

# Transgressing and Reworking Social Boundaries Through Dance and Music: Introduction

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## **ABSTRACT**

In this introduction article, we present the origins of this Special Issue publication and set out the analytical themes underpinning it. The articles in this collection all focus on music and dance in and from the Global South. The central analytical theme connecting the contributions is that of boundaries and the role of dance and music in transgressing and reworking sets of boundaries. This refers to the boundaries of methodological conventions, the boundaries that are often drawn between what are deemed private and public spheres, the role of gender in relation to boundaries as well the spatial dimension of transgressing and reworking boundaries - including the emplaced aspects of dance and music.

## **KEYWORDS**

Boundaries; Creative practice; Emplacement; Gender; Methodology; Dance; Music

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## SETTING THE STAGE

In recent years, there has been an increased interest among artists, curators, as well as researchers in socially engaged creative practice<sup>1</sup> (e.g. Zebracki et al., 2010; Möller, 2016). Such work is motivated by the idea that through creative practice, social and political issues can be addressed in novel and different ways. The arts, as a medium and embodied practice, is recognised as having the potential to affect, possibly moving to action, people differently (Huijsmans, 2019; Abdel Aziz and Grabska, 2019). Scholars who have examined the role of creative practice in public spaces (e.g. Salzbrunn, 2019; Zebracki et al., 2010; Schmitz, 2015) or in places of political violence (Grabska and Horst, forthcoming; Christophersen, forthcoming) have documented its diverse impacts on the societal norms, values and practices. This work has confirmed that arts have long played “a formative role in the constitution of social life, in the ways in which people take responsibility for creating their own histories, for participating in the management of their own social and political realities” (Heble, 2000, p. 78).

At the same time, Helen Hintjens and Rafiki Ubaldo (2019, p. 279) observe that “the arts – from dance, theater, and cinema to fine art, popular, traditional and classical music, are profoundly rooted in their social, relational, and historical context” and therefore reflect and operate “within the boundaries of social practices, norms and values”. This premise implies the need to be cautious and more nuanced about claims that portray creative practice as either a driver of change, or a force of reproduction (see also: Jackson and Shapiro-Phim, 2008). This does not mean, however, that the creative practice leaves such boundaries unchallenged or intact. Rather, it requires grounding analyses in order to appreciate how creative practice may play a role in the reproduction, the reworking or possibly the transgressing of social boundaries, albeit always in relation to particular issues and social groups, and in particular times, places and conjunctions (Jackson and Shapiro-Phim, 2008; Risch, 2015; Malcomson, 2019).

In this Special Issue, the focus is on the ways that creative practices are used to challenge, rework, and transgress social boundaries in everyday life. This includes rapping about the lived gendered experiences of refugee life and sharing such work beyond the confines of the refugee camp (Hill, this issue), the transgression of gender norms by women dancers in a men dominated hip hop scene (Kurfürst, this issue), women musicians recrafting political and existential belonging to the nation-state through creative musical practice (Grabska and Abdel Aziz, this issue), contemporary dancers’ insistence on imbuing their creative work with meaning in a context in which both the dance genre and expressing social commentary can be seen as crossing boundaries (Huijsmans, this issue). In addition, the interview with the artist Prumsodun Ok shows, amongst other things, the contradictory role of labels. As Prumsodun explains, labels can both highlight how certain genres of arts or artists challenge the boundaries of established practice, while potentially also locking these into new sets of boundaries (Grabska and Huijsmans, this issue).

In focusing on dance and music as social and political activities rooted deeply in social relations and context (see: Sklar, 2000; McRobbie, 1998), we explore how creative practice affects social boundaries and spaces. In this way, we seek to contribute to a body of work analysing the social significance of creative practice

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<sup>1</sup> We use the term ‘creative practice’, rather than the more generic term (creative) arts to emphasise our interest in the practices of, and related to, arts rather than the products of arts.

at the level of everyday social relations and forms of belonging (Ní Mhurchú, 2016; Kitiarsa, 2006; Abebe, 2020). This diverges from studying music and other forms of popular culture as representation (Lewis et al., 2014; Dankoff, 2011). In addition, our focus also implies a slight shift from a key manner in which the arts have entered the broader social science literature, namely in more applied forms of social science research which discusses how the arts, or arts-based interventions, may contribute to predefined social, political or therapeutic objectives (e.g. Uy, 2012; Prentki, 1998; Hintjens and Ubaldo, 2019). Importantly, much of the work coming out of this genre has shown that such arts-based interventions should not be appraised in a linear manner. In fact, the more ethnographic inquiries typically show that the effects of arts-based interventions may well be other than, or beyond the stated objectives (e.g. Lumenta et al., 2017; Magowan, 2019). As such, this literature remains important for our purposes here.

