

THE BOUNDARIES OF HEGEMONY: Configuring public space from the margins

James R Cochrane
University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg*

Abstract

This paper aims to develop a hermeneutic strategy able to direct a useful participation by the Church in the formation of public policy. It does so by drawing on the work of feminist theorists, among them Kathleen Kirby. The political implications of the 'hermeneutics of the boundary', Kirby identified, are explored here to establish how they might impact on conceptions of public policy making and applications. The main focus is on configuring the public space from the margins, using the notion of boundaries as one important strategy the Church might employ to make its contribution. The context is post-apartheid South Africa but the strategy is intended to find application far beyond this context.

Introduction

Some time ago, in *The Analogical Imagination*, David Tracy (1981) proposed the now popular tripartite division of the publics of theology into society, the academy and the Church. Tracy argues that theology is always in some sense public discourse and, that it willy-nilly addresses a plurality of publics. This plurality of publics, increasingly internalized in our time, produces much confusion in the minds of theologians and believers alike. Who exactly is one addressing, asks Tracy? Should one attempt to address the entire spectrum of publics, or is theology essentially the parochial conversation of the community of Christians?

Religious questions, in Tracy's view (1981:4 &5), are 'fundamental questions that cut across the spectrum of publics. '...Behind the pluralism of theological conclusions lies a pluralism of public roles and publics as reference groups for theological discourse.' Recognising with Tracy that his view of the three publics constitutes a useful typology and not a strict demarcation, we will concentrate on the role of theology in the public of society as our principal addressee.

The task is to find an authentic way of addressing society which simultaneously addresses the Church and the academy. The Church is implicated because *if* it enters into the configuring of public space (society) it must do so in an acceptance of plurality, and must open itself to the critique of others. The academy is important because any theoretical foundations for a genuinely ecumenical view must be able, with validity, to engage in the plurality of discourses which enter into the configuring of public space.

We will follow Tracy's (1981:6ff.) delineation of society into the spheres of the techno-economic structure, of polity, and of culture - and argue against instrumental rationality as the basis for any of them. We will also accept that each of these three spheres in large modern societies is sufficiently complex to make generally acceptable and effective public policies difficult to arrive at and hard to apply.

The effects of complexity in our present societies may be described as 'a widespread tendency towards privateness; a diminishment of belief in the possibility of authentic civic

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discussion in the community; and, finally, the tendency to discourage, in both piecemeal and systematic fashion, any significant role in the realm of polity for those whose principal home is the realm of culture' (Tracy 1981:11). A theological view of the dignity of persons suggests that these effects need to be countered. This cannot be done in order to rescue a social role for theology, but to express the particular possibilities of the human spirit, both personal and communal, which would guarantee the social order itself as just and good.

We will not, therefore, be concerned with apologetics, the traditional way of talking of the public task of theology. At least not if apologetics means communicating the already established testimony of the Church outside its specific community in the languages and discourses of its host societies and cultures.¹ Instead, we will focus on a hermeneutic strategy capable of directing an adequate participation by the Church in the formation of public policy in the task of nation-building. Our focus is the realm of polity, recognizing that polity cannot be divorced from questions of technoeconomic structures or culture. The context is post-apartheid South Africa, but the strategy is intended to be widely sustainable beyond this particular context.

We are looking for contemporary hermeneutic insights which would achieve two goals relevant to the question of the Church's role in public policy. First, we need to be able to take account of the particularity of subjects in a plural, secular society. Second, we need to be able to draw on the historical strengths of the Church in the fight against the subjugation of people.

Both assumptions, about the particularity of subjects and the role of the Church in resistance as important to a strategy for the formation of a public will, have been defended elsewhere through arguments in favour of particularity and commitment (Cochrane 1996f). The gist of this essay provides further warrants for the claim that these assumptions have social significance sufficiently profound to justify their strong status.

To begin, we will establish some terms of reference for the notion of the formation of public policy as an expression of the public will which will guide the application of the concepts of public space I propose to adopt.

Policy Making and the Public 'Good'

Participation in the formation of public policy may be seen as 'normal' for citizens in relatively open societies. It is the stuff of elections at all levels, of policy brokering between groups and blocs, of power and influence played out on a daily basis in the offices, floors and perhaps streets of cities, towns and villages.

Such participation may not be felt to be significant when things do not work out as one had hoped in exercising one's political rights; or when one is faced by much larger conglomerations of power than a single person can ever contend with.² But it remains the taken-

- 1 There are other ways of conceiving apologetics. A broader understanding would take away any implication of 'an already established testimony,' opening up the theological dialogue of the Christian community to influences that come from outside itself, not only as a missiological principle, but in relation to fundamental theological claims. It is this last 'openness' which has the potential of destabilizing the Church's self-understanding as given, fixed, established, essentially determined. If that can still be called apologetics, then this essay stays within its realm. It would probably be more accurate, however, to speak of an ecumenical theology, in the sense developed by the World Council of Churches in the last decades, namely, one fundamentally open to dialogue with other faiths, philosophies and ideologies as a way of developing the Church's self-understanding.
- 2 The exercise of 'political rights' here is understood broadly to mean any intentional actions which are aimed at influencing the way public policy is shaped or applied, whether at local, regional, national or international level. Participating through a parents' meeting in the workings of a local school, or protesting against inad-

for-granted substratum of the social contract, even when accompanied by alienation and the partial failure of the contract. The underlying system and its forms of regulation are brought into question only when the social contract itself is delegitimised.³

'Politics' in this sense has become part of the ordinary life of many people in the more stable open societies of the world. There it becomes difficult to discern how to alter the ways in which public policy is formed and applied or, indeed, why they should be altered. The given practices, at the macro-level at least, are accorded an ethos of 'naturalness.' This is true even where those practices are alienating and the response is not resistance, but withdrawal by increasing numbers of people from the processes and institutions which govern them. In either case, the ways in which public policy is formed have taken on hegemonic dimensions.⁴ To contest these ways, and their related morés, may in such situations be felt to be an affront, or to be futile.⁵

In South Africa, this kind of hegemonic 'naturalness' does not exist any more (though new processes and practices may acquire status as time goes on) because the patterns that have governed past public policy procedures and practices have already been delegitimised. Consequently, the question of how public policy is formed has become once again an open field and an occasion for intervention in the shaping of our consciousness in respect of what counts for good public policy making and application.

