

# ***DEVELOPMENT STUDIES AS BOUNDARY CROSSING: CHALLENGES AND POSSIBILITIES***

Inaugural lecture  
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24 November 2016

## **Abstract**

The idea of boundary crossing is explored in this lecture as referring to traversing those contentious barriers that demarcate disciplines and geopolitical spaces. Such boundaries are posited as ultimately transformable in a context that demands complex solutions to complex problems. Boundary crossing then becomes the stretching and refiguring of these demarcations and spaces. This can happen by re-imagining teaching and scholarly engagement within a framework that problematizes the power effects of knowledge-creating and -seeking practices. Using four vignettes to illustrate boundary crossing as lived experience, the lecture interrogates its progressive potential to advance ideas and actions in many domains of social and intellectual life. It envisions transformed knowledge production that moves across boundaries (be they those that separate academe and activism, theory and practice, researcher and researched) most deliberately. Notions such as reciprocity, positionality, self-reflexivity, emancipatory epistemologies and transformative methodologies are reviewed as keys to boundary crossing. Inter- and transdisciplinarity are presented as projects that can offer enriched thinking, teaching and knowing about development as social change.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

In this lecture, I place the idea of boundary crossing as a central heuristic notion. By boundaries, I mean those contentious dividing lines and porous casings that demarcate disciplines and geopolitical spatial metaphors of domains, turfs, territories and power hierarchies (Thompson-Klein 1996:1). I want to posit boundaries as ultimately transformable in a context that demands complex solutions to complex problems. My aim is to rethink teaching and scholarly engagement within a framework that problematizes the power effects of knowledge-creating and -seeking practices.

The focus is on the possibilities for the contestation of epistemic violence inherent in the generation and dissemination of knowledge based on hegemonic discourses. It is a call for interlanguages and hybrid, multiple communities of practice (Thompson-Klein 1996:2). As someone who often crosses disciplinary boundaries, I hope to conclude by offering a vision of the future of scholarly enterprise that embraces the kind of complex, ethical and responsible knowledge production demanded from us and our students today.

This lecture is borne out of personal disciplinary boundary crossings in which I faced many doubts over institutionalised, hegemonic practice, which is bounded and gagged by regulations, doctrinaire rules, CESH (classification of educational subject matter) categories, forms and committees which can remove the intellectual task of teaching and research from its ethical, social, contextual, and political agency. I believe that there is intellectual richness to be discovered in the wide array of methods and sources out there. I would therefore like to begin this discussion with four vignettes which illustrate the way I discovered boundaries in the last few years of my academic life at Unisa.

Firstly, I recently received a new ethical clearance form to complete on behalf of my students. It suggested that non-English speaking research participants fall into the so-called, institutionally-constructed "vulnerable group" category. The thoughts that occurred to me were: Whose vulnerabilities am I constructing, contesting, protecting or reifying? Am I, by subjecting to these imposed categorisations, replicating unattainable, universalist (and universalising) research ethics which are part of a western-centric impulse, with its normative reference point taken to be unremittingly white, affluent, urban, Western, English-speaking, elite, heterosexual, able-bodied, individualistic and male? At a deeper level was the realisation that this creeping bureaucratisation of research has bounded ethics into the discourse of audited accountability and normative regimes that threaten to render it perfunctory (Emmerich 2013). This unease deepens every time we encounter a research proposal from a postgraduate student that seems to require "boundary work". The debate of what lies inside and outside of reach of our discipline's borders tells me that this is a matter deserving urgent attention.

