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New Area Studies and Southeast Asia

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New Area Studies and Southeast Asia – Mapping Ideas, Agendas, Debates and Critique

Editorial

Andrea Fleschenberg and Benjamin Baumann

"Debates on area studies have turned into something of a frenetic scholarly enterprise," writes Victor T. King (2017: 758), Professor of Borneo Studies at the Institute for Asian Studies, University of Brunei Darussalam, in his review of *Area Studies at the Crossroads. Knowledge Production after the Mobility Turn* – one of the recent comprehensive contributions to the so-called Third Wave of Area Studies[1] (edited by Katja Mielke and Anna-Katharina Hornidge, 2017). James D. Sidaway, Professor of Geography at the National University of Singapore (a key site of Area Studies within the region commonly labelled as Southeast Asia and beyond) identifies "Area Studies [as] an enduring source of fascination" with "always something new to think about", as a cross-cutting knowledge enterprise, navigating manifold demarcations and (re)connections along with (geo-)political influences (Sidaway 2017: vi).

This leads us to a number of questions that are part and parcel of this special issue and its quest to provide space for and continue with a multi-sited and multi-layered debate set around a number of questions as well as contestations regarding the current state of Area Studies. What is "new" about New Area Studies (not only with regard to Southeast Asia)? Why Area Studies (with capitals)? Who studies (with whom) and who is studied (and how)? Is it possible to rethink Area Studies in a way that not merely acknowledges power imbalances between studying "subjects" in the so-called global North and studied "objects" in the so-called global South, but genuinely transcends them? Is such a transcendence possible in Area Studies, or is the unequal distribution of power through the production of scientific knowledge about spatially grounded "areas" or "regions" the actual raison d'être of the field? How does Area Studies

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position itself within the wide range of academic disciplines? What could a current vision of Area Studies, one that acknowledges these issues, look like?

Take as an example the critique outlined by King in his book review and his challenging of some key components and propositions presented by key thinkers and scholars of what we would term "New Area Studies" (NAS, a term advanced in particular by Vincent Houben and Peter Jackson, along with Boike Rehbein and Claudia Derichs in this issue).[2] King points towards an "anxiety among scholars in and practitioners of area studies to justify what they do and what they have been doing", faced with a fundamental critical gaze from (other) disciplines, and asks if "area studies can produce something that is arresting and distinctive" (2017: 760). He questions the fact that key components of New Area Studies as outlined by Houben (2020, 2017) or Mielke / Hornidge (2017a), such as mid-range concepts, epistemological or empirical insights produced from within NAS approaches, "haven't already been generated within disciplines" (ibid.). In his critique, Vickers (2020) juxtaposes the New Area Studies approach with the Comparative Asian Studies approach (referring to the work of Arham 2011 and Middell 2018). Tapping into a larger debate with regard to what NAS aims to achieve through its key components of decentring, decoloniality, trans- and/or interdisciplinarity, scalar notions of locality and regionality as well as translocality and transregionality,[3] he highlights that "[s]eeking to escape […] binds can simultaneously tighten them, as the epistemological bases and conceptual frameworks employed largely remain grounded in established traditions" (Vickers 2020). NAS proponents would counter that a focus on a certain comparative approach doesn't transcend containers – part and parcel of projects of ordering and othering – such as "area" or "region" and highlights what can be gained from a pronounced scalar understanding when transcending or opening up such containers.

1 Sidaway (2017: vi) demarcates this body of area studies as "conspicuously Cold War" and "displaying influences from social and cultural theory and registers geopolitical and geoeconomic shifts that are yielding a more multipolar world". He argues that "[e]ach wave, with respect to the one before it, developed in a historical epoch associated with reconfigurations of space, time and scholarship; the first marked by the novelty of the telegraph and powered shipping, the second by television and aircraft, and the third by the internet and digitization. The transitions between each wave of Area Studies were marked by contention and a sense of loss of mission or crisis" (ibid. 2017: vi). The contention starts right here with this very notion of a specific kind of periodisation, using Global North-centred signifiers and thus centring what is looked at in the development of Area Studies in a certain academic gravitation centre reminiscent of Cold War and colonial legacies rather than opening up to a plurality of trajectories and centres of knowledge productions as, among others, the case of scholarship on and in Southeast Asia (see Jackson 2019 and Banerjee 2020).

2 See contributions of all four in this special journal issue along with Houben 2013, Derichs 2017, Houben 2017, Jackson 2019, Baumann / Bultmann 2020, Baumann / Fleschenberg 2020, Baumann / Rehbein 2020.

3 As Benjamin Baumann has outlined elsewhere, New Area Studies can be understood "as an ethnographically founded transdisciplinary project that seeks to answer theoretical questions raised in the disciplines in the context of emplaced orders of knowledge. This form of emplacement is explicitly spatial, so that the situatedness of knowledge remains not limited to discourses, social milieus or moving bodies, but becomes emplaced in concrete locations. These locations are situated on different scales ranging from 'the local' to 'the global', thus producing the spatial continuum of New Area Studies" (Baumman / Fleschenberg 2020: 37). This ethnographically founded vision of New Area Studies or EFNAS is outlined in his contribution to this special issue.

This relates to our central question about how to rethink Area Studies beyond the existing and powerful power imbalances in knowledge productions that is also emphasised by Peter A. Jackson in this issue. How can one overcome or at least aim to transcend structures of domination, dynamics and entrenched asymmetries of “Euro-Amerocentrism” and neoliberal globalisation in scholarly practice, moving beyond “important, self-reflexive comments on scholars’ own positionality and knowledge production” (Vickers 2020) in terms of lived transformative (and ultimately empowering and inclusive) scholarly praxes? Vickers points here to a crucial point that we as an editorial team had to confront when preparing this special issue, seeking to invite collaborations from across locations and positions (and yet sometimes failing to do so, not least because of the pandemic-related work overload, but also because of the need for scholars – not only in Southeast Asia – to publish in specifically indexed journals).

How can we truly embody and live a concern for decoloniality and decentring, when the cognitive centres of gravitation continue to concern and reside within the academia of the global North from which we propose our critical project of New Area Studies? And what if the contributing reflections in this issue come from authors who are either based in the Global North-North (e.g. Australia, USA, Europe and Japan), the Global North within the Global South or have been (partly) academically trained in academic institutions of the Global North? What can and should be the critical potential as well as modus operandi of New Area Studies if the field is really concerned with taking on colonial legacies and continued (neo-)colonial asymmetries, enabling a multiplicity of epistemological perspectives and traditions along with reverse flows of theorising and concepts informing research processes and knowledge productions, while at the same time aiming for a certain universalising tendency when proposing the emergence of a “meta-discipline” (Houben 2020)? How does this vision of New Area Studies come together with diverse Area Studies projects and practices in the regions themselves and what is the latter’s standpoint on the highlighted relationship of “areanists” and those working from “conventional disciplines”? What centring tendencies might (re-)emerge or continue to be entrenched? What about containers that inform inquiries and subsequent tunnel views in the scholarship produced in the so-called “regions” (Derichs 2017)?[4]

4 Claudia Derichs (2017) critiques conventional Areas Studies for its tunnel vision, i.e., blind spots emerging from only taking into account a certain set of geographies while excluding others (such as emotional geographies of belonging that are transregional in character and connect beyond established containers of such as “state” or a specific region) and thus lived realities. She challenges such ordering projects as a practice of othering and centring in Western academia, particularly emerging from conventional disciplines such as sociology, political science or anthropology. She invites a rethinking about scales and geographies and how they are shaped and reproduced from outside as well as from within “regions”, leading to diversity and decentring as well as epistemic decolonising knowledges (see chapters 6 and 7 in particular, as well as Derichs 2015).

Adding further food for thought: Can such a New Area Studies critique of the disciplines (as outlined by Derichs and Rehbein in this issue), stemming from a transregional (and transdisciplinary) perspective and decentring quest, be read as characteristic for the (again) growing politicisation of Area Studies, and its entanglement with geopolitical projects or modern identity politics?[5] This is discussed and problematised in a number of inputs about the proposed New Area Studies approach in our debating section (see for instance the contributions by Manan Ahmed, Ramon Guillermo, Ahsan Kamal) as well as in the articles of Baumann et al. and Antweiler and the Research Note of Gerlach et al.

A common thread that runs through all contributions to this special issue written by scholars from a "region" is post-colonial critique that addresses the power imbalances shaping the institutionalised knowledge production in conventional Area Studies as practiced within and outside "regions". To what extent does such a critique (re)produce dichotomous containers of global North and South or how can this bind of a complex matrix of power relations along the axis of global North and South be transcended (see Rehbein and Gerlach et al. in this issue)? A point made by the two commentators on the piece by Claudia Derichs, Ariel Heryanto and Itty Abraham, for example, which serves to blur the boundaries between disciplines and Area Studies emphasised by Derichs is that the knowledge created in the disciplines is always to a certain degree spatialised and usually produced within the confines of nation states, which also remain the implicit point of reference. Given the methodological nationalism of most disciplines (Wimmer / Glick Schiller 2002), they are therefore to a certain extent always Area Studies (Jackson in this issue). This fact is, however, rarely acknowledged and frequently not even recognised by the so-called disciplines.

Another point Ariel Heryanto and Itty Abraham make is the relational quality of the classification as area scientists. While Asian scholars conducting research in their home countries are classified as social scientists in Asia, they become Asianists in Western academic settings (Jackson in this issue). They are thus excluded from the symbolic capital associated with disciplines and relegated to the less prestigious realm of Area Studies.[6] This marginalisation also takes place within the region of Europe where area specialists are "being

5 Modern identity politics follow an essentially binary logic and presume an identity-shaping opposition of Self/Other that entails an inevitable devaluation of "the Other". While this understanding of "identity" is universalised by modern science, it is challenged in various contemporary approaches that stress the non-binary foundation of identity in everyday and non-modern contexts (Baumann 2020). Mielke and Hornidge (2017a: 5f, 9) argue that political entanglements as well as political instrumentalisations of Area Studies are not new, but a continued legacy as well as reality, albeit different in its trajectories, institutionalised manifestations and political geographies. They stress that "the respective Area Studies throughout their institutionalization over time depended on (geo-)political trends according to related national science policies, and that the 'debates' can be read as the results of threats to downsize funding (and actual cuts) for departments and scholarly activities" (ibid. 2017: 9; see also Derichs 2017, Manan Ahmed and Ahsan Kamal in this issue along with Baumann / Fleschenberg 2020).

6 In his reply to Houben's debate section, Elísio Macamo evaluates the distribution of symbolic capital between Area Studies and disciplines differently (see also Baumann et al. this issue).

kept at bay when tackling the big issues in the humanities and social sciences" argues Houben (2020), due to centred particular epistemological traditions and standards which are thought of as "universal" in Western academia. There subsequently arises a certain potential for irritation caused by the decentring gaze of Area Studies as "we use vocabularies that are different and we start from unfamiliar, strange places which cannot be understood by non-specialists" (Houben 2020). On the other hand, this potential to unsettle taken-for-granted axioms stems from the continued "marginalisation of knowledge from the Global South and on the Global South" and standards of epistemic relevance in the Global North Academia, as Houben stresses (2020).

In light of the above, Vickers (2020) however contends that "a problematic binary marking the empirical-local and scientific-global does emerge", given that "[a]rea studies remain an endeavour pursued predominantly by outsiders looking in on another space and communicating findings outside it". This contestation speaks to the notions of area, scales, spatiality and disciplinarity in New Area Studies and thus what is "new" or "universal" in its proposal of an emerging discipline in its own right and standing where "trans" notions are key as well as inviting contestation. Vickers (2020) thus challenges the contrasting of perspectivity in Area Studies (inside-outside perspectivity) and "disciplines" (outside-inward perspectivity) as presented by NAS proponents such as Vincent Houben and Claudia Derichs.

Seeing the need to deconstruct geo-political regionalisations and transcend the power imbalances reproduced by them and simultaneously believing in the interdisciplinary vision of Area Studies and the analytic value of context-specific and spatially grounded research "areas" are important issues when looking for ways to think Area Studies anew. This rethinking, however, doesn't have to proceed unidirectionally, looking exclusively into the future while searching for something "new" – the next paradigm shift promising to revolutionise the field – but may find crucial inspiration by looking back and beyond the narrow boundaries of "science" and nation states. Rethinking paradigms long discarded, rediscovering scholars already forgotten and reanimating methods declared to be obsolete may be promising as well, providing creative means of scientific progress, and may in the end help to deconstruct the modern myth of unidirectional scientific progress in such an interdisciplinary field as Area Studies (Feyerabend 1983, Baumann et al. this issue).

The power imbalances critiqued in the post-colonial contributions to the debate section are produced by orders of knowledge and institutionalised language games that are essentially modern and Eurocentric (Houben this issue). Despite their obvious Eurocentrism and their entanglement in modern identity politics, like the assumption of an identity-shaping distinction between Western "Self" and oriental "Other", they are nevertheless treated as universals by scholars from a "region". What is at stake in NAS is a questioning of these

orders of knowledge and their assumed universality through a showcasing of the lifeworld significance of local alternatives, one that characterises many decolonial projects, which also differentiates them from post-colonial critique (Anzaldúa 2015, De la Cadena 2015, Stengers 2018).

Beyond this, NAS must also address the power imbalances of a system of knowledge production that is not only essentially unequal, but legitimises the existence of inequalities on the basis of ostensible universals identified by the system, which are simultaneously instrumentalised in various political projects within and outside the system. Houben (2020) thus argues for New Area Studies and its "enormous potential in understanding the world and its structural asymmetries, starting from a non-European perspective, [...] a very necessary enterprise".

New Area Studies at the IAAW – An ongoing debate and project

A re-imagination of Area Studies under the label New Area Studies at the Institute of Asian and African Studies (IAAW) started several years ago as a project to rethink the field at the Department of Southeast Asian Studies (Houben 2013, 2017). Its goal was and is to make Southeast Asian Studies sustainable, by opening the field to global processes, while remaining spatially and epistemologically firmly rooted in a "region". The project gained new impetuses that were frequently the result of negotiations between faculty from different disciplines as well as transdisciplinary standpoints with sometimes irreconcilable understandings of Area Studies.[7]

Re-imagining Area Studies while combining Asia and Africa in a single bachelor's programme (and soon master's programme), the institute's vision of New Area Studies now emphasises the processual character of globalisation phenomena, transcultural entanglements and an ever-increasing mediatisation while aligning itself closely with the mobility turn or the "new mobilities" paradigm (Hannam et al. 2006: 2, see Mielke / Hornidge 2017). This vision is not only explicitly power-critical, but considers any language of "regions" or "areas" as an anachronistic manifestation of the global North's hegemony. In this post-area vision of Area Studies the prefix "trans" legitimises the maintenance of an existing university structure of area institutes, while being simultaneously able to distance oneself from the symbolic violence exercised in all unequivocal classification processes through an emphasis of transimperial, transregional, transnational and translocal dimensions.

7 These negotiations also characterised the crafting of this editorial.

Key components of New Area Studies

As might already have become visible between and above previous lines, thinking about New Area Studies can be regarded as a response to "the new multi-centric world [which] continues to be dominated by few, but changing, centres and structures (regarding publishing and academic merits) that further reinforce existing inequalities" (Mielke/Hornidge 2017a: 3) and the end of the bipolar world that "opened up avenues for knowledge production and caused several currents of rethinking the subsequently arising ontologies in how we see and order the world" (ibid., see also Baumann / Bultmann 2020). It implies addressing and transforming the continued reality of othering and us-them-division within sciences, politics as well as societies at international and domestic levels, as Mielke and Hornidge (2017a: 3), among others, outline. This speaks to the "economisation" and political entanglements of academia as well as to continued and new assemblages of power imbalances and subsequent structures of inequality and thus ontological and epistemological ordering, "the drawing of new cognitive boundaries" which do not stop at political borders (ibid.: 4). What can be outlined and thus debated as making up the "new" in Area Studies includes (according to Mielke / Hornidge 2017a: 8): 1) trans-perspectives (trans-regionalism, transculturalism, translocality) and thus "new levels of spatial relevance", a deconstruction of "the conventional container focus of Area Studies" and a de-territorialisation of terminologies; 2) comparative approaches and a "trend towards interdisciplinary research following certain thematic frames or newly (de-)constructed 'area' dispositions in a quest to look at the world differently"; 3) "reactivation of the debate on the relationship between Area Studies and 'systematic' disciplines" (see also Jackson 2019 on his notion of spatially bound epistemologies).

Furthermore, notions of decoloniality, deschooling[8], deconstruction and de-centring the "hegemonic power-knowledge order between North and South" (Mielke / Hornidge 2017a: 15) and what "one believes to be true" (Rehbein 2020) are prominent among writings of key proponents of NAS, positioned across the Global North as one centre of gravity (see contribution in Mielke and Hornidge and this issue). Vincent Houben sees the NAS approach as a "provocation" and "thought experiment" to devise a strategy for the future of Area Studies "to be discussed among the key stakeholders", shifting from Area Studies

8 Deschooling refers to a process of academic unlearning, described as "reflexive praxis for transforming knowledge through epistemological critique and the conscious co-constructions of evidence-based 'truth claims'" (Mielke / Hornidge 2017a: 20, referring to the contribution by Epifania A. Amoo-Adare 2017). This notion is also linked to what Boike Rehbein (2020 and in this issue) identifies as a key problem of knowledge production: "to deconstruct what one believes to be true". Boike Rehbein proposes to work at interstices, i.e. to contrast different systems of knowledge, theories, epistemologies, and empirical realities. To choose these interstices, these places of meeting, clashes and collisions, he argues, enhances our knowledge production as it challenges containers and our taking sides (ibid.).

as a "study field", implying thus mono-regionality and -disciplinarity as in political science or sociology and leading to a "mosaic-like structure" to NAS as a "meta-discipline" (Houben 2020). While positioning himself as working from within a given institutional and disciplinary infrastructure, Houben considers that this project might go beyond a quest for reform and institutional weight and allow for a transformative potential. At the same time, the contestation over the relationship between Area Studies and "systematic disciplines" starts right here, among contributors to this issue as well as key proponents of NAS.

Without aiming to map a specific canon for theories and methods (see also Rehbein 2020), this includes, first, the development of a novel theoretical and methodological basis "by giving explicit attention to the Global South from a Southern perspective", and, second, trans- and interdisciplinarity as well as collaborative research "across social cognitive geographies" in "pluri-local research groups" (Houben in this issue). As in Rehbein's proposition of interstices and notion of configurations in this issue, key thinkers of NAS emphasise the potential for innovation that takes place when boundaries – disciplinary, epistemological and ontological – are crossed (see, among others, Baumann 2020, Houben 2020, Rehbein 2020).

Questions for moving forward

One of the key aims of this special journal issue of the *International Quarterly for Asian Studies* is to open up a platform for debate as well as for taking stock, since a number of critical junctures took place post-1990s. There are no foregone conclusions, nor clear "truths" that emerge, neither was this one of the aims of this special issue. We intend to contribute to this ongoing, open and contested debate with a series of articles, research notes, debating inputs as well as by interviewing Prof. Peter A. Jackson. We thus conclude as we started – with food for thought in the garb of questions and with an invitation to contribute, to counter, to think with/about/along.

Where do we stand, what questions need to be asked, what critique needs to be laid out (again) and engaged with when contextualising and reviewing the so-called "Third Wave of Area Studies" and any New Area Studies approach? While some ponder if "areas" have been and will be "passé" (Sidaway 2017: vii), what changes when following the proposal of Vincent Houben to shift Area Studies from a "field of study" to a "kind of emerging new discipline" (Houben 2020)? How does this relate to the idea that "globalisation [remains] the talk of the town" and that "[m]any of the critiques levelled at its predecessors are still in the air, for Orientalism was back on active service after 9/11 and the

legacy of the Cold War division of intellectual labor and areas lingered, although they looked increasingly arbitrary" (Sidaway 2017: vii)? What is "new" about the re-imaginations of the field outlined in this special issue?

Taking to heart our concern for positionality and self-reflexivity as well as decentring, if we criticise ourselves in a deep self-reflection process, what does emerge? Do we need to question that the reimagination of New Area Studies should rather be understood as logical continuations of developments which have shaped the field since the late 20th century, appearing to generalise the knowledge produced while simultaneously scientificising and politicising the field through a growing dominance of the social sciences and continued politicisation or political entanglements of research agendas? Or, does this vision of Area Studies – shifting epistemologically from the particular to the general, spatially from the local to the global, and disciplinary from humanities to the social sciences – lead to the production of generalists, easily adaptable to the changing requirements of job markets and the latest academic trends and paradigm shifts?

What becomes of the key component of the mastery of local languages, previously a distinguishing feature of area expertise, within the ethico-political frameworks characterising much NAS rethinking? How are scholarly subjectivities formed – for whom and by whom? How to move from an overt criticism of neoliberalism and neoliberal academia while continuing to perform within and along the critiqued structures and dynamics, and what are alternative and countering roadmaps, agendas and praxes (if any)?

How can decoloniality be practiced by white scholars from the global North who practice Area Studies in the global North but continue to address socio-cultural configurations in the global South? Is self-reflexivity and collaborative research really enough or just another appropriation strategy that seeks to assimilate the foreign in the familiar? What can be the potential of opening up Area Studies to global processes and comparative projects and thus the growing awareness of the ontological and epistemological multiplicities shaping contemporary socio-cultural configurations all over the world and the recognition that we can only understand them in transregional dialogue? How is this understood at the various centres as well as the still marginalised peripheries of knowledge production and what are praxes towards solidarity and inclusiveness? How and where does "local" scholarship from within the region feature in knowledge productions across regions? Who is allowed to speak (or not) and how is epistemic justice as well as tolerance achieved and safeguarded (and by whom)? What does this also mean for academic publishing practices, whether in terms of peer review processes, academic writing standards or language options?

Zooming out a bit further from the presentation of scholarly work, practices and debates in this issue, we need to acknowledge that most contributions were written before or at the beginning of the current COVID-19 pandemic. Mielke and Hornidge (2017a: 7) remind us about how critical junctures inform aca-

demic rethinking, as “neither in the USA nor in Europe were Area Studies existentially scrutinized before 1990. Only with the increasing impact of globalization […], and subsequently arising influences from different evolving ‘turns’ in academia […], including post-colonial perspectives and post-development, a debate set in.” The debate has begun on what the current pandemic means for scientific knowledge productions, knowledge transfers into policy circles and public discourses, and for notions of “expertise”, “expert authority”, “truth” – not only in light of fake news and conspiracy theories gaining prominence in world- and meaning-making (see Butler 2020). What is and can be the purpose of science, what kind of knowledges are required, what practices should be reconsidered (Das 2020, Hussain 2020)? A debate has also started to rethink research challenges and opportunities, not only but particularly for those working from one “region” on another “region” as well as within “regions”. Is it a rupture, a historical juncture, and if so, for whom and with what kind of implications? Or is it rather a continuation or even acceleration of existing phenomena, developments within pre-existing hegemonic structures as outlined by Aymar Nyenyezi Bisoka (2020), Boaventura Sousa Santos (2020) and Raza Saeed (2020)? The floor is open to research – and especially to re-search these questions.

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Reflections on Critical New Area Studies – in Conversation with Prof. Dr. Peter Jackson

Andrea Fleschenberg

Prof. Dr. Peter A. Jackson (Australian National University) has written extensively on modern Thai cultural history with special interests in religion, sexuality, and critical theoretical approaches to mainland Southeast Asian cultural history. He currently holds an Australian Research Council Discovery Grant for the project "Religion, Ritual and Health in Thai Gay and Transgender Communities". His article "South East Asian Area Studies beyond Anglo-America: Geopolitical Transitions, the Neoliberal Academy and Spatialized Regimes of Knowledge", published 2019 in *South East Asia Research* 27(1), pp. 49–73, was the starting point for this interview on his reflections on New Area Studies.

Keywords: New Area Studies, Southeast Asia, Germany, spatiality of knowledge, knowledge production, collaborative research, critique, interview

Andrea Fleschenberg: *In your most recent article "South East Asian Area Studies beyond Anglo-America" you challenge "criticisms of Area Studies in light of the fact that, contrary to some predictions, spatiality has not been erased but rather has been reformulated in the context of globalization" (p. 50). And you also argue "for a theoretically sophisticated Critical Area Studies formed on the empirical reality that knowledge continues to be deeply spatialised in early twenty-first-century globalization" (p. 50). Furthermore, you later move on to refer to "new forms of border-crossing mobility" that are emerging as well as to new forms of bordered, monitored and policed restrictions of transnational flows and argue therefore that location and geography remain key issues for critical theory and comparative epistemology. Could you please elaborate this a bit with some illustrative examples?*

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Peter Jackson: In terms of the spatialisation of knowledge, I think that the discipline of anthropology is a good example. Scholars from Western universities – those who have grown up and been educated in the West, in Australia, in Europe, in the United States, in Britain – usually don't think twice about the fact that they can study any particular part of the world and bring the methods of anthropology to research in that location. But if a scholar is from the South, from Asia, and they undertake a graduate programme in anthropology in a Western university, whether in Australia, Germany, or the United States, then their ethnic-national background will usually define their field of study for them. If a scholar is from Thailand, then they become an anthropologist of Thailand. Whereas myself, being from Australia, I could have chosen any particular field site to pursue my interest in comparative religion. One's positionality within the global system – it's not only a system of knowledge but also a geopolitical system of which knowledge forms a part – profoundly influences one's academic career. Even given the critiques of imperialism and neocolonialism, and even with the rise of Asia economically and politically in the last two or three decades, we still have a situation in Western universities where scholars from the South are much more marked in their research focuses. And the lower the GDP per capita of the country from which one comes, the more likely I think that you are to be constrained to become a specialist of your own country.

And in Thailand, which is my area of specialisation, the discipline of anthropology in that country focuses specifically on Thailand. Whereas in Australia, academic departments of Anthropology include scholars who specialise on a wide range of countries. By comparison, the national academy in Thailand is much more self-reflective. It is comparatively unusual for an anthropologist in a Thai university to study, say, Latin America, Europe or any country in the West. In the West it's not considered unusual for anthropologists to study Asia, but it's uncommon for anthropologists in many Asian countries to study the West. This is just one example from one discipline in which the spatiality of knowledge is still quite strongly marked. And it's marked by a strong correlation between the historical imperialist countries vis-à-vis historically colonised countries.

Andrea Fleschenberg: *Referring to the questions of positionality and spatiality, you also point out the multiplicity of Area Studies approaches, and I quote you here again in terms of the specific forms of political, economic and discursive powers that intersect in each academic location. Meaning that "one's objects of study, one's research methods and theoretical orientations and, equally importantly, one's academic publications are all located within global networks of unequal power" (p. 51). If we were to draw a map, what kind of*

a map would you thus draw for critical New Area Studies institutions, debates and challenges for scholars who have to navigate somehow this what I would call a political geography – it is a geopolitical geography, you say, for critical knowledge production, particularly in non-Euro-American locations.

Maybe [allow me to] add a little bit from my own experiences working in Pakistan. I was sent [there], very interestingly, upon the request of Pakistani colleagues. So they said, it's sort of Area Studies, the National Institute of Pakistan Studies, [which trains] people for the civil service but many go to civil society professions, teaching all over the country, which has its own centre-peripheries. But the university where I was based, Quaid-e-Azam University, is a public one and it's one which draws students from all over the place; a lot of them from marginalised peripheries, with scholarships. So these are not the students that you would find for example at other universities in Islamabad, which are either military-sponsored (so money we are talking about or well-off students) or private universities where you can get a kind of academic quality like you get in Oxford, which you have in Lahore, which is really the elite-elite. I don't have those students there. But if we look for example in Pakistan, we have students who come from the peripheries, we have people who come from certain elite networks, yet there are multiple elite networks. For [some] people to work in Islamabad, that's already the metropole you refer to in your article. While for [other] people in the same space, Islamabad is a provincial town because they are used to maybe New York or London. […] When I read your article, I was really intrigued because I also think when students say: "Okay now if I want to continue this, I understand now how important it is for me to engage with these issues and I understand now what a hegemonic knowledge production is", which some of them might not even have noticed before – that they are subject not only from a Western point of view but also within their own country within the centre-periphery negotiations. So what do I counsel them? Where in the world can you go to train further? You also talked about this a lot. If you think about it, what map would you draw of critical Area Studies and the challenges we face, where people can go, gain exposure, learn about how to also negotiate these issues?

Peter Jackson: There are so many issues in what you've mentioned ... If I could perhaps address one or two of the points you've made. One of the important issues is the language in which one writes, and the linguistic skills that one draws upon in one's research. You mentioned that you were invited to teach critical analysis. The academic literature on critical analysis is predominantly published in European languages, whether English, French or German. Increasingly English is the international academic language. If a scholar is not proficient in English, would they even have access to the source materials to

permit them to engage with discussions of forms of critical analysis? There is a high level of cultural capital associated with the language one uses.

To take this further in the context of your collaboration in Pakistan, if one is a Pakistani scholar who has acquired proficiency in the global languages in which critical analysis is communicated, where does one go from there? The critical analyses that you have mentioned have almost without exception emerged historically from Western academies. And most critical and analytical scholars in the West have neglected or overlooked the fact that critique and with it the production of general knowledge are implicitly associated with the geopolitical spatiality of the Western academy. By general knowledge I mean frameworks of knowledge that have the capacity to cross geographical borders. If we go back to Hegel, to Weber or to any major German theorist, then there has been an implicit assumption that the work of Hegel, Weber or whoever will be relevant beyond the borders of Germany. These scholars imagined themselves as engaged in something general, that is, that their work and ideas had the capacity be taken up and used beyond the national borders of Germany.

However, if one is a Pakistani scholar, even if one is interested in general knowledge, is one's work going to be read as a contribution to cross-border knowledge? More likely than not in many situations internationally that scholar's work will be read as a local Pakistani form of knowledge, which while regarded as being relevant to Pakistan, may be not be seen as being generalisable, that is, as not being able to travel across geographical borders. This does not mean that scholars in Pakistan are not producing critical work that is relevant in interdisciplinary cross-border situations. Rather, it means that the geopolitical frameworks of knowledge position them in such a way that they are expected to be local, that is, tied to place, rather than contributing to general knowledge, that is, engaged in the production of knowledge that crosses borders and which is not tied to any specific place.

Let's take this a step further. Even in a contemporary situation in which increasing numbers of scholars from diverse non-Western backgrounds are producing broad frameworks of critical reflective knowledge, they are only able to contribute to the global border-crossing knowledge system when they relocate to a Western university and have their work published by a Western academic press. Scholars from the South are only able to contribute to cross-border global knowledge after they have acquired a significant degree of intellectual and cultural capital. The geopolitical regime of knowledge means that it simply isn't good enough to be a brilliant person and to stay in Pakistan. It is very difficult to be regarded to be a generalist and to be read and taken seriously as contributing to global knowledge if one remains positioned within the Pakistani university system.

This situation still persists today. If you look at the big names in early twenty-first-century critical thought, what university are these thinkers based at? Even if they come from various parts of the Global South, they have had to acquire a global language – English, French, German. Then they have had to obtain a graduate degree, often in a globally recognised university, and subsequently win an academic position in a Western university in order to authorise, that is, to legitimate their work, and then to have their work read by scholars internationally. It is not the inherent quality or the insightfulness of one's own work that determines whether it is read internationally or across national borders. Rather, it is one's own location within highly spatialised and bordered global academic networks that determines whether one's work is read and whether it is taken seriously beyond a limited field of knowledge. I don't think we have decolonised forms of knowledge at all.

Andrea Fleschenberg: *And you make this point very well, saying we need to move beyond Euro-Anglo-American locations. And I like that you talk about it like luxury brands: theories are value added exports and travel only in one direction. But if we come back to this question of the map, let's be constructive thinkers: If you drew a map, where do you see entry points for critical New Area Studies beyond European, Anglo-American locations where debates are ongoing, where there are experiments even maybe to address those challenges that you described? Where would you place them on the map?*

Peter Jackson: In reflecting on my own career starting in the early 1980s, being based in Australia, I made some decisions early in my career about where I would try to have my work published. I write in English, but I did not want to have my research published by an American academic press. I wanted my work to be accessible within Thailand, within Southeast Asia, and I felt that at that time American and European publishers were so expensive that their books were not affordable to most scholars in Thailand. Especially in the 1980s and 1990s, books published by Western academic presses were too expensive to be accessible for the people with whom I was working in Thailand. So, I made the decision to try to publish in Thailand and other parts of Southeast Asia.

I know, I am not providing a direct answer to your question about the map. You asked where are the entry points to respond to this situation. I think one entry point is the location of the output of one's research: where does one publish one's findings? This is important in terms of making a contribution to breaking down the persistent colonial borders of knowledge. In terms of making a forceful contribution to a New Area Studies, the location of publication is important. In my own academic politics I have tried to publish with non-

Euro-American presses and journals. Yes, I have also published in Europe and America, which has been strategically important in securing an academic position within an Australian university system that is still largely Euro-Amerocentric. However, publishing beyond Euro-America has also been important for me to try to contribute to building networks of knowledge within the Asian region itself.

I find it difficult to picture a map that you are talking about, because I think the answer might be different depending on whether you are talking about a graduate programme for research, a conference series or publications. To consider conferences, I think that having major academic conferences in Asia, outside the Western academic systems, is important to build networks and I have tried over my career to contribute to events and academic exchanges in Thailand, for example.

You were talking about a map. It's a good question, but I will have to think about it more as we talk. Perhaps one issue will be to consider sources of funding for building knowledge forms across borders. In reflecting on my own field of Southeast Asian Area Studies, after the end of the Vietnam War there was a widespread defunding of Area Studies in America. Britain has been in decline for some time economically in terms of funding. However, in Australia our geopolitical proximity to the Pacific and Asia means that Area Studies have remained important for geopolitical reasons. I know that recently there was the Excellence Initiative here in Germany that funded a renewed interest in Area Studies.

Andrea Fleschenberg: ... *the new round will come next year.*

Peter Jackson: Oh, it's happening a second time. My reading of the first round of the Excellence Initiative was that it was justified in terms of globalisation and repositioning Germany within global networks of human movements, the rise of Asia, and related issues. There was a geopolitical foundation for the decision by the German Federal Government to fund Area Studies. I found that interesting because Germany lost its colonies after World War I, so there is a different history of Area Studies here compared to other European countries such as Britain, France or Belgium, which all kept their colonies until the post-World War II decolonisation movements and colonial wars of independence. It seems to me that Germany has an opportunity to imagine and participate in a form of New Area Studies in which postcolonial critiques are not as intensely biting or as forceful as in say in the United Kingdom, France or even North America. This in one of the reasons why I became interested in the New Area Studies projects here in Germany. At the same time, however, and maybe this

is a critique of the resurgence of Area Studies in Germany, it has been facilitated within a decidedly neoliberal framework. You can see that the German Ministry of Education (sorry, I forgot the name in German), ...

Andrea Fleschenberg: ... *the BMBF [Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung, Federal Ministry of Education and Research]...*

Peter Jackson: Yes, thank you, I was just reading the English translation of the Excellence Initiative on the BMBF website and it seems to me that it is very much about positioning the German academy to produce knowledge that will be of value to Germany in a global situation, of a globalising economy. There is a decidedly neoliberal element to that. In fact, all of us are now subject to these neoliberal pressures. It's a situation impacting the academy everywhere and as critical scholars we need to try and find ways to respond. Perhaps a more anarchist-type approach would be to try to find gaps within these neoliberal academic systems. Yes, we need funding for our research, and we need to play the neoliberal games of meeting "national benefit" criteria to secure grants from our respective national research funding agencies. In Australia the Australian Research Council now requires all applications for research funding to be justified in narrowly neoliberal terms of "benefitting the Australian people". However, even as we play this neoliberal research funding game there are still spaces and opportunities for critique.

Perhaps it has always been like this in some way. Critique has located itself in the gaps, in the fissures within forms of hegemony. The forms of hegemony have changed with time. Fifty years ago, hegemonic power was structured by politically polarised Cold War frameworks. Now, neoliberal economic forms of hegemony are imposed on knowledge. Reading contemporary forms of critical analysis, one often gets the impression that neoliberalism is a more restrictive mode of hegemonic power than the capitalism-versus-socialism binaries of the Cold War period. Neoliberalism is indeed a different form of power, but I don't know if it's more constrictive than the situation four or five decades ago. Whatever the case, neoliberalism does require us to develop new strategic approaches to critical analysis.

I see major changes in the geopolitical context of epistemologies in Asia. In Southeast Asia things have changed very quickly. When I began my academic career in the 1980s, all of the Thai scholars I collaborated with received scholarships from Australia or America. However, now they come to study in Australia with scholarships from the Thai government. With the expansion of the Thai economy, Thai universities now have budgets to fund their scholars to travel and study internationally. This means that Thai scholars participate in

international collaborations in a markedly changed economic and political setting, which I think is contributing to a much stronger self-confidence amongst scholars in emerging academies. In part, this is an intellectual self-confidence as well as a social self-confidence on the global stage. While many Asian scholars might be too polite to put it so bluntly, the rapidly growing self-confidence within Asian academies emerges from the attitude that, "My country is no longer poor, so you Westerners don't have to look down on us anymore." The dramatic transformations across East and Southeast Asia are providing the foundations for a new type of Asian intellectual positionality that has the potential to authorise new forms of general critical analysis. I think we are beginning to see this type of intellectual self-confidence emerge academically – often it is happening in Asian languages rather than in English – but it has the potential to challenge the Euro-Amerocentrism of knowledge that I talked about before.

To return to your earlier question about where we might draw a map of sites of critical intervention to build a New Area Studies, I would draw the map in different languages. I would like to know what is being written in Urdu in Pakistan, what is being written in Thai, in Chinese, Korean, Japanese and the other languages of the diverse Asian national academies. I think the map of the intellectual world represented in these languages will look markedly different from the ones that are mediated by international academic languages such as English or French. This is one of the points that I made about the geopolitics of knowledge in my recent article. In that article I was in part responding to the American situation. A couple of decades ago, an especially strong critique of Area Studies came from sections of the American academy. Area Studies was criticised for being atheoretical, for being anti-theory, and for having a genealogy emerging either out of colonialism or of Cold War politics. However, the world has moved far beyond the setting from which those critiques were produced, and it seems to me large sections of the American academy still haven't caught up with what is happening in the academies of places like Singapore, Hong Kong, Bangkok or Seoul. If we were to map the intellectual universes being produced in Asian academies within Asian languages we would gain an entirely different perspective. Part of the self-confidence that I see emerging in Asian academies is reflected by the rise of publication in those languages. In Thailand, for example, there has been a proliferation of new Thai-language journals in a wide range of fields in the last decade, and I think that we get quite a different picture of forms of knowledge if we look at these intellectual modalities.

Andrea Fleschenberg: *And you were talking in this article as well about the importance or the theoretical importance of languages or language skills. And*

just as a follow-up question: We have the rise of knowledge production in Asian languages but how do we deal with scholars who are only proficient in a vernacular language? They nevertheless remain outside of global theory, method-building and the publishing circuit. And I know that in many countries people say if only there would be more of a kind of translation. There is this debate – if we think about Judith Butler and also Nivedita Menon when they talk about translation. [...] I think, coming back to my teaching, one thing was also if you look at the textbooks of social theories, the examples that are given, the life worlds that are referred to. The same for books [...] on research methods, a lot of them they are designed from life worlds or certain perspectives and not so much from [diverse] grounded realities. I am just thinking: how do we deal then, thinking of entry points, how do we deal with scholars who remain proficient only in vernacular languages or wish maybe only to be proficient in that? I mean it can be a political point of view.

Peter Jackson: I agree completely.

Andrea Fleschenberg: *I mean, even within countries, talking in Urdu or Dari as a hegemonic language if one comes from a Saraiki or a Pashto background. So, the language is also political. How do we deal with scholars who wish or can only be proficient in a vernacular language?*

Peter Jackson: Your question relates back to my earlier point about the politics of language use. In Thailand I know of a number of scholars who are proficient in English or French but who have made a political decision to only publish in Thai. They are doing excellent important, critical work. In this setting, projects of collaboration become really important. The politics of language use also needs to be married with a politics of international academic collaboration. There is no easy answer to this. International academic collaboration takes a lot of investment in time, as well as an investment in resources.

I think a key entry point to building a critical New Area Studies is in terms of finding ways of building bridges that permit collaborative work. If you and I are based in Western universities and we want to take these issues forward, then an entry point is to make both political and personal commitments to collaborative research – in which, for example, we work together with colleagues in Asia and from the outset we understand that the outcomes of our research collaborations may be published in both Asian and European languages. I acknowledge that this is not easy, and it takes time. However, we have the responsibility of our positionality in globally privileged Western universities to build these collaborations.

To give an example of the importance of acting responsibly in international research collaborations: I have worked with HIV education and LGBTQI human rights NGOs in Thailand for over twenty years. One of the major complaints that the members of these community organisations have expressed to me is that many of the Western scholars and graduate students who they have enthusiastically assisted have never returned to provide copies of the outcomes of their research. After these researchers go back to their university in the West and get an academic job, they don't always return to the people who provided them with the wherewithal to become a scholar. This is a question of the ethics of research that is fundamental to international collaborations. I am perhaps giving you a very roundabout answer, but I think there is no simple or easy response to the question of how we might draw a map of entry points into building a new critical Area Studies.

Andrea Fleschenberg: ... *building bridges ...*

Peter Jackson: Yes, building bridges. And also giving back to the people who have been interviewed. There is no simple answer, but whatever response we develop will require time. And I am painfully aware that within neoliberal universities based on performance indicators we are not given credit for the time that is required to make international collaborations really work.

Andrea Fleschenberg: *Or it is disregarded as an action research activity ... And I think we can take a cue from Tuhiwai Smith or also Bagele Chilisa who talk about decolonial methodologies. And for example, I have always done action research. So, I do action research that is open access, which uses participatory methods but gets funding from, for example, German political foundations. But this does not count in terms of the funding that I get for the institute. But I always have a copyright agreement that I can use something for academic publications, those which are in career-furthering publishing houses or journals. Or if I then do community outreach, so I sometimes do volunteer consultancy with activist networks. It's fine, it comes out of my pocket and I think I have an obligation to do this, but they will say "this will not further your career, why do you do this? Are you an academic or are you an activist?" [...]*

Peter Jackson: I know exactly what you mean. I have had similar experiences. I think that in terms of entry points, while you and I have had different careers, we are each trying to negotiate this. Maybe the project of the special issue of this journal is one way to contribute to bringing these issues to a wider audience – even if within neoliberal frameworks it may not be counted as a signifi-

cant research output – to use the language of neoliberal performance measures.

And just going back to reflect on this situation more broadly, one of the experiences that has informed the academic politics of my career, based on long-term engagement with a particular place, was my surprise when I first visited American universities. On that first trip to America, I was surprised to meet scholars who had done their graduate studies on Thailand, or another part of Southeast Asia, got a tenured job in a disciplinary department in an American university, and then subsequently moved on to study another part of the world. I did not understand the strong American academic culture of placing disciplinary knowledge above engagement with and commitment to understanding a place. In this not uncommon situation in the United States academy, it seemed to me that all of the networks that a scholar may have built up during their graduate studies would be lost.

I felt that this type of focus on placing disciplinary knowledge as primary undermines the type of political commitment to collaborative research that I talked about a minute ago. The politics of collaboration that provide entry points to challenging the geopolitical borders of the spatialities of knowledge and academic privilege requires commitment to the people of the place of one's research. It takes time to build the expertise, the linguistic skill and the trust of colleagues in other countries. The idea of using research on one place merely as a stepping-stone to an academic career in a Western university seems contrary to the academic politics that underpins successfully challenging Euro-Amerocentrism.

To an extent, the critiques of Area Studies that were put forward in the 1990s, for example, in the context of critical theory and poststructuralism, are valid. Area Studies does need to be much more critically reflective, and indeed it has become so in recent years. But the great value of area studies research is that it allows conversations across disciplinary borders. It permits a more issue-focused research. And in a world that is increasingly complex, I think that this type of research is much more valuable for responding to pressing issues in the real world. Whether it be issues in health, the environment or politics, the borders of disciplinary knowledge can often present barriers to developing comprehensive analyses and effective responses. In speaking up for the value of Area Studies, scholars who regard themselves as area specialists need to emphasise loudly that the issues we confront today cross existing disciplinary boundaries and for this reason we need to develop frameworks that bring cross-disciplinary work into play.

I keep coming back to the question of collaboration that I talked about earlier. Collaborative research can bring together the skill-base of multiple disciplines

and if you can negotiate this form of collaborative research across disciplinary boundaries it can produce much more relevant outcomes. I believe that Area Studies can transcend the history of its origins in colonial or neocolonial Cold War settings to produce the new forms of knowledge that are required to respond to the complexities of a world that also transcends the boundaries of established disciplines.

Andrea Fleschenberg: *One interesting point you raised was about theorising about power and I would like to address this in the next question. Be it within academic institutions in terms of teaching and research as part of an academic or public discourse within wider society or vis-à-vis political authorities. Negotiating hegemonic influences can amount to a daunting, even career- and life-threatening task for scholars in various locations across Asia, but not only. You highlight the need for a multi-nodal, multidimensional approach to critiquing hegemony when analysing power, moving beyond deconstruction as a form of analysis vis-à-vis newer and older hegemonies. Could you provide maybe one or two examples how you personally negotiated this challenge in your own research, in terms of how you approached this with research partners and research designs – if we think about theoretical frameworks, methods, resources, ethical consideration safeguards?*

Peter Jackson: It comes back to building long-term collaborations with scholars in Southeast Asia. It takes time to demonstrate one's bona fides, one's commitment to the place, and these vital types of collaboration can only be built in the longer term once trust has been established. Coming back to the point of multi-nodal forms of hegemony, I was thinking about the rise of China and how new forms of hegemony are arising even as the impact of older European colonial or American neocolonial forms persist, as we talked about at the beginning of our conversation. While I don't read Chinese, it seems to me that in the case of Southeast Asian Area Studies some of the critiques that were made of this field in the United States and Europe two or three decades ago could now be made of Southeast Asian Area Studies in some Chinese area studies institutes. I mentioned above that the German Government's recent support for Area Studies in this country emerged out of geopolitical considerations. Similarly, it needs to be recognised that some forms of Area Studies in China are also emerging within the context of the geopolitical aspirations of that country. We cannot overlook the likelihood that the forms of knowledge that develop within Chinese Area Studies centres may reflect the projection of Chinese power internationally. Yes, the interdisciplinary methods of Area Studies are vital in the 21st century, but we also need to remain deeply cognizant of the intimate connections of power and knowledge. While we urgently

need the cultural and linguistic insights of interdisciplinary Area Studies, we must at the same time remain aware of the fact we still have to overcome the histories of colonialism and neocolonialism and also engage the phenomenon of a new hegemony that is arising out of an anti-democratic dictatorship.

How does one position knowledge in this complex situation in a region such as Southeast Asia, which is caught between all of these modes of power? Southeast Asia was a site of colonisation by various European powers. Then it was a site of proxy wars between Russia, China and the United States during the Cold War. Now it is a site of China's expanding geopolitical interests. Southeast Asia has been and remains a site of the intersections of all these various forms of global power. How can we conceptualise and theoretically negotiate this complex history of multiple, over-lapping hegemonic powers? Perhaps understanding the well-known ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic diversity and the many plural societies of Southeast Asia can provide insights into how we develop the intellectual tools to understand, and the cultural strategies to negotiate, a multipolar world of several co-existing hegemonic powers.