The rise of public policy studies as a sub-discipline within political science is recent and born of the conviction that rationalist principles (logic, evidence, technical efficiency, and predictability) would make for better government.⁶ Indeed, the vision of its early theorists was that public policy as a rational process of decision making would overcome the

quate municipal services, for example, are thus as much the exercise of a political right as is a vote for the State President, or indeed, a decision not to vote at all.

- 3 This may happen for an individual, such as the Unabomber of the USA, or for a group such as the Jonestown sect, or for a much larger body of the populace as happened in South Africa during the nineteen eighties. From the point of view of the prevailing system, such individuals, groups and populaces represent a pathology, to be eradicated or brought under control. On the other side, system interests and their agencies are perceived as presenting a threat to a lifeworld which must be defended.
- 4 The definition of hegemony I adopt here is that of Jean and John Comaroff (1991:19ff.): Hegemony is the 'assertion of control over various modes of symbolic production': that what at one time might have been a conscious, strategic propagation of a particular world-view or ideology, now gradually takes on sufficient sense of naturalness to become part of a background understanding of the way things are. The 'repetition of signs and practices' leads to habituation, and they become 'so deeply inscribed in everyday routine, that they may no longer be seen as forms of control--or seen at all.' Crucial to my argument is also the other side of the story, the side from which hegemonic ideas and practices are challenged, thwarted, altered, used against themselves, ignored or overcome. As the Comaroffs suggest, 'hegemony is never total... It is always threatened by the vitality that remains in the forms of life it thwarts.' Thus, 'the hegemonic is constantly being made--and, by the same token, unmade'; it is 'realized through the balancing of competing forces, not the crushing calculus of class domination.'
- 5 For example: My own sense of the USA at this time is that in the face of multiple socio-economic crises which the hegemonic traditions cannot address, this kind of hegemonic weight upon its citizenry, produces a strange and increasingly frightening disintegration of the very processes which have undergirded the founding history of the nation. These processes are so naturalized that uncoordinated alternatives to them proliferate mainly in the nooks and crannies of society, adding to the process of disintegration without any prospect of an alternative to the two-party system which now rests so strongly on an existing bureaucracy and financial elite. In the face of the growing variety of uncoordinated and fragmented alternatives which have no major party political home but are often driven by the so-called 'minorities' of the USA, the centre inevitably pulls together into conservative alliances across traditional party boundaries, to protect what has become naturalized but to exclude all others. The cycle inevitably deepens as new alienations occur and new alternatives proliferate. Slowly but surely, this must imply a growing delegitimation of the prevailing hegemony.
- 6 Vide, for example, the useful description of the history of public policy science in Charles E. Lindblom (1980).

greatest 'weakness' of a large democracy, namely that of the entrance into public debate of ignorant, prejudiced or 'irrational' positions which bedevil the effective definition and execution of good public policy. Opposed to the supposed ignorances, prejudices and irrationalities of the democratic public would be the scientifically informed, impartial and rational contributions of public policy analysts and experts. Public policy, despite (or because of) its practical utility in helping manage complex societies, in its origins, is thus clearly an expression of the hopes of the modernist agenda.⁷

But more recent reflections on the nature of public policy analysis take much more careful cognisance of the flaws in the 'objective,' 'scientific' argument. As in other spheres of human reflection, the failures of positivist, utilitarian or rationalist positions have not gone unnoticed. Charles Anderson (1987:22ff.), for example, notes that 'countless books and program statements' have as their most persistent aim 'to recommend some conception of technique, a mode of analysis or style of thinking that, if consistently employed by public officials, would presumably result in better public decisions.' These kinds of approaches, however, have 'seemed an evasion of essential questions of public good and public interests or of class or factional advantage.' Anderson identifies five points of critique against 'neutral' notions of policy science, all of which will be familiar to those who are influenced by hermeneutics.

Policy analysis 'inevitably rests on some conception of desirable public purpose.' All theoretical frameworks for interpreting social reality, including those that govern policy science, are both 'multiple and conflicting' and 'have normative implications.' Experts, officials and administrators do not function as objective servants of decisions made by others, but themselves, sometimes in quite discrete or hidden ways, affect policy directly in 'interpreting political mandates and translating them into policy.' If divorced from broader political discourse, public policy tends 'to buttress existing institutions or practices.' Finally, because policy often touches on fundamental ethical dilemmas, 'a conception of policy analysis that ignores the moral dimensions of public choice and public service is an inadequate pedagogy.'

