become less distinct: the clarity of the social distinction involved has become clouded." And finally, *boundary shifting* refers to "the relocation of a boundary so that populations once situated on one side are now included on the other: former outsiders are thereby transformed into insiders" (ibid: 23). In a critical consideration of this typology, Alba argues that boundary shifting may be a logical, but rare option in contemporary immigration societies, hence "the distinction that has greatest relevance is between boundary crossing and blurring." He then turns to qualities of the ethnic boundary itself and proposes a basic distinction between "bright" and "blurred" boundaries. In the case of *bright boundaries,* "there is no ambiguity in the location of individuals with respect to it. In this case, assimilation is likely to take the form of boundary crossing and will generally be experienced by the individual as something akin to a conversion" (ibid: 24). In the case of *blurred boundaries*, "individuals are seen as simultaneously members of the groups on both sides of the boundary or […] sometimes they appear to be members of one and at other times members of the other" (ibid: 25).

Alba's main interest is in the relevance of different types of boundaries for *processes of assimilation*. He holds that crossing bright boundaries brings along "all the social and psychic burdens a conversion process entails: growing distance from peers, feelings of disloyalty, and anxieties about acceptance" (ibid: 24) and concludes that if assimilation requires "a breaking of many ties to the group of origin and the assumption of a high degree of risk of failure, it is unlikely to be undertaken by large numbers, even in the second generation" (ibid: 26). In contrast, blurred boundaries may enable a gradual and flexible style of boundary hopping which reduces social and emotional tensions and allows for temporary experiments of identification (akin to what Teczan called "precarious identities," see previous section). Consequently, he asks for the conditions under which boundaries can be "blurred or blur-able" and points to the *institutional embeddedness* and path dependencies of ethnic boundaries which "determine the social distance between majority and minority group," such as the public recognition of religious holidays (ibid: 26–27). In

order to illustrate the connection between institutional trajectories and boundary work, Alba points to challenges in the legal accommodation of Islam in many European societies: as national religious incorporation regimes evolved from a Christian model of religion, it is "difficult for Islam to achieve parity" and "Muslims cannot help but be aware of the secondary status of their religion" (ibid: 32).

How can these considerations be applied to the domain of interreligious and intercultural conviviality? First, and on a more academic level, it seems important to acknowledge the role of different *theologies of religion* (or other normative patterns of multiculturalism) in rendering religious boundaries as bright or blurred. Whereas exclusivist concepts are based on the notion of bright boundaries, inclusivist and pluralistic understandings involve boundary blurring at least as a kind of thought experiment. As Klinkhammer has shown, the blurring of religious boundaries in interreligious events is carefully monitored – and sometimes sanctioned – by ecclesiastical hierarchies (Klinkhammer 2019: 97–99). Second, on a practical level, interreligious activism is strongly influenced by *institutional patterns* of religious accommodation: While the established churches can afford full-time commissioners for interreligious affairs, Muslim associations (and other religious minorities) often have to send volunteers. A similar pattern can be found for the accommodation of cultural diversity *within* the churches: whereas in the Roman-Catholic Church native-language congregations are endowed with their own priests and chaplains, Protestant churches struggle to grant international communities equal rights and endowment (see Baumann-Neuhaus in this volume). Third, and perhaps most importantly, the *representative design* of many interreligious and intercultural activities fosters bright boundaries between religious traditions while at the same time blurring boundaries within these traditions, thus purporting to reify the world religion paradigm. However, it should be noted that such boundary work differs across various interreligious formats: while a pattern of representation and bright boundaries is prevalent in "staged" activities, such as dialogue events or peace prayers, it is less salient in interreligious neighborhood meetings or formats based on biographic story telling (Nagel 2016: 234–237).

2.3 Shifting vs. Modifying Boundaries (Andreas Wimmer)

In the year 2008, the German sociologist Andreas Wimmer presented an article on "Elementary strategies of ethnic boundary making" (Wimmer 2008). Like Alba, he wanted to contribute to the study of ethnicity and like Lamont and Molnár, he was hopeful that a typology of boundary work might serve to bridge the disparate lines of the interdisciplinary discussion. In his search for universal strategies of boundary work, Wimmer aims at an analytical distinction that allows both transregional and diachronic comparison. As a consequence, he argues that "that modes of ethnicity making are indeed finite, even if we consider far-away places and distant times" (ibid: 1026). He positions himself in an "'agency-rich' understanding" which looks at the making and unmaking of ethnic boundaries (ibid: 1027). Overall, he adopts an action-theoretical perspective and seeks to identify "different options that actors may pursue to react to existing boundaries, to overcome or reinforce them, to shift them to exclude new groups of individuals or include

others, or to promote other, non-ethnic modes of classification and social practice" (ibid: 1028).

