

**Commencement speech for University of Miami:
“Connecting the dots in a dangerous fragmented world.”**

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Gillian Tett

Hello to everyone who is here today. I am delighted to be here today and very honored indeed to be given this degree. Miami is one of my favorite cities in America, if not the world, not just because of the beautiful weather and beach, but because it epitomizes some of the best aspects of our modern world - a world of connections, collisions, exchanges. Miami is a crossroads, between North and South, East and West, and that makes it is a fantastic place to earn a degree. So I am thrilled with this honor and would like to say a big congratulations to all the graduates here today who have now received their honors after years of hard work - and also to the parents, family members, friends and anyone else who has supported them. Well done!

Twenty seven years ago, I was standing in the same spot as you at a graduate ceremony - albeit not anywhere quite as sunny and trendy, but in cold, damp and grey Britain (and if you never never seen what damp and grey means, you haven't experienced an English summer.) To be precise, in 1989 I graduated from Cambridge University with a BA in anthropology. And, like some of you, as I got my degree I was wondering what on earth I was going to do with my life.

I had spent most of college thinking I wanted to work in the theatre as a set designer. But then I became interested in journalism and applied for jobs there - but got turned down everywhere. I didn't want to work in business and economics, since that didn't seem like the thing that anthropologists did. I wasn't interested in law (although my parents were keen that I should be!) So, eventually, I enrolled for graduate work and went off to a place called Soviet Tajikistan to do my research there, thinking that in the future I might use that to work in a university or aid work; I liked the idea of saving the world.

But nothing quite went to plan. Just after I finished my research, the Soviet Union broke up, and Tajikistan plunged into war. So, almost by accident, I started writing news dispatches - and then found that there *was* a route to get into journalism after all, as the junior reporter-cum-grunt who got sent off at horrible times of night to nasty places to cover small wars, and all the jobs that senior reporters didn't like. So I jumped in, worked hard as a freelancer - and decided that my new goal in life was to become Martha Gellhorn or Christiane Amanpour..

But then my life plan veered off track again. The FT told me that if I wanted to get a job with them I had to know more about finance - no surprise there, perhaps! - so they summoned me to London and put me to work on the foreign exchange column of the FT. I went from dodging bombs to writing about dollar bonds. And my first reaction was: "Yikes! Get me out of here!" I didn't know much about the dollar; or yen or stock market; didn't know anything about total factor productivity or economics jargon. And I didn't think I wanted to. After all, college - as you know - can often be tribal. Anthropologists in one corner, economists in another. And since I was an anthropologist I always thought that people who studied economics were boring, boring, boring. So I told myself: "I will do this for a bit, tick that box - and then go and do something more important and exciting. Like trying to be Christiane Amanpour."

But then I suddenly realized something important - my reactions were mostly driven by prejudice - and fear. I thought that I didn't like economics because I didn't understand it. I was put off by all the jargon. So, I decided to set about trying to teach myself everything about economics. And I realized three key things. Firstly, if you want to understand how the world works, you need to understand how money moves; it's like the lifeblood of the global body. You cannot just explain the world by looking at culture or politics, as many social scientists try to do. Secondly, I realized that you cannot explain the world *just* by looking at money alone; if you look at economies purely through the prism of economics, you are as limited as someone who ignores it. Somehow you need to use culture, politics, business - and economics - to paint a picture of the world, and see how it really works.

But that is not easy because the way that many of us are trained to think is very tribal. Economists are economists and stay in their economics box; anthropologists are anthropologists. As a result somebody like me arrives at the FT saying "yikes, I am not sure I care much about markets" - with all that prejudice and fear. And vice versa - I daresay those of you who are working in business today have never even spoken to an anthropologist; or tried to get inside their minds.

But the third thing I realized was that we don't need to be so tribal; not should be be prejudiced because of fear. More specifically, nobody should ever assume that cannot do something or cannot learn something because jargon. Here in Miami, we are in a city which is adept at juggling languages - many of you speak Spanish and English, or other languages too. And if you can learn more than one language you can learn different disciplines and specialist jargons. All it requires is an open spirit, and a willingness to jump across borders.