Clearly, if the analyses and practices of public policy are to avoid falling into the traps marked by these five basic criticisms of what have been the dominant models in policy science, then the contrasting positive terms should guide an appropriate approach. The implication for our purposes is that public policy processes should be conceived as governed by a conception of desirable public purpose, recognizing the plurality of purposes in our society (which implies negotiation, compromise, consensus and optimal choice). It should also be taken into account that the makers of public policy are not only those overtly charged with this function, and that those deemed to be political scientists (or anyone fulfilling analogous functions) are implicated in the interpretation and translation of public policy, with their

7 I reserve the term 'modernist' here for 18th and 19th century philosophies and mindsets governed by the conviction that rationalism, understood along Cartesian lines (a mental act), would liberate human beings from error and ignorance. I do not include the project of Jürgen Habermas, for example, whose understanding of rationality is far removed from that of Descartes, and depends upon the concept of communicative action rather than mental operations. While Habermas defends modernity, it is a different kind of modernity in which political praxis is given a place as significant as argument, and argument itself is subsumed under the process of the regulation of lifeworlds and systems. Habermas certainly believes that a kind of rationality is at work in communicative action wherever its processes are governed according to criteria of 'good reasons,' and 'understandable validity claims' for reasons given in taking a particular position. He also believes that this kind of communicative action is preferable to violence (when communication has been suspended). But the communicative dynamic at the center of these conceptions is not rationality *a'la modernité* in its classical sense.

own biases, perspectives and norms. Lastly, public policy analysis must be located in the broader political discourse, to be problematized along with any other element of this discourse, and thus subject to the moral dimensions of public choice and service.

The argument which follows takes these propositions to be the basis of an adequate interpretation of public policy. It further suggests that an adequate definition of what counts for 'good' public policy must take seriously the experiences, the perspectives and the needs of those people who are easily squeezed out of the public space. These tend to be people marginalised from the centres of power and influence, and thus from the making of policy, and from the evaluation of its practical impact.

The question of public 'good' so posed asserts at the outset that public policy is not merely a matter of efficiency or equity in a given system, as in the classic origins of the disciplines which reflect on public policy, but equally importantly, a matter of values and ends. It is part of the life of the *polis*, rather than the limited sphere of technical experts.

My approach to this question is neither empirical nor strategic, but hermeneutic, at the level of first principles. My method is not that of logic, narrowly understood, but that of rhetoric, the process of persuading the reader that a particular perspective is important for all perspectives. An interpretative sociology and a historical anthropology provide possible tools for this approach. But we move into the use of these tools, in the first instance, via feminist theories of social location and the historical construction of the self.

Space, Place and Boundaries

In order to develop the necessary hermeneutic strategy, I shall draw particularly upon the work of feminist theorists on the use of the metaphor of space in an understanding of subjectivity. The advantage of doing so is two-fold: First, feminists are particularly sensitive to the dynamics of the formation of the self, and of the self in relation to the other. They understand deeply the way in which power, location and the construction of subjectivity are interwoven with each other, forcefully shaping the body politic as well as interpersonal relations.

Second, much feminist work, especially more recently, serves to confront and ultimately undermine the dominating metaphors of modernity which have played a role in establishing the hegemony of Cartesian understandings of the self. These understandings have so configured public space, in multiple spheres, as to naturalize conceptions of the self which assert the superiority of a particular culture, philosophical tradition, economic mode and social form of organisation. Imperial attitudes and practices thus mould the other and her space in terms set by the dominant discourse.

I want to claim that boundaries, as expressions of space, link particular places in a way that simultaneously affirms them as it destabilizes them. What is true of places is also true of identity, once we recognize that identity is not an essence but a configuring of space too. The point is admirably stated by Kathleen Kirby (1993:174-5):

Space ... seems to offer a medium for articulating ... the many facets, or phases, of subjectivity that have interested different kinds of theory: national origin, geographic and territorial mobility (determined by class, gender, and race), bodily presence and limits, structures of consciousness, and ideological formations of belonging and exclusion. ... The subject and its form, subjects and their natures, are tied into political commitments and ethical positions by nature of being tied into particular material spaces, like bodies or countries, ghettos or suburbs, kitchens or boardrooms.

Affirming particular places and identities suggests a recognition of plurality and ambi-

guity. But their simultaneous destabilization suggests that one cannot dissolve all locations and identities into difference. Particular places, in our time at least, can in general never be isolated places (except where social pathologies erupt in attempts to fight off all others). Nor can particular identities be disengaged from the way in which a multitude of other identities impact upon them (except where psychopathologies have defeated all links to reality).

In this respect, the public space of a society or nation is one arena wherein particularities must also come to some arrangement with each other so that no valued and valuable particular place is destroyed when common places are constructively established.⁸ Difference is affirmed, but so is the project of overcoming difference where there is something greater at stake. Hence the term 'crossing' the boundaries suggests that they can be and should be crossed.

Also hidden in that terminology of crossing, like a private irony, lies a turn to the Christian image and symbol of the cross as the signifier of that which is destroyed in the confrontation with the powers - religious, political and economic powers - yet not overcome. That contradiction, victory at the moment of conquest, becomes a metaphor for the kind of boundaries that offer space for the enlargement of subjectivity, both on the personal, the communal and the national levels (if not beyond).

The metaphor supports an assertion that particular kinds of boundaries have preference over others in the project of subjectivity, which I understand to be a human project of the self in relation to the other (not, as I have said, the project of the ego as such). Out of the argument, therefore, emerges a claim for ways in which the configuring of public space, read from the margins, offers hope for the future and healing in the present. Such a strategy, I have already suggested, contributes to an understanding of what the public 'good' is.

Let us turn to Kirby's article on the politics of location, subjects and space. She notes that spatial metaphors are particularly characteristic of recent feminist work.⁹ One major root for this turn to metaphors of space, not unimportant for our interest in public policy analysis, is the rejection of the Enlightenment model of the subject 'as pure disembodied, evanescent, transcendent 'mind', which leaves it impossible to imagine the subject 'except in some yet-to-be-specified relation to real space' (Kirby 1993:175). Space, however, is not the same as place: 'Place seems to assume set boundaries that one fills to achieve a solid identity.' Space, on the other hand, is 'malleable, a fabric of continually shifting sites and boundaries' (Kirby 1993:176). This distinction between set, and malleable or shifting boundaries, provides us with one key to rethinking the formation of public policy from the margins.