The articles contributing to the Special Issue are all based on research with parts of the creative arts scene in the Global South. This focus is purposeful. Countries like Cambodia, Laos, Sudan, and Vietnam and the refugee camps on the Thai-Myanmar border are often depicted as places of lack, suffering and violence, and in need of outside intervention. In fact, there are some infamous instances in which such one-sided representations have been powerfully reproduced through creative practice too (Lousley, 2014). By focusing on creative practice in and from the South, the Special Issue seeks to contribute to correcting this influential form of representation. It counters it by showcasing the creative force and potential that is also part of the Global South but rarely given the attention it deserves (see also Perullo, 2005). This is especially important because creative works from the Global South remain underrepresented on the worlds' stages and platforms, including digital platforms such as *YouTube* and *Vimeo*.

When creative practice from the Global South enters global stages, the artists' scope to set the terms of such inclusion is often constrained in particular ways (Glick Schiller and Meinhof, 2011, p. 30). The so-called 'world music' genre is illustrative here. Tan (2014, p. 353) describes world music or world beat as "[Global North] marketing terms referring to music which combines the Anglo-American pop music idiom with musical elements from other parts of the world primarily Africa, the Caribbean, and Latin America". The genre has rendered some artists from the Global South cosmopolitan, yet often on the basis of their ethnic or diasporic identity (Glick Schiller and Meinhof, 2011, p. 30). The genre has also been critiqued for reinforcing material and discursive inequalities (Tan, 2014, p. 354). Despite the inequalities in which North-South artistic collaborations and encounters are typically embedded, it should also be acknowledged that for young artists from the Global South, such collaborations are often also essential for their artistic development and may constitute a critical contribution to 'cultural revitalization' in case there is little national level support for this (ibid 2014, pp. 354). Similarly, artists from the Global South might encounter criticisms of authenticity for working with genres that originated from the Global North, such as contemporary dance, hip hop, or punk (Lee and Ferrarese, 2018). This particular form of North-South divide is continuously contested and reworked through the creative practices of the artists that we present here, and this is achieved by engaging with a broader dance and music repertoire.

These broader debates echo through in some of the contributing articles, and especially so in the interview with Prumsodun Ok, but are not our primary concern. Instead, we focus on social contexts that are transitioning out of political repression, by embarking on processes of opening up, and where digital technologies,

especially among young people, play an important role (Huijsmans and Tràn, 2015). Creative practice is not only a traditional or local practice (to the extent it ever was) and neither is the global something that is out there (compare Mamula, 2014). As the contributing articles highlight, it is through creative practice that artists and audiences make sense of, reinterpret, or resist social realities in such fast-changing social contexts. In this way, creative practice can become a space for and act of resistance and resilience (Grabska and Horst, forthcoming; Magowan and Donnan, 2019; Malcomson, 2019) during times of repression and violent conflict.

The Special Issue, as a whole, is inter-disciplinary, bringing into conversation insights from different disciplines. The contributors come from a wide range of disciplinary orientations, including cultural and media studies (Hill), anthropology (Grabska, Abdel Aziz, Kurfürst), geography and development studies (Huijsmans), and arts (Ok). Some of our authors also practice arts and thus engage with their themes in methodologically innovative ways (see also: Wilcock, 2021). Thus, the Special Issue also transgresses the boundaries of the academe as it presents the results of dialogues between researchers and artists and combines perspectives from across the social sciences and humanities.

