6

Climate Boundaries and Border Crossers

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6.1 Introduction: Against the Age of 'Man'

Planetary boundaries were devised to call into action concerted global efforts to preserve 'Earth system stability for the survival of humanity' (Rockström et al. 2009). As discussed in Chapter 1 of this volume, planetary boundaries required identifying and quantifying biophysical targets that should not be surpassed to maintain the Holocene state, a time where 'environmental change occurred naturally, and Earth's regulatory capacity maintained the conditions that enabled human development' (Rockström et al. 2009: 472). The Anthropocene, or 'the age of man', has been described as the most current epoch where man's activities have unsettled the balance of the Holocene and is traced to the beginning of the industrial revolution. Given this clear marker of the Anthropocene that can be traced to a specific space and time, that was inclusive of specific exploitative activities of both humans and the environment (the industrial revolution and consequent global capitalism occurred in tandem with and necessitated colonization and slavery), the question of 'who is the human in the Anthropocene' (Collard & Dempsey 2018) should be central to this formulation, even more so as we seek to move away from global environmental harm. Yet, the most popular solutions to this problem are devised under the same operating frameworks causing the Anthropocene. The threat of looming thresholds shifts important conversations away from ideology and values toward quick technoscientific fixes that fail to question whether these might be the best, most encompassing long-term approaches to resolve global environmental change.

Specifically, in this short chapter, I consider the social, epistemological, and ethical dimensions of 'climate change', one of the nine planetary boundaries, and the challenges and opportunities that the framing of planetary boundary represents. The objective of creating these boundaries was that we do not surpass them and do all we can to help prevent human activities from causing unacceptable

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environmental change. Climate change was one of three boundaries portrayed as already transgressing the 'safe operating space for humanity' when the concept of planetary boundaries was operationalized (the other two transgressors were rate of biodiversity loss, and human interference with the nitrogen cycle). While three was the 'baseline' planetary boundary assessment, others are frequently being reported as crossed (Persson et al. 2022). Given that such clear-cut boundaries and specific thresholds were identified and quantified, my feminist decolonial training interrogates how vague terms such as 'human activities' or 'unacceptable' could be used to advance this concept. Surely, not all 'human activities' are responsible for climate change, and many would disagree what changes may count as acceptable or unacceptable. Yet the conversation of respecting boundaries, even though centred on measurable and quantifiable markers, inevitably brings up moral and ethical questions regarding what constitutes appropriate or desirable human behaviour on this Earth (Schmidt 2022: 1088).

Mary O'Brien, a feminist biologist, stresses the importance of feminist perspectives around issues that concern humanity. For instance, mainstream attempts to address climate change employ a seemingly objective scientific method to figure out how much more we can contaminate, exterminate, abuse, or warm up, to remain on Earth (O'Brien 1993). The way that climate change has been addressed, mostly by scientists from the Global North, has failed to reduce global warming or differential impacts. Often proposed mechanisms to address the crisis, such as carbon markets, only exacerbate social and environmental inequalities and fail to halt the use of fossil fuels (Westholm & Arora-Jonsson 2018). For these reasons, the need to develop and integrate approaches that challenge the structures and mechanisms that created the crisis in the first place is becoming increasingly apparent. Incorporating different visions to combat problems as complex as climate change may seem insurmountable to those who live comfortably in the normative strata of society and who believe in the universal quality of their knowledge. But for many others, knowing and navigating different worlds and ways of knowing has always been a matter of survival. Many lessons can be learned from those who 'cross borders' (Anzaldúa 2003), and who are hybrid and bilingual (Cusicanqui 2012). As Collins (1986) explains, marginalized groups have had to learn to navigate a world full of oppressive systems (patriarchy, capitalism, colonialism) as a way of survival by creating a vision that allows them to see the world more clearly, enabling them to navigate it safely.

In this chapter I offer border crossing as an approach to challenge power relations that produce and legitimize western scientific knowledge and, along with its distribution, the way in which it systematically disadvantages people because of their gender, geography, race, religion, nationality, sexuality, colonial status, and so on. By delineating power relations that transform people into hierarchical

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categories, we can begin to challenge socio-environmental relations that contribute to the climate crisis to cultivate more just and resilient pathways.

