2

Twenty-first-century Area Studies: Blurring genres, evolutionary thought and the production of theory

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Over the last twenty years the author has been perplexed by the oft-posited collapse of my adopted discipline of Area Studies, as proclaimed by its numerous critics. And, as a social scientist, the author has remained profoundly aware of the deep self-examination undertaken by many Area Studies scholars subject to this extended barrage of intellectual excoriation. The argument offered in this chapter gives some account of this experience concerning the repeated denigrations of Area Studies as well as the individual reflexive contributions proffered by scholars in response, arguing that collectively this amounts to a recent shift in the discipline, in its commonplace direction, and its current academic credibility. Area Studies has long been portrayed as a discipline undergoing fundamental challenge, existential crisis and inevitable decline.[1] This chapter challenges that perception, suggesting alternatively that such a view is out of date and, in the millennium's second decade, ill informed. Rather than descending into obscurity, Area Studies is undergoing a period of rich intellectual curiosity, a boundary-crossing productivity, while playing an acknowledged role in informing and supporting other disciplines, including, for example, International Relations and Comparative Politics.[2]

Realizing that we are witnessing a significant, if tentative, academic resurgence in the realm of Area Studies, this chapter marks this evolution as we move towards the end of the second decade of the new millennium. The

chapter surveys some of the more conventional criticisms of Area Studies at the end of the twentieth century. It offers too, in rebuttal, an initial insight into how the subject has evolved since the 1990s and speculates a little on how those changes may progress in future. The chapter opens with a definition of what it is to be an Area Studies scholar as defined in the last decade of the twentieth century, moving on to explore the oft-reputed crisis it has endured.

On doing Area Studies at century's end

A year before the millennium Richard Lambert argued that '[a]n area specialist [is] someone who devotes all or a substantial portion of his or her professional career to the study of another country or region of the world'.[3] Suggesting that Area Studies is what area specialists do, he posited that Area Studies specialists 'tend to be with a broad region of the world, for narrower and narrower geographic specialization, moving from world region to country to section of the country'.[4] Furthermore, in Lambert's view, Area Studies post-Second World War seemed concerned mostly with the need to understand countries that the United States did not know.[5] The means to this evaluation was the establishment of Area Studies programmes supported by private foundations delivered by 600 American university programmes. His knowledge of the organization of early Area Studies allowed Lambert to recognize that scholars within such programmes were taken up with the demands of market-orientated economics, in contemplating differences from mainstream disciplinary foci, debating applied versus pure research and anticipating the growth of the new technologies. His argument suggests moreover that the hardening of attitudes concerning disciplinary boundaries got caught up in the foundations of American positivism, when disciplinary histories became set, so that 'the heart of Area Studies l[ay] in just four disciplines: language and literature, history, political science and anthropology'.[6] This development, Lambert argued, led directly to the decline of Area Studies and what he dubbed the *ologizing* of the subject, which included high specialization, language competency and the consequent building of barriers between Area Studies and the traditional social sciences.

Subsequently, Lambert postulated that 'distinct tribes of scholars focus[ed] on the major world areas' and that 'most of the interaction … [was] with the tribe and not … the people outside'.[7] So, his argument develops, Area Studies became trans-disciplinary, with scholars' interests drawn from many disciplines, but individual research remaining concentrated within traditional disciplinary boundaries.[8] Thereby, Area Studies itself became regarded as a soft social science, one 'loosely related to public or private policymaking.'[9]

The 'crisis' of Area Studies

Some nine years later, Vincente Raphael[10] outlined how Area Studies suffered severe criticism of its ideological approaches from the traditional academic disciplines.[11] Rehearsing these arguments, he noted that 'area studies … is now routinely described as a state of "crisis" besieged by calls to reinvent the institutional infrastructure and intellectual agendas for understanding different regions of the world at century's end'.[12] Such trenchant criticisms of Area Studies were commonplace at the turn of the century. The censure included labelling Area Studies as the product of post-Cold War security interests. Styled as merely descriptive, Area Studies was considered parochial and oblivious to global forces, therefore irrelevant, still believing that the building blocks of power remained with nation states. Further criticism of the deficiencies of Area Studies included that it gave too much importance to hegemonic cultures, while at the same time privileging written texts over oral and elite over non-elite cultures.[13] The rehearsal of such arguments had been commonplace, as Jung[14] tells us, since the 1999 controversy over Area Studies delineated by Tessler et al.[15] regarding strategies for understanding complex Middle Eastern politics. Furthermore, and gravely, Area Studies was accused of maintaining artificial historical boundaries and at the same time reflecting a mixture of colonial cartography and European ideas of civilization.[16] Such sustained and multifaceted onslaughts proved deeply damaging.

Gregory White has written of the depth of the challenge to the subject area, pointing out that assaults on Area Studies were undertaken by several social science disciplines questioning its relevance in the post-Cold War world, particularly during an era of fiscal austerity. Such attacks were vitriolic.