Several distinct themes run through the articles in this Special Issue. First, all contributors illustrate how the performing arts, and those who practice it, constantly works across the private-public divide, and highlight the role of the body therein. In fact, the analyses put into question the value of treating the private and the public as distinct realms, by showing how artists and their creative work constantly transcend any such divide. This focus gave rise to a second cross-cutting theme, which is gender. Appreciating creative practice as inherently embodied brings into focus how gendered bodies matter in how particular artistic expressions are understood and contested. It also highlights what these artistic expressions accomplish in aesthetic, social, and political terms. Third, the reworking of boundaries relates to spatial boundaries, too, including geo-political ones. While acknowledging that online platforms have transformed the spatiality of many creative practices, the contributing articles make the point that place remains important. Thus, the third theme engages with the question of emplacement in order to fully appreciate the social and political significance of creative practices. The theme of boundaries also speaks to methodological conventions and how these have been reworked and challenged by the contributing authors.

In what follows, we present a short discussion of the origins of this Special Issue publication and the methodological reworkings that the authors propose. We then discuss the three main themes and use these to introduce key insights from the contributing articles.

## **TRANSGRESSING BOUNDARIES METHODOLOGICALLY**

This Special Issue emerged as part of the research project, *Creative Development: Migration and musical mobilities in Sudan and Laos*, (2019-2021) that we, the guest-editors, carried out together with our colleague Cathy Wilcock. As part of this project, we organised an online workshop in January 2021 hosted by the International Institute of Social Studies, Erasmus University, under the theme of ‘Transnational mobilities of music and dance in the Global South: Choreographing belonging, composing identity’. All but one of the contributors to this Special Issue participated in the event.

The contributing papers have all employed qualitative, arts-based, collaborative and participatory methodologies, and approached the practice of research reflexively, placing ethical concerns at the centre. A key challenge that all contributing authors have had to grapple with was the inherent limitation that comes with writing about music and dance as the written word can never (fully) capture the non-representational dimensions that make music and dance what it is (Rowe *et al.*, 2016, p. 14). In an attempt to convey some of this, many of the contributing articles have used the possibility provided by Music and Arts in Action to complement the written work with video material (Huijsmans, this issue), links to music videos (Hill; Kurfürst, this issue), photography (Grabska and Abdel Aziz; Huijsmans, this issue) and screenshots (Hill, this issue).

A second challenge was how to capture the affective and embodied dimension of music and dance, especially if complicated further by the challenges of doing cross-cultural research, and for some of our contributors, under conditions of Covid-19. Collaborative research approaches have gone some way to overcome this challenge. This included enjoying listening to, sharing, talking about, and watching musical and dance performances (see Grabska and Abdel Aziz; Huijsmans, this issue). Dancing together or making or playing music together also goes towards the embodied knowledge creation (see Kurfürst, this issue). However, under the condition of Covid-19 all of this was hard to realise and online interaction, including chatting and sharing about creative practice, emerged as a second-best alternative, as the contribution of Charlotte Hill (this issue) illustrates. As explained in the previous section, by focusing on creative practice in and from the Global South, we actively contest the dominant representations about the Global South and show the richness of creative practice, including in places under conditions of political and social upheavals. Yet, this still leaves the accompanying critique of extractivist research unaddressed. Such research is written in dominant European languages and presented behind paywalls making it inaccessible to some of the very people who have contributed to this production of knowledge. While remaining aware that power relations are always at work, we have reflexively critiqued them in our research practice and written this into the contributing articles. The collaboration in the writing of the article by Grabska and Abdel Aziz through an active engagement and collaboration with women musicians in different phases of the process is one partial way to address some of these challenges. Moreover, this awareness also informed our decision to publish with an open access journal. In addition, *Music and Arts in Action*, was also favoured because it welcomes unconventional contributions such as the interview with the artist Prumsodun Ok (this issue). The interview format, more so than a conventional research article, puts the voice and the ideas of the artist at a similar level to those of the researcher. Hence, this is another way in which we have sought to address the critique of research extractivism.

