

New Area Studies, Scientific Communities and Knowledge Production

Current Debates

Boike Rehbein

We can roughly distinguish three phases in the debates about globalisation. The first phase was characterised by optimism related to the developments around 1989. Globalisation was a relatively new term and used in the singular. The second phase was more pessimistic due to the events of 2001 and saw the subsequent return to reinforced border controls and nationalism. In many parts of the world, this phase was associated with a backlash against neoliberalism. The most recent phase, dating from around 2015, begins to accept the return of the multicentric world and its complexities, especially with the confrontation between mass migration and political correctness on the one hand and right-wing populism on the other. The rise of China and the existence of different capitalisms have become facts. We have moved from the flat world via the clash of civilizations to the rugged, uneven world.

Connected to each phase is a key epistemological configuration. The first phase saw the triumph of universalism (Fukuyama 1989) and its critique by post- and decolonial approaches (Mignolo 2000). The second phase was characterised by a return to ethnocentrism and particularly Eurocentrism. The current phase seems to imply a reassertion of local and regional traditions against Western universalism and Eurocentrism without denying global integration and the multicentric world (cf. Hopkins 2002). This paper mainly deals with this last tendency and argues that it reflects the possibility of reinventing Area Studies as well as epistemology.

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Reconfiguring Epistemologies

Whereas post- and decolonial approaches retain the framework of the colonial structure of global North versus global South, recent research has focused on the North in the South and the South in the North (e.g. Davis 2005). Few authors seem to deny that the structure of the contemporary world is an heir of the colonial world and partly reproduces it. However, poverty and exclusion in the global North have received as much attention as wealth accumulation in the dominant classes of China, India or the Arab countries (Vollmann 2008, Standing 2011, Goodman / Robison 1996). The world still has a colonial structure but each nation state has its own inequalities and the rich and the dominant can be found in all corners of the world.

The debate between nationalists and globalists or xenophobia and political correctness has put the focus on the continuing relevance of the nation state as the fundamental unit of socio-political organisation as well as on local and regional peculiarities. The binary opposition of global versus national, however, is clearly misguided. Both levels exist and both are relevant. Research and political practice must be about their relation. The exclusive focus on one level is misleading and actually impossible since they presuppose each other.

Against the background of deglobalisation, nationalism and ethnocentrism, epistemology is beginning to turn away from the struggle between universalism and relativism toward a layered and contextual interpretation of philosophy. Many philosophers from the global South no longer seem interested in convincing either “their” people of universal Western truths or Westerners of the validity of “their” national traditions of thought. They argue on a middle level without locking themselves into the box of the nation state.

Farid Alatas (2001) has proposed a multi-layered approach, which I have suggested adapting (Rehbein 2013). Based on Alatas’s ideas, I distinguish between different layers of research in the social sciences, including Area Studies: the re-discovery of local sources in local languages, the inclusion of local perspectives and perceptions, the development of new theories based on local empirical work, a universalisation of local theories, and the development of new epistemologies and initiatives for a new academic division of labour.

In the past centuries, work in the social sciences and humanities has been conducted exclusively from a European perspective. If non-European societies were at all considered, they were described by Europeans using European languages and then explained or interpreted along the lines of European theories. The universal validity of these theories was assumed without further consideration. The first step in a revision of this approach – or the first layer of a new epistemology – would consist in identifying those local sources previously ignored or translated by Europeans and interpreting them in the local lan-

guages. This approach does not necessarily imply European theory as a basis for interpretation and can be carried out in the respective local language.

The local perspectives, until recently excluded by the assumptions of European theories, would form the next layer. As a basic principle, the perceptions and perspectives of local authors and, more broadly, local interpretations should be treated as significant. This would also form the foundation of a hermeneutical process of understanding on the part of the interpreter with regards to her or his local tradition. The interpreter would usually be part of this tradition or at least intimately familiar with it.