6.2 Western (Climate) Science as Objective and Universalizing

While the historical dichotomy of science being objective, impersonal, and masculine, and 'feminine' being all the opposite seems outdated, the majority of women and men still believe that men are better suited for science (Shen 2013). This construction of science naturalizes gender and gender differences within the sciences and explains that many women simply decide to not pursue science. This formulation hides the historical exclusionary practices of science and elucidates that there are power relations within science where gender relations have been central in defining the normative knowledge producer as male, white, and western (Harding 1986; Maynard 1997; Merchant 1990). The ahistorical and apolitical understanding of western science is one of the main mechanisms that allow this way of thinking not only to dominate how we understand the world, but not to question why western scientific practice is still so exclusionary of women and people of colour. To borrow from Grosfoguel (2007), the domination of western science as the only legitimate way to know things means that even if we do see an increase of different faces participating in science, it does not mean that these scientists will automatically challenge oppressive western scientific structures (Gay-Antaki, 2022). On the contrary, members that are welcome in western scientific spaces, such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) or policy spaces such as the Conference of the Parties (COP), will most likely be trained in and promote western epistemology and worldviews even if they inhabit non-western spaces. This is precisely one of the biggest victories of western epistemology, by removing its locus of enunciation – it's western roots – by equating western, masculine, and white to neutral and universal, by claiming objectivity, western science has placed itself as the only legitimate way to know the world (Mignolo 1999).

As western science has claimed to be the universal way to know things, so has western climate change science become the universal way to understand and address global environmental change. Even though a very small stratum of society has the privilege of ahistorical and apolitical understandings of global climate change, this stratum has the most power and voice guiding global efforts to adapt and mitigate climate change. For instance, at the beginning of the global climate talks, during the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) COPs, after the Rio Summit in 1992, industrialized nations clearly recognized their role in producing most of the historical global emissions leading to global warming. Actions forward were to represent this differential

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responsibility where Annex 1 countries (industrialized countries in UN language) would lead the reduction of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions followed later by non-Annex countries (or Global South countries) (Vanhala & Hestbaek 2016). However, this acknowledgement of common but differentiated responsibility around climate change became very contentious and was quickly stifled, even though it remains a central issue at every COP meeting. Instead, mechanisms such as the Talanoa Dialogue, which seek to escape conflict by avoiding holding certain parties accountable, are fostered during the climate talks so that certain parties can be protected from being singled out during the negotiations (Lesniewska & Siegele 2018).

Under an Anthropocene frame, moral and ethical accountability, and thus actions to cut emissions, remain a distant goal as responsibility for emissions becomes blurred and narratives of a sinking ship (meaning we are all in this together) take precedence. Few would argue against urgent global action to address climate change threats; equally important is the everyday reality of the disproportionate impact that certain geographies and populations are already experiencing due to global warming. Yet, global calls to action usually fail to address climate change threats against the most vulnerable and at risk. The prevalent concept of planetary boundaries by Rockström et al. (2009) is a case in point; global environmental problems are described in measurable terms that set thresholds and boundaries trying to delimit how much more we can contaminate, or warm up, and still remain in an inhabitable Earth. The global and urgent framing allows apolitical and ahistorical understandings of the problem and thus solutions that fail to challenge epistemic and power hierarchies that are responsible for ongoing environmental change. For instance, as argued in Gay-Antaki (2022), the agreement to limit global warming by the end of the century to 2° Celsius, one of the most successful treaties to come out of the COP negotiations during Paris in 2015, was proposed by powerful countries consisting of the G8 (the USA, the UK, Germany, etc.) who believed this was a good threshold. Island Nation States have had to fight to make their voices heard since while a 2° Celsius threshold might seem reasonable to the G8, this threshold would put many Island States under the rising sea. As a matter of survival, most actions to adapt and mitigate climate change are already occurring and must take on a very localized response, which most global initiatives fail to do so.

6.3 Western (Climate) Science as Socially and Culturally Embedded

Even though climate change science carries hegemonic power, it is also highly contested as it is a science highly driven by national and international politics of climate change (Demeritt 2001). This positioning of climate science stands in

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sharp contrast with the idea of science as neutral, objective, and universal. This public understanding of science gives way for discrediting both knowledge claims and public policy decisions based upon these claims when the social relations through which climate science is constructed are disclosed (Grasswick 2014). Climate sceptics use the narrative of western hegemonic science to discount the science of climate change; as it is politicized such that science is seen as no longer objective and thus no different from folk, or traditional knowledge. This idealized understanding of science also impedes the practice of science becoming more democratic, gatekeeping what science looks like and who can practice it.