The very term 'margins' indicates that boundaries have been established which distinguish some people from others in relation to their access to power. If one is not at the centres of power, or has no means to access those centres, one is marginalised. An experience of marginalisation is one reason why feminists have found an analysis of space helpful. If, as Kirby suggests, boundaries of space are malleable and continually shifting, then one may

8 That this principle can be taken further than many people have perhaps imagined is best illustrated by the way in which the present South African Government of National Unity, with Mandela as its supreme symbol, has been able to find ways to incorporate previously implacable ideological enemies in the discussions and processes of nation-building. The activities and positions of the one group which seems least able to enter into this kind of process, the Inkatha Freedom Party, point to another possibility, namely, the ease with which fragile interactions between ideological foes can be broken. The IFP's capacity to do this, one might argue, is its political weapon and its strongest leverage.

9 She also notes its antecedents in the work of Deleuze, Guattari, Jameson, Foucault and Kristeva.

draw the implication that identity is not fixed or essential but subject to the dynamics that constitute particular boundaries.

Included in these dynamics are those who are pushed by set boundaries to the margins. Who are they? Generic persons, universal women? No: They are particular people whose particularity is an important part of their subjectivity. The space they occupy may be defined by set boundaries as an oppressive place, but it may also be the source from which specific strategies and arts of resistance grow.

Put differently, as James Scott, Jean and John Comaroff, Marcel de Certeau and others are at pains to demonstrate, hegemony is not everywhere and always successful, and its terms are never established by the dominant power alone, even in the most abject circumstances. The subjugated subject treats boundaries, no matter how set they appear to be, now as malleable when the opportunity arises to push them back to create more space, now as opaque and solid to prevent the dominant powers invading a protected space.

Thus the place one occupies as particular, as providing a solid identity, may be both constraining and oppressive or protective and liberating. Which of these a particular place represents is not something to be defined at the outset, but something to be discovered in the shifts of boundaries. Feminist critics clearly wish to loosen the notion of place from its naturalized senses under the hegemonies of patriarchy, cultural imperialism, fixed gender definitions, and an essential view of the body itself. But they also want to emphasize place as the marker of difference, that which distinguishes a middle-class from a working-class woman, an American from an African, and so on, for this difference is crucial in analyzing the disjunctions of power that cut across class, gender, race and national identities.

It seems to me that the category of place, if it is not to end up in a definition of the Other which serves to set the Other apart as 'less than' oneself or irredeemably alien from oneself, must assume the notion of boundaries as flexible, constructed. The alternative is to give in to precisely those ethnic, gender, racial, class and cultural imperialisms that are under attack. At the same time, the category of place must fill in an individual's subjectivity with sufficient three-dimensionality to allow the individual to develop her own position despite any restrictive boundaries.

A Three-dimensional Space

This distinction is developed by Kirby through a comparison of the work of Chandra Mohanty and Adrienne Rich on the notion of space. Without going into the full details of the argument, suffice it to say that Kirby reads Mohanty as wanting to empty subjectivity of all possible interiority, in effect seeking to deny that there is any meaning to the term 'woman' than that which is constructed discursively or politically.¹⁰ Subjects are thus 'relatively discontinuous from one moment to the next.'

The advantage of this approach is that it emphasizes the struggle of women as something not given by womanness per se, but as something 'that has to be worked for, struggled towards - *in history*' (Kirby 1993:178). Another way of putting this, in the terms we have adopted, is to say that boundaries are contested and that their naturalisation is the result of earlier contestations rather than of some essence of nature. This opens up space for struggle against the hegemony of set boundaries which limit or oppress the human body and spirit.

The strong deconstructionist mood of this understanding of the political function of

¹⁰ 'For Mohanty, the subject is a flat space that can be mapped on the terrain of discursive relations or a fleeting intersection of conflicting political initiatives (cartography and geography, the main figurative devices of her work, indicate this underlying philosophical foundation).' - (Kirby 1993:177)

space may be seen as part of a hermeneutics of suspicion. Yet it is not clear how it could allow for a hermeneutics of reconstruction, which is equally important in a task such as that of nation-building. To be sure, the deconstructionist moment, as long as it is sustained, prevents any attempt at nation-building, and thus any processes which form public policy, from establishing new oppressive hegemonies. But it tends towards the kind of avant-garde position attacked by Gayatri Spivak (1988) in *Can the Subaltern Speak?*, in which only those consciously entering into the political task of overthrowing domination are foregrounded. The depth of the subjugated subject thus tends to disappear, and in the name of contesting the dominant powers, she is even further marginalized by those who would now represent her.

Perhaps this judgement is a bit harsh, but Kirby (1993:179) does note that Mohanty 'cannot maintain the materiality of geographic space precisely because her project is to locate shifting intervals in discourse rather than to detail the qualities of existing individuals.' Going further, Kirby reads Mohanty as 'an oppositional cartographer,' a critic who 'stands outside the map,' one who is not a 'sad resident of one of its villages.' On these grounds Kirby believes that Mohanty demonstrates the inadequacy of poststructuralist attempts to define subjectivity in terms of 'subject position' alone.