So I thought: "If I can find a way to get over my own tribalism, to bridge those two fields - economics and culture - maybe I can offer something new!" Maybe I can put markets into a social context - and vice versa. So that is what I set out to do. And it's what I have done in the last two decades as a journalist. And insofar as I have had success, this has been the key to my success - it is what has helped me to predict the financial crisis, or see what was happening in Japan. Being a good journalist is all about trying to understand the world from multiple perspectives. And now that I am lucky enough to be in a leadership role at the Financial Times I am proud to say that this idea of breaking boundaries lies at the heart of our newsgroup. Our new corporate slogan is "Make the Right Connections".

Now nobody should pretend that it is easy to jump across boundaries in this way. We live in a world where we have the illusion that we are all hyper-connected - due to our cell phones, planes, internet and so on. Living in Miami it is easy to feel that you are at a crossroads, as people flood in and out from around the world. But I promise you that from the moment you graduate and walk out of this stadium, you won't just be hyperconnected, but will face enormous pressure to be fragmented too - and in subtle way you may not even notice. Yes, we have access to the internet on our phones - but we often read news that we customize, in a way that makes us politically polarized. Yes, we can connect to anyone around the world - but we tend to huddle on social media in cyber tribes. It is no surprise that we live in a very polarized political world today. No, I am not going to talk about Donald Trump or Bernie Sanders, but the key point is this: when you listen to the debate today, whatever side of the political fence you sit on, you see a world that is very fragmented.

But there is fragmentation in careers too. If you are lucky enough to find a job, and it is at a big company or government bureaucracy, you will probably be put into a department or specialist box. If you have a professional skills, you will be with people like you. At almost every stage of your career you will be told to specialize, to streamline, to focus and to stay in whatever career box you have chosen. We live in a world that is all about efficiency, focus, streamlining. And in that world it is very hard to jump out of the box; redefine the boxes, or even notice how rigid the boundaries are. And that is understandable, in some senses. We are all hardwired to stick with people we know, who are like us. Anthropologists find it easier to hang out with other anthropologists - rather than work out what those weird economists do and think. And vice versa.

But if I have one clear message to you today it is that you cannot afford to be tribal today. Tribalism is deadly for society as a whole. It is deadly for politics. It is deadly for institutions. But it can also be deadly for individuals; it makes us narrow, one-dimensional. It gives us tunnel vision. It makes us blind to risks *and* opportunities.

And it is that last point which is really crucial, as you stand here today; for the good news about this pressure to be tribal is that if you are willing to jump across boundaries, think outside your tribe, you can unleash innovation and creativity. One person's silo is another person's opportunity; if one person has tunnel vision that creates a chance for someone else to disrupt, to reinvent, to rethink and re-connect in all types of creative ways. That has been the key to success for me - mixing up anthropology and economics. It has been the key for many successful people I know.

But if you want an even more compelling example of why it pays to mix it up, and jump across borders, to look at a man many of you grew up to worship - Steve Jobs. Back in 2005 the mighty Jobs gave the commencement speech at Stanford where he told the students there that his success did *not* lie in the fact that he was a nerd, with brilliant IT skills. Nor was it his business acumen. Instead, the reason he designed those brilliant Apple products so beautifully was that when he was student, years before, he happened to wander into a Japanese calligraphy class

and get hooked. That is not an obvious thing to do if you are doing to be a tech entrepreneur; it was not part of an efficient or focused or stream-lined career plan. But years later, when he designed his Apple products, he suddenly - unexpectedly - reached into his past and used his knowledge of calligraphy to design his apple products. He “made the right connections” to be creative - as the FT slogan might say. Or as Jobs said in Stanford: “You cannot connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect looking back. So you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future.”

So my message is this: get out into the world and start creating and collecting dots - by that I mean go and embrace experiences, knowledge and specialist skills that will excite you - and hopefully even pay the bills. But don't just collect one set of dots, or become tribal without even noticing; if you get a chance to travel, take it. If you get a chance to try a new professional field, or company, grab. If you get a chance to learn a whole new skills or discipline, grab that too - learning doesn't stop today. If you get a chance to change the news source you read, connect with new cyber tribes on social media, change your point out view - grab it. Above all get out there are connect the dots - and, as Jobs said, trust they will connect.

And never forget to say a huge “thank you” to whoever gave you the dots of your life - starting with whoever is here to support you today. Go forth and connect - and good luck.