One of the things I find exciting about Southeast Asia today is that scholars in the various countries of the region are much more connected and aware of what's happening next door in neighbouring countries than they were twenty or thirty years ago. One of the main historical issues for Southeast Asia has been that it was colonised by so many different powers. Indochina was French; Burma, Malaya, Singapore were British; Indonesia was Dutch; the Philippines was Spanish and then American; and Timor was Portuguese. Until quite recently these countries continued to have much stronger cultural, academic and intellectual connections with their respective former colonising power than with their immediate geographical neighbours. Until very recently, Indonesia was still much more connected to the Netherlands than to Singapore or Malaysia; and Cambodia and Laos were more connected to France than to Thailand. However, over the past three decades these countries have all begun to communicate and interact much more among themselves. This is building very interesting forms of conversation that were not possible previously and I think this is one of the entry points for critique that you were asking about before. The increase in the possibility of cross-border conversations is potentially very productive.

Coming back to our positionality in the West, while we in the West have the historical burden of colonialism – which means that self-reflective critique must be the starting point of all our research and collaborations – we also have a responsibility to use the cultural capital that derives from our privileged location and positionality in the global system to promote the type of openings that you have asked about. One small example is the activities of professional academic associations. The Asian Studies Association of Australia has existed

for almost five decades, and in the past its biennial conferences were attended overwhelmingly by Australian scholars of Asia. However, over the past decade there has been a dramatic shift in attendance, with the majority of scholars participating now being from universities and research institutes in Asia. The Asian Studies Association of Australia, and its conferences, have in effect increasingly become venues for presentations and exchanges by scholars who are participating in the dramatic rise of Asian Area Studies within the Asian region itself. And the Australian Asian Studies conferences have become venues for critical work from Vietnam, China and many other countries that scholars in those societies cannot discuss openly at home because of political restrictions. Universities and institutions in the West can provide safer spaces that facilitate forms of critique and criticism that are not possible within authoritarian regimes in Asia. Even within the neoliberal university system that now dominates in the West, we still have levels of funding and cultural and intellectual capital that enable us to mobilise forms of critique that are denied to scholars in many Asian countries.

Andrea Fleschenberg: *If we come back to the example of China and the Belt and Road Initiative – and if we think about research of the Belt and Road Initiative in diverse countries such as, I am just making a list which is not exhaustive, Pakistan, Myanmar, China, Malaysia, Laos, Singapore, not even to mention Central Asian republics – what we see are hegemonic influences and also even securitisation or even a militarisation of such a let's call it a development project or if we want to call it an infrastructural project. Whatever it is, I mean I think these are the realities… What does this then mean for critical knowledge production on the issue at hand? I mean we really face the challenge that yes, we have entry points, we can negotiate spaces but there might be hegemonic influences which are so strong, spaces so restricted, where this impacts then on knowledge production, on certain issues. In this field, if we think particularly about China and the Belt and Road Initiative and research for example on emerging social movements, on demands for participation, how is it imagined, how is it planned? What happens to knowledge production and, again being constructive in that regard, what are counter hegemonic strategies and entry points for you? Considering also that there are different negotiating powers like you say between the local and the non-local scholars. But I would say even for scholars from the West it might just be red tape here, end of the line.*

Peter Jackson: Sometimes as scholars we need to make individual career decisions: is one prepared to publish critical research on China if it may mean that it is not possible to return to China for further research? Or to use an

example from Thailand, given the sensitivity around public discussion of the monarchy and the draconian legal sanctions for criticising the monarchy, some international scholars who have voiced criticisms of the monarchy have done so knowing that they will not be able to return to Thailand, at least for the present period. Some critical Thai scholars have had to flee into exile to avoid being arrested and imprisoned. And some international scholars of Thailand have effectively been blacklisted by the Thai government, while others have been subjected to forms of intimidation by immigration authorities in the country. How do we in the West respond to these types of authoritarianism? I don't think there is a single answer and we each need to make strategic decisions in light of our own research topics, and in terms of our respective networks of colleagues and collaborators who live and work under dictatorial regimes, and who may also be impacted by our decisions and our actions.

I don't think that one scholar acting alone can respond to all of the various strategic options in situations like this. We need to take a broader, collective perspective on a spectrum of responses that may be taken up by different members of our respective academic communities. In my own case, I have made a decision to continue to work in a way that allows me to return to Thailand and to maintain direct connections with Thai colleagues, even if that means I may not be publishing everything that I am aware is taking place. To allow me to continue access ... It is a difficult thing ...

Andrea Fleschenberg: *[...] I know; it is a tough question ...*

Peter Jackson: In terms of my own academic strategy, I have felt that it's been important to maintain direct solidarity with my colleagues in Thailand even if that means I have to undertake a form of self-censorship to allow me to continue that type of access. I strongly respect those who are speaking truth to power in Thailand, but in my own case I have decided to maintain collaborations even if that sometimes means having to engage in self-censorship at a certain level.

Andrea Fleschenberg: *[...] Vincent Houben argues that New Area Studies are a discipline in the making, [an] interdisciplinary discipline, while Katja Mielke and Anna-Katharina Hornidge, who you quote as well in the article, highlight the importance of Area Studies debates on issues of interdisciplinarity, cross-disciplinarity and transdisciplinarity. You have criticised established disciplines as disguised forms of Western Area Studies ...*

Peter Jackson: Vincent says that as well. I quoted Vincent, I think.

Andrea Fleschenberg: *Yes, you did … Area Studies in particular also given the immobility of theory building and the theoretical importance of non-European languages for decolonial critical epistemologies. Like yourself, many highlighted [that] this debate takes place in a wider field of competing disciplines, in terms of theories, methods, institutional resources, training and career perspectives for students and also for early career researchers. One is reminded of the challenges that women's or gender studies have faced so far in terms of breaking through epistemological and methodological borders, achieving sustainable institutionalisation and resources.*

And now let us look forward, maybe the next ten years, so what are for you important steps for critical New Area Studies to take in the coming ten to fifteen years? Remaining conscious on the one hand, I am quoting you here again, from your article (p. 13–14), referring to Chun (2008), "of the caste-like divide between 'local' and 'global' intellectuals" as well as on the other hand of hierarchies within centre-periphery institutions within the country, the region or even within single academic institution". So what would you say, what are the work packages that you would identify for critical New Area Studies to grow stronger, to have an impact or to, I mean, we say cracking in feminist research, cracking patriarchy or gaps or entry points? What would be the work packages for you? And of course, here it's a very broad question I'm asking, feel free to either think of students or early career researchers, university administrations, wherever you would like to start.

Peter Jackson: It seems to me that in Australia the neoliberal framework of knowledge in terms of performance indicators is intensifying the disciplinary formations. For example, every publication is now measured as an output for federal government measurements. One needs to determine a number related to a discipline in reporting each of one's publications. This is a quantitative framework of disciplinary knowledge that is being imposed by the Australian Federal Government and which is so restrictive.

In terms of the work packages, in my own work I try to write across the borders of disciplinary knowledge that are being intensified by neoliberal regimes of academic measurement. In my current research on new religious movements in Thailand my writing is partly anthropology, partly political analysis and partly gender studies. My research is issue focused. Throughout my academic career I have been interested in bringing comparative perspectives to broader issues. In terms of packages for priorities in the next ten-to-fifteen years, I think it will be important to identify broader intellectual issues as focuses of research that allow multiple disciplinary approaches to be brought to bear on those issues. Rather than seeing our topics of research as say an anthropological issue, as a historical issue, or as a question of political analysis, to instead con-

ceptualise our research more broadly and to bring different fields together into conversation on key issues. The important issues in the world don't fit within narrow disciplinary categories. And it is also a matter of finding spaces to allow these cross-disciplinary conversations. It will also be important to argue strongly for research funding that supports this type of approach. An important issue in the decade ahead will be exploring approaches that facilitate bringing together multiple disciplinary methodologies in issue-focused research.

We have talked about a number of difficult issues in this conversation; it takes time to develop skill bases in these various approaches. It also requires a certain breadth of perspective and an openness to listen in conversation to colleagues working in other fields. It also requires an openness to exploring new types of collaborative research, not only between scholars from Western and Asian universities, but also among scholars working in different fields of knowledge. This can only happen in conversation, and with an attitude of openness to collaboration, both across disciplines and across geographical fields.

Andrea Fleschenberg: *How does one create openness or the willingness to listen? If I think about gender studies, which has been doing this for a generation now.*

Peter Jackson: Do you feel they are still minoritised within the academy?

Andrea Fleschenberg: *[…] I think yes and no. I just wrote a handbook article on gender studies [in] a handbook in German […] on international gender studies. I wrote about South and Southeast Asia and I said, "Wow, just South Asia is already so diverse and then Southeast Asia is even more diverse", so we had a big discussion about which countries I then use as case studies and why. But I read obviously the whole shebang and when you read those reports and talk to them, the colleagues that I know who are [at] gender studies centres or teaching there, I think they are still saying "Yeah, we are still marginalised in terms of having proper resources [for] Master/ BA programmes, applying for funding, then there are shrinking spaces because of right-wing populism so also the anti-genderism debate so we are trying".*

And there are different approaches, Thailand more in cooperation with civil society or with international development cooperation, others like in Pakistan, they have established centres of excellence, but they are sort of linked to a government programme and also to Western funding. In other countries they say "okay, we do that but then we have maybe a small steering institute, steering body, but then we borrow from the colleagues who are in law, who are in sociology, who are even in physics, not just to think of social sciences and humanities. And we run the programme we don't have our own staff and pro-

fessors but we borrow, but it always demands that we are in the good books and many of the colleagues who do it, do it on top of their field", you know this is what I am thinking. [...] they have a lot scholarship out there and I think they are making an impact. But if we then talk about disciplines like political science or history and talk to colleagues. This is what I mean when I heard this debate now at the Institute, I was reminded a little bit of what I know from gender studies.

Peter Jackson: Yes, I think it's very similar at my university, the Australian National University. In the early 2000s, together with another colleague I set up a research network on Asian cultural studies. We got a small amount of funding from our departments and initiated graduate seminars, and over a period of time we built up a sufficiently large network of scholars that a new Department of Gender and Cultural Studies was able to be established within the College of Asian and Pacific Studies. This new department emphasises critical cross-disciplinary approaches with a gender studies focus on Asia and the Pacific. This was an example of successful negotiation within the discipline-focused academic structures. The scholars who came together to form that department were mostly from history and anthropology. This took some fifteen years to happen, and it began with academic seminars and building cross-disciplinary conversations. Then undergraduate programmes were created in the new department. So, that was an example of successful academic politics in the context of ongoing emphasis on disciplinary boundaries.

Andrea Fleschenberg: *... and I think even with Area Studies, you talked about this in your article, and this is just the last comment I have about the language, language training. It has been cut down in Germany as well. You have to compete in this field as well, in the field of various disciplines and resources are scarce. You see this in Area Studies.*

Peter Jackson: This is not only happening in Germany. It is also taking place in Britain and Australia, where there have also been cuts to language programmes. Area Studies programmes have historically emphasised the acquisition of language skills to allow in-depth research of documentary sources, oral histories and to undertake interviews and conduct participant observation. If one knows more than one language, it opens up perspectives and worlds of knowledge that often don't exist within particular frames of existence. So, the capacity to maintain language programmes is essential, I agree.

Andrea Fleschenberg: *Thank you very much, Peter. I took a lot of your time, but really, really thank you. It was a very interesting conversation.*

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Area Studies and Disciplines: What Disciplines and What Areas?

Current Debates

Claudia Derichs

Area Studies (AS) debates often centre on the relationship between AS and disciplines, with a particular focus on so-called systematic disciplines including social sciences and economics. To my mind, this is a bit short-sighted and narrows the issue of what disciplines and AS mean. In the following paragraphs, I offer some thoughts about disciplines in a broader sense, about methods and about areas as a structuring element of the institutional academic landscape in Germany. I end with a recommendation for liberating the AS debate from the quest for the relationship between AS and disciplines and for a strong integration of transimperial, transregional, transnational and translocal dimensions into the segmentation of institutions and study programmes.

Disciplines

Natural sciences, life sciences, mathematics, economics, social sciences and the like demand to be characterised first and foremost by particular methods and methodologies. This feature also qualifies the subjects of study subsumed under such headings (e.g. physics, biology, sociology, political science) to be called disciplines. In the German language, disciplines are also called *Einzelwissenschaften* or *Fachwissenschaften*, signalling a kind of singularity and systematicity. They are seen as "systematic disciplines", which is a term that is meant to distinguish them from allegedly non-systematic methods of scholarly inquiry. While systematic / non-systematic is a delicate binary in itself, the designation "discipline" merits attention for several reasons.

I would like to start out by reflecting on the temporality of disciplines and then move on to the methodological plurality of some disciplines. Concerning

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temporality, it is interesting to recall how dynamic the process of the designation of new and abandonment of "obsolete" disciplines has been throughout centuries. Historian Anna Echterhölter examined a case in point. During a fellowship at the German Historical Institute in Washington DC, USA, she researched the emergence and then disappearance of a discipline known as "descriptive statistics" (Echterhölter 2016). It was a discipline with a rather short life of less than a century (1750–1810). The author puts its trajectory into the context of its time:

> It presents the odd case of statistics before data. In these early days, solid numbers were not easy to come by. Words were favored over mathematics, although units and lists, sizes and scopes were increasingly integrated into the text. The statistical descriptions of different countries, which appeared in great number, were much closer to a collection of historical facts, which could include numbers. (Echterhölter 2016: 83)

The discipline did not belong to economics or mathematics. It was the time before historicism, and "to contemporaries, descriptive statistics belonged to the ensemble of auxiliary sciences (*Hilfswissenschaften*)" (Echterhölter 2016: 84, italics in original). The author traces the birth and death of descriptive statistics, pointing out the aspects that moved the discipline's critical scholar August Ferdinand Lueder to eventually reject it – in contrast to prominent proponents of descriptive statistics, among them Johann Christoph Gatterer, Gottfried Achenwall, Johann Stephan Pütter, Arnold Heeren and August Ludwig Schlözer (Echterhölter 2016: 86). This illustration of the ups and downs of descriptive statistics, its rise and fall from grace, also accompanies the development of "history" as the discipline we know today. Looking at methods such as comparing and measuring, from today's perspective the work of historians around the turn of the nineteenth century seems to have been much closer to political science than to history. But political science was not yet established as a discipline. The dynamics are amazing, at least in retrospect, and they give us an idea of how fluid the history of knowledge and the history of science have always been. In the second half of the nineteenth century, we find new disciplines such as neurology (a spin-off from medicine), and in the latter half of the twentieth century, it is probably informatics that stands out as one of the most prominent new disciplines.

When it turns out that one discipline is not sufficient for the study of a problem, combinations such as neuro-biology, bio-chemistry, bio-informatics or geo-informatics are created to study the problem in a more comprehensive and encompassing manner. This quick glimpse into developments over time shows that disciplines are not fixed ontological entities that can claim eternal validity. Methods, too, can change and be transformed; they come and go, as do disciplines. There is no necessary nexus discernible between the designation of a scholarly approach as a discipline at one point in time and its revocation

at another. Nor is it definite that a discipline is always characterised by a particular method.

A highly esteemed discipline is medicine. Medicine is conventionally registered as a discipline in the natural or life sciences. It has numerous sub-disciplines such as pathology, dentistry, urology, pharmacology, ophthalmology, veterinary medicine and many more. Similarly, geography / geo-sciences and economics have numerous sub-disciplines that are often acknowledged as disciplines in their own right. This is understandable, since most human beings would feel uncomfortable if a urologist were to examine their eyes and prescribe glasses of a certain strength. Given these circumstances, I ask: Why it is apparently so straightforward to disapprove of Area Studies as a discipline (with numerous sub-disciplines)? Is there no method to Area Studies and its different strands? Is methodology in AS solely imaginable as an application of methods "borrowed" from the "systematic disciplines"? I pose these questions because I think that there are certainly various methods to researching a particular problem in different regional contexts, but that such methods do not necessarily have to be rooted in approaches from the (systematic) disciplines.

Methods and Areas

An example of the plurality of methods within AS is the introduction of new methodological approaches from Asia. A recently established network of scholars on and from Asia – the Shaping Asia network[1] – discusses numerous fresh and innovative methodological approaches from Asia. While emphasising their origin "from Asia", it is at the same time certain that divisions such as north, south, east or west have become very much obsolete as markers for places of knowledge production. The network takes the criticism of Eurocentrism and methodological nationalism seriously, and Europe is understood as just another region (area) on the globe. The term Area Studies designates an approach that renders Europe an area to be studied from "outside" using theories, concepts and methods that may or may not have been developed there.

Moreover, as Elísio Macamo put it, there is a "Eurocentrism of origin" that has to be distinguished from a "Eurocentrism of application" – a valuable distinction that twists the knife in the wound.[2] What it exposes is the fact that even if theoretical, methodological and conceptual approaches from the so-called global South are acknowledged in the so-called global North, they are not applied to objects of study in said North. Why is that so? What prevents

1 The Shaping Asia network brings together scholars from the Humanities and Social Sciences. It acts as a platform for trans- and interdisciplinary knowledge production among researchers working on and in Asia. Conceptually and methodologically, the network emphasises three main lines of enquiry (connectivities, comparisons, collaborations) and provides a framework for dialogue and comparative engagement among researchers working on related topics in sites across Asia.

2 Personal conversation with Elísio S. Macamo, Freiburg, 22 June 2018. See also Ouédarogo et al. 2018.

social scientists from, for instance, applying theories of tribalism to contemporary Western Europe? Why have some concepts developed to become applied only to “the South”? I would like to illustrate this by taking the concept of kinship as a case in point. Kinship has a splendid track record in anthropology but is hardly used as an analytical concept in studying liberal democracies. Nor is it prominent in sociology. In the former case, the “modern state” has been conceptualised as one that is organised by functional rather than kinship groups. In the latter case, the nuclear family has become understood as “more modern” than extended kinship formats. Hence, kinship studies are perceived to be suitable for analysing “traditional” rather than “modern” societies. This perception did not come about accidentally.

> Central to Western self-understanding in the twenty-first century is that kinship plays no role in politics. This separation has a long genealogy and enormous consequences for research and policy-making. Particularly in the domain of modern politics the presence of kinship was (and is) seen as something to be exorcised in order to establish rational administrative systems, mobilise colonial populations and even destroy terrorist infrastructures. It is behind distinctions between modern and traditional, between Western and “Other” societies. (ZiF Research Group 2026/2017)

I was part of the above cited research group that committed itself to tracing the obvious conceptual split between kinship and politics. As I have discussed in more detail elsewhere (Derichs 2018, 2017), this split has far-reaching consequences for disciplinary and Area Studies. Neglecting the category of kinship in research on Western democracies and societies renders it negligible for the analysis of those states and societies. But, needless to say, the fact of the Kennedys, the Bushes and others should raise a certain awareness of the oddity of neglecting kinship as an analytical category in research on democratic politics. The practice of in vitro fertilisation, the distinction between biological and social parenthood, or legal issues pertaining to paternity tests all illustrate that kinship is by no means an outdated category for social science on “modern” societies (the use of the words “modern” and “traditional” may be tolerated here for the sake of argument). What is at stake is thus no less than a thorough revision of said conceptual split. More precisely, what we did in the research group was

> to explore the implications of viewing non-Western societies through the lens of kinship, and of excluding kinship from the analysis of Western societies, as has been common since the nineteenth century. A critical examination of the epistemological history of disciplinary categories [was] combined with empirical findings about the work that these categorisations still do today. (ZiF Research Group 2026/2017)

We sought to develop new approaches for using kinship as an analytical tool in the study of current questions of belonging and the making and remaking

of the political order.[3] With regard to areas, European states and societies are sites for the enquiry on kinship in the same way as other areas on the globe. With regard to methods, examining kinship in US-American politics requires a different methodological approach than the study of kinship among Rohingya migrant communities in various states, for example. But it is thanks to the rich methodological toolbox of AS that kinship can be made productive as an analytical concept. Coming back to the disciplines, studying kinship with different AS methods is similar to examining, for instance, mental health in medicine with different methods (neuro-biological methods, pharmacological methods, etc.).

Transregional Area Studies

Having used Asia and Europe as designations of areas or regions in the preceding paragraphs, it is now time to scrutinise these area designations and discuss them more critically. To be critical does not mean to abandon the terms and seek alternative terminologies. What I think should be examined are the reasons, in the study programmes of higher education institutions, for segmenting the world into those regions offered for study. Observing the development of institutional representations of "world regions" in academic study programmes, it is striking how long it takes to translate scholarly inferences and empirical realities into institutional formats. While publications of contemporary research on the Indian Ocean, the Mediterranean, or the Bay of Bengal are filling library shelves,[4] universities are rather slow in following up and offering degrees in Indian Ocean or Mediterranean Studies (exceptions confirm the rule).[5] That being said, while Central Asian Studies are by now a tiny but nonetheless seriously acknowledged subject within Asian Studies, in the countries of Central Asia themselves it is quite unusual to have Central Asian Studies departments in higher education.

Similarly, I remember travelling through Southeast Asian countries less than a decade ago and trying to document the work of Southeast Asian Studies departments in Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand. To be honest, the majority of the universities I visited did not have a department of Southeast Asian Studies. The exception back then was Singapore, where the ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute was indeed outstanding for its consolidated institutional framework and its high number of publications in this field of study. The Singaporean case shows that area studies maps may become accepted and adopted in the regions to which they pertain – Southeast Asia being indeed a case in point. The geographical areas themselves have

3 The results of this collaborative research are going to be published in an edited volume (forthcoming). For preliminary intensive reflections on the topic see Thelen / Alber 2017.

4 Out of many, the mention of a few works may suffice to map this field of study: Allen et al. 1998, Lewis / Wigen 1999, Vink 2007, Prange 2008, Jones 2009, Amrith 2013, Varró / Lagendijk 2013, Sheriff / Ho 2014.

5 For a concise assessment of Indian Ocean Studies see Verne 2019.

developed into units of shared visions, values, norms and identities. As Goh argues, such areas should be recognised accordingly:

> While indeed much in the criticism of area studies as contrived geographical and cultural conceptions is warranted, what critics often forget is that the area studies map of the Cold War has been adopted throughout much of the world. Hence, as much as a territorially-bounded concept of the region can be theoretically deconstructed, there is a *lived reality* to this constructed geography. (Goh 2012: 91, emphasis added)

Goh has certainly hit the bullseye by reminding us of the importance of lived realities. I want to take this point further and use it as a bridge to the issue of research *beyond* regions and regional borders. Taking the lived realities, mobilities, connectivities and people's feelings of belonging as a vantage point for defining "areas" may lead to the approval of a "constructed geography", as Goh put it, but it may also lead us to disapprove of the rather stiff boundaries that are drawn by structuring area studies programmes into Japanese Studies, Chinese Studies, Korean Studies, Southeast Asian Studies, South Asian Studies, Central Asian Studies and the like. Oftentimes, and increasingly so in the wake of globalisation, "there is more Delhi in Oman than in India", a phrase referring to the strong presence of Indian communities in Oman. Transregional, transnational and translocal ("transversal" in one word) connectivities are most visible and relevant for people's lives; they reflect geographies that are not defined by borders between territorial or maritime spaces, but by the feeling of belonging regardless of "where in the world" one is physically located.

Is transversal connectedness a new phenomenon? It is not. As Indian Ocean Studies and Mediterranean Studies aptly convey, seascapes and cross-regional landscapes have a rich and complex history. However, conceiving of world regions beyond established meta-geographies (cf. Wippel / Fischer-Tahir 2018) in a consequent manner is a desideratum in many institutions of higher education in general and AS institutions in particular – at least in Germany. The Institute of Asian and African Studies (IAAW) at Humboldt University Berlin has been responsive to the demand for recognising transregionality. From the winter semester 2019, three professorial positions for transregional studies have been held by colleagues with a strong track record in analysing phenomena that transgress national and regional borders.[6] The provocative point of historian and Latin Americanist Michael Goebel notwithstanding – he found that "[b]y and large the limits of 'transregional studies' as a self-proclaimed field or perspective are identical with the boundaries of universities in German-speaking lands" (Goebel 2019: 64) – I believe that transversal perspectives in general and transregional perspectives in particular have tremendous heuristic potential. Of course, anyone can challenge the use of the very term "transregional" at any time because it implicitly hosts a particular comprehension of

6 The three professor positions are for Transregional Southeast Asian Studies, Transregional Central Asian Studies and Transregional Chinese Studies.

the concept of “region” and thereby acknowledges regions as entities. However, this is too easy a criticism and does not contribute to the epistemic value of transversal perspectives (of which the transregional is but one).

What finally merits attention is the comprehension of transregional AS with regard to the skills required for conducting such studies. I am a strong advocate of language proficiency as a necessary tool for practicing AS. Given this conviction, I consider it imperative to include language expertise in the design of transregional studies as well. The claim that I frequently come across is, not surprisingly, that an individual scholar can hardly live up to such a requirement because it would mean, at the end of the day, being trained extensively in several languages, preferably non-European ones. I respond by suggesting that transregional research can be arranged as teamwork, in possibly the same way as transdisciplinary research is often carried out. I see ample choices in the coming years to push for “working with” – or, as I recently called it in a lecture, proceeding from re-thinking towards “we-thinking”(Derichs 2019).

A Response to Claudia Derichs’s “Area Studies and Disciplines”

Ariel Heryanto

Claudia Derichs’s text is one of the best expositions that I have seen over several decades on the now lengthy series of debates about the nature, legitimacy and relevance of Area Studies in research institutions and tertiary education. In admirably lucid and succinct fashion, she critically examines key conceptual and operational issues. I am thankful to her, and to the editors, for inviting me to comment. The Asian Studies debate which I have been following centres on two sets of relations: 1) between traditional academic “disciplines” and “inter-”, “multi-” or “trans-disciplinary” fields, where Area Studies is widely assumed to belong, and 2) between “Asia” and the rest. Below is a modest comment on each, complementing or supporting many of Derichs’s points.

Area Studies and disciplines

The decades-long debate on Area Studies versus disciplines often falls into binary stereotypes, with different degrees of simplification. In the crudest version, it paints Area Studies as an under-theorised, crude empirical enquiry,

focusing on a single non-Western country, versus those in disciplines, characterised by erudite theoretical argument and comparative study of multiple countries leading towards some universal truth about humans or social change.

One may polemically argue that the so-called "disciplines" are actually a kind of "Area Studies" too, except that many fail to acknowledge them as such. Most works in social sciences and the humanities (disciplines) focus on a nation-state, with the important exception of anthropology, with its strong tradition of focusing on even a tiny part of a single country. According to Timothy Mitchell:

> The social sciences at this time were built around the nation-state as their obvious but untheorized frame of reference. The study of the economy, unless otherwise specified, referred to the national economy […]; political science compared "political systems" whose limits were assumed to correspond with the borders of the nation-state; society referred to a system defined by the boundaries of the nation-state; and even culture came to refer most often to a national culture. (Mitchell 2003: 158)

The familiar notion of regions as consisting, first and foremost, of nation-states is problematic for several reasons. It overlooks the immense diversity of their size and their formation. Some countries are tiny in size with a relatively short period of history (e.g. the city-state Singapore). Others are huge, with overwhelmingly diverse populations and a wealth of complex history (e.g. India or China).

A serious study of Indonesia is not possible without a substantive interrogation of the inflows and interface of Chinese, Indian and Middle Eastern thoughts, people, languages, stories, songs and goods prior to European colonialism, nor without considering the impact of the Cold War. These are not simply external influences that can be studied optionally or in isolation from the internal dynamic of Indonesia. They constitute the founding forces that have shaped Indonesia from the very beginning to the present. However, incorporating all these global forces in a study does not require giving up a focus on Indonesia as a single country. For these reasons, Derichs's idea of "transversal" is welcome. Likewise, Europe is as we know it today thanks to its rich and complex encounters with many parts of Asia and Africa.

Asia and the rest

The post-Cold War debate about Asian Studies as outlined above is an expression of the growing tension within knowledge production institutions in the West, where Asian Studies used to be strong. It is prompted by protracted competition over reduced resources within universities and among state departments. These unfold in the broader context of shifting global competition over capital and labour. Understandably, the outcome of such a debate is ultimately dictated by broad political and economic imperatives rather than intel-

lectual exchange or abstract reasoning. More often than not, it is a losing battle for Asian Studies.

This is not to say that interest in Asia has declined dramatically in the West. The rise of China's economy, following those in East Asia and Southeast Asia, has increased interest from global state and non-state agencies. However, this new interest does not translate into huge investments in academic training and research in universities, strengthening or enlarging the size of Asian Studies units. Instead, government think tanks and private institutions take strident steps to conduct their own research and publications, occasionally with some support, if any, from a small number of academics. Universities follow suit. They develop greater appetite for new engagements with Asia, but not necessarily in academic fields, and for various goals broader than purely academic research and training under the formal rubric of "Asian Studies".

In most of Asia, the debate over Area Studies versus disciplines has been non-existent or foreign. As Anthony Reid observes, most Asian scholars are "only 'Asianists'" when they are in Western academic settings but "social scientists" when they are at their home bases (Reid 1999: 142). For a complex set of reasons that I have discussed elsewhere (Heryanto 2002), the production, distribution and consumption of scholarly studies on Asia in internationally prestigious English-speaking venues are gravely uneven. With occasional exceptions from Singapore and several East Asian countries, Asia-based studies on Asia have long been under-represented in international conferences, research grants and networks, as well as in peer-reviewed publications. This situation will continue, if not worsen, in the near future.

Under such circumstances, it is never easy to hear and appreciate the voices of Asian scholars about their own region, or about themselves. It is tempting to dismiss their work for a lack of rigour or as a poor imitation of their counterparts who conduct the "real" scholarly activities half a globe away in America or Europe. By no means am I referring to "orientalism" or "racism" in any straightforward sense. Rather, as academic enterprises around the globe are increasingly incorporated into a global system of hierarchical knowledge production and legitimation, only those deemed relevant, valid or valuable to the centre will be on the radar of active researchers who are themselves a product of the system.

Consequently, it is easy to miss things of great concern to the lives of millions of local Asians. It is also easy to overlook the problematics of the notions of "real" versus "imitation" in scholarship and beyond. I have elaborated such issues with a reference to the ideas of "hero" and "heroism" in the production and consumption of the internationally acclaimed film "The Act of Killing" (Heryanto 2019).

Here is another example: In a study of the cultural tastes and consumption of popular culture among Indonesians from middle-class backgrounds, Solvay

Gerke focuses on Indonesians who aspire to a modern Western lifestyle. In her view, these Indonesians have devised a strategy of "lifestyling", which is a poor imitation of "real" middle-class lifestyles as found in wealthier Western societies (Gerke 2000: 137). She writes, "only a small portion of the Indonesian new middle class was able to afford a Western or urbanized lifestyle. The overwhelming majority was unable to consume the items defined as appropriate for members of the middle class" (ibid.: 146). Interestingly, in her study of Asian cinema, Krishna Sen (1991) identifies a common failure among Western but also some Asian scholars to understand why the majority of Indonesian moviegoers prefer to see a domestically produced film that unashamedly portrays the lifestyle of Americanised Indonesian protagonists, instead of the "real" Western blockbusters.

There are good and bad examples of scholarly work from Area Studies or the discipline-based circles. They need not compete with one another. But in a world of unequals, the potential values of diversity and complementarity are not immediately obvious. It is also unwise to think there are only two options for studying Asia, in a discipline or in Area Studies as we know it today, or with some modifications. Alternative and innovative options have yet to be further explored. One promising key to such exploration is to take Asian languages more seriously, beyond their practical function as a communicative tool, as Derichs proposes, and see language as social relations, as a way of being and world-making.

Disciplining Area Studies: A Comment on the Debate on "New Area Studies"

Itty Abraham

I write this comment from two standpoints: first, as someone who participated in and observed the end of one moment in area studies while working as a programme officer at the US Social Science Research Council (SSRC) in the aftermath of the Cold War (1992–2005); and, second, as a scholar based at an area studies department "in the region" – in this case, the Department of Southeast Asian Studies at the National University of Singapore (2012–present). Both vantage points offer particular angles from which to engage this emergent European debate on "New Area Studies". And, if I may jump to a tentative

conclusion, seen from these dis-locations, while this debate is both critical and thoughtful, it may also be read as incorporating strategic silences while unconsciously projecting its own "areal" anxieties more widely. In its search for answers, especially the expressed call for institutional legitimacy, one must ask what is the problem for which this desire appears to be a solution.

Lessons from the United States

Area studies' "ancestral sin", as it has been referred to by some of my colleagues in a recent article that I otherwise disavow, is traced to its imperial and national security origins (Chua et al. 2019). In both the UK and US, founders of the modern tradition of area studies, it was the intimate linkage of state military and strategic needs with knowledge of a region and its peoples that "originally" contaminated this field of study. In numerous scathing critiques of the Cold War university, mostly written after 1991, scholars have shown how the tremendous international infrastructures of the American academy were built upon the millions spent by the US national security state to know both friends and enemies much better, often substantially aided by private foundations (Chomsky et al. 1998; Miyoshi and Harootunian 2002). This desire (with local institutional variations) was reproduced in France, the Soviet Union, China, Japan and India during the Cold War, on correspondingly minor scales. Not coincidentally, these are all countries that sought or claim great power status in the modern international system.

What must also be pointed out is that in all too many cases, US scholars critical of area studies were themselves beneficiaries of the same state funding streams, which helped them learn foreign languages, visit foreign countries and acquire positions of academic influence. Only a few, notably the distinguished Berkeley East Asianist, Chalmers Johnson, were willing to turn their gaze on themselves as self-consciously as he did, referring to himself as a "spear-carrier for empire" once the scales had fallen from his Cold War eyes. Johnson, initially a specialist on Japan, would go so far as to acknowledge that he turned to the study of China "because that was where the money was" (Johnson 2000). His failing, retrospectively understood, was too much faith and trust in the *bona fides* of the American imperium. Whether we like it or not, the shadow of the state is all over area studies, new and old.

My point is simple. While the origin story is vitally important for understanding why modern area studies came into being, its reproduction over time requires examination also of a host of supporting institutions, including universities, government agencies, international development consultancies, foundations and think tanks, both for their purpose as well as for the opportunities they provide for training, careers and prestige. Inseparable from these institutional and individual passages are well-endowed academic infrastructures such

as grant opportunities, gate-keeping journals, libraries, museums and archival collections. In this light, it is hard not to notice the proliferation of new international research agents and centres in Asia in recent years, from European funding agencies to multiple German political party foundations (*Stiftung*) and French centres for overseas studies. To put it bluntly, why are they (now) so visible in Asia? What is their relation to the "new area studies"? Does including these para-state knowledge-producing-and-supporting institutions in the discussion help situate the "crisis" of area studies in Europe differently? At a minimum, in order to assess what is at stake in the "new area studies", is it not important to consider the politics and impact of state institutions and funding streams for area studies research and capacity building, whether in Europe or overseas?

The view from the region

Area studies done in the region is not the same as area studies practiced in metropolitan countries (the discussion that follows refers primarily to social science fields, not the humanities). This is a fundamental point that must be appreciated. Regional area studies centres study the "home"; metropolitan centres of area studies study non-local places that may or may not represent the "other". Moreover, in Southeast Asia, the region is studied at multiple sites, only one of which is the area studies department. Effectively, many scholars in disciplinary departments at my university are also area studies scholars, requiring the same training and expertise and meeting the same standards in order to be taken seriously and seen as credible. What differentiates area studies as practiced in regional area studies centres from area studies done in disciplinary departments in the region are their audiences, norms and approaches to knowledge production.

My colleagues in the Department of Southeast Asian Studies celebrate crossing disciplinary boundaries, they make claims to universal theory-building from local settings, they teach the region as a whole, whether as a unified or disjointed space, making clear their investment in a complex understanding of places and peoples beyond and below the nation-state. In contrast, my disciplinary neighbours are less adventurous, disciplined by their need to be recognised as peers by international colleagues who hold the same affiliations. My neighbours' limitations are marked by their distance from the disciplinary mainstream, a separation that is flagged in the titles of their work: [*topic X or theme Y*] *in Asia, in Southeast Asia, in Singapore*. Disciplinary colleagues in the region are, all too often, relegated to empirical data production and theory-testing by their metropolitan colleagues who have claimed the prestigious high ground of theory-building for themselves. Regional disciplinary adherents (are

made to) feel parochial in a universal space; by contrast, my area studies colleagues see the particular as the ground from which universals may emerge.

The intellectual challenges facing area studies scholars are much greater, precisely because they cannot fall back on the alibi of disciplinary norms and boundaries. By the same token, they are also much freer to make grander claims and stronger assertions because they range more freely and with fewer methodological constraints. It is no surprise that when Southeast Asia becomes the source for universal theory it is almost always produced by area studies scholars, not disciplinary fellow travellers.

What I am getting at is a global division of intellectual labour that, in spite of welcome change in recent decades, still privileges theory that comes from the Global North. Yet, it can be argued, what is disciplinary knowledge other than area studies of the metropolis? The canonical figures of modern sociology – to take just one example – Max Weber and Émile Durkheim, were writing from and about their home countries, Germany and France, respectively. Why is their work considered foundational of a discipline instead of being seen as (merely) area studies? Their disciples' ability to claim that Weber's and Durkheim's findings are universal cannot be separated from the power differentials that divide and create Global North and South. In other words, these are claims not adjudicated through epistemology but rather via geopolitics. The global distribution of power/knowledge is what makes some national understandings universal – worthy of disciplinary status – while relegating others to parochial modifications, or worse, aberrations from the norm.

Area studies in the region is homologous with disciplinary knowledge in the metropolis. Area studies in the metropolis, by contrast, is constrained by its apparent distance from the established disciplines and its geographical area of study. By specialising in the study of foreign spaces and people, metropolitan area studies scholars relegate themselves to performing second-class knowledge in the eyes of their mainstream colleagues, forever having to justify, explain and legitimise themselves in non-intellectual ways. Little wonder that we see a drift toward overtly serving state objectives by so many area studies colleagues working in the United States – a compensation for institutional marginality? For those who don't want to do this, for good reason, the only remaining solution appears to be the old saw, "if you can't beat 'em, join 'em". Or, as these essays propose, identify area studies as a discipline. This response, while understandable, will not solve the greater problem of why some kinds of regional knowledge are privileged over others, a structural hierarchy that originates in the spatial origins of each knowledge formation.

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New Area Studies as an Emerging Discipline. The Way Ahead for Southeast Asian Studies

Current Debates

Vincent Houben

Fifteen years ago, I wrote an article on the marginalisation of Southeast Asian Studies in Germany. This piece was meant to engage in stock-taking at a moment when major budget cuts were being imposed on the Institute of Asian and African studies at Humboldt University, only shortly after I started working there. Referring to the contradiction between the politics stressing the importance of Asia on the one hand and the factual reduction of the university-based knowledge infrastructure on Asia on the other, I pointed to the external and internal causes for this process of decline. As one of the so-called "small study fields" (*kleine Fächer*), Southeast Asian Studies was an easy target for university administrators trying to find places to cut costs. Subjected to rigorous quantitative benchmarking and represented only by small-scale units scattered across Germany, such fields were relatively defenceless. But there were internal factors as well that made this branch of Area Studies vulnerable at that time: internal conflicts between philological and social science approaches to the region, the unresolved debate on what an "area" in area studies actually was, the relatively isolationist character of the German orientalist tradition and a focus on the extension of existing knowledge rather than on innovation (Houben 2004).

Since then the externalities of Southeast Asian Studies have unfortunately altered very little, with neo-liberal technocratic university management still on the rise and, despite the rise of a multipolar world, a continued lack of political will among Western leaders to earnestly engage with Asia and the global South. Indeed, the sweep of populist conservatism has strengthened the tendency towards preoccupation with the Self at the expense of the Other. But

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the scientific dynamics of the field have changed in substantial ways. Despite all the staff reductions, this branch of Area Studies remains active and its practitioners are more vibrant than ever, as was recently shown at the tenth EuroSEAS conference in Berlin in September 2019. There German Southeast Asianists interacted with circa 700 colleagues from other centres of learning in Western countries and from the region itself. The scope of themes was markedly broader and involved issues of current global relevance such as climate change and democratic regression. Transdisciplinary and transregional approaches moved into the foreground. More than before, a process of self-reflection has begun to examine what Southeast Asian Studies is, what kind of knowledge it should produce and how it should develop into new directions (www.euroseas2019.org).

In this contribution I want to present a mission statement on the future of Southeast Asian Studies and argue that it should strive to become a discipline rather than remaining a mere field of studies. Some would consider this move a surrender to an old, nineteenth-century model of university organisation, which was based on a classic division between a limited number of recognised, predominantly Eurocentric disciplines. Indeed, even until today, disciplines have acted as the watchdogs of established formats of scientific endeavour and, not unimportantly, as the main avenues through which funding for teaching and research have been channelled.

New disciplines have emerged in the natural sciences as a result of specialisation but, for some reason, the same development has not occurred in the humanities and social sciences. There new terrains are covered by so-called study fields, for which the financial resources fluctuate with societal acceptance but have never attained the same level of institutionalisation that established disciplines are still able to command. Instability and fluctuation also prevail in Area Studies in general and Southeast Asian Studies in particular. By becoming a discipline, New Area Studies could then strategically move into safer waters and become part of the main canon of university knowledge production, without constantly being challenged to prove its right of existence. Following the Humboldtian tradition, in Germany "world knowledge" (*Weltwissen*) has recently emerged as a concept in this context, implying both knowledge of the world beyond Euro-America and knowledge from places other than the centres of Western knowledge production.

Far from advocating a conservative agenda, I am convinced that by becoming a discipline, Area Studies in the plural must progressively converge into a common singular and develop the epistemic clarity that enables its own full-fledged "disciplinarity". I think that in current debates on Southeast Asian Studies strong elements of such a convergence are already becoming visible (see the thematic issue of *South East Asia Research* 27(1), 2019, introduced and edited by Rachel Harrison and Geir Helgesen). A discipline fulfils a range

of conditionalities that make it exclusive in relation to other disciplines. These include a clearly demarcated subject matter, a set of basic theories, distinct methodologies, specific publication outlets, own programmes of teaching and research and a clearly identifiable scientific community.

One could argue that Area Studies, and Southeast Asian Studies as a branch, have all of this but still only in a disintegrated, sometimes rather haphazard manner, which may offer to some a comfort zone for much variability and freedom to experiment but provide too little institutional punch. The critical question is therefore whether the field of area studies moves or should move into the direction of becoming a discipline or stay a scattered, open-ended and highly contingent field of study. I think there are good intrinsic reasons in favour of choosing the first option, or at least considering it seriously. By embracing the programme of becoming an own discipline, New Area Studies could adopt a progressive and forward-looking agenda instead of retaining its predominantly defensive mode in the academic competition for ideas and resources.

Stock-taking: An emerging discipline

The first step would be to take stock and summarise where Area Studies now stands in the face of the criteria listed above for recognition as a discipline. As far as subject matter is concerned, Southeast Asian area studies occupies a clear-cut epistemological terrain, focusing on human world-making (or "worlding") within the world region conventionally labelled Southeast Asia. Area is here not so much defined as a distinct territory but as a location from which perspectives on the world emerge that are different from those in other areas (not only the West). Far from trying to extrapolate the singularity of the area, the aim of this scientific endeavour is to gain a deep understanding of its alterity, i.e. relative difference in relation to other worldviews. Not only is the object of study relational but also its spatio-temporal embeddedness. Following up on current debates in the field of geography, area should be understood in the chronotopical sense, as a temporal-spatial constellation within which various time dimensions and spatial scales, ranging from local to global, intersect. This idea of area is open to human mobility as well as translocal and transregional dimensions.

The term "timespace" or "chronotope" refers back to Mikhail Bakhtin's attempt to capture entities in the format of dialectic mutualities. In geography it was first applied by Mireya Folch-Serra to the study of spaces, regions and places. Other geographers have followed suit and argued against the Euro-American concept of time and space as empty containers. Instead they propose that timespace unfolds only through human agency, possessing a "becoming" quality through circulation, (re)combination and rhythmicity as condensed in

specific nexuses (Mulíček et al. 2015: 308–310). It is through these chronotopes that the area in New Area Studies manifests itself. Cultural formations can only appear and be fruitfully studied within such timespace dimensions.

Area Studies theory is not so much based upon a singular discipline, usually chosen from the humanities or social sciences, but is rather considered to be a cross-disciplinary (Jackson 2019) or even interdisciplinary endeavour. Instead of refuting Western scientific knowledge creation altogether, Area Studies has tried to cut across disciplinary boundaries or fuse theoretical notions from different disciplinary fields. Whereas disciplines are considered to be disconnected, largely autonomous undertakings producing results for a circumscribed terrain only, interdisciplinarity promises to integrate knowledge across disciplinary divides. In this manner phenomena that lie beyond single disciplinary endeavours become visible, allowing for "new" knowledge to emerge. However, interdisciplinarity in a predominantly disciplinary environment is still often considered to be a non-starter, as over time disciplines have developed their own languages, epistemological styles and assessment criteria, becoming durable as disciplinary units precisely for this reason (Jacobs / Frickel 2009). Relegating Area Studies theory simply to interdisciplinarity falls short of formulating an own, independent theoretical basis.

Therefore, in the theoretical sense New Area Studies should be more than cross- or interdisciplinary but rather "post-disciplinary". Boike Rehbein has proposed a critical theory in the form of a kaleidoscopic dialectic, in which a relational epistemology transcends prevailing dichotomies of universalism and relativism. Western principles of scientific cognition, based on the universalist thought of René Descartes, Georg Hegel and Karl Marx, presupposed that the world is a unitary totality, which can be explained from one single, objective perspective. Theodor Adorno instead came up with a relational understanding of reality, which he labelled constellation or configuration. Following up on Adorno and Norbert Elias's idea of figuration, Rehbein argues that the object of research is not independent but consists of a multitude of relations, which are situated not on the level of totality but on that of specificity (Rehbein 2015). The understanding of reality as a set of specific relations, which cannot be explained fully on the basis of cognition, is the fundamental point of departure for New Area Studies's meta-theory.

On a more pragmatic level, Area Studies can neither be merely descriptive (something it is often accused of) nor engage in the verification and/or falsification of Western theory but should produce theory itself. With its focus on specificity, the kaleidoscopic dialectic has the potential to generate theory, not of the universalistic kind but what has been labelled as "middle-range". In another publication I have already outlined that mid-range theoretical concepts entail comparativity, in the sense that they are both globally referential and area-specific at the same time (Houben 2017). Earlier theoretical interventions

originating from Southeast Asian Studies match exactly this format – think of theatre state, *mandala* state, geobody of the nation, Zomia, galactic polity, etc. The key element shared by all these categories is that they have been grounded in area-specific cases yet framed in such a way that they could apply to similar space-time configurations in other parts of the world. The idea of Benedict Anderson on the "imagined communities" underlying Southeast Asian nationalisms (Anderson 1983) could successfully be extended to Europe and elsewhere and for this reason it entered mainstream theoretical work

Area Studies is often practised through the application of a mix of established methodologies. Superficially, this habit could be rated as an indication of its non-disciplinary character. Indeed, "areanists" often use the methods of the root discipline they were trained in at some point of their academic career, such as linguistics, history, politics, anthropology and the like. Newer methodologies are a bit more sophisticated since, depending on the object of research, they engage in methodological "triangulation", i.e. a combination of disciplinary methodologies that seem to fit best for the study of a particular subject within an area. This mixed methodology is then thought to offer the best empirical results for non-Western area contexts. The problem is that the way in which research data is generated and then analysed still reflects Western ontologies, with the result that non-Western cultural patterns often fall through the cracks of the analytical grid that is applied.