The third layer would consist in the development of local theories. Such theories would incorporate local perspectives and sources and would formulate valid reflections on these. The definition of the object and the formulation of the theory would be directly connected to the local society and its linguistic view of the world, as is the case with European scholarship. Thus far, theories have been developed only in European languages, and it is taken for granted that a debate on theories, today, takes place in English. This framework can be amended by other languages and traditions.

With the fourth layer, the locally generated theories could be applied to other regions much as European theories have been applied to the rest of the world. The point of this would be to check whether or not a non-European theory, developed using a non-European language on the basis of non-European empiricism, could be put to use in other contexts. If not, such a theory could either be adjusted or simply confined to the local context from which it arose.

The fifth layer would be the formulation of a non-European philosophy of science. This could, for example, entail an investigation of whether science, against the backdrop of non-European experience, should be framed and practiced differently. We might find that the basic assumptions that we cling to regarding the construction and verification of scientific objectives or our general criteria cannot be readily applied to other social contexts. After all, it could well be the case that our conception of science is entirely mistaken.

Science is inherently social, and therefore its organisation plays an important role that must also be analysed from the perspective of the philosophy of science. The global North has managed to retain its hegemony in the current global division of scientific work. In a multicentric world, alternative forms of organisation will be conceptualised and practiced. These alternative forms could compose the sixth layer of a revision of European science. The next section will address this issue in more detail.

The rise of the Global South makes it possible for hitherto unknown matters to be researched, and it allows us to draw on novel circumstances in the formation of new social theories. It also enables us to re-invent epistemology so that the blind spots of conventional concepts, theories and philosophies of

science as exclusively European products become visible. An avenue for communication that brings together heterogeneous perspectives and societies, placing them on an equal footing and leading to a discussion, is finally imaginable. The diversity of theories would no doubt increase, but such a diversity of paradigms should not be interpreted as a lack of rigour but should rather be viewed as a necessary step towards a truly global social science.

Reconfiguring Area Studies

If we take the layered approach seriously, Area Studies can become the key arena in which this epistemology plays out. Research has to be comparative, multicentric and layered with a global horizon. This implies local (or regional) and translocal (or transregional) as well as global knowledge. It will not be sufficient to apply a particular disciplinary approach, if it refers only to one nation state and is not informed by local, translocal and global knowledge. This is true for research in a particular discipline, such as sociology or anthropology, as well as for an area specialist with a particular disciplinary background, such as an Indologist or a linguist of Hamitic languages.

The two interesting questions in this regard concern the role of the area. Firstly, can Area Studies be invented as a new discipline that applies multicentric epistemology as a layered approach? This would mean to re-invent Area Studies as a discipline that pursues research on different levels of area in a comparative way with a global horizon. Secondly, can all areas contribute to this endeavour in a meaningful way? This question points to the fact that the return of the multicentric world has been generally accepted and no longer allows for a return to ethnocentrism.

Area studies has become increasingly comparative and translocal (McVey 1998: 51). On the one hand, few phenomena are restricted to one limited, isolated location. Migration, the circulation of goods and ideas, political influences from other parts of the world, digital networks and other factors have become so commonplace that basically every phenomenon in the social world points to other phenomena anchored in other places. Classic fieldwork in a presumably isolated village and its description are no longer the prevalent form of academic discourse in anthropology and socially oriented Area Studies. Neither is the description of a language or a text as an autonomous phenomenon without any allusion to other languages in philology or humanities-oriented Area Studies.

On the other hand, the detached description of an isolated phenomenon as a unique reality no longer holds much value. We have a large corpus of such descriptions and comparative work has revealed many phenomena as not all that unique, many villages as not all that isolated and many practices as not all that authentic. Comparison is absolutely necessary. However, translocal or

transregional work traces linkages and movements across time and space. This adds a new dimension to comparative work, since the genesis and the embeddedness of a phenomenon become visible from the start.

In addition to a translocal perspective and comparison, Area Studies have to be inter-, trans- or multidisciplinary (Osterhammel 2001: 40). This has been the case to some degree ever since the emergence of the field. It is, however, difficult to put into practice, as most area specialists have a particular disciplinary background. This problem has been tackled by the cooperation of area specialists from different disciplines. Whenever such a cooperation works, it is of great value. Cooperation continues to be a key procedure in the Area Studies.