Secondly, at the time of conceptualising this lecture, I was led by my then Chairperson's comments on what Africanisation of the curriculum should imply. In particular Mazibuko (2015) emphasises the adoption of an *"Afro-centric approach to research, teaching and learning, and community engagement"*. This, to him is essential in *"making a positive*

*difference in the lives of individuals and communities."* He suggests that *"this does not mean throwing a few African words such as Ubuntu here and there in the study material. It means the content of what we teach must speak to the cultural experiences of the majority, whose interests the College and University must serve. The curriculum must reflect development in people's own norms and values to determine both economic and political processes and therefore reject the historical structures of domination by others. In other words, we need complete change of mind-sets in the teaching of our subject if we are to contribute meaningfully towards the college and university's vision."* Although the university now has other voices adding to the debate, these ideas entice us to consider some boundaries still unexplored. What is more, the call to transdisciplinarity and interdisciplinarity work here is obvious, because of the way intersectionality is embraced. But let me warn at the outset that I do not see transdisciplinarity and interdisciplinarity as the binary opposites of disciplinarity – instead, I wish to posit them as labels of productive tensions that come about because of critique, complement and supplement.

While my third vignette was highly visible during the composition of this lecture, it has morphed and changed over the past ten months. You will recall how social media erupted over the contrasting anthropomorphised grief over the killing of Cecil, the Zimbabwean lion shot by a Minnesota dentist, versus the plight of nameless migrants in Calais, dehumanised as cockroaches by Sun columnist Katie Hopkins (*The Sun* on 17 April 2015). The migrant crisis, to me, represents *inter alia* a challenge of hermetically-sealed boundaries and hegemonic ones. It brings the "us-versus-them" debate to everyone's attention. At the same time, I remember colleagues struggling to account for moral outrage over the callous treatment of animals on our continent when so much human suffering goes unnoticed. The "us-versus-them" debate deepened in race-based police killings and the tempest that was the US Presidential Electoral Campaign. In our own country, it rears its head in constant local struggles centred on the representation and ascription of our identities and how these control access to resources.

Clearly as social scientists we are in the middle of a storm of unfolding events that problematizes, confounds and dissolves the relationship between received, created and contested knowledge and any particular cultural or intellectual tradition. The migrant crises in its multitudes – be in it Calais or on our country's borders, brings the terrifying reality of territorial boundaries as tools to oppress into sharp focus. Whether this lies in the hands of European settlers sheltered by colonial rule or state officials banishing non-violent, and productive people for no other reason than them being labelled as "aliens". Member states of the Southern African Development Community

(SADC) still struggle to find a suitable regional framework for migration, free movement and social rights in Southern Africa. Human mobility clashes with disaffection amongst unsettled nationals in our country, our continent and elsewhere, making geopolitical boundary crossing a contentious issue linked to security, threat and diasporic modes of belonging.

The fourth and final vignette relates to my recent research endeavours in 2014 and 2015. I spent several months grappling with the possibilities of doing cross-national (boundary-crossing) work between Mexico and South Africa as two powers in the Global South characterised by transitions to democracy. My appointed role in this multi-institution project was to draw important comparisons between Mexico and South Africa in consolidating multicultural democracies as peripheral states against the canvas of neoliberal globalisation.

My Mexican counterpart and I envisaged this project as an assessment of dominant paradigms of globalization, to be argued from the vantage point of the histories of the countries of the South. In doing so, the idea was to foreground a critique of existing hierarchies of power that offer limited options for “emerging” countries and groups. Separated by the Atlantic, anthropological and sociological disciplinary boundaries, different time zones and poor Spanish-English translations, we were able to see two societies with a rich diversity of language and tradition, attempting to forge a national identity from the ashes of economic dispossession that produced complex layers of deprivation.

We could see ourselves reflected in the other’s struggles and successes. We mused about the nascent emergence of many different *imagined communities* inside our countries and outside our borders in their many diasporic varieties. We found our boundary crossings difficult, requiring constant commitments to confront complex problems from different angles. We laughed about our differing interpretations of words like *transformation*, *Indian* and *indigenous*, and at our futile attempts to suggest whose future challenges appeared the gravest. Currently, the Mexicans are leading that race, of course, but on a serious note, it brought home the fact that understanding differences was a far greater challenge than unabashedly making false generalizations.

These four vignettes point to tensions over the nature and significance of boundaries – be they institutional, conceptual or even territorial. Although each of these tensions warrants an extensive analysis, for the purpose of the lecture I distil these to two themes:

1. Boundary crossing as potentially progressive in advancing ideas and actions in many domains of social and intellectual life.
2. Imagining transformed knowledge production that moves across boundaries most deliberately because it sees boundaries as permeable and ready to be crossed.