Jung[17] recounts how the public benefit of Area Studies was questioned, along with its use to the state and its grasp of real world issues. Allied to this was the profound and essential question, 'is there still a need for specific regional expertise in an increasingly globalized world?'[18] In his 2014 article Jung regales us with a vivid account of an annual meeting of the Middle Eastern Studies Association in November 2001, wherein a 'full-fledged polemic attack against the "very sick discipline" of Middle Eastern Studies was undertaken', and followed up in the American press and publishing media.[19] Finally, he recounts the damning indictment of Middle Eastern Studies as a 'culture of irrelevance' accused of political bias and the implementation of faulty paradigms.[20]

Worse still came a fundamental accusation by social scientists that Area Studies broadly was 'preoccupied with the description of cultural details and historical specificities at the expense of comparative and generalizing research'.[21] Area Studies stood accused of failing to embrace theoretical research of appropriate scientific standard. Profoundly, per White, it was the generally accepted view that Area Studies overall proved 'less rigorous … eschews the building of scientific knowledge and the crafting of broader generalizations for mere description and worse, storytelling'.[22]

This was reinforced by the concurrent arrival of Rational Choice Theory in Political Science, which 'help[ed] us understand humans as self-interested, short-term maximizers',[23] challenged notions of embedded fieldwork in communities or regions, criticized the focus on language or deep cultural understandings, and was seen by some to have undone Area Studies. Later, as Ostrom (1990) tells us, moves towards expanded second-generation rational choice theories and behaviourism[24] continued to confront traditional approaches undertaken in regional or place-based study. Furthermore, such challenges were accompanied by postmodern claims that Area Studies itself was the embodiment of Western ambition to maintain control of the less developed world, aimed at achieving an unethical symbiosis and capitalist exploitation of the rest of the world through expanded global development. This corresponded with a general drift, in Europe at least, towards the acknowledgement of the concept of obscurantism[25] – as older sciences were increasingly challenged by modern forms of critical thought. The arrival of newer and more quantitatively focused ways of thinking about what works in research, in government or, indeed, in practice threw up ever more common

questions to the academy over its older, regionally focused, embedded ways of working.

Self-examination in Area Studies

Such a welter of prolonged public challenges led to deep reflection by Area Studies academics on fundamental questions concerning the nature of their personal scholarship. Katherine Graham outlines the usual experience: 'The claim that one is pursuing, say, South American or East Asian studies rather than economic or urban geography consigns one to the periphery of the discipline, while simultaneously invoking the authority, authenticity, and mystery of "the field".'[26] The exclusion felt by scholars building research focused on people and place was reflected in personal success (or its lack) within the disciplines, and within schools, as Area Studies departments were merged, or closed, across the minority world around the millennium.[27] The difficult experience of hard to negotiate careers within Area Studies in the new century precipitated careful and personal scrutiny of professional futures. And, as significant as the angst about career progression, came the accompanying anguish over the shape of Area Studies in the twenty-first century. This journey of re-examination and renewal was not, however, unique. At the same time, other cognate disciplines were undergoing enormous challenge and change. For example, Geography, described in the 1970s as an 'introverted discipline',[28] moved from Geology and History to the mainstream social sciences, taking on board all necessary and associated physical and mental emendations. And, as Johnston describes, geographers negotiated a tricky path through both their intellectual milieu and their wider institutional settings to make an effective comeback in both domains. Others have struggled to record and outline these profound twentieth-century changes within the academy. Russell,[29] for example, noted that with the rise of the disciplines the inevitable outcome was not (as one might have hoped) communication to make complex understanding simpler; rather, it became knowledge 'to advance the activities of specialized communities'.[30] And such complex social organization of knowledge had severe implications. Russell articulates these consequences as producing a system wherein the disciplines became so diverse and independent that they 'require[d] no common language or even values or methods within the university in order to

pursue those missions'.[31] Indeed, he goes as far as to maintain that the conventions, assumptions and methodologies of the various disciplines today 'are characterized more by their differences than their similarities',[32] ensuring that, in the end, the academy became beset by small and different, uncomprehending worlds. The evident disadvantage of such dysfunctional arrangements necessitated prescient change.

Self-examination is plain to see in the literature of the time. Questions proliferated, and within Area Studies they multiplied. Introspection included – what is the correct classification of area to study (does 'Asia' really exist?)? Can Asia, indeed any region, have a newer vision of its self-subject to the intensification of flows (capital, labour and transnational networks)? Moreover (and regarding Said, 1978), do older classifications including conceptions like 'the Orient' still have relevance today?[33] Animated and detailed conversations sprang up in inter/national scholarly networks, considering whether 'Orientalism' was in truth a cultural infection of colonialism,[34] while pondering at the same time how states in postmodernity relate to transnational corporations. The rate and depth of self-analysis within Area Studies proved foundational, persistent and fundamental. Conversations commonplace within the academy during this time included contemplating the scale and size of appropriate study, the choice of methods to be used, reconceptualizing innovative spatial categories and reconsidering appropriate scales of analysis. Increasingly taking place was the process of *mixing up* traditional paradigmatic approaches. A cursory glance at the breadth of Area Studies literature over this period demonstrates that the interdisciplinary, the comparative and the multi-cultural arrived simultaneously, along with contingent challenges about where to study, how to study and with whom. Indeed, contemplation of similar challenges for today's researchers continues unabated. A report funded by Research Councils UK recently described interdisciplinary research as that which had 'cross disciplinary outcomes',[35] with multidisciplinary research dubbed as 'research that brings disciplines together'[36] and comparative research likely to include some combination of both. At century's turn, Area Studies underwent a substantial and profound self-examination concerning methods and approaches, which to this day bears plentiful fruit.[37]