The problem in cooperative research has been the balance between translation and rigidity. An inter- or multidisciplinary approach needs to find a language that can be understood by all participants. Transdisciplinary research, which tries to dissolve the boundaries between disciplines, was proposed as a solution. But the fluidity comes at a cost. Theoretical traditions and established methodologies can no longer be applied rigidly and methodology no longer strictly matches the theoretical framework.

At the same time, trans-, inter- and multidisciplinary cooperation allow for a discussion about theoretical and methodological traditions in the disciplines. Hidden assumptions can be made visible, reflected upon and corrected or improved. This feeds directly into the multicentric epistemology discussed in the previous section, especially the final layer, namely a new division of academic labour. This epistemology is about learning with and from other perspectives. These perspectives are based on diverse languages, objects, academic traditions and theories. This is not so much a cooperation within a university or a discipline but mainly a cooperation across areas or a transregional cooperation.

At this point, the re-invention of Area Studies comes into play. A new Area Studies needs to incorporate a multicentric epistemology, which could define it as an autonomous discipline. While cooperation across boundaries is the organisational form of this discipline, a multicentric epistemology is its defining characteristic and a layered concept of area its empirical object.

A new Area Studies would have to proceed very much along Alatas's lines, as outlined in the previous paragraphs. A scholar has to learn something about other societies and from these societies. This knowledge alters his or her concepts, theories and explanations while adding to the stock of empirical knowledge. I call the resulting knowledge a "configuration" (Rehbein 2013). The necessity to think configurationally becomes evident when we start learning about entirely new and different societies. We tend to explain the world from our desk. When we leave our desk, we may discover very different realities. The necessity and possibility of looking at society in a non-Eurocentric way emerges when we look at non-European societies.

The multicentric world offers a singular opportunity for learning. If societies actually differ fundamentally from each other, it becomes possible to transcend one's own society. In Hans-Georg Gadamer's (1960) hermeneutics, one can merely interpret what was already given because there is only one tradition to interpret – namely, the European tradition. In a post-Eurocentric world, however, one can actually learn something new, something that has not been known before. According to Gadamer, the social sciences and humanities need to include understanding – in a double sense. First, one has to understand the object and second, one has to seek an understanding with others. To understand the object not only implies understanding its meaning but also understanding the other's perspective as well. This type of understanding has to be complemented by a form of mutual understanding. Only on this basis are we in a position to interpret and to explain another's actions appropriately.

Without the actual effort of understanding, any mutual understanding could imply symbolic violence. For this reason, one has to know why someone agrees in the process of mutual understanding. This is only possible on the basis of an effort to understand the other person's view of the world. As forms of life differ greatly in the world, perspectives, standards and actions diverge to a substantial degree as well. Perspectives have to be organised as a configuration with varying relations between elements. Any understanding opens up a new perspective and thereby new aspects of reality, even though any configuration remains limited in its entirety.

A configuration is relative to the respective level of area (such as local, regional, national, translocal, transregional or global) and to the respective epistemological level (according to the preceding section). However, it is only a configuration if different perspectives have been included. This calls for cooperation, as proposed above. While any social science ultimately constructs configurations, the defining characteristics of new Area Studies are the object, namely an area, and the epistemological approach of a layered procedure.

It has become necessary to acknowledge the interaction between globalisation and localisation. The theoretical concepts proposed for studying this relation, such as "glocalization" (Robertson 1995), "framegration" (Rosenau 2003) or "hybridization" (Nederveen Pieterse 2005), remain too abstract and universalist to deal with a reality that is characterised by a diversity of local, regional and national responses to globalisation. Most theories of globalisation as well as some political tendencies remain disinterested in local dynamics, which has led to a strong backlash not only against globalism but also against liberalism.