## **2. CROSSING A BOUNDARY: CONFRONTING HEGEMONIC ENQUIRY**

Many postcolonial theorists have already problematized the power and continued dominance of Western-type intellectual enquiry and concluded that much of our current range of research epistemologies arose from the social history and culture external to the Global South and therefore reflect and reinforce Western social history (Scheurich & Young 1997:4-161; Elabor-Idemudia 2011:142-156).

This boils down to the basic question: how do researchers represent (or how should they represent) the "Other"? It is a weighty responsibility to possess the power to narrate someone else's story – something that should be approached with great circumspection and awareness of the complications involved. Taking my cue from Spivak (2016) and bell hooks, I argue that authentic engagement with the Subaltern means the removal of the researcher-as-expert at the centre of invidious othering in social research. In the words of Hooks (1990), the relationship between the academic and the subaltern can be summarised thus:

*[There is] no need to hear your voice, when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own. Re-writing you, I write myself anew. I am still author, authority. I am still [the] colonizer, the speaking subject, and you are now at the centre of my talk.*

In *Making Development Geography*, Victoria Lawson (2007) suggests that mainstream development discourse is the simple reinstatement of the other or the Subaltern, detached from other social nuances, such as context, community, social class, ethnicity, sexual- and gender-class differences. This, in turn, legitimises social practices that have material effects against which the colonised and formerly colonised groups continue to struggle. Lawson (2007) says that this causes the Subaltern to remain the subject of

development, ignorant of what to do and how to do it. Syed Hussein Alatas (2004) refers to this as "*the captive mind*" – meaning the uncritical imitation of Western research paradigms within scientific intellectual activity, reflecting in that the understanding what Fanon (1967) and Ngugi (1986) refers to as colonisation of the mind.

De Sousa Santos (2012:52-53) asks us to consider the "othering" or "deficit" implicit in Western knowledge production. His ideas that this posits the fallacy that time, development and progress are linear processes, I feel, can be extended to the fallacy of regarding the nation-state as the prime site of developmental inquiry, thereby creating blind spots for new interpretations of power as multi-sited, shifting and able to produce multiple subjectivities. De Sousa Santos refers to other complications such as the fallacy that differences can and should be codified into universally accepted hierarchies. He also references the fallacy of a 'logic of productivity' which posits economic growth as the sole measure for development status and progress.

Regarding this last point, I recently heard a scholar from a sister institution declare at an international conference that collectively owned land and collective action are two major bumps in South Africa's charge to developmental success. Missing from the debate, however, was any insight that institutional boundaries can draw rigid distinctions between members and non-members and that this leads to the exclusion and silencing of those trapped on the outside. Such boundaries operate at all levels: domestic, household, state, community and institutions of learning. Those on the "wrong" side of the socio-cultural-political-economic-spatial-gendered fence would find little in terms of redistributive transformation and social inclusion.

### **3. IMAGINING TRANSFORMED KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION THAT MOVES ACROSS BOUNDARIES**

Beyond De Sousa Santos' (2012) deconstruction of knowledge production, reconstruction is needed to develop alternatives and to reanimate visions of social justice. For research practice, it implies problematizing the following five assumptions (assumptions currently codified into our rigorous research ethics policies and procedures:

- 1) The assumption that informed consent is a once-off negotiation. This assumes that the research site is not to be transformed in the process of data-generation so that the nature of power and consent can or should change.

- 2) The assumption that there is a sharp delineation between the researcher and the researched. This disables foregrounding collaboration and multiple roles evolving in the research encounter over time.
- 3) The assumption that risk assessment is confined to individuals or institutions without considering overall the risk to the community.
- 4) The assumption that institutionally-sanctioned ethics equals non-disturbance as the key to protect against harm. In this regard, transformation would demand that it is unethical to observe pain and poverty yet to remain passive (Manzo & Brightbill 2007:31).
- 5) The assumption that research is the performance of a suite of textual competences by a researcher deemed necessary and desirable for the institution (Halse & Honey 2007:344-345).