Alongside Mohanty's work ranges that of Adrienne Rich. Her major concern, like Mohanty's, is 'to destroy an originary emphasis upon centrality, a vanity inseparable from ethnocentrism' (Kirby 1993:181). The spatial trope of geography offers both thinkers a figural alternative of 'equalized pluralities' to writing which is paradigmatically linked to positions of privilege and power, and discursively linked to 'imbalanced binaries' (such as the literate and the illiterate, the advanced and the backward, the educated and the uneducated, the rich and the poor - one may extrapolate from these terms into a whole range of such oppositions). Geography demonstrates difference, but it does not demonstrate superiority. It opens up space for the Other, as long as the maps used to chart the territory are themselves not already part of the patterns of binary discourse (which, of course, they may be, as in the classical Mercator projection of the earth whereby the Northern countries appear to be both central and overwhelmingly large).

Rich's work diverges from Mohanty's at the point of defining subjectivity. She is concerned to reconcile spaces, though she cannot avoid their continual slide into difference; to heal the fragments of the subject, though she cannot deny their tendency to fragment again. For Rich, architecture or organic forms (e.g. body) rather than geography or cartography is the underlying spatial metaphor. Immediately this provides a three-dimensional character to her description of the subject. The self is now not simply a mapping on the political or historical terrain, but a 'volume that the self both occupies and is' (Kirby 1993:184). Thus Rich can say that 'To write 'my body' plunges me into lived experience, particularity: I see scars, disfigurements, discolorations, damages, losses, as well as what pleases me.'

The value of Rich's approach, as Kirby notes, is that it allows us 'to incorporate into our theoretical framework personal history and the particular shaping forces of specific kinds of bodies.' Thus subjectivity, rather than being only the 'depthless projection of discursive actions,' is both a space one is compelled to occupy and a space whose interiority affords a place for reaction and response (Kirby 1993:185).

The danger in Rich's approach, according to Kirby, is that it leads once again to an essentialism 'in the assumption that her body already and always contained a certain subjectivity - [in which once again] the limits of identity are fixed.' A centring of space around the specific individual occurs once more, setting boundaries as natural rather than as fluid, flexible, malleable.

The Promise of the Boundary

What Kirby wants to retrieve, in both the work of Rich and Mohanty, is 'the promise of the boundary.' This promise lies in two directions: 'becoming politically conscious might mean becoming conscious of one's own boundaries, feeling the way we live them; becoming politically active might mean attempting to transform the shapes culture projects for us.'

The reason this promise lies in the notion and experience of boundaries is because they seem to 'provide a medium for articulating specificity and punctuality, but also materiality,' and as these boundaries shift, so identity reconstructs itself or is reconstructed. The specificity and materiality of identity lies in the changing relations between the edges of all of our boundary lines (gender, race, class, nationality, politics, ethnicity, culture, geography). But the punctuality of the border is the important element: 'it is not an ontological feature, but an effective, differential one. It holds open a space, but the space it materializes is shifting, temporary, and replaceable.' (Kirby 1993:187-8 *passim*).

Thus the subject is defined as one who *has* space within which to engender projects of freedom, through which to give expression to the drive of human spirit, by which to reconstruct her life, at least at one moment across one boundary whose contours have become sufficiently transparent to allow movement. Boundaries may and do still 'arrange space in an inclusive/exclusive dynamic,' but this now becomes a two-edged sword. The reading of the workings of inclusion and exclusion goes both ways, and in doing so, pays attention to the specificity of the Other across any boundary without evaporating it into the clouds of essentialism or the emptiness of universalism.

The subject now is a social agent, but with contours lying deeper than the merely political or historical grand narratives. The subject is now seen to have a flexible specificity which overcomes 'the inadvertently rigid boundaries built up by the Enlightenment individual, the autonomous ego, and ontological categories of race and gender,' boundaries set in the stones of hegemony by which these hermetic structures provide 'the foundation for exclusion and oppression.' The final implications drawn by Kirby (1993:189) from this vision of boundaries may now be understood in their fullness, and they provide the pegs upon which to hang a conception of the configuring of public policy from the margins:

We cannot afford to naturalize the boundary, though we must analyze boundaries that have been naturalized in order to break down their rigidity. We cannot afford to reify the distinction between 'inside' and 'outside,' though in formulating a politics, we cannot abandon either space but must continually traverse the difference. We must neither collapse the distinctions between all forms of space that shape our being nor entirely disengage them; rather, we need to work toward describing occasions on which they converge and reasons for why they diverge.

Configuring Public Policy on the Boundaries

The proposals about the formation of public policy which I wish to consider derive directly from the above consideration of the notion of boundaries. They follow fairly straightforwardly. I shall not argue for them any further, therefore, but merely indicate their shape and a general framework for considering the application to the task of contributing to the shaping of public policy and its application.

This should be seen as a tentative problematization of the role of the Church in the making and applying of public policy along the lines of the boundaries it may recognise from its own tradition, drawing on its primal commitment to the fulfilment of the human

spirit in the promise of life abundant.¹¹ Let us take, one by one, the political implications of the 'hermeneutics of the boundary' identified by Kirby, spelling out how they might impact upon conceptions of public policy decision making and application.

'We cannot afford to naturalize the boundary.' Hegemony does just this. It moves what are otherwise conscious elements of public life into the taken-for-granted background of lifeworlds (as Jürgen Habermas puts it). It does not appear to me, however, that one can ever step outside of such realities, for no individual or group can sustain or survive a continual conscious encounter with all boundaries which define the subject. If the psyche is not damaged in trying to do this, then certainly other things will be, especially for marginalized groups upon whom the negative effects of the power of others over them may threaten a great deal when they overstep the mark. It pays, both humanly and politically, to choose the boundaries one will push. Equally, it pays to leave others 'naturalized.'