Thongchai Winichakul (2003) has proposed focusing on interstices, where globalisation and local phenomena meet directly and translational processes become easily visible. We have arrived at a time when all phenomena seem to imply interstices. The most local object has to be understood with reference to

the global, while any tendency of globalisation requires localisation. This combination requires a particular epistemology, which, in turn, could potentially define a new discipline, namely a new Area Studies.

Some Thoughts on Reconfiguring Epistemology: Location, Authenticity and Value

Ahsan Kamal

Boike Rehbein identifies an opportunity to reconfigure epistemology, afforded by the current world-historical conjunction – in particular, the rise of right-wing populist governments and the tension between globalist universalism and nationalist particularism. Postcolonial and decolonial scholars have been questioning the narrowness of hegemonic theory and epistemology for a long time, with a firm foothold in the Northern Academy for about three decades now. Arif Dirlik calls this the conquest of the Northern Academy by the “Third World” intellectuals (Dirlik 2002: 22). But Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (2012) doubts that the Academy can be decolonised from within – not by scholars who left the *qasba* and are residing in the “European Quarters”.¹ So how do we go about the task of decolonising knowledge practices? Rehbein presents a collaborative, comparative programme and calls for a turn to the local, as a generative source of universal social theories. Decolonising Area Studies requires shunning the singular, universalist and Eurocentric vision of social knowledge in favour of plural, multicentric and cosmopolitan visions.

Rehbein extends Farid Alatas’s call (2001) for work in local languages and outlines a multi-stage, multi-level programme. New epistemologies can be developed by working in local languages, recovering local sources, interpreting through local lenses and subsequently developing and testing Southern theories. These theories and concepts can be deployed elsewhere, exploring the potential of universalisation of Southern theorising. In the end, we aim for a multi-

1 The term *qasba* in South Asia refers to a small town, a centrepiece of sedentary settlements in the pre-colonial era. The term is also used for an inner city residential area, or the *medina*. My use of the term *qasba* in contrast with the “European Quarters” alludes to the distinction made by Frantz Fanon in the residential areas of the colonised and the colonists – as Fanon notes “le monde colonial est un monde compartimenté” or “the colonial world is a compartmentalised world”, cut in two (c.f. Pandey 1983 and Fanon 1961).

verse of social theories by avoiding the traps of local particularism, nationalist peculiarism and Eurocentric universalism.

This programme resonates strongly with me, and I have three affirmations to offer. First, I appreciate Rehbein’s attention to the multiversal potential of the local. We do not set out merely to decentre Europe and replace it with another universal centre grounded in nationalist, culturalist or religious pride. Instead, we want to move towards a notion of tolerance articulated by many Southern decolonial thinkers. The call begins, fundamentally, by accepting the truth-potential of others even as it appears unintelligible and immutable to us. This orientation puts us in good company – with the poets, philosophers, politicians, saints like Muhammad Iqbal, Léopold Sédar Senghor, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, the indigenous and Adivasi peoples, queer and feminist thinkers from the many Souths across the globe.

Second, I appreciate the author’s call to move beyond mere descriptives and multiplicities, towards generating concepts that travel. Concepts that can emerge, say, from Adivasi fishers along the Sindhu river or urban activists in Karachi can be deployed elsewhere. There’s no reason to believe that local knowledges are limited to mere descriptions or must be confined to the realms of philosophy and spirituality without any “sociological” content. Such a call also demands rigour from local imagination, beckoning it to transcend its local, regional or national boundaries.

Third, I appreciate that the author puts forward a rather concrete programme. The programme proposes transregional cooperation, bringing new and diverse perspectives that will help us understand each other, with each other. We can set to work by thinking about the procedures and institutional arrangements needed to implement this programme. What would it take to recover local sources and invest in local language-based analysis? What do we need to build and which institutions already exist and must be revived? How can we prioritise local interpretations and perceptions? What will the “locals” need to do to make their concepts travel to other places, to build theories that help us understand behaviour, social facts and sociological formations in other places, including the global North? The programme has a certain pragmatism that is refreshingly simple, even if these questions appear daunting at first.