In an attempt to offer a counter to these assumptions, I wish to interrogate five issues that might offer alternatives and take us closer to the boundary-crossing I have in mind. These are reciprocity, positionality, self-reflexivity, emancipatory epistemologies and transformative methodologies. Taken together, these ideas can help us reconceptualise research practice within a framework that problematizes the power effects of knowledge-creation and knowledge-seeking.

### **3.1 Reciprocity**

When we hold reciprocity up as a key to boundary crossing, we start from an ontology that embraces socially-constructed, multiple realities fashioned from the diverse connections between human beings, the natural and human-made environment, the living and those long past. We foreground relational accountability to promote respectful representation and a deep regard for the rights of the researched. This opens up the scope of research endeavours to emphasize appreciative inquiry, desire-based perspectives and positive psychology.

Martín-Baró (1994:31) suggests here the "*de-ideologization of everyday experience*" that counteracts the reification of dominant discourses which obscure identity-based domination. If the researcher's or knowledge-producer's ideological positioning is not declared and acknowledged, it would naturalise social injustice. Persistent social inequality is then seen as natural differences in people's abilities or inclination to seize apparent equal opportunities. The link to my argument here is the call to think critically about the origin and power of reciprocity and our responsibility as lecturers and researchers to interrogate and strengthen these sites and potentialities.

Reciprocity assumes multiple voices and permeable, contested boundaries. It concretises this understanding through relational knowledge production that enables the researcher and the researched to cross their respective boundaries creatively. Indistinct, ever-changing boundaries then become wellsprings of intellectual or social advancement.

My own research with HIV-positive women crossing the boundary between healthy to potentially contagious mothers, revealed multiple realities of struggle, strength, resilience and its complex unfolding in the interdependence of individuals, partners, parents, children, health care providers and the state's grant provisions.

### **3.2 Positionality**

Conventionally, positionality questions how the researcher's biography influences data-generation and the representation of the voice of the researched. In this paper, it is also taken to refer to an understanding of the reason for undertaking research. A rationale for research influenced by this then becomes an authentic challenge to deficit thinking. In this regard, call to mind those research proposals serving at our departmental Higher Degrees Committees, in which marginalised groups become the facts or data for manipulation within other people's preconceived notions of social problems (for example teenage pregnancy or welfare dependency).

From the postcolonial perception of positionality, the solution is not to reify such thinking through imposed vulnerability-labels. In the place of such a deficit model is a reconstructed knowledge base that carries hope.

The researcher is challenged by the question: Have I captured the voices of the researched in a way that they will recognise themselves, and would prefer others to know them by? This is imbued with the understanding that empowerment is not about someone else (the researcher or activist) setting free the oppressed, but rather granting the researched epistemic agency in a particular struggle for social justice (Hill Collins 2015).

The call of positionality to enable self-authenticating claims on knowledge production hold very specific implications for the way immediate personal experience is often privileged in hegemonic data-generating strategies (for example, in eliciting responses to survey questionnaires) as opposed to a more situated knowledge production. It

would seem that such a call asks us to critically examine the way in which the current knowledge economy contours research training and production in higher education. The commodification of research means that academics use studies to broker contract renewals, National Research Foundation- (NRF) ratings, promotions, positive student evaluations, lucrative research grants and subsidized outputs. These hold serious implications for the integrity of scholarship in service of social justice. The forces coalescing around the commodification and popularisation of research and research celebrities are equally erode academic authenticity and integrity. Thereby it would obstruct the road-less-travelled for those following behind and, so doing, block the way for a differently imagined future university.

This is why the call for what De Sousa Santos (2012) calls a "*sociology of emergences*" is so appealing to counteract this. He foresees this as enabling pluralist capacities and possibilities charged by visions of "*what ought to be*" and an anticipatory consciousness. This demands the twin processes of, on the one hand, recognising the equal status of indigenous and alternative forms of knowledge and, on the other hand, promoting mutual cooperation between different types of knowledge production.