Parallel to a comprehensive theory, it would therefore be important to develop a meta-methodology that is specific to Area Studies, which would then underscore its disciplinary nature. Without wanting to diminish the existing methodological repertoire, which includes participant observation, critical text analysis, conducting interviews, oral history, statistical analysis and the like, the question remains of how area studies should analyse the data generated in ways that are particular to the discipline. At this juncture a case could be made for the mapping method of situational analysis (SA), which is a sequel to the grounded theory method (GTM). The grounded theory method does not start from any existing theory, which is then tested in the form of a case study, but involves empirical data collection in combination with interactive analysis. The data are analysed in several steps in order to develop abstract categories that form the basis for independent theory production.

Critiques of the grounded theory method have emerged with regard to the biased role of the researcher and the nature of the interaction between the researcher and his/her interlocutors. Nevertheless, the advantage of GTM remains that the knowledge acquired and the abstractions produced always reflect specific chronotopical contexts. Yet how to integrate context into analysis and how to avoid conceptual simplification when making abstractions on the basis of rendering concrete social processes remain unresolved issues. In contrast, the situational analysis method (SA), as developed by Adele Clarke

and others (2015), does not research social processes but looks at social arenas, which are inferred from field data on the basis of several rounds of relational mapping exercises. SA ultimately aims at the production of situated knowledge, marked by place, time and circumstance. The aim is not to separate object from subject, micro from macro, individual from society but rather to show the ways in which these are intertwined (Connley 2019: 72–80).

Briefly summarising my previous discussion on the subject matter, theory and methodology of new area studies, it appears that the core of these lies in the aim of finding relational spatiotemporal outcomes instead of making static, singular and generalised claims of truth. The main subject matter, focusing on processes of world-making within a perspectival time-space constellation called "area", puts human agency and positionality at the centre of the scientific effort. Its theoretical basis moves beyond multi-/trans-/cross- or inter-disciplinarity and adopts kaleidoscopic dialectic as the principle of knowledge generation in the format of comparativity. Its methods consist of no mere eclectic triangulation of disciplinary methodologies but are based upon situational analysis. Taken together this package is homogenous enough, so I argue, to qualify for disciplinary status.

Additional criteria of disciplinarity are fulfilled as well: own programmes of teaching and research, specialised publication channels and a coherent scientific community. Since these are well known, these dimensions can be dealt with in brief. Leading institutions of Southeast Asian Studies worldwide combine teaching and research but are also embedded in broader ventures of Asian, Afro-Asian or global studies. Their transregional and interdisciplinary institutional setups allow for students and specialists alike to transcend what Claudia Derichs called the tunnel vision of conventional Area Studies, to explore alternative epistemologies and engage in international scholarly cooperation across socio-cognitive geographies (Derichs 2017).

As far as specialised publishing outlets are concerned, there is no doubt that area studies has its own avenues of knowledge transmission. Major academic publishers have series of (Southeast) Asian Studies volumes and there exist specialised international journals – ranging from the prestigious *Journal of Asian Studies* and *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* to German national ones such as *IQAS*, *Asien* and the *Journal of Southeast Asian Affairs*. At the beginning of my digressions I pointed to the EuroSEAS association and its bi-annual conferences, where hundreds of Southeast Asianists meet, exchanging information and truly experiencing the fact of belonging to a single scientific community.

The way forward

After having made a case for Southeast Asian Studies as a branch of the emerging discipline of New Area Studies, the question remains of what should be

done to realise this project of upgrading its status in the scientific landscape. The main answer lies, I think, in greater cooperation and exchange between institutions and scholars within and between the world regions concerned. Here too creativity and ingenuity are needed to transcend existing formats of scholarly cooperation and engage in a true exchange of knowledge based on mutual respect and equality as part of a New Area Studies ethics. The current digital infrastructure and improved conditions for mobility can facilitate this to an extent that was impossible twenty or thirty years ago. What is also needed is a reconsideration of the principles of intellectual property that are now vested in the individual scholars and their institutions.

Until now, and in contrast to the natural sciences, publications in area studies are mostly single-authored. The number and quality of publications of each individual scholar is an important criterion for his/her academic career. Therefore, all Southeast Asianists are more or less compelled to become involved in a rat race for the highest number and the most prestigious publications. Participation in joint publications and in publications that appear in Southeast Asia instead of the West are still ranked rather low. This logic of university assessment should be overhauled and replaced by a mechanism in which the originality and scientific merit of publications is appreciated rather than their individual authorship and sheer number.

In addition, students should be trained from the beginning to engage in group research. The scope of the most promising themes in area studies is simply too large to be covered by a single scholar any longer. These research groups can now be pluri-local, involving specialists as well as students from Southeast Asia and other parts of the world in virtual classrooms. Joint field research, online discussion groups and several persons writing simultaneously on the same paper are techniques that can easily be realised as a result of increased mobility and digital technology. The results of such endeavours should be uploaded on an open access platform, so that hierarchies of knowledge production are levelled. Rules organising proper scientific conduct in such an open environment and new mechanisms of scientific quality assessment should be developed, so that individual scholars still benefit from their engagement in scientific exchange for their own individual careers.

This all may sound very idealistic but the fact that Southeast Asian Studies is a rather small discipline-in-the-making, where most specialists know each other face-to-face and are informed about each other's research interests, creates a potential for commonality that is lacking in the large, established disciplines. At least in Europe national funding agencies are losing their importance in the face of European institutions. This heightens the pressure to engage in international cooperation in any case.

I am aware that my argument in favour of New Area Studies becoming a discipline and for a new way of organising research and teaching can be con-

tested. This outline is by no means a complete let alone finished project but only a blueprint for what should happen. Yet, given the current state of an ongoing and increasingly differentiated debate in area studies, I think it is the right moment to try to capture where exactly the potential for the future of New Area Studies lies. Despite many struggles and reorganisations, Southeast Asian Studies is still one of the most dynamic and intellectually vibrant fields in Area Studies worldwide. Its complexity makes its innovative potential high and I think that its practitioners should try to seize the opportunities that are now surfacing.

A Comment on Vincent Houben's "New Area Studies as an Emerging Discipline.The Way Ahead for Southeast Asian Studies"

Ramon Guillermo

Most accounts locate the heyday of Southeast Asian (SEA) Studies during the post-WWII era, especially when the Vietnam War was in full, devastating swing and a lot of money was being poured into US counter-insurgency campaigns throughout SEA. This all-around war effort naturally involved academic institutions, which found themselves awash with funds for undertaking research projects (including those not directly involved in the war or even opposed to it). Indeed, as the historian Wang Gungwu reminds us, the founding of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) cannot be understood separately from two major events of the twentieth century, namely, the anti-communist massacre of 1965 in Indonesia and the Vietnam War. SEA Studies, as it is known today, was born in a state of exception and grew up in a state of war. There is nothing like a war to bring together interdisciplinary teams to work on a single goal, and there is nothing like a theatre of war to make one appreciate the value of an Area Studies approach. The end of this state of exception and transition to the "post-ideological" globalised era was arguably heralded by the EDSA Uprising in the Philippines, which produced in its turn an entire liberal, orientalist and mystificatory literature on the "peaceful" or "spiritual" Filipino.

The challenge to SEA Studies in the West, which finds itself persisting beyond the state of exception, is how to flourish and to avoid the fate of languishing indefinitely or even of totally disappearing. The parameters that determine the

current state and future of SEA Studies, as well as all other academic disciplines, have been determined by what may be called the neoliberal takeover of the university. We live in an era of globalised competitive university rankings, quantitative performance benchmarking and performance metrics such as h-indices, citation rates and journal impact factors. At the mercy of these disciplinary forces, SEA Studies in the West, with its numerous "*Orchideenfächer*" ("orchid subjects", i.e. exotic, unusual subjects with small numbers of students), has repeatedly fallen victim to rationalisation, downsizing, merging and even closure of many of its small academic institutions.

Given this difficult academic environment, Houben points to the perception of a lack of disciplinal coherence in SEA Studies as the key factor in the weak institutional foothold of SEA Studies in the academic domain. He therefore proposes the recognition of SEA Studies as a discipline called "New Area Studies". As an emergent discipline, SEA Studies must possess a certain coherence in terms of its subject matter, theory and methodology, according to Houben. Despite the fact that he attempts to be as general in his formulations as possible, there is no doubt that Houben's formulations are exclusively oriented to SEA Studies in the West. For example, his elaboration on the "clear-cut epistemological terrain" of SEA Studies, the main aim of which is "to gain a deep understanding of its alterity", is arguably a project of SEA Studies in the West and not that of SEA Studies in SEA, where there may not be the same emphasis on matters of "alterity" to Europeans. Moreover, Houben's proposals for going beyond "Western" modes of thought are based entirely on an internal Western conversation taking place within the Western intellectual tradition. His proposals for a theoretical grounding of the discipline in the "kaleidoscopic dialectic" (Boike Rehbein) and, for the methodological side, on "situational analysis" (Adele Clarke) are stringently Euro-American in origin. Southeast Asian scholars and their intellectual traditions are firmly and politely excluded from the all-important conversations regarding the subject matter, theory and methodology of SEA Studies.

Things become even more unreflective as Houben goes on to discuss how SEA Studies meets the additional criteria of disciplinarity such as teaching and research programmes, specialised publication channels and a coherent scientific community. By consistently eliding the problem of existing power relations among the various centres of production and dissemination of SEA Studies on a global scale, Houben can only provide us with an extremely incomplete and partial account of the current situation of SEA Studies. When he mentions in quick succession the "leading institutions of Southeast Asian studies worldwide", the "major academic publishers" and the "prestigious journals", one immediately wonders if any of these are located in SEA (barring the special case of Singapore). He admits, however, that "publications that appear in Southeast Asia instead of the West are still ranked rather low" and that "all

Southeast Asianists are more or less compelled to become involved in a rat race for the highest number and the most prestigious publications". If, in light of their careers, it really doesn't make sense for Southeast Asianists in the West to publish in "non-prestigious" journals in SEA, does the same apply to Southeast Asians doing SEA Studies in Southeast Asia? Is it really such a shame for Southeast Asians to publish in their "non-prestigious" journals, in their own languages, so that they can have some kind of humble, non-prestigious dialogue about themselves among themselves? Do Southeast Asianists in the West and in SEA (as well as those in other parts of the world) really belong to a "single scientific community", as Houben believes? Do they really have the same kind of access to those "leading institutions", "major academic publishers" and "prestigious journals" to which he refers? Is he really serious when he writes that "most specialists [in SEA Studies] know each other face-to-face and are informed about each other's research interests"?

Granted, Houben may accept all of these "injustices" as givens which must, at least for the time being, be accepted as academic fate. But these injustices are precisely those that will continue to consign scholars and academic institutions in SEA to a permanent condition of marginality and intellectual dependency. SEA Studies scholars in SEA cannot therefore afford to be uncritical of the current directions and tendencies of the neoliberal university and how these shape their field of study today. But let us consider SEA Studies in SEA separately for a moment. Perhaps the error of SEA Studies in SEA is that it has tried for too long to become a mirror image, in terms of conceptualisation and institutionalisation, of SEA Studies in the West. Because of this, it has ended up trapped in a merely reactive game of catch-up. Worse, it has been locked in a perennial and seemingly inescapable "politics of recognition" that ensures its permanently dependent and subordinate status in relation to SEA Studies in the West (another colonial legacy for sure). This should not be the case. SEA Studies in SEA must assume a different form and must grow organically from the multiple and interconnected networks of scholars working in SEA.

However, in spite of all the good intentions, even here the networks are extremely uneven. Linguistic, geographical, historical and cultural affinities in SEA continue to overdetermine in almost random and contingent ways the degree and extent of academic cooperation and intellectual convergence in SEA Studies. Nothing can be forced in this case. An exploratory and experimental spirit may therefore be more conducive to the organic development and growth of SEA Studies in SEA rather than a disciplinary process dictated from the West and formulated in accordance with the inexorable imperatives of the neoliberal university.

It may seem paradoxical, but one point of convergence for Southeast Asianists in SEA (though perhaps initially mainly involving Indonesians, Filipinos and Thais) was the great and warm personality of Benedict Anderson. Ben, an

"orang bule" who claimed to have invented the term itself, was a true Southeast Asian cosmopolitan intellectual. He was a "Western" Southeast Asianist who looked upon the intellectual traditions and cultures of the nations he studied with deep respect, astonishing openness and boundless humility. To enrich his own theories, he learned voraciously from "marginal" and "forgotten" thinkers of SEA with much enthusiasm and pride. Having often walked the streets of Metro Manila with him, I saw how he looked upon ordinary people and even street children as his teachers. He deplored the turn of the neoliberal university towards the devaluation of languages, literatures and cultures in the study of SEA. He despised the careerism, bean-counting and narrow disciplinary focus of the contemporary neoliberal academic milieu and thought that absolutely nothing good would ever come of it. A few years after his death, an extraordinary conference on Ben Anderson was held in Yogyakarta at the Universitas Sanata Dharma (2017). The great majority of participants were from Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines and Japan, and most of the papers on the most diverse topics were delivered in Bahasa Indonesia. In warm affection for Ben, hundreds of participants and students came even though school was out of session. At a meeting at the end of the conference attended by the organisers, we made plans for more such conferences and seminars to further understand, advance and critique Ben's ideas and more importantly to use these meetings to develop a stronger dialogue among ourselves towards a deepening of SEA Studies by and for Southeast Asians. Though that plan has not yet materialised, there may actually be a lot of potential in it.

Southeast Asians weren't mere objects of study for Ben. To him, we weren't just fodder for dissertations, glorious academic careers and institutional respectability. We were his friends, interlocutors, fierce critics, collaborators and comrades. We were bound together in thinking and dreaming about the future of Southeast Asia.

In order to attain its potential, SEA studies in SEA needs to overcome at least two things initially. Firstly, scholars in SEA should overcome the stubbornly national orientation that limits the scope of their study. It is a fact that up to now, the great majority of scholars from SEA who take their PhDs abroad concentrate on studying their own countries while exerting hardly any effort to study other Southeast Asian languages or to engage in comparative approaches. They may thus be negatively pigeonholed as "scholar-informants" on their own countries rather than as being on a par with other highly trained Southeast Asianists. Another result of this parochial narrowness is the quite comical situation of universities in SEA having to rely on visiting scholars from Australia or the US, for example, to give lectures, analyses and timely updates on contemporary events in their neighbouring countries. Even among themselves, Southeast Asianists in SEA generally continue to be consigned to a marginal or secondary status as specialists on their own countries at the

"international" level. It is as if the pinnacle of scholarship on German Studies, for instance, could be achieved in Brunei rather than in Germany, or that such a state of affairs could even be tenable.

Secondly, efforts should be made to overcome the replication of the binary West-East logic in the orientation of SEA Studies even within SEA. In order to address this, and in spite of the extremely limited resources available, academic centres of SEA Studies in SEA ought to develop multi-nodal networks of sustainable cooperation in teaching, research and publication involving academic institutions within and without SEA. Such networks, which will have their centres in SEA, will hopefully give rise to more open dialogical spaces of communication where essential questions on the subject matter, theories, methodologies, power relations and ethical practices in and of SEA Studies can, for the first time, seriously be posed and collectively debated on a genuinely global scale.

"New Area Studies as an Emerging Discipline" – A Critical Commentary

Elísio Macamo

Vincent Houben's think piece is a passionate and bold case for the transformation of Southeast Asian Studies into a discipline of its own. This, according to Houben, would serve two equally important goals. One would be to help address the problems that this particular area of study faces in terms of recognition within the German academic establishment, a condition that undermines the ability of its practitioners to secure research funds and adequate funding for academic programmes. The other goal would be to bring an intellectual developmental process to its logical end by not only acknowledging a distinct research and study object, but also by delineating a clear theoretical approach and set of methodological procedures to support any endeavours that invoke Asian Studies as a discipline.

It is fair to make a distinction between two types of concern in Houben's think piece. There is, on the one hand, a practical concern and, on the other, an epistemological one. The former is a statement of the constraints faced by Southeast Asian Studies that necessitate its transformation into a discipline.

The latter offers a tightly argued scholarly case for the proposed solution. Both types of concern are compelling in and of themselves. However, it is not entirely clear whether together they make the case that the author believes he is making. Treating Southeast Asian Studies as a discipline in order to overcome logistical constraints is a legitimate case to make, one which does not place any kind of onus on the author to demonstrate that it constitutes a discipline in its own right. After all, developments since Bologna have created a broad institutional framework within which disciplines have increasingly played a subordinate role in the distribution of positions and funds within universities. It is true that old habits die hard and, consequently, an appeal to disciplines still commands respect. Nonetheless, it is fair to assume that Area Studies has not been disadvantaged on that account. Within universities it is arguably the case that the successful integration of disciplines within the Area Studies construct has, if anything, helped it more than harmed it. In other words, Area Studies appears to have symbolic capital that may be greater than Vincent Houben might be prepared to acknowledge.

The epistemological case is a refreshing statement of the (continuing) relevance of Area Studies. The way Houben frames the object – as "world-making" that occurs at a local spot where different time dimensions and spatial scales intersect – is a powerful attempt to avoid the pitfalls of essentialism that have rendered Area Studies guilty of being a tool for Western dominance. This is accomplished by adopting a decidedly relational approach that places emphasis on conceptualising reality as, to use Houben's own words, a set of relations. Framed in this manner, the intellectual pursuit underlying the study of world-making does not aim at applying theory and validating it empirically somewhere, but rather at description, with the aim of producing novel theory. This is the sense in which Houben favours a methodological approach informed by grounded theory and, in particular, by situational analysis, for the focus is on emergent entities, rather than on perennial ones that are accounted for by overarching truths.

It is hard not to agree with Houben's passionate description of what the discipline of "New Area Studies" is all about. However, the description is an equally strong case for the preservation of Area Studies as a framework within which disciplines constrained by the historical and political context of their emergence can engage in meaningful theoretical and conceptual soul-searching when confronted by an elusive object that must not be taken for granted. There is a powerful exercise in humility that Houben's account of the new discipline invites us all to engage in. Such an exercise makes room for a deeper understanding of Area Studies as a form of methodology of the social sciences and the humanities, for the epistemological framework it offers is one that challenges researchers to critically evaluate how they frame their object and how they are able to produce credible accounts of reality.

Forcing Southeast Asian Studies into the corset of a discipline in order to respond to financial constraints blunts its critical edge by recreating the original sin of Area Studies, namely the Western gaze that renders the world intelligible as part of the "world-making" concerns of a community of scholars who feel marginalised at home. Such a discipline would necessarily invite a call to arms from the scholars from the region concerned. They would challenge a potential pretence of knowledge that pays lip service to unknown, or repressed, ontologies conjured up by the theorists of the new discipline to lend legitimacy to their own claims to truth. If there is anything that we have learnt over the years, especially in the exciting responses to the West issuing from the Rest, it is that the scholarly field has become a veritable minefield to any scholar based in the West who lays claims to knowledge about the Rest. However well-meaning this may be, and there is no doubt about this as far as Vincent Houben is concerned, it is easy to mistake such claims as ploys that serve the reproduction of Western dominance by other means.

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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), "fragmegration" (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 precolonial 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 compartimentalised 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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Southeast Asia as a Litmus Test for Grounded Area Studies

Christoph Antweiler

Abstract

Using Southeast Asia as an example, this paper is a plea for a reconciliation of diverging epistemologies in Area Studies. The argument is for a moderate realism that conceptualises areas as socially constructed but based on empirical research. The southeastern part of Asia, being extremely diverse – historically a mixing zone with no hegemonic dominant civilisation and currently lacking a truly regional power – provides us with a litmus test for area methodology. In reclaiming a spatial reality this contribution systematically develops steps towards a realist approach to Area Studies. This is done by demonstrating that the core of Area Studies should be seen in a theory and methodology of socio-spatial relations. With regard to theoretical approaches and methods it is argued that the notion of family resemblance and the method of social network analysis are especially fruitful by allowing for a critically reflected and yet empirically oriented study of areas in Asia.

Keywords: Critiques of Area Studies, realism in Area Studies, space, network analysis, family resemblance, Southeast Asia

> The task is to render space autonomous
> without making it a natural object.
> (Strandsbjerg 2010: 49)

Area Studies is a spatially-oriented science or it is nothing

Taking the standard critique against Area Studies, which argues that areas are merely constructed, this paper aims at a constructive answer with a plea for a moderate realism in Area Studies. Area Studies as conceptualised here for Southeast Asia would not replace the disciplines but complement them (cf. Bowen 2010; Derichs 2013, 2017). Southeast Asia is a suitable laboratory for area approaches and, thanks to its extreme cultural diversity, provides a true "litmus test" for the potentials and limits of Area Studies. Space is both a result

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of socio-cultural production while at the same time a universal condition for social practice. The challenge is to theorise area in a way that avoids the spatial determinism of the geopolitical tradition without rendering area an overtly socially constructed phenomenon (Strandsbjerg 2010: 49). Thus the conceptual core of an area study (or even an area science) may be seen in a theory and methodology of socio-spatial relations. This may be useful as an antidote to conceptualisations that completely lack any spatial notion, such as the following example: "In this text, region is defined as an ongoing process involving the communicative construction of social relations" (Holbig 2015: 1). Areas may be conceived as an amalgam of material landscapes plus spatial relations plus mental concepts of spatial features. Exemplified by Southeast Asia it is argued that two concepts – networks and Wittgensteinian family resemblance – are the two most fruitful venues, allowing for an area science which conceives areas as entities with a characteristic profile but not as neatly circumscribed territories.

Taking into account globalisation, especially transnational and multicultural flows of people, materials and cash, as well as ideas, the potential of Area Studies is to go beyond the older West-versus-the-rest and newer methodological nationalism as well as extreme localism or relativism (Thompson 2012, Sidaway 2013: 985–988, Duara 2015). Area Studies can provide a middle ground between localised studies and all too often overly generalised Global Studies. How can we make globalisation theories more empirical and infuse them with a "deeper engagement with societies and cultures" (van Schendel 2012: 498)? Methodologically, Area Studies could inform the project of decolonising methodology (Chilisa 2020) and could also contribute to the project of a global ethnography, to make accounts of globalisation more ethnographic. But it would retain the regional perspective and thus not end in an ethnography unbounded. Related is its potential to change mainstream theory, for example to inform universal concepts of democracy with regional or localised middle-range concepts (Houben 2013, Orta 2013, Huotari et al. 2014, Antweiler 2019). Thus area studies may be useful as a crucial remedy against panglossian globalism or empirically ungrounded cosmopolitanisms as well as an unbounded cultural relativism.

A danger lurking always in spatial conceptualisations is the territorial trap – linking spatial entities in the geographical surface uncritically or even automatically with an assumed spatially confined unit of causes, effects or interests. But the well-known critique against thinking in "containers" itself entails the danger of overlooking distance and scale as key elements in almost any human reality (van Schendel 2002). Thus we should make use of scientific disciplines or interdisciplinary research fields that explicitly deal with spatial entities. It is remarkable that such disciplines and fields dealing explicitly with areal issues but in a critical way are practically neglected in Southeast Asian Studies. Exam-

ples of spatial theorising almost unaddressed in Southeast Asian Studies are theoretical geography and inter-disciplinary regional science. These approaches take space, distance, proximity and vicinity explicitly into account.

In many of these fields there are useful approaches that bridge essentialist and realist with constructivist orientations, such as in the fields of international relations or geography (e.g. Jessop et al. 2008). An explicit area orientation would entail cognised spaces or "psychic geographies" but would reduce space neither to imagined space nor to power-driven spatialisation. To develop Southeast Asian Area Studies more scientifically I argue that area, if conceived as societal space, can be more than merely (a) a heuristic device to reduce complexity, (b) a pedagogical means useful for organising the curriculum, (c) a means useful for political solidarity, (d) a way to secure funds in competition with greedy neighbour disciplines, (e) a means to rescue otherwise dying disciplines or (f) a forum, a cosy zone or comfort box, where we can feel a sense of belonging in academia. Surely, area can provide all these functions but the concept might also be useful as an explicit scientific conceptual tool. Exemplified by Southeast Asia, network and family resemblance might arguably be the two most fruitful methodologies to allow for an empirically oriented yet critically reflected Area Studies in general.

Thinking alternatively about areas

If the notion of Southeast Asian Area Studies is to be more than a convenient way of organising science and teaching, we should conceive Southeast Asian Studies as genuine area-focused studies albeit open to many disciplines. Thus we should not tie it only to social science, nor to philology or primarily to Cultural Studies (Clark 2006: 103–106). In general, areal thinking does not happily marry with any extreme constructivist notions or a consequent form of post-structuralism (contra Curaming 2006). If we want to discard territorial or other container-like concepts, we have to come up with an alternative that is useful for empirical research. We should develop conceptual tools for Area Studies; metaphors like "scape/landscape" or "rhizome" may be stimulating for thought, but heuristically are not enough for truly theory-oriented scientific work. Furthermore, these metaphors are not very productive if it comes to the task of conceiving empirically grounded studies.

Areas may be seen as an amalgam of material/physical surfaces, spatial relations and concepts with respect to imaginations of spatial features and thus are reduced neither to the former nor the latter. In regard to alternatives there are on the one hand concepts that allow for more cautious versions of areas. On the other hand there are alternatives to area notions as such. One useful

concept deriving from current geography and human ecology is the "functional region". This concept goes beyond the received binarism of container versus floating constructs. The idea is to conceive areas differently, depending on the topic or issue studied. This approach is used mostly when referring to sub-national scales. A related conciliatory approach is to determine circumscribed regions that are nonetheless different from received areas with regard to their boundaries (Emmerson 1984).

Referring to Asia, older examples of such conciliatory approaches are "Southern Asia" or "Southeastern Asia" (combining South Asia and Southeast Asia). Physical geographers and bio-geographers often use notions such as "Monsoon Asia" and "Tropical East Asia" (e.g. Corlett 2019). More recent proposals, especially among economists, political scientists and decision-makers, are "Pacific Asia (Asia-Pacific)", "Australasia" and "Chindia" (China plus India). More specifically pertaining to trans-border spaces in South Asia and Southeast Asia are the older calls – often politically framed – for "Maphilindo" (*Ma*laysia, the *Phi*lippines and *Indo*nesia), the sub-regional notions of "Sulu Archipelago", "Golden Triangle" and "Mekong Region" and the transregional concepts of the "Southeast Asian Massif" or "Zomia" (van Schendel 2002, Lieberman 2010, Michaud / Forsyth 2011).

Currently the most popular alternative to the notion of area is the concept of "scape" as coined by Arjun Appadurai (1990). Taking the idea of landscapes, Appadurai proposes several scapes as continuous flows of things and ideas, which are distinct. The problem here is that Appadurai uses "scape" in a very metaphorical sense, which makes the idea quite diffuse, not to say fuzzy. In his work we do not find any clear discussion of the underlying concept of land-scape. No wonder that scapes are far less frequently translated into concrete empirical research compared to network. If studies are making empirical inquiries for example into knowledge scapes, security scapes or sea-scapes, in most cases they use the term "scape" only metaphorically. Within geography – especially in German geography – there is a longstanding discussion about the concept of *Landschaft*, be it social-constructivist, discourse-oriented or from a system-theoretical stance. *Landschaft* would allow us to speak concretely about human connectedness as well as borders and frontiers (as an overview see Kühne et al. 2018: 11–27). Jonathan Rigg perceptively speaks of Southeast Asia as a "human landscape" (Rigg 2002).

In the search for other alternatives to the use of areas we could think of the concept of "field" (social field, cultural field). This concept of a field made of social relations lies behind the notion of "fieldwork" or "field research" in cultural anthropology and qualitatively oriented sociology. Referring to macro-spatial cultural realms this concept was most clearly developed in the Dutch concept of "field of anthropological study" (*ethnologisch studieveld*) developed

for the Malay realm in insular Southeast Asia. Such a field of study is a geographically circumscribed realm of similar cultures, which borders neighbouring cultures or an adjacent field of cultures. The classical source characterises such fields as areas sufficiently homogenous and unique to form a separate object of study and sufficiently local and varied to make internal comparative research worthwhile (Josselin de Jong 1935: xx–xxii). Comparison is used here to reveal a structural core. The argument is that prehistoric heritage lives on in cultures of the same origin, but the aim, for example pertaining to the "Indonesian Field of Anthropological Study", is not to construct a hypothetical *Ur-situation*. An example pertaining to the Malay Archipelago is the existence of plural societies in otherwise quite different social formations. The idea of a field of study may be seen as the field of anthropological *field*work writ large. A strength of the field concept is that it provides a remedy against Euro- or other nostro-centric typologies. On the other hand, the *studieveld* concept comes with its own problems. The "elasticity" criterion provides no basic model, because it provides no structural framework. In historical perspective the question is how to draw time periods and in spatial perspective the problem is how to delineate spatial borders, for example through historical connections. Another problem is the link of the concept to assumptions of the quite specific Dutch version of anthropological structuralism (Schefold 1994: 366).

A more recently proposed alternative option to the use of areas is the concept of "figuration" as used in the German Crossroads Asia project (Mielke / Hornidge 2014, Mielke 2017). Following Norbert Elias, "figurations" are configurations, constellations and especially inter-dependencies. The concept is quite open and allows relations of different content nature and also of scale to be conceived. An open question is what the scale implies and whether there are differences between small and large regions. What about change, e.g. due to migration? Another problem of this use of figuration is the focus on bi-directional dependence in multiply-scaled networks. Here the problem arises that uni-directional dependencies are excluded. The strength of this concept is an explicit notion of space, whereas its weakness is its fuzziness.

Beyond mere particularism – despite tremendous diversity

Introductory and overview publications on contemporary Southeast Asia stress its diversity (Vorlaufer 2018: x–xi, Husa et al. 2018: 11, Ba / Beeson 2018: 7–11) just as texts on history emphasise the region's multiple historical emergence (e.g. Wolters 1999, Schulte Nordholt 2019: 22–24). A recent historically focused introduction refers to this as Southeast Asia's "mind-boggling heterogeneity" (Rush 2018: 6). As a bibliography consisting only of books that cover the entire

region clearly reveals, diversity is a default notion in titles on the area (Antweiler 2004). Literature from geography, sociology, political economy and especially anthropology of the region abounds with the word "diversity" (see e.g. Steedly 1999, Szanton 2010, Guyer 2013, Kleinen 2013, Derichs 2014). Popular notions portray Southeast Asia metaphorically as the "Balkans of Asia", a "bridge continent", "hybrid region", "collage", "jigsaw puzzle" or even "shatterbelt" (Spencer / Thomas 1971). Thus, what we could call "deep diversity" makes Southeast Asia a real challenge for any Area Studies approach. Taking into account this overwhelming diversity, what about Southeast Asia's unity? "The interesting case with regards to Southeast Asia is, why no such homogeneity has been constructed, not even by anthropologists or sociologists" (Korff / Schröter 2006: 63). Are there historical continuities and commonalities among societies and cultures of Southeast Asia (Rush 2018: chapter 1)? Can we disentangle something that has been aptly called the "cultural matrix" (King 2008: 15–16)?

Regarding cross-cutting similarities within the region, there is the question of whether there may be more unity within its sub-regions than in the region as a whole. The argument would be that "Mainland Southeast Asia" (or even the sub-sub region of "Indochina") and "Insular Southeast Asia" ("Maritime Southeast Asia", "Archipelagic Southeast Asia", the "Malay Realm", "Insulinde") show enough similarities within themselves to figure as separate regions (Josselin de Jong 1965, Tachimoto 1995, King 2005, Wang Gungwu 2012, Ellen 2012). Cynthia Chou emphasised this multidimensionality and went so far as to say that "there are different 'Southeast Asias' to study" (Chou 2006: 130, Chou 2017; similarly Bowen 2000: 4–6).

On the other hand there are debates about overlaps with neighbouring cultural realms. There have been discussions about including adjacent lands such as parts of Bangladesh (conventionally South Asia), Taiwan or Yunnan (conventionally East Asia) in conceptualisations of the region. Political scientists habitually include Vietnam as part of East Asia (but see Evans 2002: 151–155, Croissant / Lorentz 2018). The Philippines are often seen as an outlier within Southeast Asia (Hau 2020). Similarly, others have emphasised the similarities of Papuan Indonesian cultures with those of the Pacific realm of Oceania (Uhlig 1989). Internationally, political scientists nowadays tend to include Southeast Asia within Pacific Asia and, especially because of differences in state formation, to differentiate between Southeast Asia and the Chinese-influenced realm of Northeast Asia (Huang / Jong 2017: 12–14).

Southeast Asia was and is a zone of intensive trade in regional scope. From a historical perspective, trade organised in widely spun multi-cultural trade networks rendered the region a true melting pot. The margins of Southeast Asia leading to neighbouring Indian, Chinese and Oceanic realms were especially important (van Schendel 2012: 499, Reid 2015, Schulte Nordholt 2018: 24–32).

In addition to this extreme diversity, the region currently has no dominant regional power and historically was a mixing zone with no hegemonic dominant civilisation. In contrast to India for South Asia and China for East Asia, currently there is no regional power dominating the vast realm of Southeast Asia. Indonesia is by far the largest country in the region but does not (or not yet) act as a regional power. With all its diversity plus continuous intra-realm variation, Southeast Asia provides a suitable laboratory for social and cultural studies – especially for an empirically oriented testing of the concept of area (Antweiler/ Hornidge 2012: 5). As mentioned, taking these circumstances together and considering relations to neighbouring cultural realms, Southeast Asia can be a litmus test for Area Studies (Schulte Nordholt / Visser 1995, Kratoska et al. 2005, King 2008, Winzeler 2010, Rigg 2016). In order to go beyond an unrelated collection of country studies we need an area or regional approach. This is especially necessary for any systematic and comparative research. Beyond all construction there is a cartographic reality of space. Otherwise Southeast Asian Studies would remain an assemblage of mostly localised, nation-oriented, historically specific or otherwise particularistic accounts. On the other hand, we would have a small number of very general studies often not grounded in truly regional or even comparative empirical research.

Within Southeast Asian Studies there is a lot of talk about comparison but truly comparative approaches are quite rare (Anderson 1998, Harootunian 2003, Huotari / Rüland 2018). Among the disciplines, linguistics and political science (e.g. Kuhonta et al. 2008) are the main exceptions here. Within Asian studies in the German-speaking countries there is a renewed interest in "entangled comparison" or "thick comparison", which calls for comparisons intensively linked to studies on the ground. The basic problem pertains to Asian Studies in general: "Whereas quantitative inquiries deploy comparative methods (while lacking fine-grained insights into cultural specificities), qualitative research is generally challenged when involving in comparisons" (Pfaff-Czarnecka / Brosius 2020: 1). A recent example is the Comparative Area Studies approach aiming to combine context-specific insights from Area Studies with cross- and inter-regional empirical methodology (Köllner et al. 2018: 3).

Construction and co-construction: well-taken critiques vs. bugbears

Mainstream critiques raised against Southeast Asian Studies are to a large degree a derivative of the diagnosis of a Western hegemonic legacy of ways of research. The three main critiques state (a) that the region of Southeast Asia is merely constructed, (b) that this construction represents an outsider's view and

(c) that the realm of Southeast Asia is a strategic or power-related concept (Thum 2012 as a concise summary). Taken together, this amounts to a view of former and even current Southeast Asian Studies as a nostro-centric and dominance-oriented endeavour, biased in Eurocentric, Atlanto-centric or US-centred ways. As far as research and training institutions are concerned, this critique is quite accurate (Schulte Nordholt 2004) and can also been directed at many conceptualisations of regionalism (Rüland 2017). Currently the main institutions of Southeast Asian research are centred in the US, the United Kingdom, Australia, the Netherlands and Singapore. Furthermore, the output of research on the region is heavily skewed towards English texts. In anthropology, e.g., the bourgeoning studies about Southeast Asia produced in Japan are recognised almost only as far as they are written in English (Shimizu 2005). Southeast Asian scientific voices are only slowly being recognised. Some colleagues from the region even went so far – I think too far – as to ask whether there is any place for Southeast Asians in Southeast Asian Studies at all (Heryanto 2002: 3–5).

This state has been criticised and there are calls for a de-centring of Southeast Asian studies. From Southeast Asia, there have long been calls for an attempt to examine the area beyond Western perceptions, for an "indigenous social science" or an "Asian anthropology" (Abdullah / Manuati 1994, Rafael 1999, Goh 2011, Park / King 2013). These alternative approaches come especially from researchers from the Malayan realm and from East Asia or Australasia (e.g. Yamashita / Eades 2001, Alatas 2006, Ooi 2009, Duara 2015). There is also an emerging institutional interest in Southeast Asian Studies within Southeast Asia itself, as can be seen from many recently established academic centres.

All this notwithstanding, scholarship and academic teaching within the region itself tend to re-institute methodological nationalism. Despite programmatic statements, most studies sailing under the banner of "Southeast Asian Studies" are in fact still largely confined to specific countries (Evers / Gerke 2003, McCargo 2006). As a look into recent conference programmes or publication lists quickly reveals, this holds true for the entire region: the overwhelming number of studies made by scholars with roots in Southeast Asia are about their own countries and there is also a certain mutual ignorance between mainland and insular researchers (Korff / Schröter 2006: 63–64).

Let us have a look contentwise at the core of these critiques. Firstly, Southeast Asia is portrayed as a constructed area (cf. King 2008: 13–17, Acharya 2012, Houben 2013, Ileto 2013). Linked to the allegation of the area as an outsider's paradigm is the critique of practicing an Othering or being an Orientalist and thus failing to study societies on their own terms. I largely agree, but this often goes in line with an assumption that this construction would be *entirely* strate-

gic or a Eurocentric fantasy. Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak speaks of an "imaginative geography" and proposes that one should "imagine pluralized Asias" and "break postcolonialism into pluralized (Euro)Asias" (Spivak 2008: 2, 11).

Against this, I argue that Southeast Asia as a region was and is constructed, but it is constructed on an experiential basis and thus co-constructed by combining human imagination with material reality. There are spatial clusterings of phenomena such as social structure or kinship patterns and confluences of historical processes, as with trade (for example Higham 2014, Reid 2015). Such a mixture of reality and construction also pertains to earlier external concepts such as the much older Chinese concept of *Nanyang*, which is not exactly coterminous with Southeast Asia in that it refers primarily to areas reached from China by sea rather than by land. This encompasses a much broader region than maritime Southeast Asia but excludes northern Burma and Laos.

The allegation that areas are merely arbitrarily constructed or artificial is overstated at best. In order to argue against conceiving a straw man, I ask: who ever really postulated fixed territories with closed boundaries and a clearly distinguished inside and outside? All the classic area texts mention overlaps with adjacent areas and mention peripheral or marginal spaces. In contrast to its notorious popular use as well as assumptions of its critics, even the concept of *Kulturkreise* did not invoke closed geographical or national containers. Against this bugbear of closed space, what was meant are regions or clusters of intensified exchange. Similarly, the archetypical proponents of a "culture area" approach in anthropology, like Clark Wissler, Alan Kroeber and Julian Steward, never thought in static, clearly bounded and internally homogenous territories (Malm 2013; for examples cf. Haller 2018: 74–76). The same holds – despite critical aspects – for the concept of sub-continental *Kulturerdteile* in German-language cultural geography. Neither classical nor modern works of this approach (Kolb 1962, Newig 2005) eschew connectivity of such a huge realm with neighbouring areas (Uhlig 1989, on Southeast Asia as a "bridge continent"). The alleged container thinking thus may hold for many popular materials as well as for almost all school materials until today, but to a far less degree for scientific texts. Overstated critical mantras bear the danger of an Othering of Area Studies or regional specialisation, as in German geography (cf. critique by Verne / Doevenspeck 2014: 8–14).

The standard criticism portrays the area-oriented conceptualisation of Southeast Asia as a result of colonial cartography and strategic manoeuvring in the WWII and later cold war geopolitical theatres. This is a default statement in textbooks on the region. But, again, this regionalisation did not arise out of nothing, but based on empirical commonalities among cultures within this region. To portray the concept as a mere product of geostrategic thought is again a severe reduction at best. The English term "Southeast Asia" was

created before late colonial times. The concept of Southeast Asia as a cultural realm is historically older, especially in the German-speaking scientific world (*Südostasien*, Heine-Geldern 1923). This areal concept was derived from an interest in the distribution of languages and material culture and from motives quite different from geopolitics or colonialism. Furthermore Southeast Asia is conceptually also rooted in non-European traditions of science, for example in China, Japan and Korea (Shimizu 2005, Woo / King 2013). Allegedly merely constructed notions e.g. of a collective ASEAN identity leave the academic perimeter of scholarly research and become part of everyday lives. They are an aspect of identity construction not only of political leaders but also of ordinary people. In these transfer processes people are not passive receivers, but they take area conceptions and localise them (Jönsson 2010, Rüland 2017). The same holds true for nation-building-infused provincial identities that integrate manifold linguistic cultures (Antweiler 2019). Such imaginations become social realities in themselves and should matter for empirically oriented social scientists and cultural studies.

Current concepts and their implicit spatiality

Regarding the alleged outsider's source of the notion Southeast Asia (van Schendel 2012: 500), this critique itself argues via assumed regions. And the outsiders are not all "Western": currently a large number of people living a Southeast Asian identity reside outside the region, for example in Australia, England, Canada, the United States or Arabian countries. More fundamentally, the "genesis and validity" (*Genese und Geltung*) of scientific positions should not be confounded. Even if the concept is that of an outsider it may be scientifically correct or fruitful. Against notions of cultural appropriation I would argue that academic knowledge should not belong to a particular cultural group or tradition (cf. Cribbs's comment in van Schendel 2012: 504).

There are several constructive answers to the abovementioned critiques. Beyond New Area Studies, as in this volume (cf. Houben 2017), there are several recent approaches, for example Post-area Studies, Critical Area Studies, Crossroads Studies, Boundary Studies and Inter-Asian Cultural Studies. Beyond that there are notions that emphasise connectedness and cross-bordering (e.g. Middell 2017, Derichs 2017b). Examples abound: "beyond area", "differentiated spatialities", "trans-regional connections", "trans-national spaces", "transient spaces", "translocality", "trans-boundary" and "borderlands". Other proposals speak of "inter-connected spaces" and "connectivity", or of "entanglement", "discursive moment" or simply of "mobilities".

Most of these propositions come with their own implicit spatial baggage. If we talk of "trans-regional" connections or of "trans-national" interaction, we refer to "spatial" units. The same holds for the use of "transient spaces". Furthermore the question is "trans" to what? The same can be said for all formulations with "boundary" such as "boundary studies" and "trans-boundary" research. Boundaries require units (to be bounded). Spatial boundaries imply area units. Any boundary space is an area and automatically creates spatial entities and raises the question of sub-areas. Notions of "borderland" (Horstmann / Wadley 2005) and "transgressing" are doubly loaded as regards space. Formulations such as "dynamic borderlands" and especially notions such as "transgressing borderlands" comprise multiple spatial connotations. Other formulations try to distance themselves from old area thinking by promoting "Post-area Studies", "Critical Area Studies" or research "beyond areas", but all three use the very word and thus transport an idea of space.

If we use terms such as "Inter-Asian Cultural Studies" (Chen 2008), similar problems are inherent. As with the notion of intercultural relations any "inter" logically needs at least two entities to be linked by it. This pertains also to the notion of a "third space" (Appadurai 1997). Any talk of "entanglement" should precisely state which items or entities are entangled. Are they systems, cultures, civilisations or areas? Such formulations implicitly use similarities in two or more areas respective to civilisational realms. Any talk of spatial "mobility" requires minimally two areal units. "Cross" implies mobility and a border, which also requires minimally two units. The notion of "crossroads" refers not only to roads (implying spatial links and lacunae) but also asks (a) cross which entities such a mobility is realised in practice (cf. Mielke / Hornidge 2015). Notions of "connectivity" and "inter-connected" spaces or "connectivity in motion" imply the question of which entities are connected and whether the concrete connections themselves move. Most of the objections to areas or more specifically container ideas are not at all specific to Area Studies but reflect classical problems in conceptualising contiguous social spaces (Lewis / Wigen 1997). Even more fundamentally, the entire critique is structurally quite similar for example to the objections to the anthropological concept of culture in the plural sense.

A relational alternative: area as network-cum-family resemblance

Two concepts might be productive in developing a reflected yet empirically grounded science of areas: networks and family resemblance. A first concept I

would consider as fruitful not only for Southeast Asian Area Studies is the notion of a "network" (or "web"). A network is a structural and relational concept, the main elements being actors and relations. Actors may be individuals, collectives or institutions. Relations form a structure and may be spatial. The concept allows for spatial, motional or communicational proximity (see "air-travel proximity" vs. "digital proximity", van Schendel 2012: 498). It provides a simple and parsimonious model that allows but does not require repetition, purposefulness or mutuality (reciprocity) of relations. Instead of *ex ante* definitions of borders of regions, the outer borders of such a network would be derived empirically *ex post*. The relational approach allows for an empirical determination of fringes and frontiers. Thus spatial areas are conceivable as zones of intensive internal exchange. Through mapping connectedness by the measures of centrality, betweenness and closeness, network analysis is useful for elucidating embeddedness or disembeddedness. The method is also valuable for historical research, for example on pre-modern trust networks or the webs of the silk roads (Gordon 2008: 16).

The argument that there is not one centre sometimes denies the relevance of spatial imbalances or distance. If this approach is to be related to space we should ask if actors, relations and their nodes or knots are topographically determinable, whether fixed, moving or movable. We should avoid a bias towards connectedness and a fixation on nodes and thus not overlook structural wholes (Granovetter 1973). Taking a network approach, a region could be determined as an accumulation of actors or as higher densities of relations, that is, as a relational cluster. If movements are dominant the area could be seen as the culmination of trajectories within relations. Thus exchange and migration – both aspects of mobility – may constitute a region historically. This can be shown in the case of Southeast Asia (Antweiler 2011, Rush 2018, Schulte Nordholt 2018).

Networks provide a relational and very open approach useful for quite different purposes. This approach and its accompanying methodology are mostly applied in cultural anthropology and sociology but still seldom used in Area Studies. The network or web concept could and should be used if socio-spatial relations are seen as the core of areas (Derichs 2014: 2, 2017b) and especially by projects explicitly interested in relational patterns. A network approach allows for an empirically grounded analysis of societal as well as economic and power relationships. We can ask who the dominant and the subordinated actors are. We can study connectedness as well as disconnectedness and thus avoid the overstated assumptions of connectivity and mobility often found in current studies. A concept similar to network suitable for this line of thinking is the notion of "archipelago". We can think of the concrete Malay or Indonesian *Nusantara* or an Asian *Mediterranée* (Lombard 1998: 184, 193; Evers 2016). Formally an archipelago is a structure of dispersed spatial entities, each

one circumscribed but unequally linked within an overall structure. Thus we can study spatial networks with knots, clusterings and hubs, e.g. current dominant knowledge and power centres linking Mainland and Insular Southeast Asia.

