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# From the Window to Wall: A Visual Commentary on Borders, Healing, & Transformation in Social Work

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## **Abstract**

This reflexive visual essay draws on my lived experiences as a Black man social worker to explore how borders, both internal and external, influence the construction of identity within and through therapeutic spaces. Systemic oppressions, stereotypes, structural inequalities, and racialized and gendered expectations born of colonialism have historically delineated healing spaces and encounters, creating borders that ultimately inhibit and inform social work and therapy practices. On the one hand, practitioners such as myself are compelled to code-switch and recalibrate to navigate racialized biases within institutionalized care systems. On the other hand, the process of clients offering their lived experiences in therapeutic spaces is a political act that challenges the assumptions of Black men and minoritized communities within wider society. As such, reflecting on borders and their impact reveals possibilities for identity formation, therapeutic care, and liberation within the field of social work. With this, the following piece advocates for a culturally and spiritually sensitive praxis that resists colonialism to empower substantive care, using a blend of reflexive standpoint and photography to capture my approach.

## **Keywords**

Black masculinity, decolonialization, social work practice, therapeutic space, governmentality

## Introduction: External and Internal Borders



This photo essay adopts a reflexive approach to explore how borders, or the act of bordering itself, shapes my therapy practice, my identity as a Black man social worker, and



the space in which my therapy occurs. On the one hand, I am a tall Black man of African descent. The state, the media, the world says men like me are always already angry and impulsive; we are said to lack emotional depth and patience (Fanon, 2008). What could I possibly know, then, about self-care and empathy; about emotional intelligence and regulation? What could I know about analytical and conceptual thinking? How does someone like me even *do* therapy?



I am aware of how I am perceived in this profession, policing myself through what French philosopher Michel Foucault (2007) calls governmentality. I carefully monitor my voice, tone, words, body language, and emotional expressions to ensure that I align with the dominant expectations of professionalism that are rooted in colonialism and the whiteness therein.

### **Therapy as Transformation**

On the other hand, therapy is a border-crossing space; it is a form of hazardous work that crosses borders that are not traditionally crossed. In this regard, my experience as a social worker offers a counter-narrative, a life story of survival.

For example, on many Indigenous reserves, technological issues caused by a lack of Wi-Fi can disrupt virtual sessions. At other times, clients are unjustly apprehended and arrested during our sessions. These external forces complicate both internal and professional boundaries of my practice as I grapple with personal disclosure,



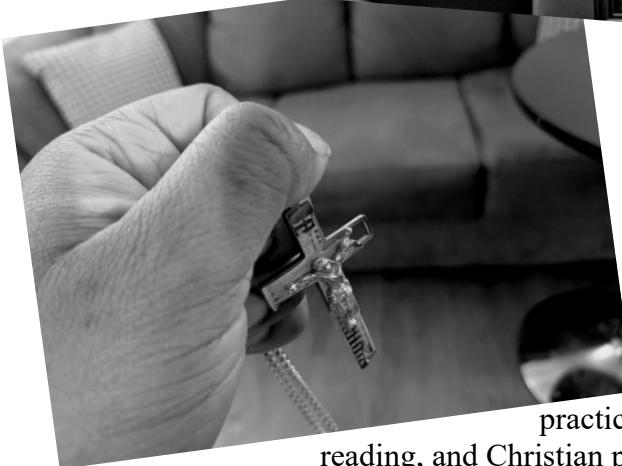
rethink colonial power dynamics, and strive to maintain trust in the relationship.

Undoing borders while operating within them also means co-creating a space for my clients where vulnerability, truth-telling, and healing can emerge. Through their own courageous narratives of trials and triumphs, which showcase the



complexities of their lives, those who seek my services challenge their own assumptions about Black men and Black people.

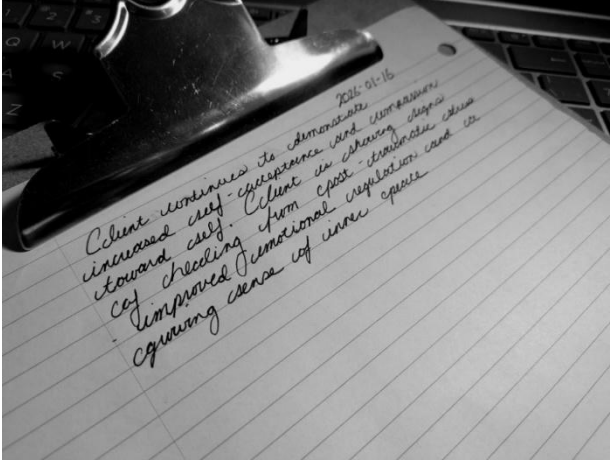
I, too, am challenged to access different energies and code-switch, while balancing the softness required by the profession and whiteness with the hardness linked to Black masculinity, and cultural and societal expectations.



This requires meaning-making afro-emancipatory approaches that centre grounding and radical self-determination, respect for the epistemologies of the oppressed, conscientious decolonial methods, and the further integration and re-centring of spiritual and divine practices such as prayer, scriptural reading, and Christian proverbs (Jean-Pierre et al., 2025).

## Un-Bordering

There is an un-bordering in my work that foregrounds racialized narratives and challenges imperialist and oppressive borders. I construct a therapeutic space in



which both practitioner and client to reclaim and engage with cultural and spiritual epistemologies and modes of knowledge production. I also create a therapeutic space for both me and my clients to reconnect, explore, and uphold cultural and spiritual epistemologies through practices such as culturally grounded dialogue, storytelling, and spiritual

meaning-making, alongside conventional therapeutic approaches. My reflections reveal that borders and un-bordering can shape identities, create new narratives, improve therapeutic care and safety, and pave the way for emancipatory practice within the field of social work. Borders can help me express empathy more fully and influence the professional decisions I make as a therapist.



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*To my dear cousins Nonso and Funnanya.*

## Author Biography

Kevin Ufoegbune is a Nigerian Canadian psychotherapist, social worker, educator, and entertainer who is currently completing his PhD. His Master of Social Work (MSW) practice-based research paper completed at York University examined intergenerational trauma and psychotherapy within the Nigerian diaspora through a critical autoethnographic approach. As a therapist, Kevin works with BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour) community members, families, organizations (including the National Basketball Association), and fellow Christians, to address issues such as spirituality, addictions, trauma, depression, anxiety, and other challenges. As a television producer, he co-created *Flavours of Africa* on Rogers Television in 2016. The series highlights African and international cuisine, culture, and storytelling.