Some researchers who have incorporated the call to positionality in their work, embraced strategies to place the voice of the researcher and the researched alongside one another via, for example:

- Split-page textual formats that place the words of the researched directly next to the analysis of the researchers (Lather & Smithies 1997)
- Life history methods in development research (Baillie Smith & Jenkins 2016).
- The use of 'I poem' or 'I tale' narratives (Reid 2015; Miles 2016)
- Ethnographies of development practice (Cappellaro 2016; Wanvoeke, Venot, De Fraiture & Zwarteveen 2016).

In development research, these problems of positionality enjoyed prominence in the 1990s in the work of England (1994) and Escobar (1995). They analysed how discourses constructed by Western researchers legitimised the so-called "expert voice" in development. This encouraged the communitarian ethics of so-called participatory methods for development research. It also demanded a rigorous investigation of the interpretative and political limits of research and policy work (Lewis 2015:416). An informed scholarship for our time, I would argue, should work at making the boundaries between data-driven development research and critical development studies permeable via dedicated inter- and transdisciplinary work. I would return to this point later.

Linking back to my third vignette on the contrast between concerns for fauna and flora versus concerns for millions of displaced people crossing various geopolitical boundaries, I wish to pause this to link positionality to further boundary work.

About a decade ago, Africa's "environmental crisis" became fodder for frontline policy debate. Fingers were pointed at governments, farmers and industry. Kevin Cleaver and Gotz Schreiber in the World Bank publication of 1995, dramatically entitled *Reversing the spiral: the population-agriculture-environment nexus in Africa*, painted our continent as caught in a vicious "spiral" of uncontrolled population growth outstripping the ability of institutions and technologies to cope. They announced that deforestation, loss of biodiversity, overgrazing, and soil exhaustion created this cycle that can only be broken by state interventions via expanded national parks and game preserves, buffer zones, taxes, and creating demand for new agricultural technologies (Berry 1997). Here, Berry (1997) points out, the World Bank crossed its own ideological boundaries - throughout the 1980s it "*advocated moving people, resources and economic decisions from the public to the private sector*", although lately they seem to vacillate between this position and for bringing the state back in.

But let me take the notion of positionality down to a lower level of analysis. In my current position, I have to consider my embodied subjectivity vis-à-vis that of my colleagues – most acutely my subjectivity as a permanent, senior academic versus that of a contracted, junior staff member. There is a creeping directive that the temporary/permanent ratios of departments should move from the precarious 30:70 per cent to the 40:60 per cent levels. This is wage repression simply in a different guise, but with the same machinations. Flexible, cheap labour is used as a buffer for internal and external economic shocks. This is, by all accounts, a bad idea.

South Africa, as a so-called middle-income economy is caught between the rock of ultra-low wage economies and the hard place of high productivity economies. Commentators are looking at the effect modest increases in the national minimum wage (NMW) across some selected sectors had in Germany and Malaysia, for example, in decreasing the casualization of work (Bossler & Gerner 2016; Adelzadeh & Alvillar 2016). Others warn that increasing the NMW would lead to job destruction without addressing the plight of the unemployed poor or the working poor. Instead, they advocate for increased wealth taxation and employment guarantee schemes (Seekings 2016).

Taking the point back to my positionality, the national call for social accord in the country means that all institutions, including our own, must look at and reform super-exploitative labour practices. It can do so only by setting up a dedicated task team of scholars open to true transdisciplinarity and an ability to place themselves into the community that is Unisa. This brings me to my next point on self-reflexivity.

### 3.3 Self-reflexivity

Clegg and Slife (2009:24) remind us that every research activity is an exercise in research ethics. Consequently research questions are moral dilemmas demanding decisions that epitomise values. This renders researchers as knowledge brokers, information collectors and meaning producers in charge of legitimising arguments for or against ideas, theories or practices. Marshall (2001) regards robust self-questioning as the core of the kind of self-reflexivity that current research endeavours require. But the notion that appeals to me most is that of Wanda Pillow's (2003; see also Nairn, Munro & Smith 2005) 'uncomfortable reflexivity' that casts all knowledge in tenuous light. Pillow (2003) posits it as the kind of reflexivity that questions positionalities inside and outside the interview space. Those positional boundaries are seen as part of the histories and narratives that we wish to escape.