Finally, one area of contestation that required particular ethical attention was the issue of anonymity. In an era in which research-related practice is increasingly bureaucratized with an emphasis on standardising research practices, such as a contractual approach to informed consent, research ethics checklists and data management procedures (Pels *et al.*, 2018). Under these conditions, it can become difficult to adequately address the ‘situated dilemmas’ (Ferdinand *et al.*, 2007, p. 540) often emerging in ethnographic research and rarely fully anticipated by research ethics protocols. For the articles in this Special Issue, the case in point was the issue of anonymity. In qualitative research it has become good ethical research practice to anonymise research participants in order to protect their identity. This is

part of the ‘do no harm’ principle ethical researchers adhere to. Yet, the protagonists in our research are artists, and as such, public figures. Thus, to keep their anonymity would have often been impossible, or would render their work invisible. Almost all artists featured in this Special Issue expressed their wish to be identifiable.

Charlotte Hill discusses the dilemma this gave rise to in most detail in her contribution based on research with a young woman hip hop artist from Myanmar, residing in a refugee camp on the Thai side of the Myanmar-Thai border. As Hill (this issue, p. 20) explains, quoting Gordon (2019 p. 544), “anonymity can encourage solidarity and greater understanding about women’s experiences and amplify women’s voices, but still maintain women’s safety”. This is especially true in contexts in which researchers work with marginalised populations who are in precarious conditions (Grabska and Clark-Kazak, 2022). However, Hill (this issue, p. 20) also draws on Berkhout (2013), to point out that using pseudonyms can inadvertently silence participants as “*naming* can itself be an act of power” (p. 30). All participating authors paid particular attention to their ethical considerations throughout the research process, including the tensions around anonymity and security. The concepts of ethics of solidarity and care, and the duty of care (Reilly, 2014; Grabska, 2022) were at the heart of these methodological crossings and transgressions.

#### **REWORKING AND (RE)CONNECTING PRIVATE AND PUBLIC SPHERES**

The first theme the articles in this Special Issue engage with is how performing arts and those who practice them transcend the boundaries between the private and the public spheres. The articles demonstrate the value of keeping these two dimensions in the same analytical frame, rather than separating them. In doing so, the Special Issue draws inspiration from feminist researchers who have long emphasised the fluidity between what is deemed private and public (Massey, 1993; Fraser, 1993) and builds on work that has extended this insight to studies of creative practice (*e.g.* Rowe *et al.*, 2016). The contributing articles do so by bringing out the voices of individual artists which illuminates the personal stories of what it means to be and become an artist. These insights are put into dialogue with accounts of relevant broader social dynamics while being careful to not reduce these individual stories to products of histories, politics or social relations.

Dancing and performing music are performative acts that reshape public space as much as the practice is anchored in the individual biographies and aspirations of the performing artists (Shapiro-Phim, 2008; Oakes and Yang, 2020). As such, public performances interact and interconnect with intimate spheres of lives, including family and circuits of friends. For example, despite the increasing use of private indoor spaces for teaching hip hop dance, Sandra Kurfürst’s work with the young hip hop women dancers in Hanoi, Vietnam shows that the street remains of utmost importance for becoming an accomplished dancer. Since the genre has been mainly considered as a men’s world, when young women hip hop dancers practice on the streets, they “make their actions visible and accountable to other women, who might be inspired to follow them” (Kurfürst, this issue, p. 76). In addition, such public performances interact with different gendered regimes of value differently: “Family and kin might assess their lifestyle choice as breaking with prevailing gender norms, whereas their community of peers might appreciate the performance of gender bending as a sign of virtuosity and marker of unique style” (Kurfürst, this issue, p. 69).

The circulation of music and dance is generally accompanied by processes of anchoring and re-anchoring in the various spaces through which they pass (Andrieu

and Olivier, 2017). Creative practice also provides the opportunity to (re)position oneself mentally and symbolically in space (Shapiro-Phim, 2008; Aterianus-Owanga et al., 2019). This becomes especially clear in the interview with Prumsodun Ok (Grabska and Huijsmans, this issue), who connects different geographical locations and forms of belonging not only through his mixed heritage (as Cambodian-American), but also as founder of the first gay dance company in Cambodia. On the other hand, as Grabska and Abdel Aziz (this issue) show, Sudanese women musicians reposition themselves and the discourses about historical women figures in Sudan. Through their creative practice, they made a presence on stage and on the streets amidst the Sudanese revolution of December 2018. These young women used their bodies and their musical lyrics to claim presence in the public sphere that over 30 year of Islamist rule, had been predominantly reserved for men. Through their marked presence in revolution, they emerged as political actors and contributed to debates that recast understandings of political and social belonging.