Based on a critical review of existing typologies by Lamont and Bail (universalizing vs. particularizing), Zolberg and Woon (crossing, blurring, and shifting, see above), and Horowitz (amalgamation, incorporation, division, and proliferation), Wimmer concludes that "[t]he main deficiency of existing typologies is that they are not exhaustive enough" (ibid: 1029–1030). His own typology seeks to integrate these efforts "into a logically consistent and empirically encompassing framework" and is based on a guiding distinction between *Shifting* and *Modifying boundaries*. Unlike Bauböck, Zolberg, and Woon, Wimmer adopts a wider notion of *Shifting boundaries* that includes all changes in the location of existing boundaries whereas *Modifying boundaries* refers to changes in meaning and hierarchization of ethnic categories (ibid: 1031). Boundary shifting involves two basic strategies, namely *Expansion* and *Contraction*. While *Expansion* refers to the creation of a more inclusive boundary by grouping existing categories into a new, expanded category, "*Contraction* means drawing narrower boundaries and thus disidentifying with the category one is assigned to by outsiders" (ibid: 1036, emphasis added). Hence, *Expansion* is associated with boundary *Fusion* (illustrated through nation building), whereas *Contraction* is associated with boundary *Fission*, e.g. when Chinese or Japanese immigrants in the US reject the broader external category of being "Asian".

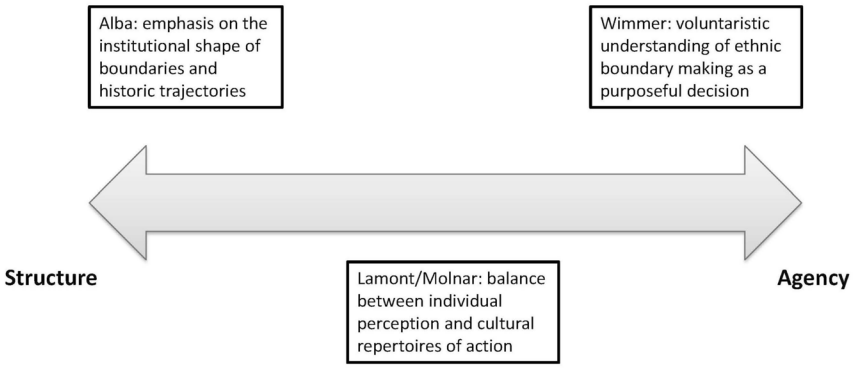
Modifying boundaries involves three basic strategies, namely *Transvaluation*, *Positional moves*, and *Blurring*. *Transvaluation* refers to re-interpretations of ethnic hierarchies either by "normative inversion, which reverses the existing rank order" or "equalization, which aims at establishing equality in status and political power" (ibid: 1037). As an example of normative inversion, Wimmer points to the black power movement in the US; as an example of equalization, he mentions the civil rights movement. While the former put the existing social order upside down, the latter "aimed at overcoming the legal, social and symbolic hierarchy between black and white and achieving equal treatment in all domains of life" (ibid: 1038). In contrast to *Transvaluation*, *Positional moves* refer to an individual or collective change of position within a given system of ethnic categories without questioning its hierarchical order. An example of individual crossing are classic processes of assimilation (as also highlighted by Alba, see above) which may eventually lead to an erosion of the boundary itself (ibid: 1040). As an example of collective repositioning, Wimmer points to "caste climbing" in India, i.e. the social upward-mobility of lower castes who adopt the lifestyle of higher castes (ibid: 1041). Finally, *Blurring* refers to a decrease in the "importance of ethnicity as a principle of categorization and social organization" vis-à-vis other principles of social classification. Potential forms include the transgression of ethnic boundaries by recourse to smaller and localized ("we as people from town or district X") or bigger and deterritorial units of collective identity ("we as Europeans, Protestants, human beings").