When we extend this uncomfortable reflexivity to the third pillar of academic enterprise, our community engagement (CE) – or more precisely boundary crossing from academe to the community to achieve "communiversity" (Kinpaisby 2008), it throws up all kinds of issues. In this past year, I was taken aback by the pronouncement by a colleague outside my department – "*you guys in Development Studies should have CE projects rolling from your sleeves.*" If we foreground our uncomfortable reflexivity, we soon find how hard it is to steer clear of donor speak, expert-led activism, careerism in academe that see CE as just another KPA to be calibrated, institutional narratives of "being in service of humanity" and buzzwords such as "capacity building" and "feasible or sustainable projects". The danger of unintentionally reifying boundaries firmly located in the very hegemonic development relations we would want to avoid or critique remains an ever-present danger – all the more when we have projects rolling from our sleeves.

I am aware of critiques that this type of self-reflexivity comes from an exaggerated rational and cognitive reading of people as being extraordinarily capable of seeing themselves from the outside in a pseudo-objective manner. It also largely ignores constraints placed on personal freedom (Bondi 2009). Fortunately Bourdieu's (1977)

conceptualization of reflexivity comes to the rescue here as he sees it as fallible, faltering and co-constructions. In the end, that is the most we can hope for – to create graduates capable of this kind of self-reflexivity. It is in this matter that I agree with some of the commentators who suggest that the current crisis in higher education stems, at least in part, from the fact that, as social sciences, we tend to teach minds, but forget to teach hearts.

So let us now exercise these self-reflexive muscles to interrogate the compelling and vexing issue of free tertiary education. Working according to the mentioned prescripts for self-reflexivity, implies situating these demands within the broader narrative. What questions would this kick up? Surely those that ask us to juxtapose this with the needs for basic education and vocational training; the commodification of higher education and that of competing social needs. Placing this in context, we need to acknowledge that tertiary education in this country has been chronically underfunded and that about half of university revenue is derived from fees. The recent announcement to address the so-called “missing middle” of students not covered by NFSAS loans, and Unisa management foregoing bonuses may go some way to alleviate the problem (Qonde 2016; Govender 2016). However the state budget of tertiary funding is at a low 0,74% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) – for Senegal and Ghana, it is 1.4% and for Cuba 4.5% (Naidoo, Hlatshwayo, Maharajh & Marawu 2016.).

So a balanced positionality is one that avoids the (far too-easy) categorisation of students’ actions as “selfish.” It would ask whether the estimated R 233 billion – that some analysts suggest can be saved through cutting wastefully inflated state procurement spending – cannot meet this shortfall (Mkokeli 2016). This debate should and must continue.

Continuing on the path of self-reflexivity also demands that students’ appeal for transformation and decoloniality should be regarded alongside – but separate from – funding matters. Why do I say so? Because the need for epistemic disobedience, decoupling and reconstruction spawned by the decoloniality debate imply a longer time frame that involves multiple role players. In other words, such changes are probably best achieved over multiple generations to ensure that the discourse becomes part of domestic and public spheres. Curriculum transformation is one small part of that larger transformative project.

Moreover, curriculum transformation should be an incremental, endless task best done calmly, with dialogue, forethought and engagement, away from the hyperbole that

describes student protests as ruptures, seismic moments or the politics of spectacle. Being confronted by the pressures of the moment is, after all, nothing new to academe. It took a massive refugee crisis and Brexit for our European colleagues to be shaken from the slumber of their hegemonic knowledge work and thus they lag behind our continent in their recovery from it. For Unisa to truly “define tomorrow” within our domestic maelstrom, boundary crossing directs that the outputs of our trade must retrospectively fulfil and exceed received pieties, institutional creeds, mission statements, staffing and project funding directives.