A second helpful conceptual idea emerges from the notion of "family resemblance". As conceived by philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, family resemblance (also "family likeness" or "cluster definition") as a method searches for commonalities between entities without asking for a continual sameness among them or an absolute internal unity within the encompassing unit. His idea is unrelated to any gene-related conception of family. Wittgenstein explains family likeness through the example of games, which are similar to each other only in that they are games. Games have several overlapping similarities, e.g. by usually having rules. "Games" are neither just a word, as represented in nominalism, nor are they examples of continual similarities, as in realism. They instead form a "family" whose members reveal overlapping similarities but do not share universal qualities in all relevant features (Wittgenstein 2009: 36e, § 66–67; Needham 1975: 355ff.).

While aiming at an inventory of attributes, this concept allows that there is not a single feature shared by all items compared. Concerning widespread features in Southeast Asia (Table 1), any researcher having done fieldwork in more than one location within the region will be quick to mention locales and/or times where the respective feature is not present. "For if you look at them you will not see something that is common to all, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that. To repeat: don't think, but look!" (Wittgenstein 2009: 36e, § 66). Accordingly we can look closely for similarities in general, in details and in gradations instead of attempting or claiming to find strict equalities or absolute universals (for a similar argument cf. Rehbein 2013).

Combining the two approaches, one via networks and the other via family resemblance, we could look for inter-relations between Southeast Asia as a network and as a unit characterised by manifold family resemblances. We could ask how these inter-relations are constantly changing with emerging forms and often hybrid formations. Such an endeavour would go beyond the Murdockian Human Relations Area Files project (Murdock 1975) of a simple quantitative inventory. Since it entails dealing with specific traits, this concept of family resemblance is useful to allow for a "unity-in-diversity" perspective in Area Studies in a grounded way, thus going beyond the usual "anything goes" or purely political programmatic spatial imaginings. The similarities found within Southeast Asia might themselves be conceived as forming an abstract network: "And the upshot of these considerations is: we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: similarities in the large and in the small" (Wittgenstein 2009: 36e).

Table 1: Southeast Asia – a profile via connectedness and widespread attributes

Southeast Asia – A profile via connectedness and widespread attributes
antagonism and relations between highland or inland and lowland societies
contrast and relations between coastal and inland polities
charismatic leadership (“men of prowess”)
political power mainly based on workforce (vs. land area)
public demonstration of power important (titles, regalia, monuments)
polities with fluid borders (*mandala*, galactic polity, theatre state, exemplary centre)
external economic ties strong, trade relations intensive
wet rice cultivation
slash-and-burn agriculture
staple diet of rice and fish plus fermented fish products
social organisation and kinship inclusive
kinship bilateral or cognatic, marriage alliances important
socioeconomic hierarchies, inequality positively approved/ affirmed
lineage and inherited rank only slightly emphasised
gender relations relatively egalitarian, high prestige of women
public and performative orientation of culture
urban culture: societal organisation in a *plural* (vs. pluralistic) way
assimilation or integration of strangers and foreign ideas easy
tension between book religion vs. local beliefs
historical consciousness presentist
leisure activities: betel chewing, cock fights, chess
material culture: tattooing, penis inserts and gong-based musical instruments

Source: Compiled by author, modified after Antweiler 2017: 76

Instead of a pre-conceived Southeast Asia the rationale in using family resemblance would be to start with a comparison of local cases open to finding differences and similarities, which may be derived from ethnographies or other case studies. Since currently there are no explicit trials in this direction I present this as a thought experiment. We would compare data about as many human collectives as possible in the area of study. These may be localised face-to-face cultures, sub-cultures or ethnic groups. In light of the difficulty of determining clear boundaries between collectives we can take the number of languages as a proxy (around 1250 in Southeast Asia). The expectation would be that if we scan these collectives for characteristics derived from a comparative reading of ethnographies made in the area, the result, if plotted as a map,

would *roughly* match the outer border of the eleven countries currently forming Southeast Asia as a political unit. In greater detail I would expect that for example parts of Southern China, Taiwan and Northeastern South Asia would be included.

The minimal assumption is that the features in such inventories are widespread in the area. We would expect that the traits are shared by the overwhelming number of human collectives in geographic Southeast Asia. But by taking the concept of family resemblance seriously, we would assume that not even one of these features is shared by *all* collectives within that geographical realm. We would also expect that some but not many of the attributes are found in collectives outside Southeast Asia. Additionally we could argue negatively and mention features of adjacent areas, e.g. caste systems and pastoral nomadism, which are almost but not totally lacking in Southeast Asia. Taking this empirically derived clustering – and not a preconceived area – we could then develop a more cohesive concept including empirical testable hypotheses about shared attributes in the area. Such hypotheses would start from a rationale of trying to link shared attributes in a causal instead of a purely summative way.

Summing up

The real challenge for area studies is to theorise area in a way that avoids the spatial determinism of geo-ecological or geopolitical traditions without rendering area a purely socially constructed phenomenon. This paper has suggested a reconciliation of diverging epistemologies. What was argued here for space can be transferred to thinking via areas in general. Spatial features are a condition enabling and constraining human action. But space is partially constructed and as such plays a constitutive, framing and supportive role for social action. Areas should thus be conceived as an amalgam of physical surfaces plus spatialised social relations, supplemented by culturally mediated and often politically charged conceptualisations of these spatial features. Well-taken critiques of Area Studies of and within Southeast Asia should be differentiated from bully bugbears and fancy straw men. Overstated critiques entail the danger that the "spatial turn" in social science and in cultural studies shifts again to an "aspatial turn". Southeast Asia – with all its mind-boggling contemporary diversity as well as historical and contemporary trans-area relations – provides a suitable laboratory for critically examining the potentials and limits of Area Studies.

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"Small Places, Large Issues" Revisited: Reflections on an Ethnographically Founded Vision of New Area Studies

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Abstract

This contribution outlines the didactic potentials and possible limitations of an ethnographically founded vision of New Area Studies. The authors reflect upon their experiences as teacher and students in an Area Studies research project in Thailand's lower Northeast that has attempted to implement an ethnographically founded New Area Studies research methodology in practice. While this methodology draws on ethnography, it additionally engages with theoretical questions raised in sociology and philosophy with the goal of approaching emplaced orders of knowledge that unfold as everyday practice in local lifeworlds. The outlined methodology is rooted in a particular understanding of emplacement that is explicitly spatial, so that the situatedness of knowledge that is emphasised in various attempts to rethink Area Studies remains not limited to hegemonic discourses, social milieus or moving bodies, but is located in concrete places. These places can be situated on different scales, ranging from "the local" to "the global", producing a spatial continuum to be addressed by New Area Studies research. In this particular research project, we have focused on the "local" end of this broad continuum in Thailand. We argue that ethnographic methods in combination with social phenomenology allow us to gain particular insights into the meaningfulness of local lifeworlds and highlight the continuing relevance of this form of emplaced situatedness for New Area Studies.

Keywords: New Area Studies, situatedness, emplaced knowledge, lifeworld, ethnography, social practice, Thailand

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This article constitutes a kaleidoscopic writing experiment bringing together five voices in different stages of their academic lives and with distinct disciplinary backgrounds as well as personal experiences in the academic field. As we aim to emphasise the subjective and embodied character of knowledge, we write from a first-person perspective whenever passages have been composed by solely one author, while using the first-person plural for the sections we have written together.

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> The discipline is also concerned with accounting for the interrelationships between different aspects of human existence, and usually anthropologists investigate these interrelationships taking as their point of departure a detailed study of local life in a particular society or a delineated social environment. One may therefore say that anthropology asks large questions, while at the same time it draws its most important insights from small places. (Eriksen 2001: 2)

In April 2018, I received the Humboldt Award for Excellence in Teaching for an Area Studies research seminar on liminal spaces in Berlin. I knew immediately that I wanted to use the prize money, which had to be spent for teaching purposes, to organise a research seminar in Thailand. My goal was to enable B.A. students studying Area Studies at Humboldt University's Department of Southeast Asian Studies to conduct field research in their area of choice while simultaneously implementing central ideas of an Area Studies research paradigm I had started to envision during the writing of my doctoral dissertation (Baumann 2017).[1]

My second immediate thought was to align this research seminar with an exchange programme I had initiated in 2014, after returning from ethnographic fieldwork in Thailand.[2] The exchange programme with a Technical College in Thailand's Buriram Province was ideally suited to providing the local infrastructure needed for such an ambitious project. The students who had previously participated in this programme were already equipped with the necessary language skills and personal on-site contacts to implement the central premises of this ethnographically founded research paradigm, while additionally being able to act as brokers for those who had never visited the province or Thailand's Northeast before. The two-semester research project was titled "Area Studies Research in Thailand: Everyday Lifeworlds in Buriram" and included theoretical preparations and methodological training in Berlin, a practical field school in Buriram Province under my supervision, individual and group field research in Thailand, qualitative data analyses and a writing school after our return to Berlin. In the course of this research project, the students developed their individual research ideas and questions, going through a complete research process that culminated in the writing of their B.A. theses under my supervision. During their fieldwork, the students explored male and queer adolescent practices in the context of motorcycle races (Danny Kretschmer), gaming cafés (Jona Pomerance) and transgender beauty pageants (Tim Rössig) as well as the imaginations of love and partnership of white migratory men settling in Buriram Province to live with their female Thai partners (Johannes von Plato).

1 This fieldwork was part of my dissertation project "The Ritual Reproduction of Khmerness in Thailand" which was funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG).

2 More information on the exchange programme is available here: https://hu.berlin/buriram-project.

In this article, we outline the employed research methodology and its theoretical foundations. We also present results of the aforementioned research projects to collectively reflect upon the potentials and limitations of an ethnographic foundation of New Area Studies and its claimed sensibility towards the situatedness of knowledge (see various contributions within Mielke / Hornidge 2017).[3] The article is thus not only an attempt at situating our individual research experiences and understandings of Area Studies within the ongoing debate on a possible reconceptualisation under the label "New Area Studies", but also at discussing the value of ethnographically founded and phenomenologically inspired didactics within New Area Studies curricula. Its first paragraphs lay out the central premises of an ethnographically founded vision of New Area Studies, which have also underpinned the field school in Thailand. Student contributions, including reflections on personal research experiences, have become integrated into the article to demonstrate the didactic value added by an ethnographic foundation of Area Studies research. This article explicitly aims not to sell old wine in new bottles, as in anthropology as New Area Studies, but to carve out the didactic value of ethnographic methods for a socio-phenomenological project within the ongoing reformulation of Area Studies as New Area Studies and its signature emphasis on situatedness.

Having been a lecturer and programme counsellor for Southeast Asian Studies at an Area Studies institute for more than six years, my impression is that students frequently struggle to develop an understanding for Area Studies and an identity as Area Studies researchers.[4] Students not only have to digest the analytical deconstruction of the areas that shape their commonsensical understanding of the world, but they also need to position themselves vis-à-vis the symbolic violence that any language of areas or world regions implies. Combined with recent calls for multi-, inter- and transdisciplinarity in Area Studies, this leaves many students baffled. The sole constant is often the language they learn, which is usually the language of an internally colonising majority population and which continues to situate them in a nation state – a political imaginary they have not only learned to deconstruct, but which is nothing more than a methodological container (Glick Schiller / Wimmer 2002). Programmes rarely manage to guide students through these conundrums and their potential to rethink taken-for-granted understandings of the world, with many students ultimately struggling to choose topics for their final theses and find suited methodologies to implement their research questions.

3 The term "New Area Studies" alludes to various projects that seek to distance themselves from conventional Area Studies by attempting to rethink regionality.

4 I left Humboldt University's Department of Southeast Asian Studies to join Heidelberg University's Anthropology Department in April 2020, where I am not only a postdoctoral associate but also the coordinator of the M.A. programme in anthropology.

Before the Bologna Process radically altered the teaching of Area Studies in Germany, the situation was different, as it was possible to study two majors over a minimum timespan of five years.[5] I was able to develop a scholarly identity through the methodology and theory I acquired in Anthropology, my first major, while I viewed Area Studies, my second major, as a field to gain language skills and regional knowledge. I thus began to envision myself as an anthropologist working in Southeast Asia. For students studying singular Bachelor's programmes in Area Studies today, this no longer seems possible. The challenges of identification entailed by the deconstruction of regions, transdisciplinary training and transregional orientations in undergraduate Area Studies programmes are also mirrored by the difficulties faced by graduates from Area Studies programmes when they try to enter monodisciplinary M.A. programmes or the academic job market after completing their Ph.D. While Area Studies departments frequently hire and actively seek scholars who have received their doctorate in a discipline, the converse is rarely the case. It is therefore a strategic decision not to pursue a degree in Area Studies. Although these observations question the general value of undergraduate training in Area Studies, we will not address these structural concerns, but rather focus on the didactics of ethnographically founded Area Studies and how they can help to strengthen students' identification with the field as well as enhance their methodological skills.

With our reflections on an ethnographical foundation of New Area Studies research, we simultaneously wish to counter increasingly dominant trends in the field that emphasise global entanglements, flows, moving bodies, growing urbanisation and the inexorable spread of neoliberal capitalism at the expense of neglecting the local and emplaced aspects of contemporary lifeworlds. While these trends also serve as a response to the problems of Area Studies outlined above as they seek postmodern identities within transdisciplinarity and -regionality, the didactics and methodologies of these trends are, especially on an undergraduate level, poorly developed. This transformation of Area Studies under the label New Area Studies, along with the continuing crisis of representation in the humanities, results in area scholars increasingly staying "at home" to look at mediatised representations or conduct research with diaspora communities or people on the move, following the latter's movements in multi-sited approaches (Marcus 1995).

While we do not wish to deny the unquestionable relevance of these "trans" perspectives for an understanding of the contemporary world, the ethnographically founded sub-field of New Area Studies we envision seeks to carve out the continuing relevance of the "local" and emplaced as study objects *sui generis* in a world of global entanglements. We imagine this sub-field as a

5 I limit this discussion to Area Studies in Germany, as this is the academic field I am most familiar with.

project to map what Jackson labels as "spatialities of difference" (Jackson 2019: 61), in which the in-depth study of the emplaced can thrive against the backdrop of being increasingly neglected in all other disciplines and transdisciplinary projects. It thus presents an antidote to the atopia of poststructuralism that flourishes under the banner of New Area Studies (Favret-Saada 1981: 38).

In formulating this sub-field, we are also seeking to write against the growing "political scienceification" of New Area Studies.[6] An increasing focus on questions of instrumental forms of power is clearly discernible in contemporary Area Studies research. Self-acclaimed critical scholarship frequently argues that "everything is political" and, in the end, reducible to questions of power. It is no coincidence that, as a co-organiser of the 2019 EuroSEAS conference, I made the observation that Southeast Asian Studies are becoming increasingly politicised. Upon raising my concern, during informal conversations alongside the conference, that other topics are vanishing from the programmes of Area Studies conferences, two scholars with political science backgrounds independently responded that such a fear was unwarranted as "everything is political!" This simplification is increasingly shared by Area Studies scholars, a fact demonstrated not only by the dominance of panels addressing politics at this conference, but also mirrored in Peter A. Jackson's power-critical interpretation of New Area Studies (Jackson 2019). Co-organising this conference also revealed to me that scholars with backgrounds in philology, linguistics, archaeology, art history and religious studies view this simplified and morally charged politicisation of Area Studies under the label New Area Studies not as an opportunity, but increasingly as a marginalisation of research that does not directly address questions of power, resulting in a reluctance to participate in any debate to rethink the field.

Marshall Sahlins has convincingly deconstructed the political claim that "everything is political" from an anthropological perspective, succinctly labelling the totalising thrust of self-acclaimed critical scholarship "powerism" (Sahlins 1999: 405, Baumann 2017: 159–168). Sahlins reveals how powerism ridicules the detotalising outset of poststructuralism that simultaneously underpins this branch of critical scholarship, and how culturally reductive many power-critical explanations of social phenomena are. This most fundamentally owes to the neo-functionalism that speaks through the universalisation of instrumental forms of power that characterise much of this scholarship, as it impedes our ability to fully understand how social inequalities unfold in the Global South. Powerism denies the need to undertake the epistemological breaks we identify as the foundation of ethnographically founded Area Studies research, as it assumes universal thrusts of "power" and "inequality" linked to

6 "Political scienceification" is the admittedly awkward translation of the German *Verpolitikwissenschaftlichung*, designating a growing encroachment of Area Studies by issues, perspectives and paradigms from political sciences and their normative universalisms.

colonialism, the inexorable spread of neo-liberal capitalism and the global hegemony of naturalism (Baumann / Rehbein 2020). In order to counter these totalisations of powerism, which also thrive under the label of transregional studies, and evade the paradoxes produced in attempts to acknowledge alterity while simultaneously emphasising the political relevance of human universals, an ethnographic foundation of New Area Studies seeks to acknowledge alterity without translating it into an analytical language of dual oppositions enmeshed in modern identity politics. Engaging ethnographically in New Area Studies means practicing epistemic disobedience (Mignolo 2011); its central goal is to counter the ontological imperialism of well-intentioned scholarship that pursues a supposed human universalism and repeatedly incorporates others' "objectivization of themselves into our own objectivization of ourselves" (Descola 2013: 81).

> Given this point, ironically, any efforts to eradicate the idea of otherness, however well-intentioned, may do more to perpetuate than to combat the violent conceit of colonialism. For by denying otherness, these efforts too manage really to belittle the distinction and authenticity of the other. (Dumont / Evens 1999: 16–17)

The continuing relevance of "the local"

> Nobody lives everywhere; everybody lives somewhere. Nothing is connected to everything; everything is connected to something.[7] (Haraway 2016: 31)

Developments in the field of Area Studies, above all the analytical deconstruction of areas in their geopolitical sense, severe budgetary cuts as well as the need to invent bachelor's and master's programmes that attract as many students as possible – a process Peter A. Jackson calls "the neoliberalization of the global university sector" (Jackson 2019: 64) – have led to various responses at German universities. While some Area Studies institutes and departments have responded by emphasising the philological foundations of conventional Area Studies, others have tried to align Area Studies more strongly with established disciplines such as the Social Sciences or History, and yet others are attempting to implement an oxymoronic vision of post-area Area Studies under the banner of transregional studies, which "argue against studying forms of knowledge in terms of spatiality or geographically bordered epistemologies" (ibid.: 50).

Humboldt University's Department of Southeast Asian Studies has tried to formulate its own concept of New Area Studies, a process that is far from complete and also not uncontested within our parent institution, the Institute

7 Even Berlin's public transport company BVG seems concerned with ideas of emplacement: Haraway's quote was spotted on the infotainment screens installed throughout Berlin's underground train network in February 2020.

of Asian and African Studies. While writing my dissertation under the supervision of Vincent Houben, who initiated the debate on New Area Studies in Southeast Asian studies with his seminal reflections (Houben 2013, 2017), my own vision of an ethnographic foundation of New Area Studies took shape, further solidifying during research seminars in Berlin and subsequent fieldwork in rural Thailand.

This vision builds upon Houben's central idea of developing a "view from within" (Houben 2017: 202). Since this goal is not only the founding idea of modern anthropology but is still shared by most ethnographies making up the realist genre (Malinowski 2005: 19, van Maanen 2011: 45–72), this contribution suggests theoretical and methodological tools to achieve this "view from within" through an ethnographic foundation of New Area Studies research. Ethnography has become a collective term for multiple writing genres that all rely on fieldwork as a way of relating with humans, non-humans and their environment. Despite this proliferation into multiple ethnographic genres, the characteristics of Area Studies ethnography are rarely addressed. One of our central questions is thus how ethnography as a writing genre within New Area Studies may be practiced. While the research and theoretical debates that ground this contribution are inspired by Thai Cultural Studies, envisioned by Peter A. Jackson as a power-critical sub-field of Southeast Asian Studies (Jackson 2005: 29), we argue that the premises of this ethnographically founded research paradigm are applicable to all scholarly projects striving to understand everyday life in socio-spatially grounded areas.[8]

We envision this ethnographically founded sub-field of New Area Studies as a transdisciplinary project that seeks to engage with theoretical questions raised in various disciplines regarding emplaced orders of knowledge. This notion of emplacement is explicitly spatial, entailing that orders of knowledge are investigated in their relationship to physical space and concrete locations. The situatedness of knowledge emphasised in New Area Studies thus remains not limited to hegemonic discourses, social milieus, subcultures or gendered, moving bodies, but has an irreducibly spatial dimension that has increasingly been denied in Area Studies and anthropology since the mobility turn. In order to challenge the apparently unequivocal understanding of globalisation as a homogenising force, this outline of our vision draws upon authors who are frequently employed within transregional paradigms to argue against spatial forms of emplacement and to instead make a strong point for the continuing social relevance of the emplaced and immobile in contemporary lifeworlds.

Haraway has criticised "disembodied scientific objectivity" as a "conquering gaze from nowhere", a "gaze that mythically inscribes all the marked bodies, that makes the unmarked category claim the power to see and not be

8 As ethnographically working Area Studies scholars, we emphasise socio-spatiality in this contribution instead of Houben's historical emphasis on "time-space configurations" (Houben 2017: 202).

seen, to represent while escaping representation". This "view of infinite vision is an illusion, a god trick" (Haraway 1988: 576–582). Seeing from everywhere while being nowhere is impossible. If there is no immediate vision from a partial perspective, if "we are irredeemably situated, located in a material semiotic weave, there is no detachment" (Law 2019: 7). And if only "instruments of vision can mediate standpoints" (Haraway 1988: 586), we need epistemological instruments of emplacement. How can this "god trick" be avoided and vision be emplaced in New Area Studies? Instead of claiming to understand the world in its entirety or from the vantage point of nowhere, Houben suggests splitting up the world "into smaller parts in order to be opened up to comparative scientific analysis", further elaborating:

> Area Studies aim at a deep understanding of "situated difference," which in sum consists of a complex set of correlations on human societies, distinguishing between them on the basis of location. (Houben 2017: 200)

New Area Studies and its reflection on the situatedness of knowledge in a particular place can consequently become what Haraway has coined an "instrument of vision" (Haraway 1988: 586).[9] We seek to argue that social practice becomes meaningful only in relation to bodies situated in physical space, in a "there" which requires the researcher's physical presence and active participation for an understanding of it to be attained (Geertz 1989). It is this dialectic of place and meaning as it unfolds in everyday social practice that an ethnographic foundation of New Area Studies research seeks to explore. The locations of social practice can be situated on different scales, ranging from "the local" to "the global", producing a spatial continuum to be addressed by New Area Studies research. With our research on Thailand, we focus on the "local" end of this broad continuum.[10] This focus on "the local" has various reasons, the most important being that the lifeworlds of actors who do not actively participate in the flows, movements and mobilities studied by transregional studies risk remaining largely hidden as they become increasingly invisible under the mobility turn in Area Studies. In the worst case, the analytical significance of these emplaced lifeworlds is outright denied.

This usually happens with reference to the twin processes of globalisation and urbanisation, said to homogenise contemporary lifeworlds to such a degree that there is no longer any need to conduct research in a village as "the rural" has ceased to exist.[11] Critical approaches inspired by poststructuralism

9 The investigation of Haraway's concept of situated knowledges, as well as the link to Houben's reflections and our New Area Studies paradigm, have been adapted from Kretschmer's B.A. thesis (Kretschmer 2020: 5–6).

10 What "the local" is needs to be specified with regard to each individual research interest. "The local" may be a province, a village, a house, a room or simply a person's emplacement in a "here" as opposed to a "there".

11 The common idea that global integration yields cultural convergence is critically discussed in the contributions to a recent volume on social ontologies and social inequality in the Global South (Baumann / Bultmann 2020).

additionally argue that "the rural" never existed in the first place, but was always merely a social category invented to sustain unequal power relations. From this vantage point, "the rural" merely serves as a foil, invented as a primitive Other by ruling elites to imagine the supremacy of civilised urbanity. Mills's well-intentioned anti-essentialism, for instance, reduces "the rural" in Thailand to a geographic domain without intrinsic meaning, denies any meaningful differences between "the rural" and "the urban" beyond the representational, and implies a total replacement of "the rural" by the homogenised urbanity of a globalised world that is synchronised by new media technologies and transcultural consumption patterns (Mills 2012). "The rural" ceases to represent a meaningful place of collective identity formation; it becomes an abstraction, a space "stripped of its holiness and its demons" (Assmann 2011: 305)[12] so that it poses no contradiction to the modern values of mobility and flexibility that the formerly rural populations of Thailand have incorporated into their claims of cultural citizenship (Mills 2012: 99, Baumann 2017: 169).

"The rural" thus shares the same fate as "the Thai village", which has also been deconstructed by self-acclaimed poststructuralist critiques. These deconstructions identify "the Thai village" as an administrative category introduced to facilitate the governance of peripheral populations and smoothen their integration into the newly centralised Thai polity (Hirsch 2002). While the idea of the rural Thai village fulfilled crucial functions as a foil in the imagination of Thai urbanity, it also, after the Asian financial crisis, became a central ideological tool to reproduce romanticised images of Thailand's past and reimagine the essence of "Thainess" (Baumann 2017: 155). Poststructuralist readings of these social categories certainly help reveal the constructed character of all social classifications in Foucault's genealogical sense and the unequal power relations that produce them, as well as their role in modern identity politics (Foucault 1972). Yet a mere deconstruction of these discursive categories overlooks the practical ramifications they assume in everyday life and the continuing relevance emplaced categories like rurality (*ban nok*) or village (*mu ban*) have for the contextuality of social practice in Thailand (Jackson 2003, Baumann 2017: 228–230).

These currently dominant perspectives imagine the urbanisation of everyday life as so thorough that it seems possible merely to sit in a Starbucks café at Bangkok's Siam Square, sipping a soy chai latte, to know what everyday life in Thailand feels like, or that talking to taxi drivers in Bangkok suffices to understand the political motivations of Thai peasants in their rural provinces of origin. The universal forms of power these studies frequently seek to critique legitimises not only the chosen spatial scale, but renders inscrutable the authors'

12 The central argument of my Ph.D. dissertation is that ritually reproduced relationships to emplaced "demons" (*phi*) are essential for the development of localised sentiments of collective belonging in rural villages in Buriram Province.

own entanglements in field-specific forms of power (Bourdieu 1999). While studies following this path may illuminate the twin processes of globalisation and urbanisation and how they unfold in contemporary Thailand, they neglect the continuing socio-cultural and political-economic differences separating rural and urban lifeworlds, the emplaced character of primary socialisation and the resulting differences between rural and urban habitus (Baumann 2017: 216–221, Baumann / Rehbein 2020: 19).

The potential of this ethnographic foundation of New Area Studies research lies in its sensibility towards the dialectical relationship of place and knowledge, capable of revealing how the practical meaningfulness of everyday life emerges from this dialectic in settings that are socio-spatially removed from urban centres. This potential was explicitly embraced in the design of the research project, revolving around the idea of studying everyday lifeworlds in Buriram, a province long regarded as the epitome of rurality and backwardness (*ban nok*) in Thailand's public sphere (Baumann 2017: 90–96). In recent years, Buriram has also been subject to its own, distinct forces of increasing transformation, owing to the construction of a soccer stadium and racing track that meet international standards and attract growing numbers of tourists.[13]

What situates an ethnographic study of emplaced orders of knowledge within the field of New Area Studies is an understanding of area that is far removed from the geopolitical regionalisations that characterise conventional area studies. The justified deconstruction of the established geopolitical units, however, does not question the analytical value of regionalisation per se, only the logic employed to delineate an area and the political essentialisation of the resulting analytical abstractions. The understanding of area that characterises an ethnographic vision of New Area Studies flexibly imagines areas with regard to each individual research question, locating the resulting analytical construction on a scalar continuum without fixed boundaries (Houben 2017: 203).

Scott's elaboration of van Schendel's outline of Zomia is one example of such an alternative regionalisation that breaks with the geopolitical units of Cold War common sense (van Schendel 2002, Scott 2009). This contextual understanding of an area is, however, nothing "new". Mus's conceptualisation of monsoon Asia (Mus 1934), based on the identification of a shared ritual language of chthonic cults that connected social collectives in the geopolitical regions we commonly label as South, East and Southeast Asia, is one early example of such an alternative regionalisation (Baumann 2020: 48–51). The contextualised regionalisations of New Area Studies are, however, not entirely random, but presuppose the sharing of family resemblances in Wittgenstein's sense (Wittgenstein 1999: 32). Areas are relational constructs and "the local"

13 In 2018 alone the number of yearly visitors has increased rapidly from 600,000 to 2.5 million (Panyaarvudh 2018).

is one dimension of regionality that emerges only in light of a particular research question and thus cannot be essentialised.

Despite this alternative conceptualisation of an "area", our ethnographic vision shares the strong interest of Area Studies in non-European socio-spatial configurations while emphasising the relevance of vernacular languages and dialects to approach the practical meaningful-ness of everyday life (Jackson 2019: 58–59). We stress the didactic value of in-depth language training, which continues to distinguish Area Studies curricula from anthropology. The range of areas an Area Studies scholar can investigate under our ethnographically founded paradigm is therefore limited by the mastery of language and the ability to actively participate in everyday language games. In this sense, our ethnographically founded vision of New Area Studies research marks a return to the strong emphasis of conventional Area Studies on spatiality and spatially bound epistemologies, and in this sense contradicts the dominant calls for transregionality in much New Area Studies theorising. However, the logic applied to delineate these "spaces" and the emphasis of the epistemological multiplicity characterising them renders our understanding of regionality fundamentally different (Baumann 2020).

Our individual research projects are situated in a vernacularly recognised geographic area known as *Isan Tai* (lower Northeast). This area is characterised by a distinct socio-cultural configuration where Thai, Lao and Khmer cultural influences intersect in everyday life. Buriram Province is one of three Thai provinces commonly considered to make up this area, which constitutes a liminal frontier zone between Thailand and Cambodia. An organic hybridisation of these cultural influences characterises this area, producing distinct and highly localised language games and identities that vary considerably between social collectives. These emplaced collectives, however, share enough family resemblances to produce a regional consciousness that is imagined in contrast to social collectives in the Lao-dominated upper Northeast or the Thai-dominated central region. The lower Northeast is, therefore, not merely an analytical abstraction, but is used in everyday life as a reference point to articulate an emplaced sense of belonging that is frequently overlooked in Bangkok-centric or Isan-centric scholarship (Baumann 2017).

An important factor that characterises this ethnographically founded vision of New Area Studies is its attempt to transcend disciplinary dogmas and its intention to contribute actively to the production of theory from an emplaced perspective. In the context of our research project, this transdisciplinarity manifests itself most explicitly with regard to the lifeworld, a concept we have adopted from social phenomenology and seek to elucidate with ethnographic methods. Although references to the lifeworld are frequently encountered in anthropological texts as well as transregional studies, the concept is

often insufficiently theorised and its phenomenological foundation rarely mirrored in discussions of the employed methodology.[14] The concept's theoretical roots in Husserl's philosophical phenomenology, its elaboration in Schütz's social phenomenology as well as its continuing relevance in Berger and Luckmann's sociology of everyday life are mostly ignored (Husserl 1962, Berger / Luckmann 1966, Schütz 1971). Methodological discussions on how to understand a lifeworld that is socio-culturally far removed from one's own are even scarcer in Area Studies. In our attempt to grasp the meaningfulness of everyday life as it unfolds in emplaced practices in Buriram Province, we emphasise the premises of social phenomenology and turn the idea of the lifeworld into the essential feature of our ethnographic vision of New Area Studies research.

Following Michael Jackson, one of few scholars who has theorised the lifeworld concept from an anthropological vantage point, the lifeworld encompasses "that domain of everyday, immediate social existence and practical activity […] which theoretical knowledge addresses but does not determine, from which conceptual understanding arises but on which it does not primarily depend" (Jackson 1996: 7–8). While intellectual concepts and structures form part of the lifeworld, they are not its foundational element, but simply one horizon of experience among others. Of most principal significance and validity are commonsensical, taken-for-granted understandings and practical skills – types of knowledge not ordinarily brought into consciousness, indeed not actually able to be brought fully into consciousness without a degree of abstraction, yet integrally part of empirical reality (ibid.: 4–15). Instead of discursive terms and cognitive reflections, practical activity takes centre stage as the carrier of meaning, the site of knowledge that underpins everyday experience and shapes collective understandings of the world.

With our vision of New Area Studies, we thus articulate a moderate phenomenological position. Strong phenomenological positions emphasise the egological foundation of meaning and see the lifeworld as the foundation of a universal philosophy (Hitzler / Honer 1984: 58). In contrast, moderate positions stress purely the intersubjective character of commonsensical typifications and the social character of meaning in everyday life (Geertz 1973: 12). Moderate phenomenological positions outline non-egological alternatives to the strictly egological perspectives of transcendental or mundane phenomenology by emphasising meaning's essentially social character. As such they are closely related to Wittgenstein's philosophy of language, in which meaning exists only in social

14 Gay y Blasco and Wardle's book on how to read ethnography, for instance, is replete with references to the lifeworld and its central place in ethnographic texts, yet does not tell the reader what "lifeworld" is actually supposed to mean (Gay y Blasco / Wardle 2019). The lifeworld is treated as a jargon term, but as it has become part of colloquial language games and because jargon terms change their meaning over time, its analytical value remains low as long as it is not situated in a specific line of thought.

collectives and not in discourses or any other analytical abstraction (Giesen 2010: 30, Baumann 2017: 84).

Reckwitz, who attempts to synthesise approaches of various social theorists to work out essential arguments of what he terms an idealised model of “practice theories”, locates the social construction of meaning as situated in emplaced practices. Practices are necessarily bodily practices, the product of training the body in a certain way. Yet the body does not merely function as an “instrument” here: it is an irreducible part of the routinised, skilful performance that constitutes each practice (Reckwitz 2002: 244–251) and renders it meaningful in its relationship to a particular location. This dialectic between meaning and locality constitutes its emplacement. Practices transcend the alleged dichotomy between body and mind, and discursive terms and categories are once again relegated to being just one type of practice among others. Through their habituality and routinised reproduction, practices are also inherently social and collective. Human beings do not “own” practices, but rather “take over” and reproduce them (ibid.: 250–254).[15]

Epistemological breaks

Haraway’s feminist idea of situated objectivity unfolds through a particular vision and partial perspective. Critical positioning, she argues, can produce objectivity, yet this objectivity is always situated and the truth produced necessarily partial. Not only does this question the possibility of a universal truth, it also identifies claims to it as hegemonic projects. Considering the practice of identity politics, this critical positioning is an epistemological process achieved by using “instruments of vision” since identity itself, “including self-identity, does not produce science” (Haraway 1988: 586). But what does this situatedness mean for an ethnographically founded New Area Studies research paradigm? Earlier, we outlined contextual regionalisation as an instrument of vision. We now turn to the epistemological breaks required to emplace this vision.

When approaching everyday lifeworlds, we, as area scientists, face an essential conundrum. In contrast to natural scientists, we are embedded in the field that we examine, the social world (Rehbein 2011: 52). In this world, myriad lived experiences and practices exist side by side, requiring us to acknowledge our own embeddedness in a lifeworld constituted by emplaced practices and habituated forms of knowledge. Realising this embeddedness raises the question of how to break with one’s own bodily and mentally habitu-

15 The investigation of Michael Jackson’s lifeworld concept and Reckwitz’s notion of social practices has been adapted from Pomerance’s B.A. thesis (Pomerance 2020: 4–6).

ated forms of knowledge that might be impeding our ability to comprehend the experiences of actors from differing social positions. Bourdieu recognises these problems with his notion of the "double break" (Bourdieu 1977: 3). This concept does not present a step-by-step guide on how to break with taken-for-granted assumptions, but calls for an awareness of the obstacles that the partiality of the analyst's perspective creates for the attempt to gain knowledge on the social world (Rehbein 2011: 54).

The first of these breaks is with the commonsensical explanations and interpretations of the social world that the researcher has incorporated during their socialisation into the language games that constitute an emplaced lifeworld (Baumann / Rehbein 2020). Bourdieu argues that in order to break with commonsensical interpretations, one must primarily reflect upon the terms employed to explain the social world in everyday life (Bourdieu 1991: 21), terms that carry meanings specific to the places and particular situations in which they are invoked. Bourdieu et al. call, therefore, for the construction of new theoretical terms to explain social phenomena (Bourdieu et al. 1991: vii). This call is mirrored by Houben, who advocates the formulation of mid-range concepts while emphasising the limits of translatability and the special role of local concepts in New Area Studies (Houben 2017: 204–210).

Attempting to break with the language of everyday life and disengage it from scientific inquiry might, at first glance, seem contradictory to the phenomenological New Area Studies approach advocated in this article. But the opposite is the case. As Bourdieu points out, a moderate phenomenological approach provides the most valuable tool for escaping one's own taken-for-granted assumptions, which impede a reflexive understanding of social practice and the explication of its meaning. Everyday constructions of reality, therefore, need to be reflexively reintroduced into the analysis:

> There is an objective truth of the subjective, even when it contradicts the objective truth that one has to construct in opposition to it. Illusion is not, as such, illusory. It would be a betrayal of objectivity to proceed as if social subjects had no representation, no experience of the realities that science constructs, such as social classes. (Bourdieu 1993: 17)

Upon carrying out the first break, we do not necessarily arrive at a more "objective" form of knowledge, as is assumed in structuralist or political-economic approaches.[16] Rather, we are required to break with the illusion of scientific objectivity in itself, which constitutes the second break demanded by Bourdieu. Reminiscent of Haraway's emphasis of knowledge's inherent situatedness, there is no position "outside" of society enabling the scientist to produce absolute knowledge in a somehow "godlike" manner (Fröhlich / Rehbein 2014: 242). This makes it necessary not only to question the rules of

16 This kind of adherence to a positivistic ideal of science characterises much of the Eurocentric social sciences, where objectivity and universal truth still constitute reachable goals.

the scientific field or the principles and strategies for acquiring symbolic capital within it, but also to question the relationship between science and the rest of the social universe (Bourdieu 1998: 84).[17]

Reflecting upon the epistemological breaks demanded by Bourdieu during my research in Thailand, I came to realise the need for further breaks in this kind of New Area Studies research. Studying the role that relationships with non-humans known as *phi* (conventionally translated as "ghosts" or "spirits") have for the reproduction of emplaced collectives in the rural lifeworlds of the lower Northeast, the ontological imperialism of a rationalised analytical language impedes the explication of the practical meaningfulness of these affective bonds as well as the character that *phi* assume in everyday language games (Baumann 2017, 2018, 2020). This explication requires not only reflexive translations and the coining of new concepts, but also the reconstruction of the social ontology of everyday life and a mapping of the socio-ontological multiplicity that characterises contemporary Thai lifeworlds. Therefore, I argue that the acknowledgement of ontological multiplicity becomes not only an essential break required in this New Area Studies paradigm, but that the reconstruction of emplaced social ontologies represents its major conceptual contribution (Baumann / Bultmann 2020, Baumann / Rehbein 2020). The recognition of socio-ontological multiplicity is not only an attempt at countering the totalising thrust of post-area area studies, but also provides a response to Harootunian's dismissal of conventional area studies in his critique of translation as ontological cannibalism (Harootunian 2000: 41, in Houben 2017: 196).

As students, we were confronted with yet another break as part of our research projects in Buriram, as we were required to enter a new field, the academic field. This entailed exposing our bodies to a wide range of new practices including participant observation, ethnographic writing, learning of the academic and vernacular languages as well as engagement in critical self-reflection. Yet the most crucial break demanded in New Area Studies research presented itself upon entering the research field and attempting to meaningfully engage in it as a participant. While Bourdieu's double break calls for the commonsensical categories of everyday life to be reflexively assessed, entering emplaced lifeworlds in provincial Thailand first necessitates an identification of these categories and their commonsensical meanings before being able to reflect them. The fact that these emplaced lifeworlds are distinct not only from our everyday lifeworlds in Germany, but also from everyday lifeworlds in urban Bangkok with respect to locally specific language games, enhances the difficulties. By drawing on the lifeworld concept, we not only critically reflect upon the universalising thrust of poststructuralist critiques that tend to reduce meaning to power, but also upon the limitations and po-

17 The discussion of Bourdieu's epistemological breaks has been adapted from von Plato's B.A. thesis (von Plato 2020: 8–10).

tentials of social phenomenology itself, which is always on the verge of remaining a type of spontaneous sociology (Burawoy 2017).

The analytical assessment of a lifeworld presupposes an intersubjective participation in this lifeworld and, consequently, an implicit sharing of the basic categories that render everyday life meaningful (Srubar 2009: 11, Baumann 2017: 83–85). What happens if we lack such an implicit understanding of the everyday because we conduct research in other languages and in socio-cultural settings that are far removed from our everyday experience? Is the explication of the implicit knowledge that renders a lifeworld meaningful and its translation into another language game possible or do we reach the limits of the lifeworld paradigm once we leave our own socio-cultural context and seek to understand another lifeworld? The totalising thrust of transregional studies that assumes a growing homogenisation of everyday life is convenient to avoid these principal questions that mirror the fundamental problem of solipsism within social phenomenology. Our ethnographic vision of New Area Studies, however, turns this problem into its point of departure. The goal of this paradigm thus becomes the reconstruction of social ontologies and the recognition of their continuing multiplicity in the contemporary world (Baumann / Rehbein 2020).

Owing to their fundamental implicitness, exclusively engaging in speech acts and explicitly asking for concepts and social categories in interviews does not suffice. Everyday knowledge can only be approached through being embodied by the researchers themselves. Another break then required is the explication of this form of experiential knowledge and its translation into semantic knowledge in the context of an ethnographic account. This is where questions of (un-)translatability arise and New Area Studies researchers have to ask themselves whether their analytical vocabulary and the translations usually encountered in their field appropriately capture the emplaced meaning of the social categories they seek to explicate. Therefore, questions of representation need to be addressed more explicitly in this New Area Studies paradigm than in conventional Area Studies.

Our model of social practices explored earlier presents a possible solution to the solipsism problem and offers a glimpse at the diverse types of knowledge contained within implicit, practical activity and the experiential domain of the lifeworld. With this understanding, the fact that the ethnographically working Area Studies scholar "is drawn into the lifeworld as a participant" (Jackson 1996: 29) presents itself not as an obstacle, but as a vital opportunity. Only by means of participation, by experiencing and "taking over" the same social practices invoked by those in the field, by acquiring the bodily routines and practical skills of those one is surrounded with, can knowledge be explored not as a universal system of inherent truths, but in its implicit entanglements with lived reality (ibid.: 8).

During our fieldwork, we attempted to achieve a certain degree of "thickness" through "taking over" the same social practices as our interlocutors. This idea of thickness, characterising our vision of New Area Studies, refers back to Geertz's "interpretative thickness" (Geertz 1973) while also stressing the "thickness" of shared experiences in the course of "participant observation" (Spittler 2001: 12). The acquisition of "thick knowledge" represents, for us, the primary goal of ethnographically founded New Area Studies research (Baumann 2017: 30). As a form of embodied knowledge that is acquired through one's participation in and shared experience of daily life, thick knowledge is only partially accessible to the researchers themselves. Its accumulation during fieldwork, however, allows the researcher to act meaningfully in socioculturally alien contexts, thus bridging one of the breaks illustrated earlier. The intersubjective meaningfulness of one's participation in everyday life reflects one's embodied (and at least partial) understanding of the interlocutors' lifeworlds. This idea of thick knowledge mirrors Wittgenstein's notion of language games as social practices that produce distinctive forms of life, whereby Wittgenstein remarks that we are only able to understand the meaning of a word if we are accustomed to its associated practice (Rehbein 2009: 53, Baumann / Rehbein 2020: 17–18).

While the combination of necessary epistemological breaks in New Area Studies is certainly different for scholars conducting research in their mother tongue and their area of origin, it would be ignorant to assume that "home scholars" are automatically able to explicate the meaningfulness of everyday life and translate it into a scientific account. Bourdieu envisions the double break precisely to avoid this kind of spontaneous sociology. Spontaneous sociology is a view of social structure that derives directly from experience, as if actors had a privileged and conscious insight into their predicament (Baumann / Rehbein 2020: 8). Despite our methodological emphasis on participation, we simultaneously argue against the idea that participant observation is "a 'natural sociology' that offers spontaneous and privileged access to truth" (Burawoy 2017: 263). What we emphasise is that participation allows us to access a particular and emplaced truth as well as that the acknowledgement of its partiality is an instrument of vision that enables us to reach a situated form of objectivity.

Within local lifeworlds

The requirements demanded by the New Area Studies research paradigm outlined above are certainly ambitious. The major challenge of our research project was therefore to determine how a research methodology requiring the

researcher to spend extended periods of time in an area, gain access to a lifeworld, participate actively in it and embody a certain degree of thick knowledge could be taught and implemented. As our research endeavours as students were limited by the brief duration of our two-month semester break, our research interests revolved around lifeworlds that we initially, yet in some cases very much falsely, presumed to be easily accessible. In the following sections, we will reflect upon our experiences with this ethnographic research methodology to highlight its didactic value in New Area Studies curricula.

Motorcycle races: On words and experiences (by Danny Kretschmer)

> With my knees pressed against the motorcycle tank, my hands holding the grips, fingers ready to react on the brake lever, the boundaries between body and machine are blurred. Moving my body means moving the bike. The bike translates every change in the surface of the street into percussions running through my body. With the streetlights flying by and my upper body leaning against the airstream, my perception of "now" is being shifted. A fundamental alteration of temporal experience is taking place. Before, "now" had meant hanging out, sitting and chatting in the workshop. In this moment, "now" is more severe, as my eyes are glued to the street and the bike in front of me. Every second is meaningful, because "now", as we speed out of the village and towards the city, a pothole, a stray dog or a car emerging from an alley will be the end. Words do not suffice to represent the sensation of vitality that comes with escaping death. As we continue our journey across the newly built streets of Buriram, the city itself starts to shift around me. This night ride opens up a different kind of spatial experience. As we ride through this space, it feels accessible, and with no one else present, the streets and the night belong to us.[18]

Initially, I had been planning to explore the lifeworld meaning of *wai run* in Buriram. *Wai run* translates roughly to the English category "teenager". My aim had been to find out what is lost in translation if one translates *wai run* as "teenager". With the focus set on the lifeworld, symbolic enactment of *wai run* as a process of meaning-making, I started to explore local language games, images and places through which this category is materialised. Unlike biological notions of "youth", my approach aims at an understanding of how the concept *wai run* is materially-semiotically practiced and interpreted within local lifeworlds. During this exploration, a *wai run*-related category, the category of *dek waen*, became apparent to me.

One meaning of *dek waen* in Thai language games refers to teenagers who race modified motorbikes. *Dek* means child, *waen* is an onomatopoetic description of motorbike sounds. Associations with the category *dek waen* are mainly negative. Due to the category's associations with criminality in Thailand's public sphere, its use to identify someone mostly means to deviantise this person. It is also a self-referential indicator of social belonging or of one's own

18 This paragraph has been translated and adapted from Kretschmer's B.A. thesis (Kretschmer 2020: 25).

practice of motorbike modifications and races. What does it mean to be *dek waen* in teenage lifeworlds in Buriram? Asking what it means to be someone in a particular lifeworld is not posed exclusively as a question for textual meaning. It extends the scope to a social practice. As explained above, it means to explore the situated, implicit, embodied logic of practice, which depends on bodies and artefacts (Reckwitz 2003: 291).