The blurring of the private and the public is also an important theme in Huijsmans' contribution that focuses on the performance, *kip*, by the Laotian contemporary dancer Noutnapha Soydala. As Huijsmans (this issue) explains, the solo performance, *kip*, appears pregnant with social commentary and the protagonists in the Laotian contemporary dance scene insist on imbuing their work with meaning. Yet, doing so is also a highly delicate matter in the political context of present-day Laos. This dilemma about meaning can be navigated by insisting on the ambiguity, whether the ideas expressed through dance are an expression of one's individual identity or a social commentary. Even so, the article shows that (parts of) audiences may insist on undoing any such ambiguity.

Altogether, the contributing articles show how by reworking and (re)connecting private and public spheres artists often lead non-conforming lives, living in the here and now, and following one's passion intuitively. This echoes a key concluding point in Stephanie Geertman *et al.*'s (2016) research with Hanoi-based skateboarders and traceurs. Evoking Asef Bayat's idea of "the politics of fun", they propose the notion of "life as art" in relation to the skateboarders' and traceurs' "non-confrontational [and non-ideological] tactics to secure space and, simultaneously, to express their interests and identities" (Geertman *et al.*, 2016, p. 609).

### **A GENDERED BODY AND WHETHER IT MATTERS**

The role of the body, a gendered body, is the second central theme running through the Special Issue. It is through the body that artists permeate the different spaces and spheres, including public-private, international borders, and artistic genres. Or rather, bodies become both the connector between the spheres whilst also transforming them and informing them (Meftahi, 2016; Butler, 1999; Washabaugh, 1998). The performing body may also evoke the politics of statehood and nationalism (Chen, 2008) where the gendered performative body in creative practice is central to the discourses of nationalism and state building processes (Meftahi, 2016).

Gender matters because dance and music are embodied practices (see interview with Prumsodun Ok, this issue). Yet, the gendered performing body not only matters in relation to the intimate sphere of everyday life. On stage, the dancing body is public and becomes subject to multiple interpretation that may well differ from the meaning dance holds for dancers themselves. The gender identity of the body makes an important difference here. This relates to both the performativity of

gendered identities (Butler, 1999) and the act of performing dance or music on stage (Magowan and Wrazen, 2013). Meftahi (2016), studying the Iranian dance, referred to such dynamics as biopolitics on stage.

These ideas are illustrated in the contribution by Roy Huijsmans who analyses how Laotian contemporary dancer, Noutnapha Soydala (de)emphasises gender and expresses gender differently, through deeply embodied ways at different moments in the solo performance, *kip*. This is achieved (amongst other things) through movement, dress, and by (not) making eye contact. Sandra Kurfürst, in her contribution, writes about ‘gender bending’ in relation to women hip hop dancers in Hanoi, Vietnam. Drawing on Rydstrøm’s work (2003), Kurfürst (this issue) explains that in the Vietnamese context, feminine and masculine ideals, in part, are performed through bodily conduct in which movements “that take up more physical and social space are considered bodily manifestations of [hegemonic] masculinity” (p. 79). Combining power moves with smooth movements that convey emotions more subtly is considered a “trait of excellence” among the women dancers Kurfürst (this issue, p. 80) worked with. It demonstrates the quality of expressing both feminine and masculine qualities through dance and constitutes a deeply embodied form of gender bending.

Gender and the gendered body are also central for the women musicians in Khartoum, Sudan, as is shown in the contribution by Grabska and Abdel Aziz. Gender informs the history of the emergence of women musicians to the public stage in Sudan. The authors demonstrate how bodies and voices of women were politicised by the state through the control of on-stage presence during the Islamist regime in Sudan. The Public Order Law of 1996 mandated strict rules for women’s dress and public appearance, effectively relegating women artists and their work to the private sphere. During the December 2018 revolution, this state of affairs was challenged by women musicians, some of whom adopted perceived subversive images by having short hair, wearing tight fitting jeans, and short blouses while performing on stage, and sometimes playing instruments that were historically reserved for men. These shifting gender norms and politicised identities are evidence of how women musicians continuously rework social and political boundaries through their creative practice.