Yet Kirby's contention is thereby merely qualified, not nullified. From a theological point of view, the values underlying good public policy must promote the freedom of the person from subjugation (to any powers of the world, at least).¹² The failure to do so is what one 'cannot afford,' because its costs to persons and to society are sufficiently deleterious. Of course, one can simply repress all attempts at addressing the imbalances between vital boundaries such as race, class and gender. At the extreme, this is the goal of totalitarian societies whose attempts to limit conflict include putting massive resources into propaganda machines designed to naturalize boundaries which are contested ('winning hearts and minds'). But the assumption here is that such policies cannot be considered 'good.'

'We must analyze boundaries that have been naturalized in order to break down their rigidity.' The naturalization of boundaries removes them from critique. The critical moment, a bringing to consciousness of the effects of a boundary, moves a hegemonic construction into the sphere of debate and action. If this is not done, it may then well be the case that important points at which the subject is denied her full humanity are side-stepped in the interests of those who effect this denial. This is clearly Kirby's concern with respect to the struggle of women against subjugation. Whereas people can be subjugated for a long time in a society, perhaps indefinitely (think, for example, of the strength of patriarchal norms in most contemporary societies), this cannot be a norm for good public policy as defined here.

The promise of the boundary is precisely its flexibility, its fluidity, over and against the three-dimensional space of containers (for body, race, class, gender). But this fluidity is clearly not simply given, for Kirby. Indeed, as she was at pains to point out, boundaries can be set, fixed, taken-for-granted as what is natural, and therefore placed outside of the province of critique (and presumably, praxis). Thus the role of criticism is important for Kirby,

11 Detailed analysis of this statement is not possible here, but it should at least be pointed out that my preference for the term 'spirit' here is in no way intended to disengage it from the body. That would, as I understand the tradition (e.g. its emphasis on incarnation and the resurrection of the body), be a contradiction in terms, even if it is the form of theology widely adopted by some brands of Christianity.

12 Subjugation to the divine may be seen as something of a completely different order, as long as one understands here the paradoxical implication of the term 'fearing God,' namely, that submitting oneself to a transcendent reality (leaving aside questions of immanence for the moment) implies being freed. At least in principle, subjugation by any lesser ('worldly,' or 'human') authority. The insight of mysticism into this kind of freedom is not easily transferable to the political realm, except perhaps in as much as it may allow one to act in any situation with greater internal authority and security. One may say that such a capacity aids processes of dialogue, negotiation, understanding and compromise where compromise is called for. It is the kind of personal 'sovereignty' prized in the term applied to politicians who are felt to be 'statesman- or stateswoman-like.'

for the sake of loosening naturalized boundaries from their apparent anchors.

This kind of analysis of naturalized boundaries becomes a suggestive metaphor for the task of public policy analysis, which for long has been seen primarily as a matter of collecting 'scientific' evidence for (or against) positions already decided upon. The kind of evidence usually admitted into the privileged circle of policy analysis is measured in terms of efficiency (will the proposed, or given, policy actually be able to do what it sets out to do?) or equity (will the proposed, or given, policy distribute, proportionally, the benefits or costs it carries among those it affects).

We may now add a third question for public policy analysis: Will the proposed, or given, policy ease any boundaries it may affect to the benefit of a greater play of space for those most unfairly constrained by current or past policies in the relevant area. The question of equity is here transformed into a question of relative justice, and in doing so the kind of policy analysis required will pay attention to where boundaries exist, why do they exist, whether they are flexible enough, and who is most unfairly constrained by them. Of course, this begs the question of our notion of justice, a concept upon which there is no universal agreement. I would argue that the answer to that question, for which we may draw upon the many profound studies of justice throughout history, is neither fixed in time nor in space, and that any adequate theory must begin with the experience of injustice in a particular time and space. It is not difficult to see the notion of the 'margins' re-emerging at this point.

'We cannot afford to reify the distinction between 'inside' and 'outside.' For Kirby, and for those she discusses (Rich, Mohanty), the reification of the distinction between the 'inside' and the 'outside' is the mark of the Cartesian subject. The same distinction, in parallel to this conception of the subject, is played out in politics and culture, leading to the easy assumption of Western elites in particular, that they are superior to others by virtue of their political system, cultural resources and mental virtues. One of the paradigmatic 'insider/outsider' discourses of human history is the result, its practical accompaniments evidencing on a broad canvas many of the destructive effects of such reification in its imperialisms of culture, economy, philosophy and religion.

Not surprisingly, given the strongly patriarchal mood and structure of this history, women are very sensitive to its effects, as are the colonized peoples and those who are defined in the discourse not simply as 'Other,' but as 'something else.' Thingness becomes a property of the Other. As noted by Kirby, the terms 'Near-East,' 'Middle-East,' and 'Far-East' beg the question: near, middling and far from whom? The same temptation appears in our own context, albeit on smaller scale.

For example, South Africa already faces the problem of 'outsiders' from the rest of Africa wishing to enter its borders and draw on its resources in seeking jobs or sustenance of some kind. The historical deprivation of the majority of South Africa's own people puts tremendous pressure upon policy makers to shut out those who compete for scarce resources and in the process reduce the chances for South Africans. This is one area in which public policy making is difficult. But it is important, if we follow Kirby, not simply to draw rigid lines between 'outsiders' and 'insiders' if we are not to do a disservice, or an injustice, to people.

In fact, it is easy to produce arguments about the claims of people from neighbouring countries, who have been drastically affected in their own life chances by past actions of the South African state, and by the centrifugal effects of the South African economy which enrich the centre at the cost, and on the back of, the periphery. The claims they make willy-nilly rebound upon our own possibilities in public policy, not simply in relation to foreign affairs but because neither our economy nor our society is, or can be, hermetically sealed

from these same 'outsiders' and the things they may do.