Exploring a deviantised category referring to a deviantised practice entails multiple difficulties. At the time of my exploration, it was not yet clear to me that I was exploring a discursive category of social distantiation and distinction, mostly used to identify others rather than as a means of self-identification. This led to a long period of meandering, as I failed to find anyone who could tell me what it means to be *dek waen* and what it is like. Only at the very end of my field trip was I allowed access to a motorcycle workshop and able to meet actual people who self-identified as *dek waen*. Participating in everyday life ceased being limited to hanging out with a group of racers and mechanics at their workshop. It meant that I could finally explore the sensual experience of riding a motorcycle through warm nights together with other bikers. In those nights and on the streets, my spatial-temporal perception was altered. Inhabiting space is bound to our movement through it. Space is interwoven with as well as product and producer of our social practices. Buriram is practiced differently on a motorbike, during nights, at different speeds. Racing as thick participation involves a break with commonsensical modes of movement, a break with the everyday mode of inhabiting space.

For some, the category *dek waen* serves as a conceptual placeholder that signifies the corporeal experiences described above. For others, it may signify the noise from the street interrupting their sleep. These variations of local language games enact differing relations to a social practice. Learning how these language games work is crucial for understanding the meaning of *dek waen*, yet as my research reveals, this mode of understanding has limits. Reading newspapers and conducting interviews present limited sources of knowledge. They might demonstrate how a hegemonic discourse is reproduced on a local level, but extending the frame from words to experiences made me understand what the practice typically referred to by the social category *dek waen* feels like. Ethnography became a tool for me to translate these feelings into words and to disclose silent, non-verbal / not-yet-verbal, tacit forms of knowledge and situate them in a lifeworld characterised by a specific form of regionality. In the end, my riding practice and a three-month period of waiting, trust-building and bonding with potential interlocutors at a gaming café lead my research to an embodied mode of understanding. Drawing from the wide range of ethnographic instruments enabled me to grasp the multimodalities of everyday life and finally assess the local meaning and practices of being *dek waen* in Buriram.

Gaming cafés: Emplaced belonging (by Jona Pomerance)

> I slide open the door and push aside the thick, pink curtains. An expansive room stretches out in front of me. Rows of tightly arranged computer setups divide the space into three narrow corridors, the tall chairs on each side packed with adolescents. I have stepped into a gaming café, one of over two dozen operating in Buriram's city centre today. Flickering colours radiate from the many screens and an auditory carpet of keyboard tapping, mouse clicks, humming fans, chattering voices and occasional slang-infused shouts weaves throughout the room. Players are immersed in the virtual worlds unfolding before them. At least that is easy to assume from a bird's-eye perspective. On a closer look, clusters of neighbouring screens change their colours in unison. Players' laughs and curses emerge as polyphonies, their voices and glances bouncing back and forth between adjacent seats. Additional pairs of eyes follow these joint efforts from behind the chairs. Customers arrive and depart as a continuous stream, cordially greeting the owner as well as those lounging smoking atop the motorcycles parked outside. An emplaced web of relationships revolves around the café, one that extends into the games' virtual realms yet has its roots firmly in the physical domain of this local gathering spot.

A perspective similar to the globalisational and transregional gaze critically assessed earlier can also be observed with regard to academic inquiry into digital games. Owing to the rapid spread of internet and technology access as well as the increasingly interconnected nature of gameplay, gaming tends to be framed as transcending emplaced bodies and physical localities, instead moving practices into the realm of the "virtual". Hand and Moore, for instance, largely dismiss physical gatherings of players as fleeting moments that produce merely transient relationships between those present (Hand / Moore 2006: 168–169), quickly shifting their focus to "imagined" and "virtual" forms of community. They assume that the collective nature of play as well as gaming-related symbols and artefacts "produce the experience of belonging to a [gaming] community" and assert that "digital gamers self-consciously develop different self-identities through the consumption and playing of digital games" and also that transcendent, "virtual identities" are assumed in online gaming environments (ibid.: 170–177).

From the vantage point of game studies, an academic field concerned with a theoretical grasp of digital games, arguments like these are reasonable. From a lifeworld perspective, however, they present a certain danger. It would be easy to simply project the above understanding onto everyone taking part in gaming practices, label them "gamers", suppose they self-reflexively construct an identity as part of a "gaming community" and assume they transcend "real-life" contexts through the "virtual" realms of online games. Ample evidence to match these theoretical presuppositions could likely be found if explicitly searched for. But would this mean these discursive categories and abstract ideas truly carry meaning within the implicit domain of each person's life-world? A self-proclaimed "material turn" within the game studies field has

succeeded in drawing more attention to the localised instances and material contexts of gameplay (Apperley / Jayemane 2012: 7–10), yet the principal limitation from this theoretical vantage point remains. Inevitably, it ends up exploring what gaming practices mean to an abstract understanding of digital games instead of what they mean within players' emplaced domains of everyday experience.

In retrospect, I was perhaps lucky that my original research endeavour, which had already addressed social practices of adolescents but not yet centred on gaming cafés in particular, had come to a halt. Informed too closely by universalising assumptions in my initial research design, I had quickly encountered the discrepancy between my own analytical language and the specificity of local language games when attempts to have interviewees explicate everyday practices had yielded reproductions of a dominant discourse rather than reflexive accounts of their daily routines. In the course of these initial attempts, however, I had implicitly started to accumulate "thick knowledge" by being embedded in local students' lifeworlds, which I was subsequently able to draw upon to readjust my research interest.

From this locally discovered, student-mediated vantage point, I encountered Buriram's gaming cafés primarily as local sites of adolescent practices, rather than against the backdrop of abstract "gaming"-related presuppositions. Two particular gaming café premises, embedded in the peripheral urbanity of Buriram City, subsequently became my "local" reference points at which I spent multiple weeks surrounded by, talking to and gaming with the cafés' customers and owners. Through this emplaced, participatory perspective and in contrast to the assumptions outlined above, social interactions at the cafés proved to be primarily localised, with the "virtual" online environments acting more as extensions of physical proximity instead of as transcendental domains, and the café spaces turned out to attain much of their significance as contextual sites of "informal" adolescent interaction (Mulder 2000: 64–65) not graspable by limiting the view to gaming practices alone. Faced with a local discourse that links gaming cafés to the pejorative associations also touched upon by Danny Kretschmer in reference to *dek waen* earlier, the cafés' customers do not identify with discursive "gamer" categories. For those not deterred by the additionally gendered, masculine nature of these discursive representations, an attachment to the café spaces instead develops implicitly – as an emplaced, affective sense of belonging resting upon embodied practices within a shared, physical locality.

Queer lifeworlds: Beyond globalized urbanity (by Tim Rössig)

> To the monotone sound of my electric shaver's vibrating razors, my facial hair slowly trickles down onto the tiled floor. My transformation for a *kathoey* beauty pageant at Buriram's Technical College starts with a shave. The aim is to become a "real" woman. My face, my hair, my clothes, my gestures. Everything needs to become more female, become indistinguishable from a cis-woman, as befriended *kathoey* have explained to me. This is not the first transformation of my gender identity. The first time I left my male body behind was at a drag workshop in Warsaw. Friends introduced me to the art of drag. From boxes filled with wigs in every colour of the rainbow, pink and furry waistcoats, black-and-white sportswear, elegant evening gowns and airy summer attire, we assembled an outfit. My beard was dyed in various colours. I was not a man anymore, but neither a woman. We were fairies, somewhere beyond the heteronormative binary of genders. Whenever I showed pictures of my previous drag attempts to *kathoey* in Buriram, they would immediately start teasing me. "*Phi*, *phi* [ghost, ghost]", they would exclaim, displaying a shocking disinterest in the art of drag. The term *phi* does not merely express disinterest; it is often used in a pejorative manner. "Ghosts" play an important role in the everyday lifeworlds of rural Buriram, where spiteful, uncanny creatures inflict illnesses and other undesired destinies onto the people (Baumann 2018: 160–165). Before my time in Buriram, I had imagined drag as an inherent part of queer culture worldwide. In Bangkok, several drag shows take place daily. Thailand even has a spin-off of the famous drag series "RuPaul's Drag Race", targeting Thai and international drag fans alike. In Buriram, however, drag appears to be irrelevant to local queer culture.

My research project aimed at examining the everyday lifeworlds of gay men and *kathoey* in Buriram. The Thai word *kathoey* is a polythetic category for a Thai gender identity; its meaning can range from gay men with an effeminate habitus, sometimes including occasional crossdressing, to the complete transformation of male gender identity at birth into a female gender identity (Rössig 2019: 8). Most of the existing English literature on queer life in Thailand focuses on urban centres such as Bangkok, Pattaya or Chiang Mai.[19] Even though many queer people migrate from rural places to these urban centres, scholarly literature tends to overlook the lifeworlds of queer people who continue to live in smaller places. In the edited volume "Queer Bangkok", P. A. Jackson critically notes that there is a need for more specific research about regional LGBT* lifeworlds in Thailand (Jackson 2012: 13).

It is not only the absence of drag culture in Buriram that demonstrates this necessity for specific research about local queer configurations in smaller places. Typical queer institutions cited in other articles, such as bars, clubs or saunas are likewise nowhere to be found in Buriram. Important events for queer people in Buriram, such as *mo lam* performances, which couple faster folk music from the Lao-dominated upper Northeast with a specific type of dance, or the significance of *kathoey* beauty pageants for the local *kathoey* community are,

19 While the common anglophone term "queer" is employed to refer to people of various gender identities, this does not mean to imply a "convergence between Thai and Western discourses" (Jackson 2012: 5–6).

on the other hand, rarely mentioned in the urban-centred gender studies literature. This discrepancy between a gender studies' vision and everyday life highlights the need to explore local configurations in provincial Thailand. The differences between rural and urban queer lifeworlds do not simply cease to exist in light of Thailand's globalisation and concomitant urbanisation or the increased mobility that characterises rural lifeworlds. In the lower Northeast, as touched upon previously, the everyday life of queer people is shaped differently by Thai, Lao and Khmer cultural influences and an agricultural economy – as opposed to by international influences and a huge service sector, as with queer lives in Bangkok or Pattaya.

Apart from needing to explore queer everyday experience as an aspect of local lifeworlds, to conduct fieldwork in Buriram it was necessary to examine the meaning of gender categories in local language games. Gender identities in Thailand can by no means be understood as self-contained, but can only be grasped as a continuum of different and contextualised meanings (van Esterik 1999: 279). Terms used in English-speaking countries, such as "trans*" or "queer", are rarely used in Thailand and hardly understood in Buriram (Jackson 2011: 3–6). Additionally, no differentiation between gender, sex and sexuality is made and the definitions of Thai gender (*phet*) vary between scientific articles and everyday use. Therefore, it is not only necessary to ask which *phet* people identify with, but, additionally, what is meant when these categories are employed and by whom they are used to engage in local language games.

In my first interviews in Buriram, the attempt to ask interviewees if they identified with categories used in Thai gender studies literature sometimes lead to irritation and confusion. On one such occasion, a person self-identifying as *kathoey* researched the *phet* categories on the internet upon being asked about her self-identification. She read all the listed terms out loud and had to laugh heartily because she, as a queer person of Thai origin, had never heard of some of these categories and was quite confused about their meanings. Mostly, she relied on the terms *kathoey*, gay, *tom* or *dee* to describe aspects of her lifeworld.[20] Two other interviewed people ended up strongly irritated about the various gender identities, starting to question where to place themselves within the narrow definitions of being gay or *kathoey*. All of my interviewees associated the term *kathoey* with different meanings. My intersubjective participation in their lifeworld, like the aforementioned transformation of my male appearance into a female appearance by *kathoey*, or going out to local events like *mo lam* performances or beauty pageants, added multiple layers of thickness to my embodied understanding of what it means to be *kathoey* as well as how masculinity and femininity are perceived by *kathoey* in Buriram.

20 "Toms, a self-identifying term used by masculine women in Thailand since the 1980s. The word tom implies a sexual attraction to feminine women who are labelled dee, a term that is derived from the English word 'lady', or pronounced 'lay-dee'" (Sinnott 2012: 455).

After returning to Berlin and finishing my B.A. thesis, I was criticised by my co-supervisor at Humboldt University's social sciences department for not engaging with critical German gender theory. There is, however, no such thing as German gender theory about *kathoey*, as the category does not exist in German language games and the category "trans*" is not equivalent to *kathoey* identities in Thailand.[21] Additionally, the rare use of participant observation and thick description in German sociology confronted me, a student of the social sciences, with the practical problems connected to breaking with the monodisciplinary ideal of Germany's discipline-focused academic field. Scientific writing in the "I" perspective and the use of emotionality to understand social relations is often still devalued as too subjective in the social sciences. However, only my realisation of how implicit knowledge and my positionality shaped my research, attained through the writing of thick descriptions, sensitised me to the epistemological breaks required to transcend the boundaries of monodisciplinary knowledge production. Applying the aforementioned New Area Studies methodology to social science research fundamentally contributed to a better understanding of the emplaced social reality of gender identities in different societies. Nonetheless, disciplinary-based dogmas of objectivity continue to limit the paradigm's applicability for students with academic backgrounds in the social sciences.

White migratory men: Limits of emplacement (by Johannes von Plato)

> A row of orange motorcycles in front of an orange house in central Buriram is the signature feature of the motorbike rental business owned by the Dutch guy Finn. Upon my entry, this tall and heavy man welcomes me with a firm handshake. The dazzling light of neon tubes envelops more orange motorcycles in a cold atmosphere, pierced by the yaps of several tiny German Spitz dogs. As we sit down on the sofa, he sends his girlfriend to get us a drink. Being served like this, I somehow feel trapped in a 1950s movie. While she brings us the fresh orange juice he has asked for, he tells me about his most memorable experiences since his move to Buriram. "In Thailand," he explains to me, "the dead need to be burned for the ancestors." Upon finishing his sentence, he seeks the approval of his girlfriend, asking "Is that right, Dao?" Occupied with work on the computer, she does not answer immediately, prompting him to loudly repeat his question: "That's how it is, right, Dao?" For a couple of seconds, I feel a sense of unease linger in the air, a tension that is not eased until her voice utters the desired confirmation: "Yeah, yeah. True." He continues with his story. Upon visiting a funeral in his girlfriend's village for the first time, the fuel of the crematorium's oven had not lasted long enough to burn the corpse entirely. The partly charred body subsequently had to be removed from the oven to refuel. Everybody, even the children, had been able to see the scorched corpse. "I mean … which normal human being wants to see his mother's or father's half-burned face?", Finn remarks. Having internalised a universalist interpre-

21 The co-supervisor's comments on Rössig's B.A. thesis prove Peter A. Jackson's argument that the social sciences continue to locate theory production in the Global North, looking to the Global South only for empirical material to prove the universal applicability of their essentially Eurocentric theory (Jackson 2019: 62).

> tation of "normal" human behaviour characteristic for the hegemonic Western ontology of naturalism, he is not able to reflect upon the diversity of knowledge systems situated in different localities, but simply degrades the funerary practices of his chosen home as "abnormal".

There are no large communities of Western men in Buriram Province and consequently no sex work-related establishments that cater to their needs in the province's capital. Most Western men who have settled in the province dissociate themselves from the large expat communities in Pattaya and Phuket, referring to these latter men as dubious "sex tourists". Much in contrast, they imagine their own long-term commitments to local women as more "genuine" and "serious", declaring that their willingness to live in a rural province without major tourist attractions and infrastructure serves as proof of their "serious" intentions. Conducting research on transnational partnerships beyond the hotspots of Thailand's "sex industry" revealed a distinct and emplaced lifeworld of Western men in Thailand. What turned out to limit my acquisition of "thick knowledge" about these lifeworlds, however, was my reluctance to actively participate in the everyday life of this expat community.

Yet reflecting upon these limitations of developing an embodied understanding, a central feature characterising the everyday life of my interlocutors became apparent to me. Similar to my difficulties to partake in and adapt to their everyday lives, most of these men, especially those who regularly meet up in bars and sports pubs, are unable to recognise the incommensurability of the situated commonsensical typifications that separate their own lifeworlds from those of their local partners. These difficulties in adaptation go beyond a mere inability or reluctance to speak Thai, which became especially evident in the men's open discussion of their distrust towards local women and their derogatory comments about "Thai culture" and "Thai women's greed for money". The frustration that is expressed with these derogatory comments and that characterises the everyday life of many of these men is partly explainable through this incommensurability. The men's strong belief that their commonsensical typifications constitute human universalisms results in misunderstandings that, over time, lead to feelings of anger and disappointment.

To understand these feelings, it is essential to recognise the Western ideal of romantic love that most of these men have incorporated through their socialisation into neoliberal Western societies. In the West, romantic love is commonly perceived as something selfless, irrational and therefore "pure". Despite the fact that most Westerners assume it to be a notion universally shared by all human beings and grounded in "human nature", it can be traced to individualisation and privatisation processes that began in the 18th century and altered the imagination of passionate love in the West. From the idealisation of an unreachable other in medieval Minnesang and via the quasi-religious commitment of choosing a partner along financial and social parameters in Victorian

societies, the modern ideal of romantic love shifts the choice of a compatible partner to the individual, disguising the financial or social qualities of a partner as personal qualities and making romantic love seem informed entirely by disinterest (Luhmann 1992: 49–57, Illouz 1997: 26).

This belief in the universality of the Western ideal of romantic love contrasts with the men's partners' expectations of their relationships as well as local women's often negative experiences with the way Thai imaginations of romantic love manifest in rural settings. Women from the rural villages of Buriram Province frequently enter into these relationships with expectations closely linked to what Angeles and Sunanta call "daughter duties" (Angeles / Sunanta 2009: 554). These gender-specific obligations involve the (financial) care for their parents along with the active support of the local community. Relationships with Western men may grant access to economic capital, enabling them to fulfil these duties. These locally situated expectations and women's frustrations in partnerships with Thai men contradict the aforementioned notion of a selfless and "pure" love, which functions as the ostensibly "objective" reference point for Western men's evaluations of their relationships with local women.

Despite the ideal of romantic love shared by most men, my participation in their everyday conversations revealed the implicit interests connected to their relationships without explicitly being designated as such. I was frequently told that former relationships in their home countries had failed due to a lack of time to settle conflicts or maintain passion and intimacy. Most of the men I encountered in the bars belonged to a particular working-class milieu and were (or had been) employed as truck drivers, factory workers or sailors, confirming Illouz's claim that such partnership problems are typical for this Western working-class milieu; the men's lack of economic capital and sufficient leisure time makes it harder to sustain long-term relationships in their home countries (Illouz 1997: 293–306). Coming to Thailand and engaging in long-term relationships during their early retirement consequently serves as an imaginary opportunity for men from this milieu to finally engage in the kind of relationships they had previously strived for but which had frequently failed.

During my attempts to participate in the lifeworlds of these Western men, I frequently found a feeling of aversion rushing through my body, exposing my own unfamiliarity with their lifeworlds. Yet precisely these feelings and my reluctance to thickly participate in the men's everyday lives served as an important instrument to situate my vision. My inability to participate in their lifeworlds mirrors their inability to participate in and understand their partners' lifeworlds. Through the theoretical instruments provided by the moderate phenomenological approach formulated in this article as well as my attempt to master the epistemological breaks this approach requires, I was able to trace my reluctance to thickly participate to the discrepancy between my own back-

ground, having been socialised into an academic family, and the men's specific working-class backgrounds. Reflecting upon my ambivalent feelings during my research in Buriram Province sensitised me to the epistemological breaks required in ethnographic encounters and the gaps separating the everyday life-worlds of different social milieus in Germany.

From lifeworlds to larger issues

As these reflections on our individual fieldwork experiences during the research project indicate, the notion of thick participation, attained through the "taking over" of the same social practices invoked by our interlocutors in order to emplace our scholarly vision, has the potential to address the larger issues of New Area Studies. Our paradigm of emplacement as an instrument of vision in turn entails the necessity of multiple epistemological breaks to understand emplaced orders of knowledge and avoid their de-contextualising translation as well as the ontological imperialism of well-intentioned, politically motivated universalisms which can easily turn into ontological cannibalism when the unproblematic translatability of social ontologies between emplaced and scientific language games is assumed. Most importantly, this ethnographic foundation of area studies research allows us to address the situatedness of knowledge from an emplaced and lifeworld perspective, thus adding an essential dimension to the burgeoning "trans" perspectives and power-critical discourse analyses that characterise the re-imagination of Area Studies under the label New Area Studies. The powerism inherent in both trends often fails to address the emplaced specificities of power and the multiple forms that power assumes in local social ontologies. At the same time, the accompanying self-affirmed moral righteousness limits our ability to powercritically question its Eurocentrism and scrutinise authors' own interest-guided exertions of power within the academic field and beyond (Behar 2009: 107, Bourdieu 1999: 369). Adding a more nuanced understanding of how social inequality is imagined, practiced, experienced and understood in emplaced lifeworlds is a central contribution that ethnographically founded research can add to the power-critical project of New Area Studies (Baumann / Bultmann 2020).

Our reflections simultaneously reveal possible limitations of such an ethnographically founded New Area Studies paradigm. Investigating the localisation of Thailand's possession complex in rural villages throughout Buriram Province, I faced similar limitations as the students during their research projects since my thick participation in mediumship rituals was constrained by my bodily dispositions. Having been socialised into a social ontology produced by naturalist language games and modern individualism, I simply lack the

dividual body and permeable bodily boundaries necessary to experience possession actively. Over the years, I have, nonetheless, accumulated enough thick knowledge about these rituals and non-human beings worshipped in the associated cults that villagers from my "home village" sometimes consult me after they return from a mediumship ritual to ask me either about my opinion regarding the veracity of a medium or whether I thinks the medium's classification of the non-humans addressed during the ritual was correct. When I try to answer these enquiries, I rely not so much on abstract scholarly knowledge, but rather on an embodied sense of appropriateness that relates the medium's performance to the ethnolinguistic configuration of the respective location. Because of my reputation as a specialist of the local possession complex, members of my host family frequently tease me with the nickname "Doctor Phi". What shapes my sense of appropriateness, however, is not only my theoretical knowledge of localised cults, but also my practical knowledge of what it feels like to plant rice, fill a rice barn with sacks full of the new harvest, catch frogs in the fields and kill them to prepare *lap kop*, listen to seemingly endless Buddhist sermons in local temples while my body turns numb or just hang around in front of one of the few village stores engaging in village gossip.

Our examples demonstrate that although it is not possible to thickly participate in all social practices we seek to understand as Area Studies scholars, we are nonetheless able to develop an embodied, thick understanding of them through our practical enmeshment in emplaced lifeworlds. This development requires us being "there", requires our co-presence in these small places and an active participation in our interlocutors' everyday lives in order to undertake the epistemological breaks required to situate our scholarly vision in local lifeworlds. New Area Studies is not (yet) a discipline, but an interdisciplinary project in which multiple scholarly perspectives meet to understand sociocultural phenomena located on a scalar continuum of regionality. Emphasising the "local" end of this continuum, we have attempted to outline a vision of New Area Studies that acknowledges the continuing relevance of the emplaced in a world of global entanglements. While ethnography is always an argument (Gay y Blasco / Wardle 2019: 98), ours concerns the significance of small places and how insights from "good old" ethnography can reveal the multiplicities of situated knowledges that may be rendered invisible by the power-critical gaze of transregional New Area Studies. An ethnographically founded vision of New Area Studies is ultimately not about reinventing the wheel, but about re-envisioning an Area Studies methodology that is increasingly declared superfluous by transregional approaches.

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Breeding Roses and Chasing Unicorns: Reflections from Europe on the Changing Field of Southeast Asian Area Studies

Saskia Schäfer

Abstract

Drawing on classic articles on the field, approaches of New Area Studies and primary research on journals and study programmes, this article discusses the current state of Southeast Asian studies from a German perspective. Southeast Asian studies has transformed from a field informed by particular political interests into a container category subsuming various different scholarly programmes. Some of these are closely connected to various disciplines, others are trans- or interdisciplinary; some are in close contact with Southeast Asian policy-makers, for instance by educating their future bureaucrats and politicians, and others remain at a distance. Thirty years after the Cold War formally ended, Southeast Asian studies programmes differ vastly in their respective characteristics and outlooks. This article maps some of these and explores their similarities and differences as well as their relationships to the established disciplines.

Keywords: Southeast Asian Studies, New Area Studies, Germany, Europe, discipline, field, reflections

In search of Southeast Asia

Fifty years after the so-called golden age of Cold-War-inspired Southeast Asian studies, some scholars are still chasing unicorns. Many Southeast Asianists themselves have doubted that the region corresponds meaningfully with its name, as it suggests commonality in one of the most diverse regions in the world. Nevertheless, several newcomers have joined the search. In his 1984 essay "What's in a Name?" Donald Emmerson stressed the constructedness of the region "Southeast Asia":

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> Some who study the region treat it as if it were Shakespeare's rose: a reality existing independently of its name. Others would agree with [J.R.E.] Waddell that an observer of "Southeast Asia" who uses the name incautiously risks hallucinating unicorns: projecting homogeneity, unity, and boundedness onto a part of the world that is in fact heterogeneous, disunited, and hard to delimit. (Emmerson 1984: 1)

The year after Emmerson's essay appeared in the *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, the journal published a response from the archaeologist and anthropologist Wilhelm Solheim, who argued that the question of whether Southeast Asia was a "true region" struck him as odd (Solheim 1985). Of course it was, he argued, and offered an array of features that Southeast Asian landscapes shared before the arrival of the Europeans who conquered, occupied, and traded port cities and areas from and with each other, such as for instance in the Anglo Dutch Treaty of 1824, in which the Dutch traded Malacca with the British for Bencoolen in Sumatra. A decade later, the Australian historian Craig Reynolds explained the desire of historians of early Southeast Asia to go in search of an *echt* ["true"] Southeast Asia as part of a postcolonial and anticolonial project. This search, he wrote in 1995, was an attempt to "write back" against the European intrusion of the establishment of the nation-state. "This pursuit may have resulted in an overly benign view of early Southeast Asia" (Reynolds 1995).

A few years after the publication of Emmerson's essay, in mid-July 1990, thirty-four Southeast Asianists gathered to discuss the relationship of Southeast Asian studies to humanistic and social science disciplines. James Scott, in his foreword to the published proceedings, remarked that every now and then, as among other regional specialists, Southeast Asianists "engage in periodic rituals of self-diagnosis", but that it was not even self-evident "that [they] would even be [t]here in any recognizable form to take [their] own temperature" (Scott 1992: 1).

Since the end of the Cold War, Amitav Acharya points out, "there has been a shift from external, imperial and orientalist constructions of Southeast Asia to internal, indigenous, and regional constructions", towards a "regionalist conception of Southeast Asia as a region-for-itself, constructed by the collective political imagination of, and political interactions among, its own inhabitants" (Acharya 2012: 4), such as in the attempts to further collaboration within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).[1] Yet, these constructions are not written on a clean slate, but build on and draw on earlier conceptions, such as "Nusantara" for maritime Southeast Asia or "Nanyang," a Chinese term for the warmer geographical area along the southern coastal regions of China and beyond, also known as the South Sea.

1 For a perspective that emphasises cultural and historical perspectives over organisational ones, see also Noor 2020.

This article participates in the ritual of self-diagnosis and takes the temperature in a different part of the body. It maps the current state of global Southeast Asian studies from a European perspective, with a focus on German Area Studies. Area Studies in Germany has, as part of the stronger integration of German higher education into the global marketisation of education, been experiencing a transformation that differentiates it from US-American Area Studies programmes. "Area Studies" today is a broad container category subsuming various different scholarly programmes and political aims, some of them reproducing, others countering the exploitability of research for foreign policy interests that motivated much of the funding for Area Studies (Dirks 2012). Some of these aims are closely connected to various disciplines, others are trans- or interdisciplinary; some are in close contact with policy-makers, while others remain at a relative distance. As will later be shown, several functions that Area Studies fulfil in different contexts can be identified, as can various effects they have on the structures of knowledge production.

For the analysis, I draw mainly on secondary literature, on the websites, mission statements and course descriptions of various Southeast Asian studies programmes across the globe, and on statements by governments and other funding agencies. My own twenty years of experience as a student and scholar of Southeast Asia, as well as original survey data collected in December 2019 and January 2020, will add to the discussion. [2]

Where is the field?

Much of the scholarship in the main social science disciplines – political science, sociology, to a lesser degree also history – obscures the specificity and local embeddedness of knowledge and the small horizon of the samples.[3] The anthropologist and Southeast Asianist Peter Jackson pointed out in his reflections on a new kind of Area Studies that "the West itself is almost always an unmarked site of the universal end of general theory, while the non-West is marked as a site of the particular and of empirical detail" (Jackson 2019: 9).

As a field within the social sciences, Southeast Asian studies developed shortly after the Second World War, in the United States, where it benefited from considerable state funding for a brief period. The term Southeast Asia was spelt

2 The survey was sent to academic and administrative personnel at 78 institutions worldwide that offer Southeast Asian studies. It included 26 open questions on the programmes. While some respondents completed the entire survey, the majority shared their views in the form of partial answers. Altogether, 37 respondents participated. Wherever conclusions in the article are based on the survey results, this will be indicated.

3 Perhaps the best-known work on this is Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe* (2000). See also Chou / Houben 2006, Houben 2013, Jackson 2019, Mielke / Hornidge 2014, Amir-Moazami / Streicher 2016, Derichs 2017, Seth 2013, Dirlik 1994 and 2006, and Spivak 2003.

differently than the British variant “South East Asia” but was nevertheless related to the British “South East Asia Command”, the body set up to be in overall charge of Allied operations in the region during World War II. Many of the most revered names in the field – such as Clifford Geertz – first travelled to Southeast Asia as part of government-funded expeditions. The decline of Southeast Asian studies, mainly in funding and thus in institutions, but also in the field’s ability to produce prominent names and well-known works, began in the late 1970s, when, with the Vietnam War waning and Suharto’s rule firmly established, many policymakers turned away from Southeast Asia.

The constructedness of the region and the geopolitical and strategic origins of its demarcations have long become part of what students and scholars of Area Studies must grapple with at the start of their studies. In addition, the imbalance between those who conduct research and their objects of curiosity remains an important aspect of Area Studies, just as in anthropology. Students, scholars and administrators of Area Studies have – perhaps more than many others – taken up the task of testing the framework and questioning their paradigm in addition to filling in the blanks and doing “normal science” (McVey 1995: 3). Many area scholars have made it a habit to question their area or region; they have made the shift away from what Arjun Appadurai suggested calling “trait” geographies to “process” geographies: they have moved from a focus on conceptions of geographic, civilisational and cultural coherence (in the form of values, languages, material practices, ecological adaptations, marriage patterns, etc.) to various kinds of action, interaction and motion (in the form of trade, travel, pilgrimage, warfare, proselytism, colonisation, exile, etc.). As Appadurai called for in 2000, regions have become viewed “as initial contexts for themes that generate variable geographies, rather than as fixed geographies marked by pregiven themes” (Appadurai 2000).

But the unit of analysis is not the only contested part of the field. As the political scientist Tom Pepinsky said in his keynote speech for the Cornell Southeast Asia Graduate Student Conference in 2014, Southeast Asianists eventually came to make peace with their contested region, but then briskly moved from the question “what is Southeast Asia” to the question “how do we study it?” (Pepinsky 2015a: 216). The focus moved from “Southeast Asia” to “studies”, to the status as a field or discipline. Over the past decades, Area Studies scholars have been legitimising and thereby refining their approaches. Highlighting some of these debates beyond the Anglophone academies of the United States and the United Kingdom, Peter Jackson called for a “theoretically engaged project of critical Area Studies in an era when neoliberal managerialism and metrification of research and teaching are casting a conservative pall over the international academy” (Jackson 2019: 49).

Area Studies scholars worldwide often have complicated relationships to the predominant foci and approaches in the established main disciplines. They

often refuse to either confirm or challenge concepts developed in what is commonly referred to as the global North and to thereby offer their regions as "testing grounds" (Mitchell 2004: 85). This refusal "provincialises" the theories packaged and exposes them as special rather than universal (cf. Houben / Rehbein 2010). Many area specialists have lived in their area of specialisation for an extended period and later struggle to translate the knowledge they have gained into the established main disciplines in ways that go beyond their respective region and make them applicable elsewhere. Their sometimes timid attempts often fall on deaf ears: most scholars in the main disciplines who claim the universality of their concepts prefer not to be reminded of the limitations of their empirical basis and hasten to render large regions of the world "special".

Some scholars have thus found their niche in Area Studies: they are specialists of their region of focus, often spend long periods conducting field research, and then present their findings to other specialists. Some offer their findings to non-area specialists within the same discipline, for instance in anthropology or in comparative political science, but they usually remain focused on their specific region of study. Claudia Derichs has called this the "tunnel vision" that characterises many scholars within the main social sciences and humanities as well as many area specialists (Derichs 2017: 152–172). Their focus keeps them from seeing and analysing the connections beyond their immediate own area expertise. What Benedict Anderson called a "collective failure of nerves" in 1978 is still true: some area scholars mindlessly try to catch up with the disciplines' latest methodological or theoretical fads while others defiantly crawl "deeper into the 'area-ist' shell, insisting – in a defensive, ideological way – on the uniqueness and incomparability of the area of specialization, and engaging in the study of ever more narrowly defined and esoteric topics" (ibid.: 44–45).

Somewhere between discipline and field

Area Studies scholars have been debating for decades whether the combination of theoretical and methodological knowledge at home in an established academic discipline, and deep familiarity with a particular language, area or region constitutes a discipline, or at least a quasi-discipline. The use of vocabulary here is inconsistent. Many use the notion "field" synonymously to that of "discipline" but for the purpose of this article, it is useful to distinguish the two in order to assess what scholars and administrators mean when they describe their approaches and programmes as "interdisciplinary", "multi-disciplinary" or "cross-disciplinary". Many of these programmes are particularly proud of their interdisciplinarity, but as Chua Beng Huat et al. (2019) point out, this

"lifeline" for Area Studies is a deceiving one because alliances usually remain within the humanities, rather than among the natural sciences and social sciences and humanities (ibid.: 40). Such deeper interdisciplinarity is a worthy goal, but given the difficulties that scholars within the humanities already have with each other's approaches, it is likely to remain the exception.

Disciplines are an awkward category. In his reflections on interdisciplinarity, Benedict Anderson offered a sober assessment of academic disciplines during his time as a scholar:

> Departments were based on the pleasant notion that disciplines were scientific divisions within the broad field of scholarly knowledge, and that what marked each division was a basic common discourse. In fact, this idea is a fiction, since scholarly knowledge changes all the time in many different directions. (Anderson 2016: 138)

Those who believe that a discipline outlines a collective set of theories and methods only needs to observe the scholarly exchanges between, say political theorists and empirical democracy scholars, the latter tending to quickly settle on an operationalisable definition of democracy and then get to their phone interviews to gather the numbers for their calculations. Likewise, a Foucauldian anthropologist and a deconstructivist legal scholar will more easily find common ground than a historical sociologist and a quantitatively working one.

Comfortably situated on the margins of his own disciplinary affiliation, Anderson further reminded his readers that the history of the word "discipline" "goes back to the self-punishing rigors of medieval monks intent on subjugating the body as the enemy of the soul" (Anderson 2016: 161). Michel Foucault described the tasks of the academic disciplines in the following words:

> The disciplines characterise, classify, specialise; they distribute along a scale, around a norm, hierarchise individuals in relation to one another and, if necessary, disqualify and invalidate. (Foucault 1995: 223)

Most scholars of Area Studies today feel more comfortable calling their area of expertise a "field". But in the sense outlined above, the field of Area Studies also qualifies as a discipline, especially in contexts where entire Area Studies departments with tenured jobs exist, such as in many European countries and Australian universities (Milner 1999). I will return to these infrastructural differences and the question of discipline below. The main point here is that the focus on an apparent clash between a homogenously imagined Area Studies and similarly homogenously imagined disciplines obscures the view towards broader tensions within the various academic systems about how knowledge should be produced.

Specialised knowledge production in the form of Area Studies is, as a group of leaders of interdisciplinary research clusters at the National University of Singapore has put it, "on life support". They argue that Area Studies suffers from a three-pronged problem: weak rules or the lack of a defined canon, hard

geographical borders and the "politically corrosive legacy of Area Studies' origins in the global North" (Chua et al. 2019: 45). All of these, in addition to "the charge of being methodologically backward and theoretically unsophisticated […] have led to the 'prestige and plausibility' and even delegitimization of Area Studies" (Anderson 2016: 44).

Student interest in Area Studies has been waning and replaced by a desire to understand globalisation in a more encompassing way, illustrated by the mushrooming of "International Studies" and "Global Studies" programmes, some of which offer not only undergraduate degrees but also PhD programmes, despite internal discussions about the value of interdisciplinary "training" for the academic system and job market, whose increasing professionalisation clashes with the fluidity and constant change of knowledge.[4]

In their capacities as leaders of research clusters in Singapore and as scholars of Asian Studies inter alia in Asia, Chua Beng Huat, Ken Dean, Ho Engseng, Ho Kong Chong, Jonathan Rigg and Brenda Yeoh map various solutions to these problems that focus on areas and regions as flexible and fluid, as networks and circulation societies that transcend and connect. This perspective focuses on wider networks, flows, circuits and circulations. Another way to address the "sins" of Area Studies is to seek comparisons within the South, an approach also supported within the framework of Comparative Area Studies (Ahram et al. 2018). Finally, the authors approach Asia as a site of theorising rather than for testing theories developed in the global North.[5] Audrey Yue writes, "to do cultural studies in Asia is […] to depart from Asia as a region and rethink Asia as a site of theory" (Yue 2017: 5). Chen Kuan-Hsing (2010) called for writing from Asia instead of seeing Asia in relation to the West.

As some of these initiatives illustrate, the appetite for Area Studies programmes and approaches arises not only from interest in a particular region, but also from a desire to globalise the social sciences, to add perspectives and experiences other than Transatlantic ones to theoretical debates. Tom Pepinsky correctly notes that "much of the anxiety associated with the 'studies' in Southeast Asian studies is not really about the clash between area and discipline, but about the tensions between disciplines, or within disciplines" (Pepinsky 2015a: 216). For instance, some political scientists have accused the methods of Area Studies of being journalistic, merely "descriptive" rather than theoretical, and generally mushy, or even "pre-scientific" (Shea 1997). Often, what the critics are missing are hard facts, numbers and rankings. Contrasting methodological approaches in this way and negating the place of qualitative work also serves the purpose of placing particular epistemologies oriented towards the natural sciences at the heart of political science as a discipline.

4 For a discussion about changes of the academic system regarding "education" and "training", see e.g. Anderson 2016: 142.

5 See also the *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies Journal* and Chen 2010.

When a group of German students at my own university in Berlin demanded that their university change the title of their degree back to *Regionalwissenschaften* (roughly: “regional sciences and humanities”) from *Regionalstudien* (“regional studies”) in 2019, they were doing so also because they face scepticism within the academic system, specifically the accusation of not working scientifically – “science” being understood here to follow the natural sciences. This accusation is a familiar one, but it concerns more than the tension between Area Studies and the predominant structure of academia into disciplines: it concerns broader questions of the place of theory in the social sciences, questions of positivism and constructivism, of empiricism and hermeneutics, of facts and truth. In their reflections on Area Studies and the social sciences, Schirin Amir-Moazami and Ruth Streicher have connected the “return to positivist epistemologies”, the “revitalized belief in the truth of ‘big data’ and a significant absence of reflexivity vis-à-vis the epistemological underpinnings of the categories with which data is gathered” to the “the exclusion of non-European archives” and highlight that the underlying epistemologies are also, often implicitly, ingrained in Area Studies (Amir-Moazami / Streicher 2013).

The administrative formats of Southeast Asian Area Studies vary widely: much like other disciplines, Southeast Asian studies is taught and researched in specialised departments, in dedicated journals and to some degree in regular academic conferences, but one major difference between the Area Studies originating in U.S. Cold War efforts and many European Area Studies constellations is that in the United States, Area Studies is mostly structured in programmes and centres rather than in departments. The Center for Southeast Asian Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, for instance, has no faculty of its own, but 20 affiliated members from a range of departments such as Archaeology and Public Health (author’s survey 2020). As David Szanton (2004) explained, Area Studies departments with their multidisciplinarity directly challenged the disciplinary departments. Trying to be both multi-disciplinary and departmental, they challenged the predominant notion that a department represented a discipline. This was “more than the older elements of the university would easily tolerate” (Szanton 2004). Area Studies centres, on the other hand, which made no claim to being departments or disciplines, were much less of a threat, but (merely) functioned as connectors between different discipline-based departments. Thus, most American Area Studies programmes do not offer permanent positions, except for a few notable exceptions such as in Princeton and Chicago.

In many European countries, today’s Area Studies programmes are built on the traditional Oriental Studies. Europeans have systematically studied “the Orient” for more than two hundred years. In the early 14th century, the Council of Vienne recommended language courses of Oriental languages at five Euro-

pean universities, emphasising the importance of the linguistic approach to Islam and laying the groundwork for later scholarship (Rudolph 1991: 68). The first European chair for Arab philology was established in 1539 at the Collège de France (Arkoun 1997: 33). In 1795, the *École spéciale des langues orientales* was founded in Paris; the University of Naples "L'Orientale" was founded even earlier in Naples in 1732. The German Oriental Society (*Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft*) was established in 1845 in Leipzig and has regularly held conventions up to the present day.

It was this "tradition of Orientalism" that gave Area Studies in Europe "something of an anchor against political winds" (Scott 1992: 2) and allowed it to disentangle itself to some degree from the "hegemonic grip of the disciplines" (ibid.: 4).[6] Germany is a particularly interesting case in this context, partly because of the rich tradition of scholarship on the "Near East", but also because of the divergent paths that this tradition took in East and West Germany respectively, and because of the ways in which these two academic systems were then joined together. For a long time, it was not questioned that Oriental Studies in Germany was an academic discipline. It had everything a discipline needed: chairs, teaching programmes, degrees, associations, journals, rites of passage. The core of the discipline was the study of language and history. In its founding document, the German Oriental Society declared that it was founded "to promote all aspects of knowledge of Asia and of closely related countries in every aspect, and to propagate participation of this in wider circles. Hence the Society will deal not only with 'oriental literature' [*morgenländische Literatur*] but also with the history of these countries and the research of their situation both earlier and more recent times" (Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft 1847: 132–133).

At the same time, the authors stated that they did not wish to interfere with politics and religion in the countries they studied, nor did they want to look down on the practitioners of other religions (Preissler 1995). Orientals themselves, the document emphasised, would be welcomed as members of the association, should the occasion arise. These naïve-sounding but surely carefully crafted formulations point at the level to which the power relations in the production of knowledge about "the Orient" were already obvious in these early stages of institutionalization. Discussions about issues of geopolitical influence, the instrumentalisation of knowledge and racism were part of the formation process more than a hundred years before Edward Said's *Orientalism* (Said 2003). In the 1860s, several Ottoman, one Asante representative and other international members became members of the society, but they would remain a tiny minority. Until today, the vast majority of academic and administrative staff at German Oriental/Asian and Area Studies institutes are originally

6 On German Orientalism, see Marchand 2009, Polaschegg 2005 and Kwaschik 2018.

German or West European, and almost all of the tenured academic staff are white. Early career scholars and doctoral students are of very mixed backgrounds, but not only have German academic institutions been very slow at trying to diversify their faculty and staff, but also the proportion of degree holders likely to leave academia is higher in Area Studies than among those who hold degrees in the main disciplines. The discipline has transformed itself from its largely philological and historical origins towards catering to students' interests in contemporary social and political questions, often regarding not only other world regions, but questions of globalisation, which other disciplines seem ill-equipped to tackle (Poya / Reinkowski 2008).

In German higher education politics, the subjects formerly subsumed under Oriental Studies are usually considered *kleine Fächer*, "minor subjects", along with, for instance, papyrology, dance studies, and glass and ceramics studies. Their relationship to what German scholars and administrators now call Area Studies (*Regionalstudien*) is contested: some view these "small subjects" within the humanities and as distinct from social sciences with a regional focus; others conceive of them as a necessary and natural extension of their traditional focus (cf. Krämer 2017, Jokisch 2008).

Southeast Asia was subsumed under Studies of the Far rather than of the Near East, and structurally became part of several of the German Orientalist institutions. In the 1950s, the GDR government integrated the study of Southeast Asia into the so-called *Asienwissenschaften* (Asian Studies), which in turn were structurally connected to African Studies. Departing from the philological origins and taking area-specific knowledge into a more explicitly political direction, Area Studies in the GDR consisted of social sciences (*Gesellschaftswissenschaften*) with additional language training and a focus on specificities in the observed regions.[7] This establishment of *Asienwissenschaften* against the background of Oriental Studies but with the political goals of the GDR in mind is one of the key moments of the transition into the amorphous quasi-discipline that is German Area Studies today.

In the 1990s, most scholars of GDR Area Studies were replaced with West German colleagues after the German reunification. GDR-style Area Studies was largely marginalised and the respective disciplines, such as Sinology, experienced a philological revival, but later suffered from waning interest on part of students (Krauth / Wolz 1998). Around the same time, social scientists and university administrators in the UK and other European countries installed "development studies", which shared some aspects with Area Studies in the ways the GDR had established. Language skills usually were and remain optional rather than a core part of development studies in the UK style, which has since been exported to other places, including Germany.

7 See Krauth / Wolz 2020. An introduction to social sciences was obligatory for all students. From 1951 until 1989, the courses were organised by the respective Institute of Marxism and Leninism at each university.

This influence from two sides is still visible in the various names of Area Studies programmes in Germany today. They are usually referred to either as *Regionalwissenschaften* or *Regionalstudien*. The German word *Wissenschaft*, typically translated as "science", is a more encompassing term. It includes the social sciences and humanities and contains hermeneutic philosophy and political theory just as much as quantitative approaches. Thus, for more than a century, Germans conducted *Asienwissenschaften* ("science and scholarship of Asia") without ever doubting their *Wissenschaftlichkeit*, their "scientific character" or "scholarly rigour". This self-understanding is mainly rooted in two different academic traditions: that of the GDR *Regionalwissenschaften*, which based their rigour on the theories and methods of the social sciences, and that of the West-German tradition of *Orientalistik* ("Oriental Studies") and *Islamwissenschaften*, "Islamic Studies", one branch of Area Studies.

Islamic Studies shares with other regional studies the focus on languages, although which languages in addition to Arabic and Turkish is a matter of contestation, but it differs through the fluid localisation of Islam. Of course, the status of Islamic studies as a *Wissenschaft* is contested, but many of the leading scholars in this field have successfully claimed and defended it as a discipline of its own with institutes and chairs at almost all major German universities. One still finds remnants of this proud linguistic and theological disciplinary past of the current Area Studies in job interviews headed by very senior professors who will pose the first question in Malay, or ask the interviewee about particular sections of the Quran to determine whether a particular group of Muslims is heretic, rather than analyse heresy as a power discourse.[8]

The reading of Edward Said's *Orientalism* was not part of the introductory courses of Middle East and Asian Studies at many German universities until the mid-2000s.[9] This soon changed: reflecting the power dimension of knowledge production became a key element of Area Studies. With reflection and self-questioning came doubt. Students and scholars within the departmental structures of Area Studies were not able to transform these doubts into progressive theorisation in the same way that anthropologists did. Lecturers in German Area Studies programmes today will raise eyebrows among their students when they teach hermeneutics, discourse analysis or methods such as ethnography and conversational interviews: is this really *wissenschaftlich*? At the same time, in defence of the existing Area Studies institutes and the establish-

8 I am referring to my own experiences here; for more detailed discussions of the tension between theological, hermeneutic and social science approaches, see Poya / Reinkowski 2008.