The proposal by Rehbein thus appears superior to the ones that limit their “decolonising” work to the labours of researchers in the Northern Academy, or North-oriented research. However, I would also like to pose three challenges – of location, authenticity and value.

Location: Let’s not be hasty in claiming that we have already broken the spell of the North. We must ask ourselves, again and again: where is the North located in this project? The North permeates social behaviour in Southern societies that suffer from a “captive mind” (Alatas 1974) or “extraversion”, a

term used by Paulin Hountondji for the phenomenon where Southern intellectual labour is oriented towards an authority external to Southern societies (Hountondji 1995). Unfortunate, but undeniable. The Academy is the North. Sitting in a Southern public academy it seems paradoxical that one of the best ways to teach my students to “decolonise” is to help them improve their English. Though social concepts abound in their local idioms, the study of contemporary social processes requires acknowledging societal extraversion. Using concepts from Northern societies to understand our societies and theirs is important, lest we make the same mistake that the Northerners have done in reifying the natives. Useful local knowledge is often found elsewhere – among communities in resistance, social movements and in Antonio Gramsci’s concept from his *Prison Notebooks*, the organic intellectuals. Academics and activists often support such communities by demystifying the language of power. The skill required is less “border thinking” and more “border crossing”, and you can’t cross these borders without keeping the North in your view.

Authenticity: Who exactly is the local? The question of authenticity has been central to political and epistemic decolonisation. If we are speaking about “local” languages, we must take care in considering that some “local” languages are a *lingua franca* or *bazari zuban* (“market tongue”). Some of these “vernacular” languages were imperially imposed in certain regions. For instance, Arabic and Urdu can be claimed as local in certain places in South Asia and the Middle East, but these languages contain deep imprints of Empire and Nation within them. The problem is further complicated by the fact that code-switching is a historic phenomenon in multi-lingual societies. Questions of language authenticity cannot be avoided. Whose authority are we going to trust now in the selection of local languages – Northern scholars, the State or the dominant if not hegemonic social forces? I would suggest that we listen to the authority of political activists and organic intellectuals, but I am afraid that many “decolonial” scholars fail to attend to their authority.

Value of Southern theorising: This issue is linked to the question of the epistemic labour of translation. Who will benefit from new forms of knowledge labour? Scholarship in the North is in a crisis of overproduction, not uncommon to capitalist forms of production that also undergird academic labours. Now everyone seems to be talking about decolonising this and decolonising that. In this climate, calls for recovering local texts can be a new way of branding and packaging local scholarship. Southern scholars, on the other hand, are offered two choices – either focus on building local institutional capacity and be resourceful with meagre funds, publish and circulate research locally. Or do twice the labour and continue to learn Northern theories so as to remain relevant to the conversation.

Market principles of supply and demand also operate in Southern theorising. Local theorising leads to “thick concepts” that are grounded in thick descriptions of local contexts. These must be translated to “thin concepts” that can travel elsewhere, as Yoshimichi Sato has observed (2010).² Sato notes that Asian sociologists have little incentive and independence to do the difficult labour of generating new concepts. It is easier to “apply” Northern concepts and theories, modify them slightly, add new assumptions and talk about scope conditions. Northerners also find it difficult to accept thick concepts, and find it easier to view these “novel” ideas as variants of their existing concepts. They are not willing to carry the cognitive load, already trapped in the academic cycle of overproduction. Their language skills, for the most part, are sub-par. In this situation, a turn to local languages will put laborious translation demands on Southern scholars. Most of this work is likely to be deemed “unoriginal” or redundant. Meanwhile, the excavation and rebranding of “Southern intellectuals” will continue to win grants and build careers in the Northern academy.