It is more difficult to consider what the reification of boundaries might mean for gender-related policy, or policy which is gender skewed. One may repeat the point for the other kinds of boundaries already introduced. The concept of the body plays a role in policies which deal with gender orientation, sexual harassment or discrimination, abortion, and even the death penalty. Race boundaries (for example, in the question of affirmative action) or class boundaries (for example, in the question labour relations) may also be introduced into the sphere of 'inside/outside' reifications.

I am not sure how best to draw on the notion of boundaries in these and similar contexts. There is evidence of creative thinking in this direction in current South African policy debates (for example, in the remarkably open, progressive position put forward by COSATU on the question of foreign workers in South Africa). But it does seem important to consider the claim that Kirby makes here, and with it, her fourth statement that '*We cannot abandon either space but must continually traverse the difference.*' The important implication here is that public policy processes include a deliberate strategic intention, whatever tactics may ultimately be used to support or thwart this intention, to 'traverse the difference' across boundaries that straddle any inside/outside position.

Perhaps a good example of the informal application of such a policy may be seen in the manner in which President Mandela has directly taken on, and in many respects weakened, the border separating conservative Afrikaners from liberal whites and all blacks. What is clear in the way in which he has developed his own personal policy in this respect, is that he never abrogates or underestimates difference (which would be another matter entirely). But he has worked actively against the reification of this distance. The task, as I see it, would be to take this principle, informed by the metaphor of the boundary, into as wide a range of policy considerations as possible.

The importance of not simply eradicating difference, but of accepting its significance while not succumbing to its reification, is stated through Kirby's fifth, and consequent statement: '*We must neither collapse the distinctions between all forms of space that shape our being nor entirely disengage them.*' Yet this claim is not simply one about inside/outside reifications. Perhaps more strongly, it seeks to reinforce our recognition that the subject is shaped by a plurality of boundaries working simultaneously (and presumably shifting both laterally - between the positions that define the boundary - and vertically - from the background to the foreground of our consciousness).

The depth to the subject that Kirby seeks in this formulation, and for which she has argued in her appreciation of Adrienne Rich's theory of space, is easily lost in public policy processes which focus on instrumental reason and pragmatic efficiency as their primary criteria. Groups, organizations, corporations, unions, parties, blocs and the like become the conceptual focus of policy debate and planning, as is perhaps unavoidable (because one cannot deal successfully, if at all, with the aggregate of individuals in a complex and large society). The restriction this places upon an appreciation for what public policy might actually mean for persons, for subjects who inhabit the space of society, is usually taken for granted as unavoidable. The best recourse is to find mechanisms which enable as many people as possible to express an opinion as often as is feasible under the constraints of running a complex society.

Yet it is the depth to a subject, by which we mean a large set of shifting boundaries not always congruent with each other, that might enrich public policy processes. For example, a common feature of the contemporary debate on the question of abortion is a view that the issue has to do simply with the right of a woman to the control over her body, versus the

right of a foetus to life.

Kirby's formulation would lead one to suggest that an adequate policy making process around the question should take into account other spaces (than 'body') which make up the subject. As is clear from the public testimony of many women on this issue, there are economic, social, race and gender boundaries here which cannot simply be discarded as unimportant to the debate (for example, statistics seem to suggest that it is the poorest, usually black, often unemployed woman who most often seeks backstreet abortions; the prevalence of these other boundaries in the situation cannot be coincidental, nor can it be simply a matter of ignorance of inferior humanity). In Kirby's terms, these distinctions cannot simply be collapsed into one defining boundary. There might be some moral purity to be gained from such a strategy, but perhaps only superficially so. Worse, such moral purity may indeed lead to policies which cause more problems than they solve, simply because the other boundaries shaping the subject do not go away.¹³

At the same time, Kirby carefully notes that the distinctions in the forms of space which shape the identity of the subject cannot be disengaged either. I would take this to mean, for example, in the debate on abortion, that the boundaries established by the body and by the Other (the foetus in this case, perhaps father as well, and certainly any other family) have to be analyzed and read in relation to each other.

If public policy processes were to take this into account, we would need much more sensitive means than we usually do to establish policy. And we would need to accept, once more, that public policy is value-laden and continually under construction. Against my own inclinations and beliefs, this would mean that the question of the death penalty, for example, could not be decided once and for all, but would have to be continually measured along all axis of the boundaries it touches. I would hope that my own belief in the ethical poverty of the application of the death penalty, and the highly dubious status of its practical utility, would be sustained in the process. But it is the process which at this point must be the focus.

The task which public policy analysis would have to take on, to be sufficiently sensitive in the manner suggested, could thus be described in the words of Kirby's final statement: In respect of the different forms of spaces which shape our being, *'We need to work toward describing occasions on which they converge and reasons for why they diverge.'* These are abstract words, to which the examples above give perhaps a little bit of concrete substance. But they do suggest a way in which the notion of boundaries helps us towards a process which would pay attention to a sufficiently complex notion of the subject who effects or is affected by policy decisions and their application.

Paradigmatic situations or cases in any particular policy area would have to be identified for their capacity to define as richly and generatively as possible the parameters of the boundaries most central to that area. Given the plurality of subjects and subject spaces which make up our society, such paradigms would also have to be socially complex, taking into account different subject positions across boundaries of race, class, gender, culture and religion, among others.