9 I myself enrolled in a programme on "Southeast Asian Studies" in 2003. For this article, I asked several colleagues with Area Studies backgrounds about their experiences as undergraduates: many of them were introduced to Said late in their studies. Several of them said that while individual lecturers favored postcolonial approaches, it was possible to obtain one's degree without ever having read *Orientalism*. This changed in the 2010s, when *Orientalism* became a key text of introductory courses in Area Studies.

ing of new ones, Area Studies in Germany is not going anywhere anytime soon. On the contrary: it has been thriving, as the following section will show.

Waves of rising and declining

The doubts originate in attacks from two sides, formulated especially since the 1980s and 90s: postcolonial scholars have been attacking Area Studies for its geopolitical offerings to policy makers and the proximity to power of many research institutions, their racism, and the imbalance between the researchers and their subjects. At the same time, increasingly method-oriented social scientists level their attacks against Area Studies scholars who spend a lot of resources on language training, logistics of travelling and building trustful relationships with locals, all at the expense of statistics courses and other skills.

From the perspective of area specialists working within political science and sociology, Area Studies is in a permanent crisis. This is mostly because competition on the academic job market has increased and there are few incentives to spend time fulfilling the requirements of Area Studies when it offers so few job opportunities. In the United States, the political scientists who turned their back on Area Studies after the drop-off in the initial Cold War-related funding never returned. Tom Pepinsky notes that policy makers continue to believe in the importance of area expertise. The crisis, he argues, "lies in the relationship between it and the academic disciplines that employ most area specialists and where most Ph.D. students are trained" (Pepinsky 2015b). Many social sciences, he says, "favor theoretical advancement and contribution to existing academic debates, not close knowledge of the nitty-gritty details of national politics" (Pepinsky 2015b). Another development that contributed to the relative decline of Area Studies in the United States was the absorption of area expertise into some particular departments of main disciplines. If the fundamental role of Area Studies in the United States has been to de-parochialise U.S.- and Eurocentric visions of the world in the core social science and humanities disciplines (Szanton 2004: 4), Area Studies scholars in the United States have been successful to some degree, at least comparatively speaking.[10]

In Germany, by contrast, area expertise concerning areas outside Western Europe and North America never made it into most of the main social sciences and humanities. One reason for this is that the parochialism of the main social sciences in Germany is even stronger and more stubborn than in the United States. Another is the relatively comfortable situation of Area Studies. Those with tenured positions conduct research and teach among like-minded specialists

10 Without looking at even more parochial systems for comparison, the situation may be as bleak as some observers state; see Kurzman 2015.

and are less pressured to contribute to existing academic debates outside their narrow field. Their insights remain locked into their particular niches and rarely make it into larger debates.

In the early 2000s, as the government under Gerhard Schröder pushed the restructuring of the German academic landscape, the German Council of Science and Humanities (*Wissenschaftsrat*), an advisory body to the German Federal Government and the state governments, recommended strengthening Area Studies. After some internal debate, the council decided to use the term *Regionalstudien*, "regional studies", rather than *Regionalwissenschaften* ("regional sciences and humanities") (Wissenschaftsrat 2006). Arguments against the usage of the term *Regionalwissenschaften* were that the term erodes important differences between the "small subjects" within the humanities and the collaboration-based Area Studies, and that Area Studies relies on disciplines rather than forming its own *Wissenschaft* (Puhle 2005). Ultimately, some of those arguing for the term also wanted to avoid the competition and challenge of the established disciplines. The situation is comparable to that of Area Studies centres versus departments in the United States. This tension informs the two competing terms that commonly describe departments and chairs concerned with particular regions, from North American Studies to Albanology.

In 2006, the Ministry for Education and Research (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung, BMBF) established a major funding scheme in support of Area Studies. It was part of a major restructuring programme of the German academic system. The so-called German "Excellence Initiative", a political initiative aimed at stimulating and accelerating the process of differentiation in the German university landscape and at integrating German scholarship better with global trends, channelled substantive funding into research collaborations. The programme has since been renewed several times. As part of this aim, the government has been strategically supporting Area Studies at various universities, citing the increase in globalisation and the need to understand developments in and to be able to communicate with other world regions as the main reasoning behind these initiatives. In some places, this has strengthened the position of Area Studies vis-à-vis the main disciplines in terms of resource allocations and infrastructure. Area-specific knowledge is framed as useful and desirable in the globalising economy. To what degree this influences actual scholarship and outcomes remains another question.[11]

Simultaneously, the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) has funded at least one multidisciplinary graduate school for educating PhD students loosely connected to Islamic studies but also rooted in other social sciences and humanities, producing more than fifty graduates within a decade. Their projects were sometimes philological, but often combined language skills and anthro-

11 For a detailed discussion of this initiative and how it draws on notions of area-specific knowledge of the 19th century, see Kwaschik 2018.

pological fieldwork in areas such as Xinjiang and rural Afghanistan, as well as European cities. For the field of Islamic Studies in Germany, the success of this particular institution meant a dramatic shift in scope from an Arab-centric notion of "the Muslim World" to a much more encompassing understanding of Islamicate societies and Muslim subcultures in non-Muslim societies. Other Area Studies institutions, such as the Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn, have also combined language training and education on the Middle East and East Asia in an encompassing Asian Studies programme, and others such as the Department of Oriental Studies at the Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg followed suit and included some work on Islam in Indonesia in their research and teaching. For Southeast Asian studies, this development sits well with an increase in the attention paid to religion, and a growing willingness to see Islam in Southeast Asia from a more comparative perspective that moves beyond the notion that "Indonesian Islam" or "Southeast Asian Islam" is per se different from an Arab-centric norm (see also Formichi 2016). As indicated earlier, among scholars within the so-called "small subjects", many embraced the chance to remake their discipline in collaboration with the representatives of the main disciplines who valued area foci. Many of them were not deeply convinced by the postcolonial thinkers they cited in their grant proposals, but connecting *Regionalwissenschaften* to *Regionalstudien* was the chance to rescue their institutes and to connect their expertise to the interests of students and the general public. This was particularly the case in the field of Islamic Studies, as discussed in the previous section, but other Area Studies and to some degree religious studies also benefitted from the initiative.

Beyond these weak but slowly growing pockets of interest in Southeast Asia in various Oriental Studies and Islamic Studies institutions, Southeast Asian Studies is currently taught at six universities in Germany: two call it *Südost-asienwissenschaften* ("Sciences or Scholarship of Southeast Asia"), one calls it *Südostasienstudien* ("Southeast Asian Studies"), one *Austronesistik* ("Austronesian Studies"), one *Südostasienkunde* ("Southeast Asian Expertise or Studies") and one *Indonesische Philologie / Malayologie* ("Philology of Indonesian / Malay Literature") (Portal kleine Fächer 2020). Together, they comprise 9.5 full professorships, most of them with several attached non-tenure-track assistant professorships. The core of these programmes is their respective language training, where Bahasa Indonesia and Vietnamese are the most popular, followed by Thai and Bahasa Malaysia. The Institute for Asian and African Studies at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin is the only institution in the country that offers a greater variety of language instruction, such as Khmer, Tagalog, Mon, Lao and Myanma. Besides Area Studies students, the language programmes are popular among anthropologists, and to some degree with people from outside the academe, mostly connected to development work. The traditional

centres in Southeast Asian studies – Ithaca, Canberra, London, Singapore, Kyoto – all continue to place a strong emphasis on language skills.

In many other places, for reasons outlined above, but also because of a greater globalisation of Area Studies programmes in terms of language backgrounds on the part of scholars and students, the importance of language training is in decline. Many students and scholars use their native languages, especially those located in institutions in Asia, but also elsewhere: a survey respondent from the Center for Southeast Asian Studies at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa pointed out that 30 per cent of their local population have Southeast Asian heritage, and some of those also bring respective language skills (author's survey 2020).

Some Southeast Asianists have discussed as one key problem the absence of Southeast Asians in many programmes (Heryanto 2002: 6) and the danger of reducing local scholars to native informants (Heryanto 2002: 6). But at the same time, in Asia itself, Area Studies seems to be less under pressure than in the United States. This might be because for Asian scholars, as for European Asianists, Area Studies programmes are an opportunity to respond to the parochialism of the social sciences and humanities. Another trend became visible in the responses to our survey: there are several policy-oriented programmes that work in an interdisciplinary way. When they are located in Asia, they use Area Studies approaches to enhance the applicability of theories derived from examples in the global North to their own region.

Various effects of Southeast Asian Area Studies

The previous section has already alluded to the large variety of functions that Area Studies programmes fulfil today. The examples from the German case have shown that Area Studies in Europe takes on different forms and fulfils different functions than in the United States. Southeast Asian Area Studies in Australia or Japan[12] has followed yet another path, as geographic proximity and national anxieties not only make Southeast Asia a neighbour that many students and scholars are eager to understand, but also pull it into security concerns and discourses.

In Europe, Area Studies of Asia and Africa are a blend of updated or remade Oriental studies, remnants of Cold War Area Studies imported from the United States, and globalised and de-colonising social sciences and humanities. In Germany, the recent funding initiatives for Area Studies have had four main effects:

12 For Japan see Yamashita 2004

First of all, as intended, the additional funding for Area Studies has allowed German scholars to participate on a greater scale in global scholarly networks. The funding has allowed them to invite scholars from around the world, and to participate in conferences and workshops that they might otherwise have missed. This has successfully globalised research in Germany in the sense that German Area Studies scholars are in much closer touch with scholars elsewhere than in previous decades. In another sense of the word "globalisation", the rise of Area Studies has enabled more scholarship that moves beyond the focus on the Transatlantic world.

A second effect, also intended, is that of bridge-building, both between the "regional sciences and humanities" and the main disciplines. Such a bridge-building function is inbuilt in American Area Studies because with very few exceptions, each area scholar has a disciplinary appointment. In the German context, area specialists can afford to communicate less with the main disciplines. This allows them certain freedoms, but also robs them of the opportunity to disseminate their knowledge in the mainstream disciplines. The new funding schemes have specifically targeted the isolation of some institutions and successfully encouraged cooperation across universities. The bridges between Area Studies and other disciplines are not as plentiful, but they too exist to a greater degree than some decades ago. Often, they take the shape of collaborative "projects", which Area Studies scholars are invited to formally join. The degree to which their expertise really informs their collaborators in the main disciplines, for instance in the form of joint authorship or engagement through reading and citations, remains questionable. In practice, the knowledge produced in Area Studies often remains area-specific.

A third effect is that to some degree, the large number of small interdisciplinary projects has meant that James Scott's call for research on "the periphery, the world of non-elites, oral culture, popular religion, the countryside, non-formal practices" (Scott 1992: 7) has been heard: many young researchers have thrown themselves into fieldwork among marginalised migrants, small and often remote congregations, and phenomena such as pop-preachers. Some of the German initiatives have been very good at bringing people from all over the world to Germany. They have also invited practitioners and public intellectuals to further their engagement with their topics in an academic setting. Tragically, many of these works will remain raw dissertations sitting on the shelves of the university library only, or perhaps published as is but without any further editing work. Funding for PhDs in Germany is very short at three to four years, and the vast majority of these researchers do not have or will not be granted post-doctoral periods comfortable enough to turn their research into well-edited articles and books. Here, due to the quantified way of evaluating success of higher education policies, a lot of high-potential work gets funded in its early phase but not properly nurtured along the way.

A fourth, and perhaps not intended but without question accepted effect is the perpetuation of the fundamental parochialism of the main disciplines. This remains unchallenged. Politicians of higher education in Germany do not exert much pressure on the main disciplines to break up their Transatlantic worldview. It hinges largely upon the research interests of individual professors whether a discipline opens itself up geographically, such as for instance in the form of the M.A. degree "Global History" that the Freie Universität and Humboldt-Universität jointly offer in Berlin, or whether it remains inward-looking and focuses on methodological finessing. While the reviewers of grant proposals reward practices of name-dropping and decorative inclusion of research areas outside the Transatlantic, the absence of actual measures of performance prevents collaborative research clusters from actually eroding the barriers and hierarchies between the established main disciplines and Area Studies.

In Asia, the aim of many Area Studies programmes and departments is to find a way to overcome the parochialism of U.S.-dominated social sciences, especially in political science and sociology, but also in the humanities. Most survey responses named "globalisation" as a main reason for the continued importance of Area Studies. One survey respondent wrote that "[the] study of world areas (combining languages and area expertise) is the only way to keep 'global studies' in check; without Area Studies, the study of the world is incomplete" (author's survey 2020). Some respondents emphasised the relief of not having to legitimise their scholarly or administrative regional focus at Asian universities, compared to universities in the West. Of course, Area Studies programmes differ among the countries, with some being strongly policy-oriented. An example is the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), a graduate school and policy-oriented think tank within the Nanyang Technological University (NTU), Singapore. Known earlier as the Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies when it was established in July 1996, RSIS offers graduate education in international affairs, taught by an international faculty, including historians and other non-political-scientists.

Whatever the precise pathway and motive behind various Area Studies approaches, they allow for much-needed specialised scholarship, but at the same time they treat the symptoms rather than tackle the cause of the problem: scholarship marked as area-specific perpetuates the notion that there is a general, un-marked core in the West, and that beyond it are, to varying degrees, additional specificities. Whether in Europe or in Asia, Area Studies simultaneously allows the crossing of boundaries but does not work towards dismantling them.

Thinking forward

From a broader perspective, Area Studies across the world fulfils three main functions: first, it facilitates issue-focused approaches that combine theories and methods from various main disciplines in the social sciences and the humanities, and sometimes also beyond that. Second, it allows the study of "non-Western" societies in their respective contexts in response to the parochialism of social sciences and humanities, and – only seemingly contradictory – third, allows the main disciplines to remain as parochial as they are, because that which is locally specific to the West may be analysed in the main disciplines while everywhere else falls under Area Studies, dismissed as specific and non-theoretical.

These functions are not that far off from what some area specialists involved in the crafting of U.S.-American Area Studies envisioned: in 1948, the political scientist and Japanologist Robert Hall led a team that drafted a report for the Social Science Research Council, pleading for the institutionalisation of Area Studies as the most effective way for achieving three objectives: first, to extend the relevance of the humanities, including the study of foreign languages in a rapidly changing world; second, to link the humanities to the social sciences across a broad range of interdisciplinary endeavours; and third, to safeguard the American national interest in what was rapidly becoming a global confrontation with communism (Katzenstein 2002). The third objective has become obsolete due to the breakdown of communism and the rise of other global powers. Instead, Area Studies and similar programmes such as International and Global Studies allow scholars to approach issues in a multi-centric world from various angles. They respond to a variety of problems within the academic system.

But the pressures that area scholars discussed in the 1990s in the United States have only increased since then: metric-based performance measurements ensure that research outcomes are predictable. In the social sciences, the focus increasingly lies on methodology, often requiring detailed coursework in statistics and programming. The professionalised academic system in its current global configuration values neither deep familiarity with a region, nor language skills.

At the same time, scholarship has globalised and diversified, but it has done so in deeply unequal ways. The dominance of English as the world's main research language allows for more global communication among elites, but it proves problematic for the perspectives of non-elites, not to mention their attempts to bring their research into journals.

This pressure on languages other than English also affects other disciplines, perhaps most of all anthropology and sociology. Already in the mid-1990s, George Marcus (Marcus 1995: 101) concluded that most multi-sited field studies

were carried out in monolingual, mostly English-speaking settings (Marcus 1995: 211). Even though language skills remain basic prerequisites for anthropological and ethnographic fieldwork (Clifford 1997: 198) and for any method of qualitative research, contemporary anthropologists and sociologists face similar pressures to Area Studies scholars. Often, they are expected to bring the necessary language skills with them prior to their respective trainings, or to acquire them on the side. Competence in a language is often assumed rather than openly discussed (Tremlett 2009: 64).

In a multipolar world order with a few dominant languages, and with increasingly competitive and market-oriented education, anthropologist and postcolonial scholars would be natural allies for most contemporary area scholars. Collaborations between anthropology and Area Studies have been plentiful, but they usually focus on the objects of their curiosity or what Kuhn (1962) would call "normal science" rather than discussing the paradigm. Anthropologists could take some of their insights from the writing culture debate – the discussions of reflexivity, objectivity and the concept of culture, as well as ethnographic authority in an increasingly fragmented, globalised and (post) colonial world (Clifford / Marcus 1986), as well as discussions on language, social reality and power relations (Gal 2012: 8; Farquhar / Fitzsimons 2012: 101–102) – to a broader level and make more encompassing demands not only for their own discipline but for the academe more generally.

If it was properly positioned to fulfil their full potential as envisioned by some of its more optimistic proponents, Area Studies would offer a way to tackle the legacies of the anti-communist era that still remain not only in Area Studies scholarship (Winichakul 2014: xv–xvi) but also elsewhere.

In order to work towards these goals, Area Studies needs to embrace its identity as a quasi-discipline progressively and forcefully rather than accept the claim that it is second league. This means demanding a high level of language skills, of knowledge of local contexts, and of substantive fieldwork. It means offering one's work for collaborative projects with colleagues from the main disciplines as equal partners, not as decorative and exotic add-ons. Further, it also means translating one's own work again and again. More generally, it is also the task of area specialists to point at what is area-specific to knowledge produced on the empirical basis of the Transatlantic world. There is much that area specialists of the Transatlantic cannot be expected to know about the world, and specialists of other areas need to identify the contradictions and encourage the conversation. In an academic system in which the power of knowledge production is more equally distributed, there would be no Area Studies, or rather, all the world would be Area Studies, in the best sense of the term.

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Area Studies and the Decolonisation of Comparative Law: Insights from Alternative Southeast Asian Constitutional Modernities

Eugénie Mérieau

Abstract

Like "philosophy", constitutional law is a disguised form of area studies that should more adequately be called "Western" or "Euroamerican" constitutional law. In this field, as in many others, the international division of academic labour reveals hierarchical power-knowledge relations: the theoretical West produces knowledge about the empirical Rest, understood as a "reservoir of raw data". Here, area studies reveals its counterhegemonic potentialities. By offering a safe space for non-Western-centric discussion, it opens the possibility of theorising from the South. For constitutional law, this means theorising alternatives to Western liberal constitutionalism in their own, normative, terms, so as to apprehend Islamic, Buddhist, communitarian or transformative constitutionalisms as equally "valid" types of modern constitutional ordering. This paper calls for a deeper engagement between area studies and comparative law scholars seeking to reflect on alternative modernities. It first sketches a brief overview of the history of comparative law as a discipline, then looks at the contribution of area studies to the deconstruction of "legal orientalism" and finally suggests three areas in which Southeast Asian modes of constitutional ordering might well offer images of the possible futures of Western constitutionalism.

Keywords: Constitutional law, area studies, Southeast Asia, orientalism, epistemic injustice

Compared to other disciplines, constitutional law's critique of the Western telos of modernity is very much in its infancy. Non-Western public law is still often considered primitive, non-normative and a product of mere politics: in short, it is the very negation of law. As taught in Constitutional Law 101 at many Western law schools, law is quintessentially the empire of the universal, and constitutionalism that of liberal modernity; there is thus no possibility of non-liberal-democratic constitutionalism worthy of the name (Frohnen 2011: 529). This assertion is itself based on the traditional claim that non-Western

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law lacks "real" normativity, and in particular that non-Western constitutions are nothing but "façade", "nominal" or even "sham" texts (Weber 1906:166, Loewenstein 1969: 213, Law / Versteeg 2013: 863). For many scholars, non-Western constitutionalism nevertheless proves itself a useful object of enquiry, as it constitutes an ideal laboratory for testing out various hypotheses within the paradigm of modernisation/Westernisation through "legal transplants". Moreover, it opens lucrative opportunities for Western constitutional scholars in the business of technical legal assistance to help the South "catch up" with the North.

But what if Hegel – who famously claimed that "the history of the world travels from East to West, for Europe is absolutely the end of history, Asia the beginning" (Hegel 2001:121) – was wrong and history in fact moves the other way? Anthropologists Jean and John Comaroff have provocatively argued that indeed, it is the West that is evolving towards "Africa", an imagined set of realities characterised by disorder, conflict and multiplicity (Comaroff 2011). If that hypothesis holds true, the evolving dynamics of constitutionalism – the prime state mechanism for legal and political regulation – should reflect that reality. An examination of the work of constitutional courts/supreme courts in the North reveals indeed that constitutional courts are increasingly grappling with disorderly and conflicting legal norms, a multiplicity of legal orders and competing notions of justice: a set of realities long established in the South. What if the wide variety of constitutionalisms espoused by non-Western countries were in fact emerging types of constitutional orderings that, perhaps, accurately mirror the plural futures of Western constitutionalism?

This article calls for the establishment of a research agenda characterised by multiple inversions of the past and the future, of the universal and the particular: regarding non-liberal forms of constitutionalism as new universals – or rather, multiversals – that as such belong to possible futures rather than obsolete pasts. Building on the contributions of legal anthropology, it aims to bring together area studies and comparative law within a non-Eurocentric frame that disrupts the common, Hegelian, sense of history.

The Self and the Other: A genealogy of comparative law

Throughout the nineteenth century, comparative law had a simple, straightforward and well-defined practical application: legal codification. During the first half of the century, legal codification meant the rationalisation of law and unification of local customs, as part of a project of nation-state building. The French Napoleonic Code was promulgated in 1804 and most of Europe followed suit. During the second half of the century, the same process was reproduced in the colonies. In those regions it meant codifying and reforming so-called

"primitive" law. The Indian Code was promulgated in 1860, blending together customary norms, Hindu rules and British laws. Legal codification became part of the project of colonisation, and comparative lawyers found in it their *raison d'être*: they embarked on the legal Westernisation (ad)venture, becoming active, enthusiastic participants in the European "civilising mission" through law. This process and the comparative law industry that it fed affected all non-European countries. Whether under colonial masters or not, all countries engaged in a legal codification process that borrowed Western forms and relied massively on European comparative law advisors – in 1882 the Japanese adopted a Criminal Code drafted by a French jurist, Gustave Boissonade. Chairs of Comparative Law were born in France and Germany, and with them periodicals, international congresses and the will to spread codification everywhere for the common good of humanity.

At the 1900 Congress of Paris, usually considered the first-ever comparative law conference, scholars shared their Kantian-like civilising dream: they would identify and build a common law for all, to bring all countries of the world on a path towards a shared civilisation that would in turn lead to perpetual peace (Fournier 2018). The League of Nations and later the United Nations enshrined these ideals in their respective charters and embodied them in their courts. Comparative law scholars engaged in the project of mapping the world's laws. René David (1968) and Konrad Zweigert (1977) established taxonomies based on the Civil Law / Common Law distinction, making it the foundational dichotomy of the Western tradition, while identifying "other" systems, mostly religious, as not part of the Western tradition. They grouped these into families: Hindu, Islamic, Confucian and Other. The Legal Families approach was soon criticised for its Eurocentrism and essentialism, which resulted in an inability to account for legal change and circulation (Pargendler 2012, Glenn 2014). This was challenged by the Legal Transplants approach, premised on the idea that most law everywhere was changing under the influences of transplants. This new approach took comparative law back to the idea of convergence – massive transplantation should in all likelihood result in legal homogenisation (Watson 1973). The Legal Transplants approach resonated with its contemporary, the Law-and-Development Approach, according to which comparative lawyers were to engage in legal reform in the Third World to bring about "development". This reproduced the late nineteenth century approach to legal codification as the only path towards becoming "civilised".

As the 1960s–1970s saw postmodern thought develop as the internal critique of the Enlightenment myths on which the Westernisation narrative was built, the Law-and-Development Approach suffered a massive existential crisis and lost momentum (Trubek / Galanter 1974). At the same time, taking its cues from Marxism and to a certain extent from postmodernism, the move-

ment for Critical Legal Studies developed in the United States. It conceived of law as of a problematic institution eager to entrench inequalities, but instead of taking aim at the Law-and-Development paradigm through a world-systems approach, it kept a rather domestic, practical focus – notably, to reform legal education in the United States (Kennedy 1983, Unger 1983) and to engage in a daily critique of the gender and race hierarchies enshrined in (American) domestic laws, mainly through critical race theory and critical feminist theory. Meanwhile, the discipline of comparative law remained informed, in its aims, outlooks and strategies, by its colonialist origins (Baxi 2003) and maintained its firm commitment to a taxonomic enterprise of categorising the world's various legal systems to identify processes of convergence (or, marginally, divergence) (Mattei 1997).

It was only in the mid-1980s that critical thought eventually came, timidly, to comparative law (Frankenberg 1985). In 1997, under the title "New Approaches to Comparative Law", critical comparative scholars gathered at a workshop in Utah to spark a paradigm shift based on the contributions of Marxism, postmodernism and postcolonialism. They sought to challenge the very idea of legal families and legal transplants, inviting scholars to focus instead on processes of resistance, hybridity, mimicry, subversion and the like at play in legal change (Carozza 1997, Legrand 1997, Legrand / Munday 2003). In a similar move, by the mid-1990s, critical legal theory had made its way in the discipline of international law, giving birth to the Third World Approaches to International Law, nicknamed the TWAIL movement (Anghie 1996, 1999). However, if TWAIL flourished, the encounter between critical legal studies and comparative law that could have given birth to critical comparative legal studies somehow failed to materialise (Mattei 2019, Seidman 2006), and the awakening of comparative law to non-Eurocentric modes of thinking remains, as of today, quite marginal. It is even more marginal in the field of constitutional law, which suffers from being doubly peripheral: it is situated at the margins of the discipline of comparative law, itself at the margins of the discipline of law (Frankenberg 2006).

As a result, constitutional law remains largely unaffected by both postmodernism and postcolonialism despite renewed calls to "decentre" the discipline and open it up to transdisciplinarity (Hirschl 2013, 2014; Frankenberg 2018). Ignoring the insights from critical legal studies, comparative constitutional law remains widely dominated by Eurocentric formalism. As a consequence, non-Western constitutionalism tends to be assessed based on its degree of conformity with its Western counterpart (Law / Versteeg 2013). Yet the shift towards a more inclusive model of scholarship has already begun and owes much to area studies, where legal scholars can safely leave legal formalism behind to enter in conversations with scholars from other disciplines.

Debunking the myth of "lawless Asia": Area studies versus legal orientalism

Montesquieu is often identified as the first Comparative Law scholar. In his 1748 opus, the *Spirit of the Laws*, he reflected on the Self through considerations of the Other (Montesquieu 1989). Although he did remark that law was tied to society, his focus and aim was not to advocate for or against legal transplants, even less for the Westernisation of the Orient, and not even to create knowledge about the "Orient". Contrary to what many comparative lawyers have read in him, Montesquieu's aim was to engage in a domestic critique of the despotism of the French absolute monarchy. Due to fear of censorship, such criticism was expressed by implicitly showing how the French King's rule was no different from the rule of imagined oriental monarchs. For the sake of his argument, he created an Asian, naturally despotic, stereotype, which he contrasted with the idea of separation of powers, which he had observed in Britain (see Sullivan 2017). Unfortunately, comparative law scholars misread Montesquieu and took his tactical, instrumental considerations about oriental despotism as knowledge about Asia: the myth of lawless Asia has informed scholars ever since. For instance, in the early twentieth century, legal orientalist Robert Lingat argued that Hindu traditional conceptions of law, based on *dharma*, prevented traditional rulers from engaging in lawmaking. According to Lingat, Hindu-based conceptions of law were not normative but descriptive, falling short of the modern/Western definition of law (Lingat 1941; see also Lingat 1973).

The two world wars and the advent of the Cold War displaced the centre of orientalist studies to the United States under the name "Area Studies". In the US, area studies was designed as the study of China, Japan, the Soviet Empire and Latin America, in accordance with the foreign policy interests of the United States (Wallerstein 1997). In the 1970s, the field came under intense criticism, not least because of the Vietnam War that divided the community of Asianists. A few years later, area studies suffered yet another near-fatal injury with the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* in 1978. In this influential book, Said offered a relentless attack against area studies as being the prime site of orientalism as opposed to more valuable modes of enquiry structured around intellectually rigorous academic disciplines. In the words of Said, "[i]nteresting work is most likely to be produced by scholars whose allegiance is to a discipline defined intellectually and not to a 'field' like Orientalism defined either canonically, imperially, or geographically. An excellent recent instance is the anthropology of Clifford Geertz, whose interest in Islam is discrete and concrete enough to be animated by the specific societies and problems he studies and not by the rituals, preconceptions, and

doctrines of Orientalism" (Said 2003: 326). Clifford Geertz was indeed not an area studies scholar but a cultural anthropologist with no clear specific regional interest. Nonetheless, he did much to advance the study of Islam as well as the study of law in non-Western contexts. In one of his most influential works, he analysed law as a cultural system to be both deciphered and deconstructed like a text (Geertz 1973), à la Derrida, and as a form of imagining the real, à la Lévi-Strauss (Geertz 1983). Moreover, using the example of Indonesia, he contended that law was no less dogmatic in the so-called "primitive" societies than in the West (ibid.: 182). Although Geertz was not an area studies scholar per se, his extensive field-work experience in Indonesia proved essential to his willingness and ability to challenge the myth of the lawless non-West.

It was much later that the Saidian analysis of orientalism was applied to Asian legal studies. The first recorded denunciation of legal orientalism is the work of Chinese Law scholar Teemu Ruskola, who coined the term in an article published in 2002 (Ruskola 2002). He defined it as "a set of interlocking narratives about what is and is not law […] and who has law" (Ruskola 2013: 5). From the mid-nineteenth century, the British had argued that China had no law, thus enabling the United Kingdom to force extraterritorial treaties, claim ports and colonise parts of the Kingdom of China. In the early twentieth century, orientalist scholars argued that the specificity of the West resided in its use of law and courts as opposed to customs, rituals and mediation as practiced in the non-West, in particular in China. In a process spanning about a century, orientalist scholars invented legal primitivism, characterised by status as opposed to contract, by hierarchies as opposed to individualism (cf. Maine 2002, Dumont 1986, Tuori 2014). But unlike orientalism in literary studies, "legal orientalism" did not give rise to a boom of legal literature, the creation of a lively school of thought or the endowment of chairs in prestigious law schools – mostly, it remained confined to Chinese legal studies, where it is still today a dynamic discussion (cf. Li 2014, Coendet 2019).

The myth of "lawless" Asia was debunked in Chinese area studies, but very much maintained in the thinking of Western law schools. Anthropologists noted the fetishisation of law in the non-West, but legal scholars were quick to point out that this was not "really" law, being inefficient at solving disorder in the postcolony (Comaroff / Comaroff 2007). In a similar fashion, legal scholars take notice of the fetishisation of constitutional law, but are quick to point out that this is not "really" constitutionalism and these courts are not "really" constitutional courts, being unable to fully uphold liberal-democratic values – in fact, the use of constitutionalism and judicial review by such courts is conceptualised as the "abuse" of constitutionalism and judicial review (Landau 2013, Landau / Dixon 2019). Even the type of judicial review operated by the Supreme Court of one of the most established Asian democracies, Japan, is described as having "failed" (Law 2011: 192).

The first denunciation of constitutional orientalism is yet to come. "Real" constitutionalism is still often associated with the type of constitutionalism practiced in the West while "sham" or incomplete versions of constitutionalism are the preserve of the East. The canon of constitutional law scholarship still tends to establish liberal-democratic forms of constitutionalism as the only genuine type and sees "authoritarian", "Islamic" or "Confucian" constitutionalism as oxymorons (Dowdle / Wilkinson 2017). Studies of constitutional design still aim to transfer constitutionalism-as-development to developing countries, especially the most underdeveloped, divided, disorderly ones (Choudhry 2008, Lijphart 2004). In constitutional studies more than comparative legal studies, legal transplants are seen to migrate primarily from the North to the South (Choudhry 2006, Perju 2012). Even if the spread of constitutions and constitutional courts has been acknowledged, the South is still seen as "constitutionalism-deprived". In the discipline, the most quoted article by the African scholar H.W.O. Okoth-Ogendo (1988) is precisely that which establishes this argument: the non-West has "constitutions without constitutionalism". Most of the studies on constitutionalism outside the West refrain from using the word "constitutionalism" – as the common assumption remains that non-Western constitutional practices are not deserving of the label (Ginsburg / Moustafa 2008, Ginsburg / Simpser 2013, Grimm 2016).

By contrast, scholars working in/on Asia have repeatedly made use of the prestigious label to refer to Asian forms of constitutional ordering (Chen 2014, Chang et al. 2014). There is much evidence that, like legal orientalism, the denunciation of constitutional orientalism will come from scholars of Asian law. For decades now, they have pointed to alternatives to Western constitutionalism as equally valid forms of constitutionalism (Thio 2012, Neo / Son 2019). In fact, constitutional orientalism has already been alluded to in specific works on Southeast Asian constitutionalism, and Andrew Harding and Bui Ngoc Son gave a first, simple and efficient definition in 2016: "Constitutional orientalism can be referred to as the western imagination of constitutional law in Asia" (Harding / Son 2016: 168). Scholars have also attempted to establish Asian experiences as having universal appeal. There is a growing literature on Asian constitutionalisms in the plural form, with the elaboration of concepts, theories, models and methodologies for constitutional law out of Asia and Southeast Asia. In the realm of concepts alone, "illiberal constitutionalism" (Thio 2012, Mérieau 2016b), "authoritarian rule of law" (Rajah 2012) and "authoritarian constitutionalism" (Tushnet 2015) were all crafted from and for Southeast Asia. An exponential volume of literature is investigating Asian discourses of the rule of law (Peerenboom 2003), Asian forms of legalities (Chen / Fu 2020) and the Asian judicialisation of politics (Dressel 2012).

The judicialisation of politics is a telling example of the type of historical inversion referred to in this piece. The judicialisation of politics was believed

never to occur in a place where law was as marginal as in Asia. In 1997, Tate Vallinder proclaimed that Southeast Asia was an unlikely candidate for the judicialisation of politics (Tate / Vallinder 1997). Yet since the late 1990s, centralised constitutional review has spread in the region (Thailand 1997, Cambodia 1998, Indonesia 2003, Myanmar 2011), while supreme courts have also embarked, to various degrees, on a constitutional review of legislation (Philippines, Singapore, Malaysia and Timor-Leste). Even Vietnam has discussed the option of adopting an organ of constitutional review (Bui 2018). In fact, in Southeast Asia, in the early twenty-first century, constitutional courts are engaged daily in dealing with a wide range of issues and core political controversies. Examining judicial behaviour in Southeast Asia in 2020, one is puzzled by the elaborate rulings issued by courts, from Myanmar to Indonesia, and by the expanding role of the judiciary in the region. Today, Southeast Asia is experiencing one of the most intense phenomena of judicialisation of politics carried out by numerous constitutional courts – with courts sending politicians to jail for lengthy sentences, dissolving political parties and invalidating constitutional amendments (Dressel 2012). Constitutionalism in fact is as intense and dynamic in Asia than in Europe, if not more so, but, more importantly, it is much more diverse.

How the West is evolving towards the East: Southeast Asian examples

The first phenomenon that puts Southeast Asia at the forefront of global legal development is its long-lasting, multifaceted experience with legal pluralism, a distinctive feature of Southeast Asian systems. In Southeast Asia, the principle that the law should be the same for all was never the rule (Hooker 1975, Hussain 2011, Bell 2017). Instead, various indigenous, religious and ethnic communities have been governed by their own normative orders within the State constitutional order (or outside of the State). In much of Southeast Asia, indigenous systems of conflict resolution coexist with sharia courts, which coexist with the national courts. On top of this, legacies of successive waves of colonialism have layered colonial over indigenous laws, often recodified as modified versions of customary laws, on top of mixed systems of civil and common law. In the region, the various apex courts including constitutional courts police the relationship between the competing legal orders and the intermingling of norms from various origins and systems as well as the coexisting means of conflict resolution (Harding 2015). For instance, the religious condemnation of blasphemy clashes with constitutional secularism in Indonesia, a clash that must be entertained by the Indonesian Constitutional Court. Indigenous voting sys-

tems in West Papua clash with the one person–one vote principle, a clash also entertained by the Indonesian Constitutional Court.

Southeast Asia is also a region that has one of the richest experiences of mechanisms of transitional justice: the Extraordinary Chambers of Cambodia put members of the Khmer Rouge on trial for more than a decade (2006–2018); Timor-Leste organised many initiatives to deal with Indonesian massacres in 1999 and in the 2000s, while Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand have engaged in deep reflections about transitional justice and attempted to set up truth and reconciliation mechanisms. In this area as well, high courts are tasked with policing the conflict between competing notions of justice and law. In Cambodia, the Philippines, and Indonesia, they have ruled transitional justice mechanisms as unconstitutional, often involving the key principle of non-retroactivity of criminal law.

So, why would such mechanisms – legal pluralism and transitional justice – designed for a perceived dysfunctional and disorderly South, increasingly appear as legal solutions to social problems of the West? The year 2020 provides a great snapshot of evidence. In the United States, 2020 has been marked by intense ethnic-based violence, a deadly epidemic, economic inequalities and crises, as well as an attempted coup, political corruption and incompetence. The foundational myth of equality before the law and the impartiality of the justice system has crumbled under the evidence brought to light by social movements such as Black Lives Matter. Protesters have called for the replacement of mass incarceration of Blacks by mechanisms of transitional justice. Meanwhile, in the United Kingdom, following the set-up of the Muslim Arbitration Tribunal in 2007, there are calls to allow sharia courts to operate in parallel to the secular courts; in Canada, there are calls to allow indigenous populations to rule themselves according to their customary norms and to give them reparations through transitional justice mechanisms. With events of violence, terrorism, ethnic riots and awareness of lingering colonial legacies, legal pluralism and transitional justice no longer appear as the Other to Western legality and justice but increasingly as potential solutions to universal issues.

Additionally, another area where Southeast Asia might be seen as a repository of legal solutions to (re)emerging problems in the West is that of authoritarian legality to respond to epidemic diseases. In Southeast Asia, as in the Western model, emergency legislation has been deployed heavily against terrorism, but it has also been used more recently to deal with epidemics, implementing quarantine and curfews – Southeast Asia was one of the first regions to adopt a "national security"or, rather "human security" approach to epidemics (Caballero-Anthony 2008). Southeast Asia has a legacy of normalising states of emergency into ordinary legislation (Ramraj 2008, Ramraj / Thiruvengadam 2009), and this has been replicated in its handling of epidemics. These legal devices are also spreading to the West, as governments grapple with the Covid epidemic

against the backdrop of continuous mass protests fuelled by an unprecedented level of income inequality and the exploding legitimacy crisis of liberal democracy. In 2020, the normalised State of Emergency as applied to epidemics travelled from China to Europe through Southeast Asia. Mass quarantines and lockdowns were quickly implemented, turning liberal societies like France into Orwellian dystopias where drones patrol the air reminding the public that anyone walking the streets or gathering in groups will face immediate sanctions. As some have argued, Europe emulated China: massive surveillance by drones, phones and tracing apps, as well as the prohibition against assembly, became the norm (Tréguer 2020 /Rocca 2020).

Finally, there is lawfare, or legal warfare – the use of courts to silence critical voices in the name of democracy. Southeast Asia has been at the forefront of this development at least since the 1990s: courts including Constitutional Courts dissolve political parties, remove prime ministers and presidents, veto constitutional amendments and pieces of legislation, support institutions such as the Church or the Military, and are used to bankrupt political opponents on a regular basis. The most telling example is that of Thailand, whose Constitutional Court has dismissed every single elected prime minister, one after the other, since its creation in 1997 and has dissolved the most popular political parties on several occasions (Mérieau 2016a).

This very brief overview aims to show how legal transfers, long assumed to move unilaterally from the North to the South, are now increasingly embedded within an opposite trajectory. If the benefits of authoritarian legality in the handling of epidemics are not self-evident, mechanisms of transitional justice and legal pluralism might appear as useful processes for dealing with current challenges in Western societies. This "inversion" of the sense of history is due to a generalisation of disorder in Western states, characterised by ethnic tensions, epidemics and inequalities, all conducive to further violence.

Towards an epistemology of the South in Comparative Constitutional Law: A set of three proposals mediated by Area Studies

Yet at the level of social theory, Eurocentric modernisation theory turned upside-down has all the same defaults as the original, substituting one imperialistic modernity (say, the Euroamerican Empire) with another imperialistic modernity (say, the rising Chinese Empire). By contrast, the aim here is to acknowledge the possibility of multiple coexisting modernities, and to recognise that Southern modernity is not a derivative of Northern modernity, nor does the South lag behind the North. Instead, the centre might mimic the periphery and

the periphery be the centre's avant-garde. In order for scholars to work towards undoing the coloniality of (constitutional/legal) knowledge by accounting for alternative constitutional modernities without hierarchising them, here is a set of three proposals.

First, it is crucial to engage in a locally-informed genealogy of the processes of marginalisation and othering at the foundation of disciplinary knowledge. In particular, in constitutional law, the mainstream approaches share a common embeddedness in an orientalist agenda founded upon the Westernisation narrative: there is only one modernity, and it is Western (Hall 1992, Wolf / Eriksen 2010). Andrew Harding wrote, in his seminal article on "Southeast Asian Lessons for Public Law", that the legal scholars who attended the 1900 Paris Congress of Comparative Law had not only ignored the region but in fact went as far as to "plan the exclusion of Southeast Asian Law" (Harding 2002: 266). Against this background, Harding calls their comparative law project "misconceived". Yet rather than misconceived, I would like to suggest that the project was very much well-conceived for its aim of epistemic imperialism, a process at the core of disciplinary knowledge. The absence of Southeast Asian Law was actively produced and reproduced with much effort and coordinated action within the discipline of comparative law. This exclusion has been achieved through an active process of policing the canon of what law is and who has it, the declinations of which have evolved over time. Therefore, engaging in a genealogy of marginalisation includes a thorough examination of how various scholars have exerted their agency to iteratively exclude Southeast Asian law over time, a method sometimes referred to as a "sociology of absence" or continued epistemic violence (Santos 2001, 2008).

Second, it is equally crucial to both provincialise the canon, by resituating it as a specific form of Euroamerican area studies and to theorise from Southeast Asia. In constitutional law as in other disciplines, it has been proven time and again that the lived experiences of the South challenge the established theories produced in the North, demonstrating the latter's particularism rather than universalism. Area studies, with its deep commitment to language training, fieldwork and interdisciplinarity, offers opportunities to revise these theories and derive new ones from non-Western grounded empirical study. So, for instance, based on the examples used in this article, legal monism must be revised, retributive justice must be revised, the binary opposition between authoritarian and liberal forms of constitutional ordering must be revised, and the faith in constitutional courts as democracy-enhancers must be revised. Revised theories from the South will be embraced by the North as it increasingly grapples with religious and ethnic diversity, conflict, epidemics and environmental disasters, and the end of the liberal consensus.

Third, it is urgent to refuse to submit to the international division of labour that assigns empirical work to the South (as the non-West is a place of "un-

processed data", Comaroff / Comaroff 2012: 114) in order to leave theory to Western scholars. In comparative constitutional law, this international division of labour knows an additional layer: scholars from the South are encouraged not only to focus on empirical work, but also to focus their empirical work on their own jurisdiction. As a result, the outcome might fall short of the label "comparative" and see its contribution reduced to that of data collection, whose value added is greatly diminished compared to comparative and theoretical work (Hirschl 2005). Due to the elite status of theory as opposed to empirics, and to comparative work as opposed to single-country expertise, there is a tendency among Southern scholars to reject area studies altogether in order to associate themselves with disciplinary work usually dominated by the North, with the risk, also present in area studies, of becoming perpetual subcontractors to more established scholars (Alatas 2000). Although this strategy might be understandable at the individual level, this paper calls for using area studies as a platform to theorise alternative modernities, aiming for an "area" type of theorising, which emancipates itself from the traditional dependencies on Western elite institutions – for instance by engaging in critical, comparative, South-South area studies.

Against the predictions of the "death" or "end" of area studies (Miyoshi et al. 2002, Walker / Sakai 2019), I contend that area studies has increasing relevance today, when the zeitgeist calls for "provincialising" the social science canon and theorising from the South. Against this background, as pointed out by legal scholars, area studies specialists and comparative lawyers have a lot to gain from entering into a mutual conversation (Nicholson 2008:72) – historically, law has, after all, been used as the quintessential sign of modernity as well as the first device to both colonise and resist colonisation. Like the discourse on Asian lawlessness, the "constitutions without constitutionalism" narrative (re)produces the Western discourse of the West versus the Rest: its survival depends on a struggle between competing interpretations of the term "constitutionalism" as being inclusive or exclusive of non-liberal-democratic forms of ordering.

Conceptual formation and diffusion, a highly valued form of knowledge production, is a function of power (Foucault 1980). For instance, the authorship of the notion of orientalism, a widely used concept in the social sciences, is attributed to Edward Said, a Palestinian scholar from Columbia University. The concept could as well have been partly credited to Syed Hussein Alatas, a Malaysian scholar from the National University of Malaysia from whom Said got much inspiration (Alatas 1977; Graf 2010). Successful theories, however historically, geographically and subjectively situated, are the ones that manage to "erase" their particularistic characteristics or "situatedness" to speak in universal terms (Said 1983: 226, Haraway 1988). Yet they often claim their point of origin as some sort of branding mechanism: postmodern critical theory

with France and Germany, subaltern studies with India, decolonial thought with Latin America, and perhaps, or so is the ambition of this paper, alternative/pluralist constitutional theory with Southeast Asia.

Concluding remarks

Comaroff and Comaroff argued that the (imagined) South ("Africa") might well represent the future of the North – mired in violence, ethnic conflicts, epidemics, inequalities and religious fundamentalism. Against ideas of convergence towards a Western telos, disordered pluralities appear on the horizon. Is it possible, then, that Southeast Asian constitutional law, in its extreme diversity, offers images of the future of Western constitutional law? Can constitutional design principles and jurisprudence travel from East to West? This article has shown not only that they can, but that they already have. Yet, this shift has not yet been captured as legitimate knowledge in the field of constitutional law, which, still blinded by the narrative of Westernisation, remains in a general state of denial of changes that have *already happened*. Twenty years ago, Andrew Harding already referred to Southeast Asian law as "post-Western": it had digested Western modes of legality, and moved beyond them (Harding 2001: 219).

If some elements of Southeast Asian constitutionalism have begun to gain increased scholarly attention, their universality is contested as they challenge the end-of-history narrative of liberal-democratic constitutionalism with a rule of law rooted in the idea of legal monism and notions of retributive justice. More precisely, the types of normativity experienced in Southeast Asia directly challenge three fundamental tenets of Western constitutional ordering: legal pluralism challenges legal monism, transitional justice challenges retributive justice, and authoritarian modes of legality – including lawfare – challenge liberal constitutionalism. It is possible to maintain a discourse of differences (here, of alternative constitutional modernities) while refusing to convert these differences into values and hierarchies in line with the current geopolitics of knowledge that maintains Western dominance through academic imperialism and dependency (see Mignolo 2002; Alatas 1993, 2016a, 2016b; Zeiny 2019). As long as theory remains an elite practice guarded by gate-keepers located in elite Western institutions, non-Western area disciplinary studies, with their journals and associations, provide an ideal site of resistance.