As a matter of fact, all of these strategies can be found in the domain of interreligious encounter. *Expansion* is a crucial prerequisite for all sorts of interreligious activism as the participants relate to an overarching category of religion which transcends the individual truth claims of single religious traditions. At the same time, the overarching category itself is subject to ongoing contestation and *Contraction*, e.g. when Muslims object to the inclusion of a Baha'i community or when new religious movements are denied access for

being "sects." Instances of *Transvaluation* can be found in inner-Christian discourses, e.g. when native-language congregations, such as Croatian or Polish Catholics, embrace a pre-conciliar theology and consider themselves as avantgardes of the faith as compared to the Laodicean ordinary Christians (Thränhardt/Winterhagen 2020: 202–203). In interreligious dialogue meetings, we can sometimes see agreement in the joint rejection of an (alleged) atheist hegemony which unites people of faith as a "last moral bastion" (Nagel 2019: 119–120). On the other hand, organized interreligious encounter can be an important arena of *Positional Moves*, in particular for religious minorities. For instance, Thorsten Wettich has shown how Yezidis make use of interreligious dialogue to articulate their similarity and affinity to Christianity (Wettich 2015: 158). Likewise, there is a strong expectation for Muslims to embrace interreligious dialogue as a chance for modernization or reform, e.g. with regard to exegesis or gender relations. Finally, some forms of interreligious and intercultural practice lend themselves to *Boundary Blurring*. Interreligious neighborhood meetings, for example, transgress religious differences with an overarching sense of neighborly solidarity and an interreligious soccer tournament may playfully overlay religious boundaries with a sense of team spirit. At the same time, the "eirenic intention" of interreligious gatherings may lead to strategic *Boundary Blurring* in order to "purify" religion as a force for peace, e.g. when the Middle East conflict is understood as an instance of political and economic "instrumentalization" of religion (Nagel 2019: 120–121).

3 Comparative Discussion

In this section I review three strands of the sociological debate on boundary work and explore their potential value for the analysis of interreligious conviviality and encounter. Even though the selective adaptation of some of these guiding principles has an analytical merit on its own, I argue earlier in this chapter that understanding the theoretical vantage points and implications of these debates may allow for a more insightful and convincing applications. A noteworthy commonality of all three strands is that they position themselves, implicitly or explicitly, in a *praxeological and field theoretical* discussion. Whereas Lamont and Molnár make frequent reference to Pierre Bourdieu with respect to cultural capital and social distinction, Alba and Wimmer have a more hands-on approach based on Bauböck, Zolberg, and Long. Nevertheless, all authors emphasize the significance of reconciling action-theoretical (micro) and structuralist (macro) perspectives: Alba points to the institutional grounding of boundaries, Lamont and Molnár acknowledge the institutionalization of social differences and principles of classification, and Wimmer considers theories of boundary work as evidence of a "general trend away from structural determinism towards theories that emphasize 'agency'" (Wimmer 2008: 1027).



If we conceive of structure and agency as a continuum, Alba might be positioned closer to the structuralist end since he puts a lot of emphasis on the institutional shape of boundaries and historical trajectories for what is considered legitimate religions which are reluctant to change. Wimmer, on the other hand, might be positioned closer to the agency end since his notion of "strategy" suggests a more voluntaristic understanding of ethnic boundary making as a purposeful decision. Lamont and Molnár carefully weigh both poles and distinguish between a psychological perspective on the results, content, and interpretative dimensions of boundary work and a sociological perspective on the cultural repertoires, traditions, and narratives through which boundaries are shaped (Lamont/Molnár 2002: 171). It should be obvious that different locations within the praxeological continuum relate to different research questions in the domain of interreligious and intercultural conviviality: from a structuralist angle, one may inquire about the *conditions* of an observed set of boundaries whereas from an actor-centered angle, one may rather look at the *impact* and actual production of boundaries.