With these three caveats, let me reassert that I am with Rehbein in seeing the current moment as an opportunity to decolonise the Academy, Disciplines and Epistemology. A shift to local and Southern theorising is necessary for such an endeavour. However, I would also suggest we reframe the conjecture, as a nod to hundreds of years of decolonial thought. Let’s not limit our framing to the anxieties of Northerners as their societies wrestle with the influx of refugees and the rise of right-wing populist governments. The tensions between nationalism, regionalism and universalism have a longer history. I propose using an alternative periodisation based entirely on the relationship of Southern thinkers to the colonial/modern project. It starts with the colonial wound in the colonies, moves through postcolonial arrivals with migrations to the North and the Academy, converges amidst activists and social movements that force a shift to acknowledging local knowledges, and brings us finally to the current moment: the moment of a possible rupture of the Souths with multiple crises engendered by the North. The current rupture is extremely violent but not without potential for rebirth, as Rehbein suggests.

2 Sato seems to be drawing from the philosophy of ethics to make the distinction between thick and thin concepts. Thick concepts are loaded with contextual and descriptive information and differ from thin evaluations that lack substantive descriptions. In the context of theory, we may not be concerned with the ethical and evaluative aspects of concepts, and even with their substantive description. But theoretical concepts need to be “thin” in the sense that they must shed the weight of context-specific descriptions, which in turn allow these concepts to travel elsewhere.

The Newness in New Area Studies

Manan Ahmed Asif

The age of “Area Studies” in the United States ended in 2008, partly as a result of the global financial crisis, which de-valued endowments of universities as well as various philanthropic organisations. More importantly, it ended due to the shift in US government’s valuation of what constitutes valuable actionable “data”.³ The paradigm of domination that emplotted language, texts, culture and civilisation to geography has new contours in the post-2008 world. In this optical age, power privileges the “algorithmic gaze”, “distal” forms of knowing, and areas as “states of exception”. Since 2008, a new “Area Studies” has emerged, alongside “new” methods. At Columbia, Rochester, Berkeley, the University of Virginia, Cornell, Carnegie-Mellon and many other institutions of higher learning, data science institutes, centres and programmes have been launched. Funded by private endowments (often Google, Uber, Tesla, etc.) these new Area Studies programmes work in close synchronisation with existing disciplinary programmes such as Electrical Engineering or Computer Science. The faculty and students in these programmes work on critical features such as natural language processing, artificial intelligence and robotics. The technologies created – such as the remote viewing via unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) developed at Carnegie Mellon’s Robotics Institute – are chiefly deployed for surveillance and the killing of terrorists in Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia.

The US-American “Area Studies” went global. The scholars trained at the University of Chicago, Cornell, Berkeley, or New York were able to write, and dictate, the grounded theories of knowing that shaped anthropology, linguistics, sociology and history on the global arena. The prestige and capital of the US-American academy, for a while, meant that scholars who wrote in the Area-Studies paradigm in Germany or Paris were forced to “translate” their work into the theoretical models given by McKim Marriott (kinship) or William McNeill (world history) – to name two examples from the University of Chicago alone.

Yet, Europe had invented “Area Studies” before the US. The “Regional Studies” stalwarts who were writing and thinking about “areas” – from William Dwight Whitney (1827–1894), Johannes Hertel (1872–1955) and Paul Haupt (1858–1926) to Joseph Schacht (1902–1969) – were all trained in Berlin and

3 For an overview of this argument, see Manan Ahmed Asif (2019), *Technologies of Power: From Area Studies to Data Sciences*, *Spheres: Journal for Digital Cultures* 5, pp. 1–13.

Leipzig.⁴ By the early nineteenth century, Berlin, Paris and Oxford were the long-established centres for the study of the colonies – the erstwhile “regions” and “areas”. The career and trajectory of Aloys Sprenger (1813–1893) – from a translator to a civil bureaucrat to a collector and finally an endower of the Berlin Staatsbibliothek – is an apt exemplar.