The gendered body also matters in Charlotte Hill’s contribution. She argues that, until very recently, in the context of Myanmar, a women’s body in rap music was viewed as transgressing social boundaries. In the words of Pu Dah “only boys could do it [rap], it wasn’t a woman’s job” because it was associated with violent gangs and therefore at odds with the dominant idea of the “good Karen woman” (this issue, p. 25). Women artists like Pu Dah have done much to change this perception but women’s bodies in the hip hop scene continue to be viewed differently compared to men. This becomes especially clear in Pu Dah’s reflection on being a single mother rap artist: “if I can be an inspiration to women in the camp, I just wanna inspire them to be rappers, but not like me. I’m a single mama. I’m independent, but it isn’t really good” (this issue, p. 26). For Prumsodun Ok, in contrast, the gendered body does nothing in particular to Khmer classical dance even though most roles in this dance genre have historically been performed by women dancers. For him, the body is an expression of beauty which conveys the spiritual core of Khmer classical dance. As he puts it, dance, including a precisely codified genre like Khmer classical dance, “is always evolving” (Grabska and Huijsmans, this issue, p. 89). Yet, he insists that if executed with precision and achieving perfection, its spiritual core stays timeless, vibrant, alive and resilient regardless of the gendered bodies that carry it. However, by establishing



Cambodia's first gay dance company, Prumsodun acknowledges that he has marked "a clear moment in time and space for LGBTQ people in this tradition [Khmer classical dance] and within Cambodian society" (Grabska and Huijsmans, this issue, p. 91).

The fluidity between the private and public becomes politically significant when we recognise artists' bodies as gendered, racialised and aged, as several of the contributing papers show. It is through the body that artists express their work, while the public perception of that work is registered through the way in which this performing body is gendered. Bodies, in this sense, transform as much as they inform the social meaning of creative practice and the social (im)possibilities of transformative processes that happen through and in the body.

### **EMPLACEMENT AND THE SPATIALITY OF BOUNDARIES**

Through their creative practice, artists often draw on traditions rooted in particular histories and places while their work may speak to certain time and space specific issues. While it is true that music and dance, as genres, travel (Kuhlke and Pine, 2015), compared to visual arts such as fine art, film, cartoon and photography, they are performed and therefore, as a practice, necessarily emplaced. It is through emplacement that the private and public spheres get intertwined. Individual artists may situate themselves and their work in particular social contexts (see Grabska and Abdel Aziz, this issue), commenters and audiences may insist on emplacing creative practice differently as part of their meaning making (see Huijsmans, this issue), and the act of performing arts in a certain time and place may also imbue it with a specific meaning that the very same creative practice might not acquire in another place and time (see Kurfürst, this issue).

At the same time, music and dance must also be recognised as shaped by and, at times produced, through the translocal or even global movement of people and ideas (Barendregt, 2014; Glick Schiller and Meinhof, 2011; Neveu Kringelbach and Skinner, 2012; Andrieu and Olivier, 2017). However, these mobilities are unequally distributed (Aterianus-Owanga et al., 2019, p. 10). This is especially true for artists and arts from the Global South who are often dependent on sponsors and invitations to access international stages (see Huijsmans, this issue). This further reflects the global power geometry (Massey, 1993) alluded to above in the discussion about world music. Yet, this state of affairs also transpires from seemingly very different instances. For example, Brent Luvaas coins the term "dislocated sounds"; (2009); music that is not place specific but could come from anywhere and be made by anyone. Referring to the internationally acclaimed Indonesian indie band, *Mocca*, Luvaas concludes that their "sugary, English language songs" may reinforce the hegemony of a hegemonic globalised form of aesthetic, but notes that at the same time for those involved in the Indonesian indie scene it amounts to "deterritorializing the self through dislocated sounds" which is experienced as "an act of liberation" (*ibid*, p. 272). For each of the artists presented in this issue, the materiality of place, and time influenced their creative practice. This is especially so given the political, ethnic and gender identities that emerge through performance in the diverse locations.