As a consequence, the different conceptual approaches to boundary work and the guiding questions they evoke call for different *research designs*: If we focus on strategies of boundary making in the domain of interreligious and intercultural encounter, we might want to combine guided interviews (e.g. with participants of interreligious gatherings or students in a multicultural class) with methods of participant observation or social network analysis. While the interviews provide insights into individual perceptions, schemes of classification, and motivations, and hence the symbolic dimension of the boundaries involved, the other methods help to shed light on actual social formations, such as cliques or factions. If we focus on the institutional conditions of boundaries, however, we might start with content analysis of programs or expert interviews with representatives of interreligious dialogue initiatives and, for instance, combine them with a discourse analysis (or again, expert interviews) to understand how a given set of boundaries (e.g. regarding the composition of an interreligious initiative or event) has emerged.

Since I have already addressed the analytical value of selected conceptual distinctions in the previous sections, I would like to close my comparative discussion by noting what I consider to be a *desideratum* of all three strands of boundary work theory, namely the

question: *How do we actually know that we are dealing with a boundary?* The authors would probably retort that we can only observe boundaries in their making. But even such an observation is far from trivial. Different from national borders, the domain of interreligious and intercultural conviviality does not (usually) involve a material manifestation of boundaries like fences or tollgates. Instead, boundary work takes place in a more subtle and mediate way. Hence, in the following and last section, I will offer some preliminary considerations as to *observable practices of boundary making* in interreligious and intercultural encounter.

4 Conclusion and Outlook

While the conceptual distinctions of sociological debates on boundary work provide promising avenues of research on interreligious and intercultural conviviality, they need to be translated and operationalized for empirical investigations. Therefore, I will use my conclusion to distinguish between various observable practices of boundary making in this domain. In doing so, I will move from communicative and performative expressions of boundaries to material manifestations.

First, and perhaps most well-known from social psychology, boundary making can be observed in the *semantic positioning* of groups via personal and demonstrative pronouns. Whereas the distinction between "us" and "them" constitutes the basic formula of all in-group-outgroup processes, demonstrative pronouns can be used to indicate social distance. For instance, during the so-called refugee crisis, some Germans would refer to refugees as "those people" and add some sort of homogenizing, paternalistic, pitiful, or skeptical attribute. In the framework of interreligious activism similar dispositions can be found between "us" (Abrahamic faiths, believers, moral people) and "them" (adherents of poly- and nontheistic traditions, atheists, immoral people) (Nagel 2019: 118–120).

A second (and related) type of boundary making are *speech-acts of demarcation or transgression*. Speech-acts of demarcation may include claims to speak in the name of a religious tradition ("I as Christian/Muslim believe"), declarations of distinction ("X is different from Y"), or general affirmations of difference, i.e. dialogue as a tool of cultivating variation rather than levelling religious differences ("in the face of God we are equal"). In contrast, speech-acts of transgression are declarations of unity which blur traditional religious boundaries. It is crucial to both of these speech-acts that they do not seek to convince or reason, but manifest and overcome symbolic boundaries in a declaratory apodictic style.

A third type of boundary making are – what I call – *boundary interventions*. Whereas speech-acts create or transgress symbolic boundaries in an explicit and deliberate way, boundary interventions render implicit social and symbolic boundaries visible. Typical examples include superiority claims ("Islam is the ethical perfection of all world religions") or incidents of embarrassment. A good example of the latter was a mosque visit with a Christian youth group in the course of a research project on interreligious practice. When a Christian girl asked if you could leave Islam once you have adopted it, thus touching upon the difficult topic of apostasy, the guide resolved the situation with a pragmatic answer: "no one is going to check that." Other, more explicit, boundary interven-

tions are provocations and polemics. Due to the "eirenic intention" of interreligious gatherings, they happen rarely and constitute a major interruption. When at a dialogue event in a Muslim community center, as part of the above-mentioned project, one participant stood up and shouted that it should be possible, in a liberal democracy, to burn a Quran, it caused both turmoil – and interreligious solidarity as several religious representatives unanimously condemned the statement as an undue boundary violation.

A fourth (and more material) manifestation of boundaries is *written documents*, such as guest and participant lists. As objectified expressions of a group´s consensus about legitimate participation, these documents may offer insights into the boundary setting of an interreligious event or initiative. As Morgan indicated, the guiding questions here are: who was (not) invited, for which reasons, and who decided (not) to come? Depending on the format, the local religious field, and the history of an interreligious initiative, we may encounter different patterns from "Christian-Muslim" to an "Abrahamic" notion of "trialogue" or "world religions" to more inclusive models that include newer religious traditions, such as Baha'i or Sikh, new religious movements, or atheistic groups. As a matter of fact, these patterns of participation may point to underlying boundaries.