Colonialism was always an order of knowledge that organised the things of the colony. The physical and territorial domination was integrated with linguistic mastery and the power of description. This basic aspect of coloniality remained constitutive of Area Studies whether in Europe or in the United States. In fact, Sprenger was able to describe the epistemological “situatedness” of studying the Orient quite succinctly:

The acquaintance with the literature of the east shows us man reflected in his own creation under peculiar circumstances and through a longer period of time than the literature of Europe. The student is carried beyond the narrow limits of European prejudices and associations and enabled to enlarge them. Taking a historical view of oriental pursuits, they are of the highest philosophical importance. Oriental nations are no longer able to take care of their own literary treasures. This is not owing to a want of veneration for them but to apathy and imbecility (Sprenger 1857: iv–v).

It is Europe that is enlightened from the study of the “area”. It is Europe that holds the material artefacts that allow for the study of the “area”.

It would appear as if we have come a long way since 1857. Yet, even as we contemplate the New Area Studies, it is worthwhile keeping in mind the material realities that undergird the five layers of reconfiguring epistemologies identified by Boike Rehbein. Europe and the US continue to hold the libraries and archives for the study of the area. They continue to dominate the cataloguing and presentation of these historically displaced materials. The publication and distribution of new knowledges continues to be situated in Europe and the US. The resources for organising, speaking, connecting, training, teaching, publishing, reviewing, arguing and theorising continue to be centred in Europe and the US.

The post-colonies, to the extent that they can produce and articulate a science of knowing themselves, are wounded nationalisms intent on creating majoritarian discourses. Nor is it merely a question of reigning ideologies. Compare the annual educational budgets: Germany, with a population of roughly 83 million had an education budget of 129 billion (4.8% of GDP) in 2016, while Pakistan, with a population of 270 million, had an education budget of 4 billion (3% of GDP).⁵ From that macro perspective, imagine the realities of being a historian at the Centre for South Asian Studies (founded in 1975 and with a faculty of four) at Punjab University with the Humboldt-

4 The arrival in the United States in the 1930s and 1940s of Jewish Orientalists fleeing Nazi Germany is a less acknowledged history of US Area Studies.

5 Figures taken from data.worldbank.org (accessed 15 October 2020).

Universität zu Berlin's Institute for Asian and African Studies (begun in 1887) where the Department of South Asian Studies alone has a faculty of eight.

The episteme that organises relationships of knowledge between the erstwhile colonisers and the erstwhile colonies is not simply that of a "gaze", a "perspective", and even of a scale. It is not, as the scholars of the 1990s argued, simply a deficit of "theory" that segregated some as stuck in the "waiting-room of history". What is valuable in Rehbein is that a call for a "multicentric epistemology" resonates as agentive, and even ethical. The scholar in the global South, theoretically, can produce a way of knowing and seeing that rises, on the epistemic level, to global "theory".

However, no post-colonised scholar is asking simply to have their translocal perspective upheld as an exemplar. What the post-colonised scholar asks are the resources for being a scholar, for accessing the archives in Europe and the United States, for accessing the social capital of European and US-American universities, for availing themselves of the distribution circuits of printing presses of the world, newspapers of the world, conferences of the world. The post-colonised scholar wishes for the security for their body in order for their minds to be able to question their own local, their own history as constructed and as imagined. They ask that their compatriots in Europe understand that to study nationalism or sexuality or religion in the post-colony is to know that there exists a public in the local that will take their livelihood, or their life itself. This is not to blame the post-colony for being oppressive against knowledge production. It is to understand the material realities that shape each local.

Most recently, a new set of "global" phenomena is asking us to re-think our world, just as the spectre of the nuclear war shaped the work of scholars in the 1960s and 1970s. Our spectre is the climate crisis, and now the COVID-19 / SARS-CoV-2 pandemic. The locals formed under these two "globals" look very different from those under the global Cold War or even the global "War on Terror". What is also clear from these recent phenomena is that it is not the relationship between the local and the global or the North and the South that is of relevance: it is between the Local and the local, the City and the city, the Old and the young, the sick and the anti-bodied.

What we have also realised is that, as Fanon pointed out, the post-colonised scholar must "define a new humanism both for itself [the colony] and for others" (Fanon 2008: 198). Can the New Area Studies offer such a humanism?

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