The spatial dimension of boundaries and how these may be reworked through creative practice (see Sieveking and Andrieu, 2019) is perhaps most powerfully illustrated in Charlotte Hill's contribution based on research with Myanmar artist Pu Dah. Pu Dah uses rap to share about her experience as a young woman and single mother living in protracted displacement in Mae La refugee camp on the Thai-Myanmar border. Hill argues that "media and new media communication practices

afford women, such as Pu Dah [...] the potential to communicate and have a presence beyond the camp gates [...] [which] challenges the image of the isolated refugee and allows a space for separated communities to reconnect.” (Hill, this issue, p. 27). Hill’s contribution shows that for artists like Pu Dah, the genre of rap and the possibilities of digital technologies afford the reworking the spatial liminality of the status of refugee that confines her physically within the camp boundaries. In addition, Hill shows how Pu Dah’s creative work, uploaded from within the confines of the refugee camp, is meaningful for Myanmar women living elsewhere in Thailand and beyond. Another striking example of how spatial boundaries are reworked in and through creative practice in Hill’s contribution is the song, *Boo*, and the accompanying music video which Pu Dah recorded together with Eazy Poe, a fellow (US based) artist she met through Facebook but never in-person (Hill, this issue, p. 27).

For young people especially, emplacement not only refers to physical sites but also to online spaces (Huijsmans and Trần, 2015). So, the gender bending referred to above in Kurfürst’s research with Vietnamese women hip hop dancers is not only evident at night-time on Hanoi’s streets and during battles performed at indoor venues, it can also be recognised in online space. In this regard, Kurfürst refers to the ‘#depzai’, a hashtag commonly used in combination with photos of an all-women hip hop Vietnamese crew dressed in hip hop apparel. Kurfürst (this issue, p. 81) explains that #depzai, queers both the Vietnamese word for ‘handsome’, *đẹp trai*, (and solely used in relation to men) and, (*xinh*) *đẹp*, ‘pretty’ (used in relation to women). In further queering, it uses the letter ‘z’, which Kurfürst (this issue) notes “is not part of the Vietnamese alphabet” and is therefore formally speaking “non-existent” (p. 81).

Place is also evidently important for Promsodun Ok. He was born and raised in the USA, yet of Khmer heritage. For this reason, he explained, “I used to feel like I was being ripped and torn apart. That I was never Khmer enough, and that I was never American enough” (Grabska and Huijsmans, this issue, p. 88). It was his love for dance that led him to move to Cambodia. Yet, while working with Cambodian dancers on Khmer classical dance in Cambodia is important, for him he very much avoids emplacing himself solely in either the USA or Cambodian context. As Promsodun explains “I found that being both Khmer and American, I have this rich foundation of knowledge of language, of history and culture that so many other people do not have access to. And I’m going to use that. Instead of placing myself within a spectrum, I’m going to place that spectrum inside of me. And whenever I need the right word or image or colour or sensation or expression, I have the ability to pull it out and use it whenever I want” (Grabska and Huijsmans, this issue, p. 88).

In conclusion, by focusing on the role of creative practice in and from the Global South in transgressing and reworking various kinds of boundaries we hope we have contributed to analysing the social significance of creative practice. We have done so, not so much by concentrating on art products and their discursive significance, (Lewis *et al.*, 2014) but rather by studying the practices that constitute certain art forms and are related to them. This allowed us to bridge the analytical gap that is often there between creative practice and the everyday, which is important for apprehending more fully the social significance of creative practice.

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### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Funding obtained through the third round of the Research Incentive Facility of the International Institute of Social Studies, ISS, (Erasmus University), as well as the Research Council of Norway is gratefully acknowledged. Most of the papers in this Special Issue were first presented as part of the ISS hosted online workshop 'Transnational Mobilities of Music and Dance in the Global South: Choreographing belonging, composing identity' (12-13 January 2021). The discussions during this workshop have helped shape the editorial introduction. We also acknowledge the important role the fourteen anonymous reviewers have played in improving the quality of the articles comprising this Special Issue.

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