### **3.4 Emancipatory epistemologies**

Emancipatory epistemologies deliberately invoke indigenous knowledge. One of the works that epitomises this is that of Virginia Olesen (1975). She tells of her quest to move her scholarship towards one that outlines and ignites passion to challenge injustice. She did so by deliberately foregrounding the needs and distinctive relevance of the research to the researched. She built up her conceptual frameworks from folktales, legends, metaphors, norms and traditions emanating from her research participants.

In this regard, let us consider the need for emancipatory frames for development in our own country today. Thomas Piketty's book on *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* commences with South Africa's Marikana tragedy. He writes “*This episode reminds us, that the question of what share of output should go to wages and what share to profit – in other words how should the income from production be divided between labour and capital? – has always been at the heart of distributional conflict.*” A Gini coefficient of between 0.66 and 0.70 demonstrates the level of consistent inequality in South Africa.

Poverty has in part been alleviated slightly by social grants, but inequality has widened. Intergenerational inequality is growing, rendering the imagined community of freedom and prosperity out of reach for many young South Africans. In this I feel we have some agreement, irrespective of our ideological orientations – namely, that inequality is related to the way in which resources and attributes (wealth, power, status, and prestige) are distributed and the underlying social forces that shape them. The exact causes and permutations of (and the best ways to measure) these social forces and their resultant distributional patterns are matters of important difference.

These matters propel and constrain the attempts by scholars in Development Studies in their formidable challenge to work simultaneously *in* and *against* the very pressures they are trying to understand. And this is what brings us in direct conflict with our understanding of what a university is or should be. Is it to develop patents and innovations for industry? Is it to train beneficent social entrepreneurs or human rights activists or even competent technocrats? Is it to counter global injustices? Is it to improve the stock of ordered knowledge? Is it to be a watchdog against kleptocratic governance? What does it mean when a university houses consulting agencies or innovation labs or policy think tanks?

Each one of these questions warrant a separate analysis, but the basis for answering them lies in an appreciation of Development Studies' ability to cross boundaries. Academic knowledge and training must challenge and transform what is being done and left unattended in the name of development. Engaged academics can do so by explicating and translating ideas, theories and critical thinking skills for their students in an accessible and relevant way. I am excited by the possibility of creating such a space in cross-institutional training in climate change and sustainability where thoughtful, careful scholars – colleagues from my own department and from psychology are at this very moment adding weight to ideas put forward by natural scientists. To me the Southern African Regional Universities Association's (SARUA's) Programme for Climate Change Capacity Development and Curriculum Innovation Network (SCIN) are practical examples of true interdisciplinarity. It is not simply adding scholars from different disciplines and ideological inclinations and stirring the pot – instead it is the mindful, vigilant boundary permeation by animated academic minds having difficult conversations about problematic assumptions and data.s

### **3.5 Transformative methodologies**

In this lecture, I tried to outline the multiple ways in which teaching; learning and research can discursively and physically create, recreate or break down boundaries to exchange and learning. Teaching and practicing transformative methodologies thus mean a deliberate move away from the duty ethics of principle and the utilitarian ethics of consequence and into a relational ethics and an ethics of care. One of the boundaries that presents itself most acutely to a Unisa lecturer is that of the divide between the powerful, well-situated and respected academic voice within an embodied place and that of the student trying to cross the spatial, digital and disembodied distance. The spectre of alienation and dehumanisation versus the potentiality of digital and electronic spaces to overcome it haunts our practices.

I do not argue in favour of a position that portrays the lives of others as being in a state of constant emergency and vulnerability with development providing the uncontentious means or insights for rescue. I mean actively encouraging polemical debate inside, outside and alongside our academic spaces to pursue issues beyond what the piper's paymaster asks for. It is inserting oneself into the broader network of collegiality and collaboration. As a sociologist in training, my disciplinary accent will always be apparent, but I assume personal, intellectual and institutional responsibility for crossing boundaries wherever I encounter them.

Knowledge institutions feel the call to transformation much more acutely than other social formations. Most try and manage their positionalities in relation to their publics and stakeholders via codes of ethics or policies. In the arena of the responsibilities of the public intellectual, codes and policies do not come close to satisfying equivalent expectations. There are different scopes and boundaries for responsibility around public goods inside and between disciplines.