There is no provincialising of the Western canon without proposals for non-Western additions to it, and this is precisely a contribution best made by area studies which, with its commitment to rigorous empirical and transdisciplinary work, is a place where the empirical and theoretical analysis of alternative constitutional modernities can be engaged with. In other terms, while the decon-

structionist work can be done by the abstract, internal disciplinary critique, the reconstructionist work relies on empiricists such as area studies scholars. In law, critical legal studies deconstructs, and area (constitutional) studies offers alternative solutions. In particular, among the legal devices for which the South including Southeast Asia has much experience, constitutional mechanisms for deeply pluralistic/divided societies appear more than ever relevant to the North. The constitutional regulation of pluralism in turn raises a set of novel issues for constitutional adjudication that will prompt a fair deal of theorisation – from Southeast Asia.

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Decolonial-Feminist Approaches in Teaching and Research: Exploring Practices, Interactions and Challenges

Research Note

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Abstract

In international academic interactions we encounter inequalities of different kinds between the so-called Global North and the Global South. Many of these are the result of a general white male superiority that has existed for centuries as well as the physical and mental colonialisation of the Global South. This paper is a joint critical contemplation by four female researchers reflecting upon the status quo in academic practices. The paper describes surmountable and apparently insurmountable injustices using examples from everyday life in teaching and research. The authors furthermore describe some of their experiences in applying decolonial and feminist approaches and methodologies to achieve an academic togetherness with all partners on an equal footing and report on the challenges and drawbacks they have faced. The authors see this as a process in which they learn, revise and reflect upon their everyday academic lives.

Keywords: Decolonial approaches, feminist approaches, Global South, knowledge production, transregional perspective

Mapping the terrain

This research note started as a journey of a new team growing together at the Chair for Transregional Southeast Asian Studies at the Institute for Asian and African Studies at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin since late 2018. In this research note we aim to explore our practices, interactions and challenges of academic teaching and research that have not only been an inherent part of our commitment to critical, decentred knowledge production but are also part of the practices of New Area Studies as an approach. Such practices are also

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an outcome of our own academic biographies and decisions for teaching and research practices within and beyond disciplinary angles. Through the three signposts "Academic Teaching", "Academic Research" and "Academic Togetherness" we attempt to highlight why critical, decentred knowledge productions are essential in order to address desiderata in research methodology and research ethics emerging from a positivist understanding of "neutral" scientific inquiry, understood as the foundation of scientific rigour and scrutiny. Furthermore, such decentred knowledge productions are entangled with the politics underpinning academic knowledge productions across the globe and with the power differences among those positioned in the Global North and those in the Global South. As Walter Mignolo (2009: 160)[1] stresses:

> By setting the scenario in terms of geo- and body-politics I am starting and departing from already familiar notions of "situated knowledges". Sure, all knowledges are situated and every knowledge is constructed. But this is just the beginning. The question is: who, when, why is constructing knowledges […].

Committed to a transregional perspectivity[2] and interdisciplinary approaches to critical, decentred knowledge productions, we were nevertheless initially trained from distinct disciplinary angles such as peace and conflict studies, international development studies/global studies, linguistics, political science and gender studies. We engage in studying phenomena in diverse areas that are not the ones in which we grew up and were socialised, meaning that we cannot read and navigate within them as an indigenous knowledge maker could. Having said that, for all of us the "field" is not positioned outside as the "other" – a place or a site to which one travels in order to engage in academic inquiries. Academic knowledge productions – whether in teaching, research or in activities of knowledge transfer via community outreach – are fields in themselves; they are entangled with one another, speaking with, to, about and against one another at times.[3] Always being part of diverse and often entangled fields (see Knapp 2014: 16) our knowledge productions require careful and continued contextualisation, negotiations of our own positionalities and a complex intersectional matrix of power-cum-inequality within and across fields, including academia and our university. Before we start diving deeper into the actual matter of this note, we should provide some introductory re-

1 See also Jackson 2019.

2 Through such a transregional perspectivity we aim to engage with "the wide variety of social, political, cultural, ontological, epistemic, emotional and economic relations that stretch beyond the regional borders of Southeast Asia. Particular attention is given to trans- and pluri-local connectivities. As for example between Southeast Asia and the MENA region (Middle East and North Africa) or between East, South and Southeast Asia. […] [We position ourselves with our respective subject fields within] New Area Studies in the sense of a consistent understanding of Europe and the West as one area among many and reconfigure the concept of 'area'. Our studies use local and analytical approaches and concepts; we apply a critical perspective on hegemonic knowledge production" (IAAW 2020).

3 For a detailed discussion see Knapp 2014, whose critique of othering the field, while not identifying academia as a field in itself (socially constructed and culturally situated also in terms of power and inequality), we follow here.

marks on who we are and the positions from which we are speaking and exploring our practices.

Although we are a diverse group, all of us employ decolonial and/or feminist toolboxes (cf. De Sousa Santos 2008, 2018; Chilisa 2012; Denzin et al. 2008).[4] Andrea Fleschenberg has been living this approach for the past two decades, while working on Afghanistan, Pakistan, Timor-Leste and Myanmar, with long periods within South Asia in particular. This means going beyond simply working within and instead immersing oneself in the (othered) field for long, extended periods of time, being fortunate enough to have become part of local academic networks and to be working in tandem with colleagues from across Pakistan, for example.

For Lina Knorr, the experiences of her field research in Indonesia made her realise that traditional political science approaches did not help her to fully understand the processes of local political engagement she was witnessing. Since then she has incorporated a decolonial-feminist approach[5] in her research and teaching to gain a more holistic understanding of global power dynamics. In her own teaching, she gives great importance to the space of self-reflection and self-learning.

In the academic environment of Linda Gerlach, the decolonial approach to research was never explicitly made a subject of discussion and is a very uncommon concept in linguistics. Although she has been employing decolonial methods in her research for the past 10 years, it was only when she joined the team of Claudia Derichs, the chair of Transregional Southeast Asian Studies, that thinking and discussing about the decolonial-feminist approach became an important part of her everyday academic life.

Finally, as an academic and associated lecturer, Nadine Heil is working on alternative approaches and has been using decolonial, indigenous and feminist lenses in research for the past three years. It was towards the end of her graduate studies when she noticed the importance of this special perspective in research and in teaching. Heil thinks of it as a process, a crucial one, to produce knowledge in more respectful, context-sensitive and people-centred ways. All of this influenced her in establishing the *Werkstatt Wissensproduktion* ("Workshop Knowledge Production"; see Signpost 1).

Within the Institute for Asian and African Studies vocal proponents call for a New Area Studies approach (albeit they are not the only ones; see interview

4 For an excellent, current overview on the legacies and challenges of positionality and spatiality of critical knowledge productions and academic publishing in and on Asia beyond Anglo-American- and Eurocentrism see Jackson 2019.

5 According to Chilisa, a decolonial-feminist research approach is "used to refer to the process of critique, decolonization and indigenization of Euro-Western methodologies and the theorizing of methodologies that are informed by the theoretical perspectives and the worldviews of third world feminisms, African feminisms, Black feminisms, borderland-Mestizajefeminisms, and all the marginalized non-Western feminisms" (2012: 261).

with Peter Jackson in this special issue for instance) combined with a transregional perspective as crucial to knowledge productions.[6] One key proponent, Vincent Houben, argues for scholars to consider and address a number of concerns. First, to work on "alternity", i.e. producing not generalisations but rather context-sensitive, situated knowledges and mid-range theories with relevance for global-scale theories. Second, to engage in "epistemic disobedience" (Mignolo 2009) vis-à-vis mainstream disciplines that predominantly and systematically ascribe non-Western areas to a secondary status,[7] i.e. as places from which to extract knowledge, used as intellectual raw materials to be processed in an asymmetrical knowledge production chain centred towards the Global North. And thus, third, to regard New Area Studies as more than just a counter-hegemonic process to Eurocentric knowledge productions and discourses thereof.[8] Along this line, Claudia Derichs identifies, among other things, the lack of reverse flows and thus a paucity of transformative, situated knowledges as key factors for (hegemonic) imbalances in knowledge productions worldwide. Transformative (thus "not only" counter-hegemonic but also non-compartmentalising) knowledge productions therefore require ontological ecologies – that is: (decentred) "plurality" (see Derichs 2017). In addition, this necessitates a more profound and vocal critique of the methodological approaches of systematic disciplines (and the preference given to quantitative methodologies) and their under-problematised situatedness.[9]

New Area Studies, be it in the realm of teaching or research, has a crucial function and role to play outside of academia, Vincent Houben stresses. Pointing towards the rise of right-wing neopopulism and xenophobia, in particular in post-2015 Europe, New Area Studies knowledge productions facilitate different, decolonial, decentred contextualisations and may inform policymakers and the wider public.[10] How New Area Studies scholars attempt to make sense

6 See for example the work of Vincent Houben and Boike Rehbein, as well as their debating section inputs, plus those of Claudia Derichs, in this special journal issue (and the responses from international colleagues).

7 Walter Mignolo (2009: 159) critiques an assumption that those from cultures positioned in the Global South are regarded as a "token" of their culture while "[s]uch expectations will not arise if the author 'comes' from Germany, France, England or the US. As we know: the first world has knowledge, the third world has culture. […] The need for political and epistemic de-linking here comes to the fore, as well as decolonializing and decolonial knowledges […]".

8 Another proponent, Rachel Harrison, based at SOAS in London, identifies a need for a common, interdisciplinary framework of New Area Studies which allows scholars to work on/from cultural difference and to be able "to talk to each other" across areas and disciplines. In the same vein, Peter Jackson from ANU in Canberra, Australia, reflects that the internal critique of Western epistemologies led him in his quest to explore non-Western epistemologies, to reinvent himself as a historian as well as to become inter-/cross-disciplinary toward the end of his career when working in the field of critical gender and cultural studies (notes taken by Andrea Fleschenberg during the EuroSEAS 2019 Conference, Roundtable on New Area Studies, Berlin, September 2019).

9 Notes taken by Andrea Fleschenberg during the EuroSEAS 2019 conference, Roundtable on New Area Studies, Berlin, September 2019; see also debating input by Claudia Derichs, Vincent Houben and Boike Rehbein in this special issue as well as responses from international colleagues.

10 Notes taken by Andrea Fleschenberg during the EuroSEAS 2019 conference, Roundtable on Southeast Asian Studies – Directions, Themes and Disciplines, Berlin, September 2019.

of the world needs to become a more resilient approach for critical knowledge productions, or, as Martina Padmanabahan argues, we have to look beyond the "region" (in the sense of an ascribed container) and connect grounded research with global debates and emerging issues in wider society and across societies. This includes linking knowledge communities and mobility of ideas in a transregional approach, cognisant of the fact that existing and emerging issues of our contemporary world no longer fit (if ever they did) the boxes and boundaries imposed by discipline-based, Global North-centred epistemologies, methodologies and theorising.[11] Following the idea of alternity, bridging conceptual translations, decentred encounters and knowledge exchanges is crucial within otherwise increasingly widespread, hegemonic, exclusionary, self-centred populist discourses and socio-political agenda-settings.[12] In addition, alternity, plurality and decoloniality are crucial for Area Studies as an academic field to emerge from colonial and Cold War trajectories. Subsequently New Area Studies aims to continuously challenge and reconfigure Global North-centeredness and engage with pluralistic knowledge productions on/from Asia, across and within multiple regions as well as from a variety of knowledge brokers within and outside of academia.

Exploring practices, interactions and challenges of decolonial-feminist approaches in teaching and research, we would like to sketch out below three signposts, derived from our activities along with experiences of decentred academic togetherness and exchange.

Signpost 1 – Academic teaching

The "Workshop Knowledge Production" is a student-initiated course of training and a space for self-reflection. Decolonial, indigenous and feminist research approaches represent the core of the workshop sessions. Running for the third semester, it is a collaboration between our research-based learning initiative at the Chair for Transregional Southeast Asian Studies at IAAW and the bologna.lab

11 Notes taken by Andrea Fleschenberg during the EuroSEAS 2019 Conference, Roundtable on Southeast Asian Studies – Directions, Themes and Disciplines, Berlin, September 2019.

12 Discussants of the 2019 EuroSEAS Roundtable on New Area Studies reflected also on the growing politicisation of academic life and how New Area Studies scholars should position themselves and their research, as introduced by Benjamin Baumann. Highlighting the entanglement of Area Studies with politics – as evident in the post-9/11 evolving studies on Islam, part of a wider geopolitical contestation surrounding the so-called War on Terror (see also Manan Ahmed's discussant entry in the debating section) or when confronted with rising illiberal nationalisms – roundtable participants argued that one can be an engaged, critical as well as rigorous scholar. Retreating to academia and thus distancing oneself from political entanglements of knowledges is problematic given an illiberal turn in "truth claiming in a world of fake news" and the call for transformative knowledge productions (notes taken by Andrea Fleschenberg during the EuroSEAS 2019 conference, Roundtable on New Area Studies, Berlin, September 2019).

at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin.[13] The workshop developed out of a BA project seminar reflecting on "Volatility, Hegemony, Neo-Coloniality and Knowledge Production in the Global South in the Context of Gender, Displacement and Activisms", which motivated a group of students to become more familiar with decolonial perspectives in their own research.

The ideas of these students to create their own format of exchange was brought to the attention of the staff at the bologna.lab with the aim of making its interdisciplinary, student centred and research-based approach more relevant for a number of student bodies (and drawing participation also from the Freie Universität Berlin) as an interdisciplinary elective course option. Students opt for the "Workshop Knowledge Production" for a variety of reasons, primarily as a reaction against the standard course offerings, due, for example, to complaints including, among others: 1) course literature derived mainly from Global North-based (male) scholars and English-language universities and thus lacking in diversity; 2) an experienced lack of persons of colour being involved in academic teaching, as well as the inequality and lack of female and/or indigenous scholarly work being presented; 3) a lack of diverse, creative sources to draw from in research, such as the use of oral histories or art in social sciences or area studies to uncover cultural dynamics.

The core instrument of the workshop is to enable a safe and creative space for discussion and (self-)reflection on decolonial, feminist approaches and one's own positionality in knowledge production and academic practices. Students bring their own ideas, concerns and questions to each session; principal articles on decolonial discourses are contemplated and standard research methods are questioned in order to develop critical perspectives. In addition, we used the past COVID-induced semester of digital teaching to produce a different set of materials: an audio podcast series featuring interviews with fifteen scholars – at different stages of their academic biography (ranging from BA students to full professors) and from a number of different academic contexts – with a particular interest or a strong opinion on decolonial approaches. From one conversation, conducted by a student member of the workshop, the idea developed to join digital workshops on critical research epistemologies between South African students and students from Humboldt University. The podcasts provide students with valuable, diverse insights into lived practices and numerous suggestions for reflecting on one's positionality and negotiations thereof, bridging theoretical texts and the lived realities of students' research projects. Another core tool was the open structure of the workshop and its horizontal nature, crucial when reflecting upon and aiming to make sense of power structures within research, academia and within and across societies. Students

13 More information on the BMBF-funded initiative for new modes of teaching and learning can be found, unfortunately only in German, at the website of bologna.lab, https://www.bolognalab.hu-berlin.de/de (accessed 14 September 2020).

called for even more such space to be given in their usual study courses, because they experience a paucity of spaces to reflect upon standard methodologies in academia in order to engage in alternative knowledge productions. During the workshop sessions, students came up with research-based ideas, which have not only shaped their academic work but also their perspectives on both society and research.

Teaching with a decolonial research perspective in mind creates difficulties on several levels in Global North-based academia. One main aspect of such a perspective is the development of one's positionality in research and a critical reflection thereof. This also means revealing vulnerability in front of students, by pointing towards our own blind spots and ways in which our research is entangled in Global North-centred knowledge production systems, which (possibly) engage in forms of epistemic violence (Brunner 2020, Motta 2019). Following Rosalba Icaza and Sara de Jong (2019: xv), teaching with a decolonial research perspective entails the use of critical pedagogy which "understands teachers as learners and students as co-responsible with their teachers for the creation of a communal space of learning". This partially breaks up the established hierarchy between students and teacher, while also demanding more involvement and critical engagement of students. The dismantling of hierarchies is in line with the general goal of creating space for the process of unlearning systems of colonial knowledge production (Vergès 2019: 92). In practice, this has meant for us to take the interests, abilities and backgrounds of the students into greater consideration when planning our seminars. Giving students the space to actually be involved in the preparation of the seminar has led to greater involvement in class discussions and has systematically improved the sense of a safe learning environment, which fosters greater self-reflection.

Leading students to reflect on their positionality in knowledge productions takes time and requires engagement with a variety of didactical methods, as critical self-reflection rarely develops after a 90-minute frontal monologue. Despite the great results coming from the application of diverse didactical methods, the engagement with them and the preparation of seminars in such a manner are often downgraded as "school-like" by other colleagues. The additional effort required for the seminar development further reduces the time available for other research projects or publications. Seminars that are conceptualised so as to further critical thinking and self-reflection are, nevertheless, greatly appreciated by students, leading to large enrolment numbers among students from different disciplinary backgrounds. While this can be seen as a great accomplishment for lecturers, it also puts them in the position of creating seminars that are interdisciplinary and student oriented. One way of adequately meeting the need for interdisciplinarity and offering diverse per-

spectives is co-teaching with other colleagues, ideally with researchers from different geographical areas and (inter-)disciplinary fields. More incentives are required for decolonial co-teaching initiatives, taking a cue from digital opportunities to bring together student and faculty bodies across spaces and positionalities, as some of us explored during the COVID-induced digital teaching period. Through a minimal use of resources this period allowed us to open up for students from universities based in the Global South (albeit with their own challenges given certain digital divides) as well as to produce and use audio podcast-based guest lectures and video-based guest-moderated seminar sessions along with online-learning platforms providing resource portfolios and interactive group work with students and colleagues from and based in Asia as well as Europe.

Signpost 2 – Academic research

With regards to academic research, a decolonial-feminist approach entails attempting to bridge, or rather to bypass, the insider–outsider conundrum, centre–periphery asymmetries, hegemonic discourses and practices within national as well as international academic knowledge productions. Doing so has been an intricate endeavour in many ways and on many fronts, which we can only briefly sketch out here.

On the one hand it calls for critical engagement with the practices and materials available, which more often than not (still) remain expressions and manifestations of academic knowledge production from the Global North. Many handbooks and readers on, for instance, social theories or on research methodologies are centred and subsequently often detached from the diverse ground realities, discourses, resources and agendas as well as respective challenges as experienced within academic everyday life and state of affairs in Global South countries. Quite frequently, case studies provided in such training manuals are written from perspectives of academics positioned within the Global North and focus on their positionalities and challenges when entering the field.

On the other hand, a decolonial-feminist approach involves engagement with the everyday politics of critical social sciences within a post-colonial polity. University systems mirror wider socio-political contestations and quests for control, along with a paucity of resources in addition to social, economic and cultural stratifications. One key issue is the self-censorship by academics themselves, be they students in search of a thesis project or faculty engaged in research projects or supervision, or outright censorship by academic or state authorities to maintain and establish a certain hegemonic policy on diverse

issues such as identity, minorities, security or development. Those who challenge hegemonic narratives and practices not only find themselves at risk in terms of career advancement or precarious work contracts, but subject to demotions, cancellation of work contracts, legal charges (e.g. for violating national security laws or for being blasphemous) or extra-judicial measures such as disappearances or worse. Questions of censorship and hegemonic knowledge productions within a public university system have implications for critical knowledge productions – who can be critical where and in what position? Who do we engage with as academic partners if critical social scientists might find it difficult to maintain a secure status within public academic institutions or to cooperate with research partners from abroad on no-go areas or topics?

The problem with socioeconomic stratifications among academics in a Global South community can be highlighted with the example of long-standing initiatives and networks such as the Karachi-based Collective for Social Science Research, which started in 2001 with studies drawing from triangulated methodological approaches. The majority of the Collective's members are degree holders from elite international universities or elite private national universities. They are thus part of a small network of highly qualified social science researchers working within a distinctly more open and well-resourced space, with access and linkages to international bodies of knowledge production that commission research work.[14] This does not intend, in any way, to diminish the value, importance, quality, rigour and critical knowledge-production generated by the Collective. However, we need to distinguish their realm from the circumstances of the majority of social scientists based at public universities and colleges across a country such as Pakistan who lack the positioning and visibility of the Collective's knowledge productions.

In contemplating decentred approaches to critical knowledge productions, Meghana Nayak and Eric Selbin's approach to decentring international relations could be insightful. They critique a myopic misreading of hegemonic power versus the "myriad possibilities" of thinking about the societies, public affairs and politics thereof (Nayak / Selbin 2010: 2). When following this line of critical inquiry as suggested by Nayak and Selbin as well as Suresh Canagarajah (2002), among many others to be highlighted here, and operationalising the concept of centre and periphery/peripheries for the cases at hand, a multi-level and multi-layered matrix of knowledge production (read: knowledge (as) power) manifests itself. In academic research and togetherness, we therefore need to spotlight and tackle the distinct conditions at the centre of analysis compared to those at the many "peripheries", often in conditions marked by volatility,

14 The Collective's research draws in particular from a political economy perspective as well as informal collective action and social networks on a wide range of topics such as agriculture, cities, climate change, nutrition, marginality, migration, reproductive health, resilience and social protection. Studies are based at the intersection of (inter)national academia, consultancy for (non-)governmental organisations and international development agencies (see Research Collective 2020).

disconnect and resources' scarcity, linked to experiences of multiple "borders" to engage in (inter)nationally recognised knowledge production and exposure thereof.

Such a complex matrix remains challenging in multiple and diverse contexts. As Caroline Hau argued in her reflections on "Southeast Asian Studies as Practiced in Asia" during a panel discussion at the EuroSEAS conference in 2019, those are manifold: first, hierarchies in knowledge productions are not challenged by writing in English.[15] Second, academic fields within the Global South, namely Southeast Asia, are marked by censorship and taboo topics which rely on alternate academic fields, more than often outside the region and within the Global North, for free knowledge exchange and debates (while encountering additional configurations of power and inequality, one might add).[16]

Signpost 3 – Challenges for decentred academic togetherness and exchange

This special issue was developed out of the international conference EuroSEAS 2019 hosted by our department. Student assistants at our institute were greatly involved throughout the organisation process and were vital in bringing the conference to life. Reflecting upon their experiences in organising such an international conference focusing on Southeast Asia, Merle Groß, Lara Hofner, Danny Kretschmer, Judith von Plato and Jona Pomerance wrote in our institute's newsletter that the conference portrayed "a gap between the critique of power relations within the regional studies and the implementation of this critique in academic practice" (Groß et al. 2020: 36). This is a great summary of what can repeatedly be seen in academia today.

While discourses and methods develop, academic practice is more often than not left unchanged. In seminars we preach that silent voices need to be given space but in conference preparations too often it is forgotten that there needs to be organisational backing for marginalised people to have the necessary means to participate, to engage, to be heard. Sufficient funding for scholars and knowledge brokers from the Global South without institutional financial backing or any direct institutional affiliation should be one of the first goals to

15 Given that English today constitutes the hegemonic language for the production and publication of knowledge, thus becoming visible and readable within academia is linked to issues of linguistic standardisation and literacy as well as to a distinct impoverishment of conceptualisations and expressions that rely on a plurality of languages, terminologies, their diversely conceived notions, practiced conceptualisations and connotations. See for instance, a critique of the Global North-centred term LGBTQI and vernacular language practices and activists' discourses on gender non-conforming identities in Myanmar (Chua / Gilbert 2015) and Indonesia (Ridwan / Wu 2018).

16 Notes taken by Andrea Fleschenberg during the EuroSEAS 2019 conference, Roundtable on Southeast Asian Studies – Directions, Themes and Disciplines, Berlin, September 2019.

tackle when organising conferences, especially conferences within the field of Area Studies. Unsurprisingly, leaving this topic to the last minute decreases the chances for greater funding. We managed to obtain full conference funding for eight scholars from the Global South.[17] While we were aware that this is still a small number compared to the hundreds of conference participants, it was important to us to give these scholarships primarily to feminist activist scholars, who often fall between the cracks in funding applications.

In this context, the general process of determining funding guidelines for academic associations as key organising bodies of such conferences should also be subjected to closer scrutiny. These guidelines are often developed by privileged Western scholars who base them on their perception of who is worthy of funding and counts as a valid or established – and thus "deserving" – scholar and knowledge broker to be included. In the light of academic togetherness this process should also be made more inclusive and transparent, cater to intersectional dynamics of power and inequality in the field of academia and thus further narrow the power imbalances within academia and across academic fields.

Returning to EuroSEAS 2019, we nevertheless tried to use the time and space to strengthen our academic relations. With the receivers of the scholarship provided by a German political foundation[18] we organised a focus group discussion on our common understanding of how we work on the topic of feminist critical knowledge production from different angles and how we could extend our collaborations. Note that "collaborations" is conceived not only in terms of combined research projects but also as a means of gaining a better understanding of how differently our activities and works are being affected by shrinking spaces.[19]

Another issue concerns the question of partner universities in the Global South. There are often well-organised Western-style and/or privately financed universities in the Global South with which it is easier to collaborate than with a number of public universities. Private universities usually have a better academic infrastructure, greater academic output and more funding than public universities, which usually draw from a wider and more diverse, inclusive student body. A challenge emerges that can only partly be resolved, for instance via a hub-based approach where a well-established and functioning private university serves as a vehicle for a wider cooperation with public universities. The idea behind this strategy is to be able to "produce" according to required, meas-

17 Apart from this our colleague Rosa Cordillera A. Castillo additionally succeeded in including an even larger number of scholars from the Philippines as part of her drive for Philippines Studies at the IAAW.

18 Stipends were granted by the Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, which is aligned with the German Green Party and works within a number of Asian countries from which we could thus invite activist scholars.

19 In this context, "shrinking spaces" refers to processes in which civil society and researchers are put under pressure by governments and state authorities. Their work is being restricted, threatened, or targeted with defamation, thereby limiting their possibilities, e.g. shrinking the spaces in which they can operate.

ured and peer-reviewed academic outputs and hence to perform within a set academic standards and performance indicators which are part of further third-party funding success.

Engaging in capacity-building activities with public universities can also lead to a reconfigured (neo-)colonial, Global North-centred approach to academic togetherness apart from being subjected to a projectification of academic knowledge productions and exchange that often does not allow for sustainable network and infrastructure development. This might be due to the resources made available by funding institutions and the specific time limitations of funded projects in combination with divergent agenda-settings and interests by academic partners involved. From our experiences with several grant proposals with a variety of funding organisations one of the greatest challenges we face is the inequality of available financial resources and academic infrastructure between the Global North and the Global South. In almost all cases the main applicants as well as the financial backing are from the Global North. Although the researchers from the Global North and the Global South engage in a horizontal academic relationship, partners from the Global South are often forced into a position of dependence due to a restricted access to financial resources. One possible solution is to budget financial means for the provision of fellowships for colleagues and PhD students from the Global South. These should be granted in addition to the continuing offer of academic supervision of PhD students in cooperation with our colleagues from the Global South. In consideration of the points just mentioned there is still one aspect that cannot be changed or accounted for: in most cases, the project lead and the majority of Principal Investigators will be from the Global North. Researchers from the Global South very rarely have the possibility to apply for funding independently. In other words, they are highly dependent on personal academic connections to researchers from the Global North in order to acquire finances for their research approaches and projects.

Another aspect that is important when applying for and carrying out projects with colleagues from the Global South and employing a decolonial, decentred approach is to provide space for different academic styles and approaches to academic writing and research methods that might not conform with Global North-centred academic standards. We need to open up more avenues for acknowledging different writing styles and methodologies used to transport knowledge and information.

Finally, there are also conceptual challenges that we face. Each call for project proposals comes with certain conditions and definitions that need to be considered, accepted and met by the applicants. What does it mean for a project if the funding is provided by an organisation or institution that defines countries from the Global South as countries that occupy a marginalised position in the global science production? Furthermore, many calls are strict about where

the financial means can be spent, often excluding institutions based in the Global South from directly receiving any of the funding or managing it themselves. How do we engage with these limitations and definitions when we apply for funding for our projects even if some of these regulations are opposed to our quest for decolonial, decentred and critical knowledge productions together with our partners from the Global South? To what extent is it possible and effective to openly criticise such formulations in the calls of funding agencies, e.g. during information sessions? What are other avenues?

Instead of conclusions

Bearing in mind the concept of academic togetherness and our experiences as touched on in the signposts above, we have to revisit our responsibilities towards our academic partners from the Global South. One issue is our responsibility towards so-called "scholars at risk" when engaging with questions of power and risk. This also influences who becomes part of critical knowledge productions (and is in a position to do so, for instance in international publications). While there exist a number of programmes for scholars at risk, some of these scholars might not meet certain performance indicators of major calls for international fellowship programmes. Furthermore, they might face reprisals within their academic institutions such as not being promoted or having to leave established academic institutions and then not qualifying for grant applications in the Global North, or not being recognised as academic scholars or knowledge brokers.

While we struggle to find solutions in order to decolonialise our academic lives, our theories and our practices, there are many questions that remain. How do we ensure more inclusivity beyond limited grants and programmes such as the scholar-at-risk programmes, more openness to alternative positions for knowledge productions that inform academic teaching and research? How can we cater for inclusiveness in terms of voices, languages and methodological ways of (re)presenting knowledges? How do we counter our own hegemonic academic practices and self-censorship in order to continue to be eligible ourselves for (research) visas necessary to further our own academic merits? How important is academic solidarity, how risky is it, and for whom? How can this be conceptualised and resourced in our own academic practices? Who has whose back?

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Transcultural Lives of Myanmar Migrant Youths in Thailand: Language Acquisition, Self-perceived Integration, and Sense of Belonging

Research Note

Gunnar Stange, Kwanchit Sasiwongsaroj

Abstract

Globalisation and international mobility have led people to settle in vastly different cultural contexts. Transnationally situated migrant families are becoming a more regular feature of children's and youths' lives in today's world. Thailand, one of four major economies in Southeast Asia, hosts over half of the region's migrant workers. In 2018, there were three million migrants living in Thailand and an estimated 300,000 to 400,000 of those were children and youths. It has been noted that migration experiences constitute substantial interferences in children's and youths' development and well-being, given the environmental and cultural changes they are exposed to. However, despite this trend, very few studies focus on the children of migrant workers. Language and language acquisition are central issues in debates about transculturation, cultural identity in transnational migration, as well as integration in host countries. Based on qualitative research with Myanmar migrant workers' children, aged between 12 and 18, in two Migrant Learning Centres (MLCs) in Ranong province in southern Thailand, this study contributes to current debates on transnational family migration by arguing for the centrality of language acquisition in the everyday lives of young migrants and their self-perceived integration into the host society.

Keywords: Thailand, migration, children of migrant workers, integration, language acquisition, sense of belonging

Introduction

Thailand is the fourth largest economy in Southeast Asia. In recent decades, the country has transitioned from being a net-sending to a net-receiving nation for labour migration (Huguet / Punpuing 2005). A massive influx of low-skilled

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workers from Cambodia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar and Vietnam into Thailand began during the 1990s (United Nations 2019). Inconsistent economic growth, social inequalities and marginalisation as well as political instability are major factors forcing people from neighbouring countries to seek work and a better life in Thailand (Gerard / Bal 2020). Given Thailand's increasingly ageing population, low unemployment rates and continuing economic growth, its demand for migrant workers has been constantly rising in recent decades (Sasiwongsaroj / Burasit 2019). Moreover, due to rapidly increasing education levels, younger Thais have been gradually turning away from the so-called 3D (dirty, dangerous and demeaning) jobs, which are increasingly being filled by low-skilled labour migrants from Thailand's neighbouring countries (Lathapipat 2011). According to the Foreign Workers Administration Office (FWAO), the number of migrant workers in Thailand increased from 632,068 in 2001 to over three million in 2019 (FWAO 2020). Among foreign workers in Thailand, migrant workers from Myanmar represent the largest proportion (67%), followed by Cambodians (23%) and Laotians (10%) (ibid.). These migration dynamics are contributing to a demographic transformation, as not only migrant workers themselves are coming to Thailand, but also their children, who either accompany them or are born in Thailand. The exact number of migrant workers' children is difficult to calculate, as large numbers of them are undocumented. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimated that there were between 300,000 and 400,000 migrant workers' children in Thailand in 2018 (UN 2019: 99). The World Vision Foundation of Thailand (WVFT) estimates that around 60,000 babies are born to migrant workers in Thailand every year (Chanwanpen 2018).

Despite these trends, the integration of migrant workers into Thai society has never been addressed as a policy issue by the Government of Thailand. Over the past three decades, the management of work migration has mainly been framed around national security concerns that permitted migrants to reside and work in Thailand on a temporary basis only (Hall 2011). With labour shortages and global market trends becoming increasingly evident, the Thai state has begun to realise that the demand for migrant workers can no longer be framed as just a short-term replacement for local labour demands. Yet, provisions concerning permanent residency and citizenship acquisition for migrant workers have largely been left unaddressed by policy makers. In addition, despite the significant large and growing second generation of migrant workers in Thai society, only in 2005 and 2008, respectively, did the Thai government provide regulations that allowed for education (Ministry of Education 2005) and birth registration of migrant children (Royal Thai Government Gazette 2008). Krongkwan Traitongyoo (2008) argued that "Thainess" – the officially propagated "trinity of nation, religion, and monarchy" (p. 221) to forge a national

(ethnic) Thai identity – plays an important role in dealing with different groups of migrant worker populations. In her work, Traitongyoo reflects upon the relationship between the construction of Thainess around language, religion and citizenship and the related immigration policies; the policy decisions regarding the inclusion and exclusion of migrant populations; and the ethnic relations within Thai society. It appears that the Thai state deliberately prevents migrant workers from either permanently residing in the country or integrating into Thai society and becoming citizens, as they represent the constitutive Other to the state-promoted idea of Thainess. In her study on the perception of Myanmar migrant workers in Samut Sakhon Province, Puttaporn Areeprachakun (2020: 153) concludes that "migrant workers from Myanmar are continuously discussed as Other or dangerous aliens who are a source of problems in Thailand, not because they are creating problems but because of the ways the state actors view and manage them". Yet, as Draper et al. (2019), among others, have shown, these othering processes not only concern migrant populations but are also part of the everyday experiences of non-Thai-speaking citizens in Thailand. Moreover, although the Thai government advertises and insists on pursuing an "Education for All" (EFA) policy (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2017), there is no official reliable data on the proportion of migrant workers' children enrolled in public schools, nor on their schooling outcomes (Nawarat 2019). In 2014, a study commissioned by the NGOs Save the Children in Thailand and World Education Thailand (2014) among migrant workers communities found that an estimated 60 per cent of migrant workers' children were not enrolled in public schools (p. 15).

The research on which this paper is based aims at contributing to the understanding of how Thai language proficiency among Myanmar migrant workers' children enrolled in the secondary education level – aged between 12 and 18 – affects their self-perceived integration into Thai society and their sense of belonging to their and/or their parents' place of origin in Myanmar and to their current home / residence in Thailand. As the research project is still ongoing, this papers intends to, firstly, outline and reflect upon the process of the first field research period and, secondly, discuss its preliminary findings. The authors conducted a qualitative case study among Myanmar migrant workers' children in two privately run Migrant Learning Centres (MLC) in Mueang district in the province of Ranong in Southern Thailand. The province hosts the highest proportion of (mainly Myanmar) migrant workers in relation to the native Thai population compared with other provinces in Thailand (Tuangratananon et al. 2019). Preliminary findings indicate a strong relationship between Thai language proficiency and the self-perceived integration of the interviewees into Thai society. However, the research also showed that the extent to which the interviewees felt integrated into Thai society also depended on their individual migration histories, the frequency of visits to Myanmar, the intensity of contact

with friends and family members in Myanmar and in Thailand as well as the educational institution they were attending in Ranong.

Language acquisition and sense of belonging

International migration intensifies the connections between different peoples, cultures and spaces (Jess / Massey 1995). Interactions with different cultures and different languages of the host country as well as transnational practices occur and impact the daily lives of migrants (Voigt-Graf 2005, Morales 2016). This poses immense challenges for migrant children to adapt to the new social milieu and physical environment. The ability to use the host country's main language is recognised as a crucial factor in the well-being of immigrants (Hernandez et al. 2007, Toppelberg / Collins 2010). It is also a predictor of social competence and educational achievements (Farmer 1997). Most research on language proficiency among immigrants builds on the human capital theory. Here, language skills are recognised as human capital for migrants in terms of increasing job opportunities and facilitating social and political participation (Chiswick 2008, Isphording 2015).

Language proficiency is widely accepted as a key driver of immigrants' integration. Thus, the learning of the national language has become a cornerstone of integration policies in many countries across Europe (Nusche et al. 2009, Siarova / Essomba 2014). Cristina Ros i Solé (2013) showed that knowledge of the host language is seen as a barometer of migrants' integration and is a part of so-called "knowledge of society", which is compulsory for entering, settling or applying for citizenship. However, the term "integration" is difficult to define and deliberately left open because the particular requirements for acceptance by a receiving society vary greatly from country to country. It is frequently linked to other complex terms such as cohesion, sense of belonging and citizenship, and the responsibility for integration is borne by many actors, not only migrants but also other agencies, such as local communities, the host government, institutions, and so on (Penninx 2004).

However, migrants generally maintain close links with their places of origin and establish local networks at their places of destination, which leads to the creation of diasporas as well as translocal spaces (Greiner / Sakdapolrak 2013) with multiple linguistic allegiances and perceptions of belonging that are no longer identified purely with territory (Valentine et al. 2008). Sense of belonging is understood here as "an individual's sense of identification or positioning in relation to a group" (Tovar et al. 2010: 200) as well as to certain spaces and places (Raffaetà / Duff 2013). Language is claimed as central in order to maintain transnational relations in transnational migration (Rumbaut 2002) – particularly

as digital communication has become cheaper and more accessible, facilitating migrant ties to the homeland – as well as to "form and maintain enduring interpersonal attachments" (Baumeister / Leary 1995: 522) and relations in host countries.

In this context, several studies have found that migrant children enter a state of "bifocality" which subjects them to the contrasting demands for linguistic assimilation between the host country and their (ethnic) community (Fassetta 2014, Phinney et al. 2001, Rouse 1992). A study of Polish migrant children in Scotland showed for example that the children spoke their own language and English in different spatial contexts (Polish at home, English at school). The intersection of the cultural frames they interact with can lead them to perceive themselves as being Scottish or British at school and Polish at home, and this affects their sense of belonging accordingly (Moskal / Sime 2016). Similarly, second generation migrants from India in Canada expressed a "dual consciousness". The construction of their identities referred strongly to both countries. They felt Indian yet also Canadian, and they retained a sense of loyalty to both India and Canada (Somerville 2008).

These studies exemplify the complex and often contradictory social dynamics second generation migrants are confronted with when navigating their lives within and between different socio-linguistic fields. Giving the children of migrant workers the educational opportunities to learn the language of the host country is one thing, accepting their mother tongue as valuable and promoting its use is another. As Moskal and Sime (2016: 45) have pointed out: "the task of maintaining children's home language too often falls to the families. Schools need better mechanisms to promote home languages in meaningful ways, and to include them in the curriculum."

Research sites

With around 193,000 inhabitants, Ranong Province on Thailand's southwest coast is the country's second smallest province. It shares a 169-kilometer land border and an approximately 90-kilometer maritime border with Myanmar. Mueang district was selected as the study area because it has the highest density of migrants in the province. Although fisheries and the fishing industry are dominant in Mueang district, all kinds of businesses that employ migrant workers can be found in this area, including construction, agriculture, factories, services and domestic work. According to a report by the FWAO in August 2019, there were 32,504 registered migrant workers in Ranong. The number of migrant children in Ranong was estimated by the Thai Health Promotion Foundation at about 7,670 in 2016 (MGR Online 2017).

As shown in Table 1, the majority of migrant workers' children in Ranong do not attend Thai public education institutions, but are enrolled in privately run Migrant Learning Centres (MLC) that have a very limited capacity for teaching Thai language and mostly follow the official primary and part of the secondary school curriculum of Myanmar (Tuangratananon et al. 2019). Most MLCs are privately funded through tuition fees and receive partial subsidies by the Government of Myanmar. In many cases, they only offer classes until the eighth grade.[1] In order to receive a Myanmar high school degree, students have to continue their studies until the tenth grade in Myanmar. Thus, children and youths studying in these learning centres either drop out of school after grade eight or leave for Myanmar to finish their secondary school degree.

Table 1: Myanmar children enrolled in different types of schools in Ranong in 2018 according to age level

	3 years kindergarten	4–6 years pre-school	6–11 years primary school	12–14 years secondary school	total
municipality	52	3	11	9	75
governmental school primary level	/	336	776	31	1,143
private school	/	20	34	/	54
governmental school secondary level	/	/	/	26	26
Migrant Learning Centre Thai-Myanmar	162	710	1,707	236	2,815
total	214	1,069	2,528	302	4,113

Source: Sasiwongsaroj /Arphattananon 2018: 8. Data compiled from Ranong Office of Educational Service Area, the Secondary Educational Service Area Office 14, Ranong Provincial Education Office, the Office of Non-Formal Education (ONFE) Ranong Province, Special Education Office Ranong Province, and Department of Local Administration, Ranong Province.

The study was conducted from 1 to 14 August 2019, in two MLCs with distinct features with regard to the curriculum taught as well as the quality and extent of language education. The first learning centre is funded by the Marist Asia Foundation and run by the Marist Mission[2] in Ranong (Marist Asia Foundation 2020). It offers primary and secondary education to around 200 Myanmar students. Additionally, the learning centre offers a two-year international diploma degree in cooperation with the Australian Catholic University (ACU)

1 Interview with a female teacher from Myanmar at Wattana Learning Center, Mueang district, 9 August 2019.

2 The Society of Mary (Marists) is an international Roman Catholic religious congregation, founded in 1816.

in a combination of in-class and online teaching. The primary education curriculum has been accredited by the Thai Ministry of Education (TME). At the time of the research, the school administration had been in the accreditation process with the TME for its secondary education curriculum. As opposed to other MLCs, the Marist Asia Foundation Learning Centre focuses on trilingual education. The primary teaching language is Burmese (Bama), the national language of Myanmar (Aye / Sercombe 2014). Additionally, students undergo language training in Thai and English languages for at least one hour per schooling day. The teaching staff is comprised of Thai nationals, international (mainly Australian) volunteer teachers as well as teachers from Myanmar. The school itself is housed in a two-story building with separate classrooms for every class, comprised of 15 to 25 students.[3]

The second MLC where research was conducted is the Wattana Learning Centre. It is situated in an area of Mueang district that is mainly inhabited by migrant worker families from Myanmar. The school differs fundamentally from the Marist MLC in terms of equipment, curricular foci and learning conditions. The MLC is housed in a ground-level building with no separate classrooms where approximately 100 students are taught simultaneously in small groups from grade one to grade eight in one school room. When the authors first visited the MLC, they were struck by the enormous volume of noise in the approximately 150 square-meter space. The teaching follows the official Myanmar curriculum for primary and secondary education but does not offer a secondary school leaving certificate. Students must either leave school at grade eight or attend the last two years of secondary education and finish their qualifications in Myanmar. With the exception of one native Thai language teacher, the teaching staff at the MLC are exclusively from Myanmar and teach in Burmese only. Thai language classes are only offered for one hour per week. Although the school had received some institutional funding from the Thai and Myanmar governments in the past, at the time of the research, the MLC depended solely on the very low school fees paid by the students' families.[4]

Methodological approach and research process

Given the scarce and anecdotal evidence that exists on the interplay of language acquisition and sense of belonging as well as self-perceived integration of Myanmar migrant workers' children in Thailand, this research followed an explorative qualitative research approach that employed narrative guideline-based interviews. The interview guideline was structured along the following

3 Interview with the head of administration of the Marist Asia Foundation Learning Centre, Mueang district, 2 August 2020.

4 Interview with a female teacher from Myanmar at Wattana Learning Center, Mueang district, 9 August 2019.

topics: a) registration status (birth certificate, local residence permit); b) family background (occupations of parents, time of arrival of parents in Thailand); c) migration history (born in Myanmar or Thailand, duration of stay in Thailand); d) transcultural experiences (role of language in everyday relations/interactions with Thai nationals); e) translocal relations (financial remittances sent to Myanmar, frequency of visits to Myanmar and by relatives from Myanmar); f) sense of belonging; and g) coexistence with Thai nationals (frequency and quality of contact with Thai nationals, discrimination experiences).

The researchers collaborated with two female community-based interpreters (CBI) in their early twenties who translated English/Burmese and Burmese/English, as all interviewees preferred to be interviewed in their native language, Burmese. Both interpreters are alumni of the above-mentioned international diploma programme of the Marist MLC, are fluent in Burmese, Thai and English, and are children of migrant workers from Myanmar. Although they were non-professional interpreters, they had gained a lot of experience in interpretation for a number of research projects relating to migrant workers. Research has shown that the need for translation might impact the accuracy of the collected data as the translators might be selective in their interpretation in the sense that they might fail to translate certain (sensitive) issues or give other (more comforting or less sensitive) issues higher priority (see e.g., Jacobson / Landau 2003). The authors attempted to address that limitation by engaging the CBIs in continuous reflections on the interview results and in discussions of their observations and perceptions of the interviewees throughout the research process.

Due to their social embeddedness in the local migrant community and their resultant local knowledge, both CBIs vitally contributed to obtaining access to the research participants as well as to the contextualisation and interpretation of information that the latter provided (see also Boyd 2019). It needs to be emphasised that the collaboration with CBIs is not a methodology as such, but an orientation that aims to even out “the unequal power dynamics that have defined traditional research practices” (ibid.: 103). However, although we actively involved both CBIs in reflections on the research process, it must be noted here that they identified themselves mainly as interpreters and did not pro-actively engage in structuring the research process. Both CBIs requested to remain anonymous as they considered several issues that were discussed during the interviews – such as discrimination experiences – to be highly sensitive. Both CBIs assessed their political agency (Lazar / Nuijten 2013) in Thailand as highly limited and saw assimilation – e.g. using Thai language rather than Burmese in public spaces – as the most secure way to navigate in Thai society. On the other hand, they repeatedly expressed their strong interest in and belief in the importance of the research topic alongside their hope that the research results might contribute to an improved access to formal education for second-generation migrants in Thailand in the future.

In both MLCs, the interviews took place in a separate room[5] and were conducted as group interviews with two to four students participating. Initial test interviews had shown that students felt more comfortable being interviewed in a peer setting rather than individually. It has been noted that group settings can help to create a safe peer environment for children and youths and reduce the power imbalance between researchers and participants (Adler et al. 2019). On the other hand, group interviews carry the risk that opinion leaders within the group influence the answers and discussion behaviour of other group members. Crucial in this specific context, however, was the generally greater willingness of the interviewees to be questioned in groups. The sampling was done randomly in so far as the respective class teachers had previously asked for volunteers among their students to join the study. Altogether, 40 students in the Marist Learning Centre and 24 students in the Wattana Learning Centre participated in the group interviews. Depending on the number of participants in the group interviews, the interviews lasted between 35 and 60 minutes. Additionally, guideline-based interviews were conducted with teachers and administrative staff of the MLCs in order to obtain contextual information on both institutions, such as the curriculum, financing aspects, role of language training, etc.

Due to time and funding limitations, this first round of research was conducted over a period of only two weeks; therefore, the amount of time the research team spent with the interviewees was mainly limited to the relatively short group interviews described above. We assume that this impacted the research results in so far as more frequent and intense meetings with the interviewees would have resulted in the establishment of a relationship of mutual trust and would have allowed for a deeper understanding of their perceptions.