Climate change poses a seemingly insurmountable conundrum, while it will require a concerted global response, its impacts are grounded and embodied; actions are necessarily local, but policies and big technologies are devised and formulated far away from where they are intended to be implemented. Concerted, gradual, global action is necessary, but so is immediate, grounded action. While these debates lead many climate scientists to attempt to convince climate sceptics by throwing more science at them (that will still be embedded in social relations), we would be better off by trying to change public understandings of science and scientific practice. As '[s]cience on its own offers no moral vision, no ethical stance, and no political architecture for delivering the sort of world people desire' (Hulme 2020: 310), it seems key to participate with critical perspectives and historical understandings of the power that science wields in our society. As Hillary Rose, a feminist sociologist, has long argued, to exclude ourselves from spaces where such power is yielded allows the status quo to continue without any criticism or effort to incorporate equity and justice dimensions (Rose 2007 [1994]). Tuana underscores that 'the point, then, is not to eliminate politics or interests from science, but to understand which interests advance knowledge and for whom, and which obstruct knowledge, again for whom' (2013: 18).

An example of social scientists engaging with planetary boundaries is offered by Gupta et al. (2021), who ask that social scientists engage with planetary boundaries to 'ensure transformative, planetary justice' (2021: 3). They propose that adding justice targets to each biophysical target might 'avoid significant (irreversible and existential) harm to humans' (Gupta et al. 2021: 3). Gupta et al. explain that '[e]arth system stability for the survival or even wellbeing of humanity is not necessarily just for all humans and that safe targets may even make things worse for some' (2021: 3). They explain that some of the 'safe' targets may be at odds with social environmental justice and may disproportionately impact the most vulnerable. For instance, 'setting aside large areas … from human use for biodiversity protection, without addressing systemic issues, such as inequality in land tenure and the food consumption habits of the rich, could have potentially devastating impacts on the world's poor and food security' (2021: 3). Gupta et al.

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propose to add a justice perspective within the planetary boundary perspective. While this might speak to those in power, the addition of justice in such a narrow framework limits the work and impact that social scientists might have if they were to truly push the boundaries of the planetary boundary perspective.

6.4 Border Crossing: Feminist Decolonial Approaches and Climate Change

Climate change presents an opportunity for border crossing like no other problem: as a localized and embedded problem, it underscores the embodiment of climate change knowledge and fights against the idea of universal knowledge – a view from nowhere – as it enunciates the location of the knower. This localization stresses the social practice of science and its inseparability from sociopolitical positionings encouraging questioning preconceptions about expertise, legitimacy, and knowledge.

Insights from feminist, queer, Black, and decolonial scholars elucidate the relationship between the domination of nature, women, and people of colour. The bifurcation of nature from culture and the consequent association of white, masculine, and western to culture, and Brown, feminine, and non-western to nature, have sanctioned an ongoing domination of western epistemological practices over all others, claiming to be universal. In other words, western scientific thought pretends to be the only legitimate way to know things about this world. It might be more fruitful to disrupt, challenge, and underscore the narrow operating framework of this vision and the epistemic violence against other ways of knowing. Border crossing as a feminist geographical decolonial approach can offer alternatives to build a truly inclusive and transformative climate change science.

Feminism is a useful approach to diversify our knowledge base as it has long challenged the logic and rational procedures that seek objectivity. Feminists have long worked to highlight gendered power dynamics that have often been invisible in our society. Rather than believing we can be 'objective observers' or as Donna Haraway expressed having 'an all-seeing eye', the introspective approach offered by feminism doubts that there is an external reality that represents the truth waiting to be discovered. Feminism stresses that our sociopolitical position determines what we know and are capable of understanding (Harding 1986). 'Border crossing develops a view from somewhere, that requires constant dialogue to work through tensions, difference, and contradictions to get closer to understanding climate change' (Gay-Antaki 2022: 118). Importantly, underscoring the location of the knower has the potential to flatten knowledge hierarchies and operationalize the knowledge that is needed for the specific problem to be addressed.

In a recent article, I stress the importance of centring feminist analyses at the intersection of race and location to find sustainable pathways to climate change.