And in the end, I have also tried to suggest throughout, these paradigms would need to be able to tell us who, in relation to the relevant boundaries, has been pushed to the margins

13 An interesting and instructive example of a similar kind is the question of prostitution. Moral purity would suggest that prostitution be outlawed by society. But other factors will continue to produce a sex industry whatever moral purists may desire, and these factors can readily be discerned in the reasons many women give for entering the sex industry in the first place. The 'sin' here may be of a different order than that usually attributed by narrow moral positions incapable of understanding the range and effect of the boundaries shaping a particular person.

and why. This assertion is the result of a theological conviction in the first place, and it functions not only to orient my own perspective on public policy but it also acts against a relativisation of all boundaries to the point where none really can be said to be decisive. If that happens, then public policy would revert once more to the experts, the power-brokers and influential elites of society.

About time? Four-dimensional space

The focus of this essay has been on the configuring of public space from the margins, using the notion of boundaries as one key to the interpretative strategies the Church may employ to make its contribution. But the metaphor of space and its analogues, valuable as it may be, does not exhaust the topic. Indeed, one may argue that the spatial theme easily leads into an old trap, that of a two-dimensional view of the lifeworlds of people (precisely the error Kirby believes Mohanty fell into), a view which foregrounds conscious political activity as the motor of change, and sends into the background those kinds of activities which do not appear to meet this criteria.

Equally, even with a three-dimensional language of space such as Adrienne Rich's, in which the subject acquires depth, one may still ask how to grasp the effects upon the subject over time - a key aspect of Rich's anthropology - if one does include duration. In other words, metaphors of time may offer the same kind of complementary significance to subjectivity as do metaphors of space, with the same kind of problems (two-dimensional versus three-dimensional; hegemonic versus flexible; closed versus open; and so on).

Jean and John Comaroff, in *Revolution and Revelation* (1991), point to the possibility of the configuring power of time along lines analogous to feminist analyses of space. The imperial centring of time in the story of the missionaries clock which imposed a new ordering of time on the indigenous population is an example of time as a form of control in the modernist project. Also explored in their work is the way in which time as resistance to this colonizing imperative becomes a *locus* of the incongruous in independent church rituals (the overlap between metaphors of time and space seems to me unavoidable). Petersen (1995), too, develops an analogous argument in relation to South African Kairos Theology, drawing on Postone's critique of the commodification of time and extending it to show that time can be a decentring, destabilizing *locus* (again) of resistance to subjugation among oppressed people who subvert the hegemonic aspects of time in the discourses of the dominant through their own apparently incongruous discourses.

In both Petersen and the Comaroffs, time functions to offer depth to an analysis of the subject whose three-dimensionality is filled out by notions of duration in history and of agency which is not overtly political. They offer a way of understanding that the effects of hegemony are not universal, that subjects can and do create boundaries which limit those effects and, ultimately, provide the breeding ground for 'arts of resistance' (James Scott 1990) which push back those boundaries where possible and solidify them where necessary as a form of protection against the dominant (Scott's 'hidden transcripts').

Time, McGaughey argues, is one of the constituting *aporiai* of theology, in the necessary gap that emerges between considering time cosmologically and phenomenologically. These two forms of time are in many ways contradictory. But it is in the holding together of this contradiction in creative tension that the *aporia* becomes the occasion for generating theological insight.

This is not the place to explore further the hermeneutics of time which may complement the hermeneutics of space which has been our focus. But the caveat about time should serve to warn us that boundaries - a spatial metaphor - extends beyond the three-dimensional. The

fourth dimension of time should help us deepen Mohanty's analysis of the social and political construction of the self so that it is less likely to reduce the self to the surfaces of political activity, and amplify Rich's analysis of the internal space of the self so that it is more able to take into account the attitudes and practices of ordinary people who at first glance may seem simply to have given in to the effects of oppression.

I do not know what effects the hegemonic view of time currently dominating the global scene - or the commodification of time - may have on the way in which public policy is worked out, nor how one may counteract its negative impact. Perhaps the answer lies in a hermeneutic of time as simultaneously mystical and material (part of Petersen's basic thesis), but that would be a subject for further investigation.

What one can see, however, is that boundaries exist in time and space, that boundaries establish identity but flexibly, that boundaries are constructions and not essences, and that boundaries can and should be crossed in the task of building a human community capable of expressing justice maximally to all. This would be to give the command to 'love your neighbour as yourself' a social foundation, and the prior phrase in that command, 'to love God,' the meaning of opening up new possibilities for the fulfilment of life abundant.

Conclusion

The metaphors of space and place, encountered through the concept of *boundaries*, have determined the structure of the core of our argument. As we have seen, it is simultaneously an argument about subjectivity, but not about the Cartesian ego. Rather, it locates the subject in the space between the self and the other, in our case within the sphere of the public, and recognises there another instance of boundaries.

But it is also an argument about crossing boundaries, and about denying their permanence or their essentiality. Boundaries define us spatially, but they do not imprison us: They are constructed realities and not natural essences. For this reason, the notion of boundaries opens up space for a change of location - a change of perspective - about the way in which we conceive of the formation of public policy. Thus the formation of public policy may be interpreted as a discourse about the construction of all kinds of boundaries and about the regulation of their interfaces.

I have suggested that an important, corrective hermeneutic to the standard practices of conducting this discourse - the 'natural' realm of experts, power-brokers and socially influential persons - is the perspective from the margins. One may say that here the limits of all boundaries are most acutely experienced and, because of this, that here lie sources, incipient or not, of wisdom about both the effects and possibilities of public policy which all too often are insufficiently tapped, if at all. Altering our practices by taking more seriously this wisdom may be as profitable a path to good public policy making as any other - and better than many favoured routes.

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