As researchers we are often bound to intellectual property protection that limits complete academic freedom and define the boundaries of individual, collective and idealised public intellectual formations of self. Tensions in and around our disciplinary space create uncertainty over the kinds of topics and the levels of academics to be entrusted with the image of UNISA via the plethora of readily-available social media platforms. Unguarded utterances can bring the institution into disrepute. Emerging researchers can easily fall into the traps of journalist-modulated work. There is the need to balance rich, diverse and equitable chances for all staff to become popularised whilst also maintaining the credibility of knowledge producers. In this, the words of our Chancellor, the Honourable Justice BM Ngoepe (2016), struck home. He pleaded for the university to retain its character as a free space by allowing for responsible, intellectual naughtiness as part of the natural rhythm of creative disruption. The time is right for our institution to have an open conversation about the stakes of knowledge production and intellectual freedom beyond the immediate confines of the academy – on how intellectual resources should be allocated and distributed to maximise value and ways to pursue robust collaboration and community building with other academics.

#### **4. CONCLUSION: REFLECTIONS ON BOUNDARY CROSSING**

Constant negotiation about boundaries is a reality for many people of the Global South today. Our relationship to rights and livelihood is foregrounded by informality – informal housing, informal jobs. This loose relationship to boundaries can no longer simply stay outside academe. As a first step, we need to agree that the crossing of boundaries – be they social, geopolitical, conceptual or disciplinary – are not only acts of desperation or subversion. Instead, seeking occasions for such crossings should become key ingredients of creativity and innovation that demands consciously fighting the deeply ingrained tendency to argue from fixed frames of reference.

Inter- and transdisciplinarity can facilitate, but not assure this. For example, the NRF-rating process might work against this when an apparent lack of focus inside a disciplinary silo leads to rating rejections. In addition, although the NRF process emphasizes collaborative work, the research incentive process punishes authors for doing so. Important cross-boundary work has and will continue to be missed in this way.

In order to deliver on the promises that inter- and transdisciplinarity have to offer, brave decisions would have to be made as to what types of combinations and boundary crossings have the best potential to deepen wisdom, expand vision and enlarge inclusivity. It would mean that we deal with the multi-, inter- and transdisciplinary (MIT) project in at least three possible ways. Firstly, to make it the object of investigation and goal-setting for the institution; secondly to use it as a situated analytical strategy to investigate social issues, institutions and problems and, thirdly, to regard it as a distinctive political ethic and critical praxis.

Internal self-reflection of our own multiple and mobile positionalities as Development Studies scholars coupled with the discipline's already established outward-facing tendencies will lead to inter- and transdisciplinarity and critical border crossings. This means letting go of the temptation to remain in disciplinary silos and merely leaning out of the windows to wave at neighbours. Here, I am reminded of Edward Said's (1982 & 1994) idea of 'travelling theory' - a warning that critical theory can lose its analytical edge as it travels across time, context or even disciplinary boundaries. Said (1994) eventually suggests that such travels may render the very same conceptual apparatus more radical and sharper. Said (1994) claimed an exilic consciousness in his own scholarly border crossing. Similarly it is my opinion that MIT work can facilitate an organic synergy of multiple perspectives if we create the space for it.

In my current academic home, I connected with like-minded colleagues who are comfortable with difference whilst seeking for the resistance points in boundary networks. They see such openness as an important antidote to the kind of overstated intellectual pessimism and fatalism which haunts some academic spaces. An active search for and funding of shifts towards pluriversal projects must become the tools for solidifying such work. Exemplary boundary crossing must receive recognition and further encouragement. In this, let me quote Paulo Freire (1970:72) "*Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other.*"

In analogy to the famous chicken-joke, boundaries should not be crossed simply to get to the other side. Instead, because it is the task of development scholars to renegotiate boundaries between public and private domains, state and civil society, movement of wealth and resources from the haves to the vulnerable, our knowledge-seeking quest is that of elucidating the distinctive dynamics of social transformations in the Global South.

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