The research was based on prior and informed consent by the interviewees and their parents as well as the rectorate of both MLCs. The research was undertaken in accordance with the guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki (WMA 2018) and the Statement of Ethics by the American Anthropological Association (AAA 2012). The ethics approval for this research was obtained from the Committee for Research Ethics (Social Sciences), Mahidol University, Nakhon Pathom, Thailand (COA No. 2019/07-240). In order to protect the identity of the study participants, no names are disclosed in this paper.

5 We were allowed to use the only separate room in the Wattana Learning Centre, which was usually used by the teachers for preparing lessons.

Preliminary research results

As explained in the introduction of the two MLCs, there is a significant difference between the two educational institutions in terms of the curricular importance of language training. The Wattana Learning Centre is essentially a Myanmar educational institution, which aims at enabling its students to continue their further education in Myanmar. The Marist Learning Centre, on the other hand, tries to prepare its students for a potential further educational path in Thailand and contributes to the linguistic integration of its students in Thailand.

These fundamental differences were reflected primarily in the interviewees' self-assessment of their Thai language skills and also in their future education and job ambitions. Generally, students from the Marist MLC suggested that their Thai language skills were at least at a basic level that allowed them to interact with native Thais. Students aged 15 years and above often reported being relatively fluent in Thai and able to assist their parents in situations when they needed Burmese-Thai translation, for example during hospital visits. Most interviewees at Marist MLC also expressed the wish to continue higher education in Thailand, hoping to find decently paid employment in the future in Thailand in order to support themselves and their families. For example, one student at the Marist MLC stated: "I am fluent in spoken and written Thai and can express and read everything I want in Thai. Yet, I prefer to use Burmese language."[6] However, older students in their early twenties who had successfully finished the international diploma programme offered by the Marist MLC in cooperation with the ACU explained in an informal conversation that they sometimes preferred using the Thai language with their Myanmar friends in public so as to be recognised as Thai rather than Myanmar and, thus, less likely to experience discrimination, such as derogatory treatment. As one of the ACU graduates told us: "although I can make a relatively decent living in Ranong, I will go back to Yangon [the former capital of Myanmar], to work there, and contribute to the development of my country."[7] When we asked the student for her reasons, she said that Myanmar would not be able to improve upon its socio-economic situation unless people who had attained higher education abroad returned to contribute to the socio-economic betterment of the country. At the same time, she admitted that, although born in Ranong, she was proud to be Myanmar and would therefore not consider applying for Thai citizenship,[8] but preferred to live in her country of origin.

6 Male student, 15 years old, interview at Marist MLC, Ranong, 5 August 2010.

7 Informal conversation with the two CBIs and one of their male friends at a local restaurant in Ranong, 4 August 2019.

8 In some of the interviews and conversations, students who were 18 and older told us that they had filed applications for Thai citizenship but had never heard back from the authorities.

In the Wattana MLC, most students assessed their Thai language skills as either non-existent or very basic. In some cases, students considered the Thai language proficiency of their parents as being more advanced than their own. Still, many of the students expressed interest in improving their Thai language skills, as they considered them important for their everyday lives in Ranong.[9] With regard to their future education aspirations, most students at the Wattana MLC expressed interest in finishing their high school degrees in Myanmar or finding a job in Ranong after finishing grade eight at the MLC. In some cases, older siblings of the interviewees had finished their high school degrees in Myanmar or were currently pursuing their last two years in a high school in Myanmar at the time of this study.

Whereas most students interviewed at the Marist MLC were either born in Ranong or had come at a very early age to Thailand, the migration histories of the interviewees at the Wattana MLC were more complex and, in some cases, characterised by moving back and forth between Myanmar and Thailand, depending on whether one or both of their parents had the opportunity to work in Ranong. Students who had either lived longer periods in Myanmar or frequently went back to visit their families expressed a strong sense of belonging to their place of origin in Myanmar and also imagined their future there rather than in Ranong or other places in Thailand. The students at Wattana MLC more frequently reported close relations to and regular interactions with family members in Myanmar. This included the regular sending of financial remittances by their parents to Myanmar.

Another very crucial factor affecting how the students in both MLCs assessed their local integration, as well as personal attachment to Ranong, was the nature of the legal documents they possessed. Only very few of the interviewees were holders of the so-called ten-years-residence card and, thus, able to prove their legal presence in Thailand when detained by the police. Most students only possessed a student card issued by their respective MLC, which is not considered an official identification document in Thailand. As one student explained: "In the past, we could live in Ranong without official documents, but now we need them, even if we are not working."[10] As obtaining residence registration is a costly and lengthy bureaucratic process, most of our interviewees did not possess official registration documents. Especially students who had only limited Thai language skills described how they would only rarely leave their neighbourhoods, as they were afraid of being taken into custody by the police and not being able to explain themselves in such a situation. Without a doubt, this restriction of movement constitutes an alienating experience in the host society as compared to the freedom of movement when residing in or visiting Myanmar.

9 Three male students, 14, 15 and 16 years old, interviewed at Wattana MLC, 13 August 2019.

10 A female student, 15 years old, interview at Wattana MLC, 13 August 2019.

The extent to which students interacted and socialised with the native Thai population of Ranong depended highly on the neighbourhoods their families lived in. Students who lived in mixed neighbourhoods had mostly experienced friendly but distant relations with their Thai neighbours. Students who lived in predominantly Myanmar quarters had none or very few Thai acquaintances or friends and reported only rare interactions with native Thais. Interviewees who had regular and frequent interaction with Thai nationals not only showed a stronger sense of belonging to Ranong but were also less likely to talk about experiences of discrimination in their everyday lives. However, nearly all respondents had experienced some kind of discrimination and showed a strong awareness of the fact that they were not equal to the native Thai population. At the same time, although students reported discriminatory experiences, in most cases they were reluctant to discuss them in detail. This might be explained by both the sensitivity of the issue as well as the limited amount of time the researchers spent with the students, which left little room for building a deeper relationship of trust.

Conclusions

In this article, we presented methodological reflections as well as preliminary results of an ongoing research project that aims to contribute to the understanding of the interplay between language acquisition and self-perceived integration of second-generation migrants from Myanmar in Thailand. Although the research area Ranong hosts the largest number of migrant workers and migrant workers' children as a share of the province's native Thai population, thus far, the issue of the interplay between language acquisition, sense of belonging and self-perceived integration of second generation migrants in this region has not been taken up by social science research.

The preliminary results of this study indicate that, for the children of migrant workers from Myanmar, Thai language skills are closely interlinked with how they perceive their integration into Thai society and how strongly they feel a sense of belonging to Ranong in particular and Thailand in general. The better the students assessed their Thai language proficiency, the stronger they felt connected to Ranong, and the more positively they evaluated their local integration into Thai society.

However, despite the fundamental differences in Thai language training quality in the two researched MLCs, this study found that most of the interviewees in both institutions regarded themselves as second-class members of Thai society. This was mainly due to experiences of everyday discrimination as well as the insecure legal status of most of the study's participants. Both MLCs

clearly constitute a parallel space within the predominantly Thai society, as they were attended solely by Myanmar students. Although the MLCs play a vital role in providing educational access for the children of Myanmar migrant workers who otherwise would most likely not attend any educational institution, they are also a signifier of the prevailing segregation between migrant and native Thai children and youths.

In principal, Thailand's "Education for All" policy must be viewed as a promising approach that reflects and is in line with the global Sustainable Development Goals agenda. But, in order to live up to this promise, the Thai government needs to actively create incentives for migrant worker families to school their children in Thai educational institutions by, for example, offering bi-lingual primary education and/or special language training programmes.

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Book Reviews

Claudia Brunner, *Epistemische Gewalt. Wissen und Herrschaft in der kolonialen Moderne*. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2020. 336 pages, €35,00. ISBN: 978-3-8376-5131-7 (available in an open access e-book version)

In her book *Epistemische Gewalt. Wissen und Herrschaft in der kolonialen Moderne* ("*Epistemic Violence. Knowledge and Domination in the Colonial Modernity*"), Claudia Brunner examines the ways in which (scientific) knowledge is connected to violence. The book is a critique of Western Eurocentric academia and seeks to break with the idea of the absence of violence in science and modernity (p. 12–13). She raises awareness of the existence of epistemic violence to enable researchers to gain a deeper understanding of the multiple ways in which "violence is inherent in knowledge itself" (p. 31) and the role that researchers and academic institutions play in the global epistemic violence system. The author aims at creating a transdisciplinary concept of epistemic violence where the prefix "trans" is intended to be understood as not only between disciplines but also as going beyond the academic field (p. 28).

The book is structured along five chapters. In the first chapter, "Thinking Violence Further", Brunner outlines her research project and methodology. As intended by the author, the book does not seek to expound a clear, unchangeable definition of epistemic violence. It is rather "a decolonially inspired and transdisciplinarily informed traversal of heterogeneous approaches to epistemic violence" combined with a "confrontation of already established broad concepts of violence with a condensed understanding of epistemic violence" (p. 29). She also criticises other disciplines that are largely centred on the analysis of violence in societies (e.g. Peace and Conflict Studies, International Relations, Political Science) (p. 9) for their limited use of the term "epistemic violence". With her criticism of other neighbouring disciplines and her methodological approach defined in the first chapter, Claudia Brunner positions herself within the realm of decolonial theory, which she continues to describe in the chapter that follows.

Chapter Two introduces the reader to the wide spectrum of post- and decolonial theory. Readers with or without prior knowledge of research from the Subaltern Studies Group and/or the Modernidad/Colonialidad Group will benefit from the reading of this chapter, as Brunner presents different theoretical ideas in a limited space (e.g. differences between post- and decolonialism; the concept of coloniality of power, knowledge and being; modernity/coloniality; the four genocides/epistemicides). The chapter also offers a linkage between decolonial theory and materialist-feminist theory by acknowledging the contri-

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butions that feminist scholars such as Silvia Federici or Maria Mies have brought to the field, while also directly criticising the limited referencing of these and other scholars by the authors of decolonial theories.

"Conceptual Landscapes of Epistemic Violence", the third chapter, is devoted to three disciplinary fields – peace and conflict studies, feminist research and post- and decolonial research – in which the term epistemic violence is occasionally used. Brunner continues to trace arguments and lines of interpretation of epistemic violence rather than searching for a deterministic definition. It is also here that Brunner describes her decision to use the term epistemic violence rather than epistemological violence, as the latter restricts the concept to scientific knowledge (p. 78).

In Chapter Four (pp. 147–269), the author practices a rereading of different violence concepts to analyse how they already include aspects of epistemic violence in their concepts and how these can be made useful to her own theory. She discusses such terms as the structural and cultural violence of Johan Galtung (pp. 152–185), Pierre Bourdieu's symbolic violence (pp. 186–245) and Judith Butler's concept of normative violence and the power of frames (pp. 246–269). What these authors share in their approaches towards violence is the belief that knowledge and science participate in violent processes. Yet none of the authors directly uses or defines the term epistemic violence. While the chapter is important for creating the link to existing violence concepts, the sub-chapter on Galtung's concept of structural and cultural violence loses the thread of argumentation that is otherwise maintained throughout the book. The reader is confronted with an extensive – albeit legitimate – criticism of Galtung's most famous concepts, which only partially contributes to the establishment of Brunner's concept of epistemic violence. Readers might further be disappointed to see that Brunner dedicates the entire chapter to the analysis of concepts of white, Western scholars, without greater reference to violence concepts outside of this realm.

The final chapter of the book goes beyond a summary of the chapters and interlinks decolonial theory with aspects of epistemic violence found in the violence concepts of Butler, Bourdieu and Galtung. By refocusing on the research question "What is epistemic violence and how does it operate?" (p. 277) Brunner connects these findings to her own understanding of violence within knowledge production. She constructs a three-level concept of epistemic violence, which I regard as the key message of her work. The first level, coloniality of being, functions here at the micro-level, in which epistemic violence is particularly seen as experiences of violence. Brunner describes the experience of epistemic violence on this level as follows: "That which is not said, that which is said but not heard, that which is heard but not understood, that which is understood but not recognised are recurring articulations of epistemic vio-

lence that can by no means be justified on the micro-level alone, but which become effective precisely there in the concrete experiences of people" (p. 278).

At the centre stage of her concept stands the coloniality of knowledge – the meso-level – which shows how knowledge (science) is used for the normalisation of violence. She argues that this is central to understanding "the fact that – and the way in which – the formerly religious-theological Christian knowledge system has secularised and naturalised itself in the process of Europe's colonial expansion and has become the basis of the enlightened modern paradigm of science" (p. 284).

At the third level, the macro-level, is the coloniality of power. The macro-level indicates how knowledge (science) contributes to the robustness of the order of violence. For a better understanding of this level, the author gives the example of the spread of the "formation of the European-Eurocentric state" (p. 293) throughout the world, to which the social sciences have greatly contributed.

The analysis of the concept across the three levels does not aim to create a defining meta-concept but rather to point out the different elements that make up the concept of epistemic violence (p. 273). Supporters of narrow definitions of violence will not be satisfied with this concept, as the conceptualisation is not straightforward. Yet, what Claudia Brunner demonstrates is that narrow definitions of violence "suggest that the question of legitimacy has already been clarified" (p. 289), a preconception challenged by her transdisciplinary concept of epistemic violence. While the concept is intended to go beyond academia, Brunner falls short in elaborating this further.

Although the book directly addresses researchers from the fields of Political Science and International Relations, as well as Peace and Conflict Science, Brunner's conception of epistemic violence is certainly useful beyond the scope of these disciplines. Especially researchers within the field of Area Studies could profit from the inclusion of the epistemic violence concept in their research, to become aware of those knowledge systems suppressed by Western academia and to reflect on how their own work partakes in this process of violence.

Lina Knorr

Hermann Kreutzmann, *Hunza Matters: Bordering and Ordering Between Ancient and New Silkroads*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2020. 570 pages, 193 illustrations, 379 photos, 7 tables, € 98.00. ISBN 978-3-447-11369-4

Hunza Matters is the third volume of Hermann Kreutzmann's trilogy on High Asia (Volume 1: *Pamirian Crossroads: Kirghiz and Wakhi of High Asia*, 2015; Volume 2: *Wakhan Quadrangle: Exploring and Espionage during and after the Great Game*, 2017). With this book, Kreutzmann comes full circle to the place where his career as a researcher on High Asia began, in 1984 with field research for his doctoral thesis in the Hunza Valley in the Karakoram of northern Pakistan. Over the course of 34 years, he has returned to Hunza together with his wife Sabine Felmy again and again, and produced a plethora of publications. Kreutzmann's field research has been paralleled by research in archives in Great Britain, Germany, Russia and Pakistan. Following his doctoral thesis *Hunza: ländliche Entwicklung im Karakorum* [*Hunza: Rural Development in the Karakoram*], published in 1989, Hunza Matters is his second single-authored book on this region.

In 2008, I concluded my review of Hermann Kreutzmann's edited volume *Karakoram in Transition: Culture, Development and Ecology in the Hunza Valley* (Oxford University Press, 2006) for *IQAS* 39(3–4) with the statement: "Since Hermann Kreutzmann is not only an excellent editor but also a prolific writer, one can but hope that his next go at the Hunza Valley may be a single-authored book." With the publication of *Hunza Matters*, this hope has been fulfilled.

Hunza and neighbouring Nagar were principalities in the Karakoram with multiple external relations and variable levels of dependence on larger powers until their integration into Pakistan in 1974. Since then, socioeconomic transformations have largely been driven by the establishment of major road and communication systems in extremely difficult terrain and under shifting political constellations. This started in 1978 with the inauguration of the Karakoram Highway and continues today with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor as part of China's "New Silk Road" or Belt and Road Initiative.

Hermann Kreutzmann writes of the Hunza Valley that it "has acquired a prominence in international relations that is hardly explainable from its position in early periods and in comparison to other regions in the Hindukush and Karakoram" (p. 363). To trace Hunza's role in the geopolitics of this region as well as its socioeconomic and political transformations through history are major objectives of this book, but not the only ones. While both Hunza and Nagar were able to retain some level of autonomy based on shifting allegiances with neighbouring powers, this ended when Great Britain secured control over Hunza in the course of the Hunza-Nagar campaign in 1891 as part of the

"Great Game", i.e. the contest for supremacy in Central Asia, mainly between Great Britain and Russia. Under British overlordship, Hunza and Nagar were granted semi-autonomy, which came to an end when the two principalities were incorporated into Pakistan.

The book is organised around four perspectives: roads and infrastructure; environment and resources; actors and their arenas; and the creation of myths. The importance of infrastructural changes, concurrent with political changes and a major underlying factor of socioeconomic changes, is indicated by the fact that the perspective on roads and infrastructure precedes the other perspectives. The chapter "From Hunza Road to China-Pakistan Economic Corridor" spans a period from the mid-nineteenth century to the present, which began with several attempts by European actors to open up a road from British India and Kashmir to Kashgar in Xinjiang through Hunza: the so-called Hunza Road. Other notable attempts include the Croisière Jaune, a promotional tour through Eurasia for Citroën cars in 1931, which came to a premature end in the forbidding terrain of Hunza, and the construction of a motorable road through the Karakoram for supplying the troops of Chiang Kai-Shek in China, which did not evolve beyond the planning stage. It was left to the Soviets to pioneer the first motorable road in High Asia – the Pamir Highway – in 1940, and to the Chinese to build the Karakoram Highway in cooperation with Pakistan as a precursor to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

In recognition of the extreme conditions in the Karakoram, the perspective on environment and resources puts mountain hazards before resource potential, starting out with a detailed description of the Atabad landslide of 2010, which inundated 20 km of the Karakoram Highway. The description features spectacular photographs, such as of the catastrophic event itself on p. 223, and is supplemented by a tabulation of hazardous events from 1894 to 2019 on pp. 226–244, which has been compiled from a variety of sources, including diaries, Aga Khan Agency for Habitat (AKAH) disaster records and observations by the author. The perspective then shifts to human diversity in the Karakoram, manifested in linguistic and denominational diversity, as an important factor underlying the complexities of land and resource use, one disregarded by observers blinded by the apparent backwardness of land use practices in the Karakoram. When the perspective finally shifts to resource use, it focuses on irrigated agriculture and animal husbandry as the main pillars of combined mountain agriculture, which characterises land use in this region. While in irrigated agriculture the emphasis has shifted from staple crops to high-value crops, especially potato and fruit, animal husbandry has experienced a decline that is partly due to a shortage of labour caused by the outmigration of young people for employment outside the valley.

The chapter "From Factors to Actors" provides a history of the Hunza valley from precolonial times to the abolition of Hunza State in 1974. Here, Hermann

Kreutzmann shows his abilities as a narrator of history and portrayer of its protagonists. I was particularly intrigued by his representation of "the outspoken quibbler" (p. 478) Reginald Schomberg, a British officer who frequently visited Hunza and whom Hermann Kreutzmann portrays with a mixture of fascination and disdain as a man who, as a solitary and expert traveller, had probably come into closer contact with the people of the region than any other foreigner at that time, but who was also more prejudiced against them than anyone else. Finally, the author refers briefly to myths promoted by Hunza's rulers to prove the valley's singular status, but also its rootedness in European history, e.g. the myth of descent from Alexander's troops. In fact, he dedicates more space to the debunking of myths created by outsiders, especially the myth of longevity.

Hunza Matters is another exercise on Hermann Kreutzmann's very own turf: to shed light on the importance of places located at the margins of or in the spaces between imperial powers and post-colonial states, and to trace the historical roots of current developments. In this case, one of the main objectives of the exercise is to show how Hunza mattered during the Great Game and its aftermath, and how it continues to matter due to its pivotal location and historical linkages in the new Great Game over infrastructure development and political influence in High Asia, in which its former ally China has emerged as the most important player.

The narrative maintains a pulsating rhythm: long and detailed descriptions alternate with compact syntheses such as the brilliant overview of the topics of mountain research (pp. 247–248). Highly condensed syntheses can be found even in the legends of illustrations and maps, such as the micro-essay on land use change in the Hunza Valley that serves as a legend to the illustration on p. 150, and the legend on p. 200 that provides a concise summary of the development of the Karakoram Highway. The attention to minute detail that marks the more descriptive passages of this book may strike those readers who do not share Kreutzmann's deep affinity with Hunza as occasionally somewhat excessive, as when a listing of actors involved in the carpet-falcon exchange trade includes even the names of their hotels in Kashgar. This may be another expression of Hermann Kreutzmann's "desire to make accessible to interested readers some selections of the valuable existing resource material gathered from a variety of scattered sources" (p. 23). Direct quotes from colonial diaries or other sources sometimes run over several pages. Though lengthy, they help to generate a feeling of intimacy with the subject and with the place – one that, I feel, Hermann Kreutzmann wished to share with his readers and which a more concise and sparse presentation would have not been able to convey. In this sense, *Hunza Matters* is also a monument to the intense involvement of Hermann Kreutzmann and his wife Sabine Felmy with this valley.

Five pages of acknowledgements, starting with their hosts in Karimabad/Baltit, are testimony to this close connection.

The book is as lavishly endowed with maps and illustrations as the preceding two volumes. Maps include historical maps as well as maps designed by the author. A highlight is the beautiful reproductions of paintings by Aleksandr Yakovlev, who had accompanied the Croisière Jaune as the expedition painter: landscape paintings, accompanied by detailed legends explaining their geographical content, as well as portraits of notables or ordinary people. Another highlight is the photographs which include the first ever photographs taken in Hunza from 1886 and 1888, and which provide documentation of nearly every decade since the 1880s. *Hunza Matters* is not simply a summing up of earlier work and previous publications. These have been incorporated, of course, but new material has been added, especially from archival sources that have become accessible only very recently, and new observations are documented by photographs by the author from as recently as 2019.

Now that *Hunza Matters* has been published as the third volume of Hermann Kreutzmann's trilogy, I would like to reiterate my amazement, stated in my review of the first volume *Pamirian Crossroads* in *IQAS* 49, 2018, at the staggering achievement of not only one but three volumes written by the same author and published over a period of five years. *Hunza Matters* and its companion volumes stand out for this reason, but also for their rare combination of encyclopaedic scope with thematic as well as regional focus.

Dietrich Schmidt-Vogt

Jonathan Rigg, *More than Rural: Textures of Thailand's Agrarian Transformation.* Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2019. 300 pages, 14 figures, 1 map, USD 68.00. ISBN 978-0-8248-7659-3

In his new book, Jonathan Rigg, until recently Director of the Asia Research Institute at the National University of Singapore and now professor in the School of Geographical Sciences at the University of Bristol, UK, presents insights from more than thirty years of research as a human geographer in rural Thailand.

The book sets out to solve the puzzle of why Thailand's stunning economic development and modernisation have not resulted in a thoroughgoing transformation of the countryside. The puzzle is epitomised by what Jonathan Rigg calls the persistence of the smallholder. One may even speak of proliferation, as the number of smallholder households has increased from 4.2 million in 1975 to 5.9 million in 2013. The persistence of the smallholder is paralleled

by other puzzling developments, such as a decrease in farm size and a partial retreat from cash to subsistence farming. These developments fly in the face of established theories on agrarian transition, especially of what is known as the farm-size transition, i.e. a transition towards larger farms for mechanised and commercially-oriented farming as a result of overall economic growth that causes farmers to leave agriculture for employment in cities. Jonathan Rigg explores this paradox in nine chapters, each dealing with one specific aspect of the countryside: Inheritances, Spaces, Flourishing, Society, Land, Labor, Livelihoods, Class, Futures.

In these chapters, the author presents a countryside that is "more than rural" in several respects, but especially in the sense that even though people continue to farm the land and maintain rural residences, only a fraction of their income comes from agriculture. Most income is from employment. Agriculture has disintensified and in some cases has even been scaled back to a complementary subsistence level. Agrarian transformation in Thailand, therefore, does not fit a simple rural-urban migration pattern. While urbanisation and migration to cities are important components of this change process, they do not tell the whole story. Migrant workers in cities hold on to their rural assets and identities, and industrial production migrates to the countryside, creating employment opportunities right at the doorstep of farming communities. These are facets of an intersection of rural and urban spaces and lifestyles that is characteristic of agrarian transformation in Thailand, but which occurs also in other parts of Southeast Asia. Closely related to this intertwining of the urban and the rural, which has been made possible by a tremendous expansion of the road network, are what Jonathan Rigg calls multistranded and multisited livelihoods, with people and the activities they pursue distributed over localities and sectors in a highly complex pattern. There is also a recognisable distribution of generations and genders. Farming activities are now mostly the domain of the elderly, and employment the domain of the young, especially of young women.

While non-urban residents have unquestioningly benefitted from these developments – rural poverty has been all but eradicated and incomes in the countryside are higher than before – the precarity of such livelihoods persists and some aspirations of the rural population, especially those concerning political representation, have remained unfulfilled. These factors contribute to a sense of alienation that has come to the surface in the red shirt – yellow shirt clashes between rural- and urban-based political activists, and that still persists today.

These are just some of the strands of agricultural transformation laid bare and woven together by Jonathan Rigg. Summarising them within the short space available for this review cannot do justice to the complexity and richness of this book. Among many other gems it includes a penetrating assess-

ment of the philosophy of the sufficiency economy, which has prompted much debate but has thus far had relatively little impact on rural development in Thailand.

At the conclusion of his book, Jonathan Rigg asks whether the picture of a spatially, socially and structurally distributed form of rural livelihood is merely a way station on the path towards a less distributed future of land consolidation and rural exodus, or whether it will persist. The last words are given to farmers in a series of quotes from an interview with a sixty-three-year-old woman from the Northeast. Her response to the question of how their grandchildren's generation views farming – "They don't care … And they will sell out [the land] as soon as their parents die (p. 233)" – points towards the first scenario of modernisation and rural exodus. An important reason given by Jonathan Rigg as to why the second scenario of smallholder persistence could prevail is the fact that national development has not provided the level of livelihood security that could persuade farmers to fully commit to alternative livelihoods.

Particular strengths of this book are the historical perspective that starts with the first efforts of Siam/Thailand to modernise agriculture in the 1890s, and a solid grounding in primary fieldwork. Jonathan Rigg draws strongly on early research on rural development in Thailand, e.g. the seminal work of Charles Keyes in Northeast Thailand, but especially on ten case studies from his own research and that of his students. That some of these are longitudinal studies with re-surveys after several decades adds to the historical depth that is so characteristic of this book. Case studies cover Central Thailand, Northern Thailand and especially the Northeast, where Jonathan Rigg started his career in 1982 with field research for his PhD, and which has remained a focal area of his research.

This focus on the Northeast has informed and may to some extent have skewed Rigg's perspective. The title of the book implies that the findings are representative of Thailand as a whole and the author even states that they can apply also to other parts of Asia, especially to Thailand's neighbouring countries. There is, however, some bias towards wet-rice farmers residing in the lowlands. While this covers the majority of farmers in Thailand, there is more diversity to the farming experience. The ethnic aspect, in particular, is missing. While Thailand stands out from other Southeast-Asian countries for its apparent ethnic and cultural homogeneity, there are parts of the country with sizeable minority populations, i.e. the North and the South. Though the North is covered by two case studies, these are in lowland locations close to Chiang Mai and not representative of the northern uplands. The farming experience of marginalised minority highlanders in the North, who are going through a transition from traditional shifting cultivation to other forms of farming,

guided and sometimes pressurised by the government but also often of their own volition, is certainly different from that of Thai lowland farmers.

An aspect of agrarian transformation that is touched upon relatively lightly in Jonathan Rigg's book are the boom-and-bust cycles of monoculture crops. While Thailand seems to be afflicted by such cycles to a lesser extent than other countries – Rigg gives the example of rubber farming in Northeast Thailand – they play a much bigger role in neighbouring countries such as Laos, and have by now generated a sizeable literature on the subject. A glimpse of Southern Thailand, where monoculture crops are more important – rubber plantations, for instance, have a much longer history in the South than in the Northeast – could have addressed the balance.

Aside from these bickerings of a stickler for regional particularity, this is a fascinating book, which I read with great pleasure and rich gain after my most recent journey through rural Thailand in February 2020. It answered so many questions that arose during the trip, and I found the complexity and dynamics of agricultural transformation in Thailand – as unravelled and re-condensed by Jonathan Rigg – a healthy antidote to the simpler narratives that I had read before. I enjoyed reading it also because of the outstanding quality of Rigg's prose. *More than Rural* is an example not only of geographical research, but also of science writing at its best.

At the very last, a comment is called for on the photograph on the book's cover, not least because, unfortunately, this is the only photograph in the entire book. A young woman in urban attire is seen striding confidently along a straight, empty and apparently new road through a setting that seems rural but not stereotypically so: illustrating the book's message that infrastructure development has led to a connecting, blending and integration of urban and rural that has benefitted women and young people in particular.

Dietrich Schmidt-Vogt

Anne Grüne, Kai Hafez, Subekti Priyadharma, Sabrina Schmidt (eds), *Media and Transformation in Germany and Indonesia: Asymmetrical Comparisons and Perspectives.* (Internationale und Interkulturelle Kommunikation, 15). Berlin: Frank and Timme, 2019. 342 pages, €59.80. ISBN 978-3-7329-0579-9

A core methodological question in comparative analysis concerns case selection. Although both are fruits, can apples and oranges be compared? In the social sciences, the structured, outcome-explaining comparison of two or more countries is traditionally informed by the logic of either the most similar sys-

tems design or the most different systems design, both of which serve to control context variables that can then be excluded from having caused a social phenomenon. While the former looks at countries that share as many variables as possible apart from the dependent variable (the outcome) under interest, the latter assembles into one data set countries that differ in as many context variables as possible but share the same dependent variable. The strength of these variable-oriented comparative studies lies in their ability to provide a clear-cut identification of relevant social elements and forces that may have caused an outcome. The downside of these approaches is that because of the limited possibilities of case selection, they follow a rather narrow perspective on what is potentially comparable, and they openly reject less structured, not outcome-explaining but empirically driven comparisons as futile.

The dominance of this variable-focused logic has also led to a narrowing of perspectives and the emergence of scientific blind spots in Area Studies. The comparison of countries located in different geographical regions or cultures remains an exception, mostly because they are considered to differ too greatly in their features and to simultaneously lack a clear common outcome. This widely diffused perception might also have contributed to the fact that in concrete research practice the classic comparative counterpart of Indonesia is its neighbour Malaysia. Including Indonesia and Malaysia within one research context is a well-established practice, but the extensive comparisons of much of the two countries over the last decades has rendered this a less innovative endeavour. It is safe to argue that the persistent lack of scientific engagement with more open-ended, alternative, transregional comparisons has prevented a great deal of knowledge production, and only recently has the emerging field of Comparative Area Studies begun to address this deficit from different methodological angles.

The edited volume at hand – *Media and Transformation in Germany and Indonesia: Asymmetrical Comparisons and Perspectives* – links up to the currently unfolding debate that critically questions the institutionalised rejection of uncommon, non-variable-based case selections by presenting an insightful and much needed comparison of Indonesia's and Germany's media systems. Moreover, the book stands out in a sympathetic way as it is the product of a collaborative intercultural project between Indonesian and German academics working in the discipline of media and communication studies, enabling each research team to gain deeper comprehension of the other's society. The German Academic Exchange Service-funded project "Media Systems and Communication Cultures – Germany and Indonesia in Comparative Perspective" was a collaboration between the University of Erfurt in Germany and Padjajaran University in Bandung, Indonesia, and ran from 2015 to 2017.

More precisely, the book under review here builds on the findings and outcomes of a joint conference held in Bandung in 2017 ("Media and Trans-

formation in Germany and Indonesia: Dynamics and Regressions in Global Perspective") as well as on several preceding workshops and student projects connected to the bilateral project. Accordingly, the volume's structure is organised along the analytical matrix that guided these meetings: Section I looks at "Media and Political Transformation", Section II elaborates on "Media Representation and Racism", Section III discusses "Internet and Counter Public Sphere" and Section IV engages with "Popular Culture and Democracy". Each section is opened by a short introduction and closed by a summary of the respective conference roundtable discussion.

In the volume's general introduction, Kai Hafez and Subekti Priyadharma convincingly defend their asymmetrical research design by arguing that such an undertaking can lead to new academic knowledge and that it can serve as a tool for seeing things from a different perspective. For them, "there is nothing worse than a rejected comparison" (p. 17) and they posit that "comparison is a real adventure and an experiment with unsure results" (p. 18). They also engage in a critical reflection on the issue of whether Indonesia and Germany really are apples and oranges and come to the conclusion that despite structural differences, they do indeed share several crucial aspects. The shared historical legacy of an ethnic genocide and current tendencies towards political radicalisation, populism, hate speech and fake news are particularly singled out, as well as both countries' multi-ethnic and multi-religious societal fabrics.

Furthermore, in the introduction the editors criticise the established understanding of what constitutes the world's centre and periphery and the hegemonic political and academic discourses that undergird these rigid concepts. Instead, they propose the application of contextual, relational and interdependent thinking, and they hold that there is indeed a "plurality of centrality and periphery" (p. 21) that is waiting to be studied. They illustrate this claim by pointing out the heavy use of US-developed social media in Indonesia, which makes it a "Facebook country" and thus, in this particular concern, somehow more Western than Europe or North America (p. 17).

The book's four sections present empirically rich descriptive analyses of different aspects of the countries' media systems, mostly concluding that the systems differ to a great extent, especially in terms of media ownership, media regulation and data protection awareness. In some instances, as an asset, a perspective on and from Egypt is added to the volume.

Of particular empirical density and informative value is the contribution of Ratna Noviani in Section II (Racism) on the representation of the ethnic Chinese minority in Indonesian cinema; the reader would have wished for more chapters of such a clear and illustrative nature. In "Negotiating Stereotypes, Re-imagining Differences: Chinese Indonesians and the Burden of Cinematic Representation in Post New Order Indonesia" Noviani shows how in contemporary Indonesia the former New Order's open discrimination against Chinese

people and their culture is broken by a growing number of ethnic Chinese Indonesian film-makers who mediate Chineseness from their own perspective. On the other hand, Chineseness remains a problematic issue in cinema, as in most films it is predominantly exoticised and fetishised, as well as submerged and absorbed by a narrative on Islamic moralism. It would have been interesting to concretely compare this discussion on Indonesian cinema with representations of the Turkish or Greek communities in German films, as there has also been a shift towards growing self-representation – the work of Fatih Akin being a case in point. Due to the persisting centrality of the issue of ethnic identity and discrimination in Indonesia, in this section a treatment of the contemporary media representation of the Papuan ethnicity and its alleged blackness would have been interesting, as well as the issue of whiteness as an ideal of beauty and how it is mediated through advertising.

In sum, the volume stands out through its brave explorative nature, its intercultural collaborative approach and its descriptive thickness. It succeeds in presenting an alternative way of comparing societies and carves out surprising similarities and structural differences – insights that contribute to intercultural understanding between Indonesia and Germany and that provide manifold starting points for future comparative projects.

Amanda tho Seeth

Soe Tjen Marching, *The End of Silence. Accounts of the 1965 Genocide in Indonesia*. With original photography by Angus Nicholls. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017. 220 pages, €99.00. ISBN 978-9-4629-8390-8

Coping with the past is a sensitive topic in many countries, and Indonesia is one of them. While some countries have been quite pro-active in breaking the walls of silence and bringing to light atrocities, massacres and torture committed either on their own soil or in other lands, others are reluctant to openly admit crimes against humanity. In Asia, Japan is well known for circumventing an admission of the forced prostitution of women – "comfort women" as they used to be called – during World War II. Cambodia, too, is still grappling with the cruel period of Khmer Rouge rule. The suffering that resulted from the partition in South Asia (India, Pakistan and Bangladesh) might also be a case in point.

Among the worst massacres in the second half of the twentieth century, however, is the genocide in Indonesia, which peaked between 1965 and 1966. Conservative estimates count about 500,000 killed; in unofficial accounts, the

number rises to three million individuals slaughtered by Indonesian military forces during that brief period. The victims' alleged "crime" was to be close to or a member of the Indonesian Communist Party, the PKI. The PKI was the third largest Communist Party on the globe in the 1960s, and then-President Sukarno actively supported communist values with his trifold NASAKOM policy, i.e. a combination of nationalism, religion and communism. In the wake of the prominent Bandung conference of 1955 and the founding of the Non-Aligned Movement in 1961, the Cold War gradually heated up in Southeast Asia. While the event most often associated with the proxy war between capitalist and socialist/communist powers on Asian soil is the Vietnam War, the genocide in Indonesia is hardly recognised internationally as yet another symptom of this antagonism. It is only in recent years that de-classified documents have proven unmistakably the involvement of the CIA, Germany and other Western governments in the butchery of 1965. Until today, an open, untainted public discourse on "1965" is next to impossible in Indonesia. Many attempts to rehabilitate survivors and correct the distorted image of communist ideas have been utterly discouraged by the powers that be. It is against this backdrop that Soe Tjen Marching's *Accounts of the 1965 Genocide in Indonesia* surfaces as a very brave and relevant, yet shocking documentation.

Soe Tjen Marching's compiled accounts are individual ones, structured in her book by generation, kinship relations and gender. The first part presents accounts of victims who survived torture and persecution, followed by a second part that is particularly committed to women of that generation who survived the horror. Part three introduces the stories of siblings from victim families. Parts four and five give voice to the children and grandchildren of victims and survivors. The latter's accounts are all the more enthralling as they break what is effectively a conspiracy of silence that remains in force even generations after the events occurred. In fact Marching herself experienced an inner conflict when she decided to commence her book project. Torn "between my duty to be a good daughter to my mother (who has suffered), and my duty to the 1965 victims", she eventually opted to carry on with her book project (p. 183).

Her mother's reaction towards Marching's plans to collect the stories of 1965 victims and their families was fierce. The project met with the utmost disapproval. But it was a "normal reaction" given many parents' perception that keeping silent is better than speaking out, and that the silencing of children arises only out of love and concern for their wellbeing. "We don't want you to say anything in relation to what happened in 1965–1966, because we love you, because we are concerned about you" (p. 35). It is this "mutation of fear", as Marching describes it, that works as a psychological barrier and prevents people from reflecting on their fate from a critical distance, from uncovering the mechanisms behind censorship and false narratives – narratives that became

firmly engraved in post-1965 Indonesians' minds and that legitimised all atrocities committed against innocent people.

Soe Tjen Marching conceptualises the instilling of fear as a key strategy in post-1965 Indonesian politics. Many former victims of 1965 later came to preserve the very anti-communist ideology that had persecuted them for decades. It is this (vicious) circle of paradoxical behaviour that Soe Tjen Marching has tried to break. And she has succeeded in doing so. Bringing together three generations of 1965-affected persons who all voluntarily agreed to share their stories – although for some it took quite a while – is in itself an impressive document of success. Nonetheless, their hesitation to speak out shows the longevity of psychological terror and tyranny.

A few works on Indonesia's traumatic 1965 experience have previously been published in Western languages. Annett Keller collected reflections from Indonesian public intellectuals and accounts of survivors of the genocide and translated them into German (Annett Keller [ed.], *Indonesien 1965ff. Die Gegenwart eines Massenmordes* [*Indonesia 1965ff. The Presence of a Mass Murder*], Berlin: regiospectra, 2015). Saskia Wieringa embedded personal stories of female victims in a novel called The Crocodile Hole (Jakarta: YJP Press, 2015) – the title of the book hinting at the name of the pit where the tragedy began, a place where the dead bodies of a number of army generals were discovered. The murder of these generals triggered the anti-communist purge and led to the eternal stigma of its survivors: their personal documents label them as *tapol*, political prisoners, for their entire lives. Joshua Oppenheimer's two films *The Act of Killing* (2012) and *The Look of Silence* (2014) have further raised international awareness of the incredible ignorance of these crimes against humanity in 1960s Indonesia.

Soe Tjen Marching's compilation of personal accounts stands out against comparable publications of its kind in that she carefully deconstructs the hegemonic narrative that pervaded the New Order period under President Suharto from 1966 to 1998. The concept of fear and the analytical tracing of the mutation of fear succinctly reveal how survivors came to perceive of themselves as offenders rather than victims. The book is a most recommendable piece for readers who are not yet familiar with the massacre of 1965 as well as for those who have already studied the tragedy. The personal accounts render the traumatic incidents an intimate sharing of emotions, but above this personal level, Marching's distinct analytical approach is a masterful study that indeed symbolises an *End of Silence*.

Claudia Derichs

Valerie Hansen, *The Year 1000. When Explorers connected the World and Globalization began.* New York: Scribner, 2020. 320 pages, US$30.00. ISBN 978-15-01194-11-5 (pb)

Even before you open this volume written by the renowned Sinologist and global historian Valerie Hansen, the first questions spring to mind, prompted by the book's subtitle: that globalisation began in the year 1000, when explorers and travellers connected the globe. All in one year? And the whole world? Even if the "year 1000" is taken to include the decades around it, the argument remains a daring one, and the reader is curious to see the underpinning evidence.

After a first chapter that is more of an introduction and overview of the whole work, Chapters 2 and 3 address a theme and a region that seem to support the claim made by Hansen. Chapter 2 describes the Vikings' voyages of exploration in the North Atlantic and their settling on Newfoundland as well as (possibly) in Maine. Both the voyages and the settlements can reliably be dated to the 11th century. This is complemented with a wall painting from Chichen Itza in Mexico depicting strange-looking, fair-haired warriors, who may also be identified as Vikings (see Illustrations 6 and 7). Hansen then extensively discusses their possible route from Canada southwards, either by boat along the coast or via a "pan-American highway" running through what is now US territory.

Chapter 4 shifts the focus to northeastern Europe and the empire of Kievan Rus', which acted as an intermediary between Central Asia, the Byzantine Empire and northern Europe. The chapter also highlights the importance of religious conversion, exemplified by Vladimir I's introduction of Orthodox Christianity into the empire. Another topic addressed here is the increasing importance of silver bullion, which was used for coinage. Silver coinage transformed the Rus' empire economically, as its rulers began to rely on taxation instead of plunder.

The Near East and North Africa, whose contribution to global trade consisted mainly of slaves and, more importantly, gold, are the focus of Chapter 5. Before ca. 1500 CE, some two thirds of the gold circulating on the global markets came from Africa (p. 114), especially the southern part of the continent. The significance of the African gold deposits for international trade can be seen from the shards of Chinese celadon pottery found in Zimbabwe, which date from the period 900 to 1200 CE. This connection across the Indian Ocean leads over to Chapter 6, which deals with North and Central Asia. This chapter, in light of the size of the region under consideration, appears somewhat brief in length and heterogeneous in content. Besides trade and political developments, it once again highlights the importance of religious change, this time the spread of Islam and Buddhism, which eventually divided Central Asia into two distinct spheres.

The two chapters concluding the book are devoted to those three regions whose importance for the medieval world and its trade has been demonstrated repeatedly: India and Southeast Asia, as well the "most globalized region in the world", China. Hansen's expertise in Chinese history and an exceptionally broad range of available sources provide the author with an opportunity to widen the time frame of the chapter considerably. On p. 179, we find the Borobudur stupa (late 8th century) mentioned alongside Angkor Wat (around 1150 CE). More generally, the spread of Indian culture to Southeast Asia (from ca. 400 CE?) marks the lower end of the timescale, whilst the shipwreck of Burmese monks in 1467 (correct: 1476; p. 189) and, in the final chapter, the maritime expeditions under Cheng-he, the Chinese Emperor during the fifteenth century (pp. 225–26) provide an upper range. The host of information found in the sources and the expanded timescale also allow further themes to be considered, although many of these are merely listed without much explanation or coherence, and topics highlighted in previous chapters are omitted. For instance, in discussions of religious change in the region, Hinduism and Buddhism are not distinguished from one another, whilst the rise of Theravada to the most popular belief system on the Southeast Asian mainland – curiously, occurring around the middle of the eleventh century and hence very close to the author's favoured year 1000 – is mentioned only in passing (p. 179).

In light of the above, certain points of criticism need to be raised. First of all, a deeper knowledge of and better informed approach to the subject matter would have been welcome here and there – particularly in relation to regions such as the Near East, India or Southeast Asia, where the decades before and after the year 1000 were eventful and have led to some controversy among scholars. Quite often, the individual paragraphs of Hansen's narrative follow a single book, which is summarised or quoted without comment or further note. The selection of the literature is limited, unsystematic and often ignores the latest research in the field. The reading list (a bibliography as such is lacking; the bibliographic data is embedded in the endnotes) concerning the Chola state, for instance, includes the work by George Spencer from 1983, explaining Chola expansionism, and the volume edited by Hermann Kulke et al. in 2009, which addresses the maritime campaign against Southeast Asian ports launched by king Rajendra I in 1025 CE. The criteria that led to the choice of these two works is left unexplained.

That the reading list is random and patchy can also be seen from the omission of a number of relevant studies and publications produced in the context of the millennium year 2000. An excuse for this could be that some of these works, e.g. the themed issue of the *Periplus. Jahrbuch für Außereuropäische Geschichte* (Volume 10, Berlin: Lit Verlag, 2000) on "Asia in the Year 1000" (Asien im Jahr 1000), were written only in German and have therefore remained outside the scope of the English-speaking scholarly world. However, this cannot hold for the publications that emerged from the project directed

by Franz-Josef Brüggemeier and Wolfgang Schenkluhn entitled "Die Welt im Jahr 1000", as the resulting publication was published in English as well (James Heitzman / Wolfgang Schenkluhn (eds), *The World in the Year 1000*. Lanham: University Press of America, 2004). More generally, the substantial and still growing body of works dedicated to presenting the medieval world as interconnected and global, for which the volume edited by Catherine Holmes and Naomi Standen (*The Global Middle Ages*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018) is a recent example, has also been virtually ignored.

One could argue at this point that such omissions and superficialities, annoying as they are, hardly threaten to disprove the main argument of the book, that globalization commenced in the year 1000 as travellers and explorers began to connect the regions of the world. As demonstrated, this is certainly true for the (North) Atlantic, which the Vikings traversed to reach Newfoundland, Maine and perhaps even Mexico. But this transcontinental connection remained episodic and ended with a full retreat of the Vikings from all their American settlements before 1100 CE. Apart from a few whalers and sporadic missionaries bound for Greenland, the American-Atlantic world remained mostly outside the global system until its reintegration by Columbus and the later Spanish conquerors after 1492.

In contrast to the western Atlantic, the Eurasian continent and particularly its eastern parts were interconnected by long-standing, complex and multi-layered networks of exchange and interaction. These networks were travelled not by explorers and discoverers but by traders, pilgrims, envoys and warriors, who knew the routes and destinations. They visited established port cities and market towns, which provided the commodities of their respective hinterlands and were often home to a cosmopolitan population. We cannot determine the exact time when these networks began to develop, but clearly economic, political and religious interaction across eastern Eurasia had been well under way by the author's "snap year" 1000, possibly pre-dating it by several centuries in some cases. By calling China the "most globalized place on earth" and vastly expanding the time frame of her investigation to almost a millennium, Hansen acknowledges the exceptional position of the region, but at the same time this seems to weaken her central argument that places the emphasis on a single year (or at least a much shorter period of time, if we take the "year 1000" with a pinch of salt). It may not seem entirely unreasonable to team up two regions that are as different as the Atlantic world and eastern Eurasia in order to distil a plain and simple argument that aims to highlight a key moment in global history. But as the argumentation lacks a certain depth, so does the evidence, the presentation of which is beset with superficialities, omissions and a lack of contextualisation. Ultimately, this fails to render the argument any more plausible, let alone convincing.

Tilman Frasch

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