Another dimension is the *temporal material manifestations of boundaries*, whether by liturgical (or folkloristic) garments, spatial arrangements, the order of appearance, or other forms of performative appropriation of physical space (see Walthert and Kalender in this volume). In some interreligious events it is common for religious experts to wear *liturgical garments* which serve as symbolic markers for different religious traditions, e.g. Geneva bands, a Seka (robe of Buddhist monks), or a hat or turban. These pieces of clothing enable a particular kind of agency as they elevate their wearers as representatives who can speak and act in the name of their religious communities. Another important indicator of social boundaries are *spatial arrangements* of people: are there observable clusters? Does the seating order imply a certain hierarchy (e.g. in an interreligious town hall meeting where the mayor and other urban decision makers sit in the front row)? Is anyone sitting at a distance? Do members of groups who are known to have tensions with each other sit together? Is there a gendered pattern of space appropriation? Apart from spatial, there can also be temporal boundary markers, such as the *order of appearance* at an interreligious peace prayer or roundtable. Here, a typical pattern is to set the order according to the alleged age of religious traditions (e.g. starting with Hinduism and ending with Baha'i).

Finally, what do these considerations have to offer for a better understanding of interreligious conviviality? In 2006, the British sociologist Paul Gilroy referred to his notion of conviviality and held that "the clash *between* finished civilisations, if it exists at all, becomes secondary to the cracks, the fissures, the conflicts to be found *within* civilisations. That's the first lesson of this multicultural reorientation" (Gilroy 2006: 7, emphasis added). The quotation makes very clear that conviviality research is not supposed to neglect instances of conflict, but suggests shifting the focus from a macro perspective on difference and unity to smaller (i.e. local or situational) sociocultural constellations (see Kalender in this volume). This chapter suggests that sociological concepts of boundary work may be one option for putting Gilroy´s claim into practice. It has offered a comparative review of three main strands in boundary work debates as well as concrete suggestions on how to operationalize a boundary perspective in the domain of interreligious

activism. I would like to emphasize that it was not my intention to interfere with theory politics and argue for "boundary work" as yet another guiding distinction within the semantic field of "conviviality," "cosmopolitanism," "creolization," or "encounter" (Hemer/Povrzanović Frykman/Ristilammi 2020). Even though a debate about the normative and colonial implication of these concepts is certainly necessary, I believe that they need to be translated into empirical research in order to prove their worth.

References

Alba, Richard (2005): "Bright vs. Blurred Boundaries: Second-Generation Assimilation and Exclusion in France, Germany, and the United States." In: Ethnic and Racial Studies 28, pp. 20–49.

Bauböck, Rainer (1994): The Integration of Immigrants, Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

Dick, Eva/Nagel, Alexander-Kenneth (2016): "Local Interfaith Networks in Urban Integration Politics: Religious Communities Between Innovation and Cooptation." In: Peter J. Margry/Hegner, Victoria (eds.), Spiritualizing the City. Agency and Resilience of the Urban and Urbanesque Habitat, Florence: Taylor and Francis, pp. 27–45.

Fabretti, Valeria (2015): "Dealing with Religious Differences in Italian Prisons: Relationships Between Institutions and Communities from Misrecognition to Mutual Transformation." In: International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society 28, pp. 21–35.

Furseth, Inger (2011): "The Hijab: Boundary Work and Identity Negotiations Among Immigrant Muslim Women in the Los Angeles Area." In: Review of Religious Research 52, pp. 365–385.

Gilroy, Paul (2006): Colonial Crimes and Convivial Cultures, Nuuk: Public Hearing "Debating Independence: Autonomy or Voluntary Colonialism?".

Hemer, Oscar/Povrzanović Frykman, Maja/Ristilammi, Per-Markku (2020): "Conviviality Vis-à-Vis Cosmopolitanism and Creolisation: Probing the Concepts." In: Oscar Hemer/Maja Povrzanović Frykman/Ristilammi, Per-Markku (eds.), Conviviality at the Crossroads: The Poetics and Politics of Everyday Encounters, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 1–14.