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Centring race and location when attempting to better understand and address climate change asks that the solutions we propose do not perpetuate structures that continue to disadvantage and marginalize those who have long been silenced by western science and are particularly vulnerable to climate change. Alongside women of colour and Global South feminists I underscore that one of the most powerful ways to challenge oppressive climate structures is to transform who participates in the climate debate. To centre women of colour and Global South voices as agents of change in the climate debate will demand a complete restructuring of how we prioritize climate knowledge and action. This centring would elucidate just how similar or different well-meaning mainstream concepts aimed to mitigate and adapt to climate change are from those that perpetuate epistemic hierarchies, paternalistic approaches, modernization, and marketization ideologies that continue to exploit those from the periphery even in the struggle to address climate change. Concepts such as planetary boundaries and the Anthropocene would take on different meanings and understandings that would be relatable for most of the world's population. Shouldn't this be one of the driving forces of a universal approach to addressing one of the world's most pressing concerns?

Border crossing will not automatically discard useful knowledge just because of a label. On the contrary, border crossing as a method can expand our epistemological canon; contrary to western science's requirement of an objective observer, border crossing values knowledge that is produced by people who are situated and informed by their sociopolitical position while challenging colonial categories (all people are situated; thus, all knowledge is situated). For many who navigate comfortably in the normative strata of society, shifting the centre might seem like an impossible challenge, or might even perceive such a shift as a threat. For many others, who experience the normative strata as 'minorities' or 'outsiders', knowing and navigating the normative space has been a matter of survival. In the words of Maria Lugones, a feminist decolonial scholar, most of us 'who are outside the mainstream of, for example, the U.S. dominant construction or organization of life are "world travelers" as a matter of necessity and of survival … inhabiting more than one "world" at the same time and "traveling" between "worlds" is part and parcel of our experience and our situation' (Lugones 1987). For this reason, 'I believe that there is much to gain from learning from those who are "world travelers" (Lugones 1987) "border crossers" (Anzaldúa 2002), hybrid and bilingual (Cusicanqui 2012) …. This hybridity grants a vantage point that can better understand the world around us' (Gay-Antaki 2022). Significantly, it is not that there are knowledges that have been ignored and could simply be added into the mix. As Collins (1990) underscores, these knowledges are subjugated and violently repressed. This repression is what has given the 'west'

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its power over non-western epistemologies. Importantly, this silencing or indifference toward other knowledges has limited the western perspective. As Hill-Collins explains, 'it is not that marginalized groups have a privileged perspective, but rather, they have had to learn to navigate many different oppressive systems (here in particular Hill-Collins was referring to black American women) providing a vantage point by which to see the world more clearly and navigate it safely' (Gay-Antaki 2022).

The western assumption that we can have an 'all seeing eye' limits our ability to resolve global environmental problems such as climate change. The complexity and scale of climate change make it impossible to understand it fully from a single standpoint, and, thus, catch-all solutions proposed from this single standpoint, such as planetary boundaries, will be severely limited. It is becoming increasingly clear that 'global' concerted efforts that fail to challenge western epistemological structures are incapable of addressing climate threats against those who are most vulnerable (including more than human species) and might even be making certain populations and geographies more vulnerable. The shift away from addressing 'common but differentiated responsibility' at the beginning of the COPs toward 'loss and damage' currently underscores a major problem of narratives that claim universal qualities but that clearly represent western and Global North priorities.

Feminist objectivity underscores that the spaces that we inhabit influence what we know and what we can know as subjects of knowledge. Under this framework, no solution can be universal or global. Border crossing can foster a constant dialogue among equal but different subjects of knowledge inspiring us to ask different questions, conduct different research, and build different partnerships, producing more complete knowledge about the world around us that will be better equipped to address both the urgent and long-term impacts of climate change. Border crossing challenges the dominant positivist disciplines in understanding anthropogenic climate change that offer 'little or no sense of humans as diverse, interpretive creatures who frequently disagree about values, means and ends' (Castree et al. 2014: 765). Border crossing underscores how climate change science is socially and culturally embedded resulting in many possible meanings and political trajectories.

By collecting diverse and partial views of global climate change into a collective subject position, border crossing challenges the superior vantage point claimed by western science. By underscoring the situated positions of diverse knowers, border crossing seeks to create a vision from somewhere to better work within the limits and contradictions of climate science to elucidate the complex ways in which gendered and racialized assumptions and power relations that discriminate against women and other marginalized groups are produced, sustained, negotiated, and challenged in the IPCC, the climate debate, and science more broadly (Gay-Antaki

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2021). Through border crossing we can better identify and address barriers and opportunities to access and produce quality climate research while fighting against overly narrow conceptions of what is possible and desirable in the fight against climate change.

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