Jørgensen, Anne R. (2015): "Reframing Interfaith Boundary Crossing and Maintenance: Middle Eastern Christians' Narratives on Intimacy with Muslims." In: Tidsskrift for Islamforskning 9, pp. 28–47.

Klinkhammer, Gritt (2019): "Der Interreligiöse Dialog als Boundary Work." In: Zeitschrift für Religionswissenschaft 27, pp. 78–102.

Klymenko, Iryna (2022): "The Fasting of Others." In: Historical Studies on Central Europe 2, pp. 60–75.

Lamont, Michèle/Molnár, Virág (2002): "The Study of Boundaries in the Social Sciences." In: Annual Review of Sociology 28, pp. 167–195.

Molendijk, Arie L. (2011): "To Unite Religion Against All Irreligion: The 1893 World Parliament of Religions." In: Journal for the History of Modern Theology/Zeitschrift für Neuere Theologiegeschichte 18, pp. 228–250.

Morgan, Peggy (1995): "The Study of Religions and Interfaith Encounter." In: Numen 42, pp. 156–171.

Moyaert, Marianne (2017): "Infelicitous Inter-Ritual Hospitality." In: Culture and Religion 18, pp. 324–342.

Nagel, Alexander-Kenneth (2016): "Relational Diversity: Religious Pluralization and Politics of Cohesion." In: Hans G. Kippenberg/Mersmann, Birgit (eds.), The Humanities between Global Integration and Cultural Diversity, De Gruyter, pp. 227–241.

Nagel, Alexander-Kenneth (2019): "Enacting Diversity: Boundary Work and Performative Dynamics in Interreligious Activities." In: Giuseppe Giordan/Lynch, Andrew P. (eds.), Annual review of the sociology of religion, volume 10. Interreligious dialogue; from religion to geopolitics, Leiden, Boston: BRILL, pp. 111–127.

Nagel, Alexander-Kenneth (2020): "Crossing the Lines? Inter- and Multifaith Governance as an Arena of Boundary Work." In: Anna Körs/Wolfram Weiße/Willaime, Jean-Paul (eds.), Religious diversity and interreligious dialogue, Cham: Springer, pp. 103–116.

Schröder, Stefan (2013): "Dialog der Weltanschauungen? der Humanistische Verband Deutschlands als Akteur im interreligiösen Dialoggeschehen." In: Peter Antes/Führding, Steffen (eds.), Säkularität in religionswissenschaftlicher Perspektive, Göttingen: V & R unipress, pp. 169–185.

Seamon, Erika B. (2012): "Transforming Religion and Christianity: The Emergence of Interfaith Space." In: E. Seamon (ed.), Interfaith Marriage in America. The Transformation of Religion and Christianity, New York: Palgrave Macmillan US; Imprint: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 151–171.

Swarts, Heidi (2011): "Drawing New Symbolic Boundaries over Old Social Boundaries: Forging Social Movement Unity in Congregation-Based Community Organizing." In: Sociological Perspectives 54, pp. 453–477.

Swidler, Leonard J. (1978): "Ground Rules for Interreligious Dialogue." In: Journal of Ecumenical Studies 15, pp. 413–414.

Tezcan, Levent (2006): "Interreligiöser Dialog und Politische Religionen." In: Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte 2006, pp. 26–32.

Thränhardt, Dietrich/Winterhagen, Jenni (2020): "Der Einfluss der katholischen Migrantengemeinden auf die Integration südeuropäischer Einwanderergruppen in Deutschland." In: Das "Gastarbeiter"-System, Berlin: De Gruyter, pp. 199–216.

Wettich, Thorsten (2015): "Die zivilgesellschaftlichen Potentiale der yezidischen Communit." In: Alexander-Kenneth Nagel (ed.), Religiöse Netzwerke: Die zivilgesellschaftlichen Potentiale religiöser Migrantengemeinden, Bielefeld: transcript, pp. 147–164.

Wimmer, Andreas (2008): "Elementary Strategies of Ethnic Boundary Making." In: Ethnic and Racial Studies 31, pp. 1025–1055.

Zolberg, Aristide R./Long, Woon L. (1999): "Why Islam is like Spanish: Cultural Incorporation in Europe and the United States." In: Politics & Society 27, pp. 5–38.