Evolutionary thought within Area Studies – working together

Others have written of this process of re-evaluation undertaken at the beginning of this century.[38] Dirlik represents the millennial theoretical turns evident with the rise of Cultural Studies, Postcolonial Studies and Globalization Studies impacting upon the academy.[39] The interplay of complexity, events and a growing awareness of power (and its capacity to work against the powerless) was becoming ever more significant as Area Studies specialists began to contemplate the correct ways in which to undertake their research. Scholars contemporaneously considered the role of Civilization Studies, Islamic Studies, Indigenous Studies, Diasporic Studies and Confucian approaches to see what could be learned or adopted. Profound ways of understanding aligned with growing multifaceted processes as academics struggled to reconceptualize what Wang called the 'global imaginary'[40] and Hozic dubbed notions of borderlands and bloodlands.[41] By 2005, Sharma described the half-decade evolution of '[t]he peculiarly American study of the "non-western" world – going under the rubric of interdisciplinary "area studies" [as] in crisis'.[42] Commenting that its Cold War origins and policy-driven focus (having survived from the 1960s until the 1980s) is in trouble, her article described Area Studies as a product of the colonial powers (Europe, Japan and the United States). Simultaneously, Sharma argued, a profound struggle was under way to win the hearts and minds of the peoples of the former communist bloc as capitalism morphed into ever more complex forms.[43]

While the 'crisis' in Area Studies was perceived by some as dragging on and on, self-examination and self-criticism evolved within the academy as Area Studies scholars sought to contemplate their futures within the discipline constantly under attack.[44] Scholars in substantial numbers reconsidered their investment in Area Studies in the longer term. Some took clear aim. Heryanto argued that Area Studies had no strong disciplinary rigour or theoretical innovation, and thus no legitimacy to stand on a par with existing disciplines.[45] Hozic questioned whether Area Studies could really stand up to the objectifying gaze of American social science.[46] Graham and Kantor[47] challenged the notion that Area Studies was a 'soft' social science

as it undertook reviewing its work with indigenous social sciences (including religious traditions). Academics, including Heryanto, contemplated the use of locally based Area Studies within chosen regions, South-east Asia, for example, after the 1990s; while Chen[48] radically suggested that Area Studies itself was method and Rausch[49] explored theory building *as* local contribution. Throughout the Area Studies community, and across the globe, experts pursued a growing and essential reflexivity in their research, their remits, their methodologies and their positions vis-à-vis the older and well-entrenched social sciences and humanities. More importantly, they contemplated the impact of their work upon the people and the countries or regions that they studied.

By 2007 confidence had grown sufficiently for Graham and Kantor to overtly challenge the accepted wisdom that social science represented theory, mathematics, rigorous methods, falsifiability/replicability and scientific approaches, while Area Studies limped along behind, badged as descriptive, cultural, historical or contextual.[50] Disabusing the idea that 'the best social analysis comes from a single cognitive approach, one that incorporates mathematics, quantitative methods, and replicability',[51] they argued rather that '[t]he best social analysis should incorporate several different cognitive styles of which the method relying on mathematics, quantitative methods and reproducibility is only one'.[52] Even the rancorous battle between political scientists and Area Studies specialists was mellowing somewhat, with those in Comparative Politics recognizing the benefit of engaging with area-specific approaches.[53] While some continued pointing up the ferocious struggles between Political Science's large-scale quantitative studies and deductive modelling versus Area Studies' regional-specific studies, others deliberately looked elsewhere. By the end of the first decade of the new century, Ahram[54] made a call thus: 'insights from area studies cannot be ignored by those aspiring to general theory, but at the same time, area studies itself must adopt a new approach to qualitative and mixed methods in order to assert its role in general theory development'.

His discernments were important. In an article likely to prove significant, Ahram acknowledges the benefits of appreciating the importance of the other – firstly by reconsidering definitions of the significance of region as an analytical category (grounded in historical processes rather than simple geographical givens). Secondly, he framed an appeal to colleagues on both

sides of the divide to appreciate the other. What was important for the health of both disciplines, he intuited, were the insights of regional Area Studies to political scientists, and a newer, broader use of qualitative and mixed methods to encourage theory development for Area Studies scholars. This common-sense appeal to mutual benefit includes the offer of an opportunity for Area Studies to engage with what Basedau and Köllner[55] called 'a truly comparative area studies by adding inter-regional and cross regional comparison to the traditional repertoire of single, intra-regional studies'. This development proves necessary, the argument goes, as the current large-n studies fail to adequately account for regional variation.[56] Playing around with boundaries for both sets of practitioners leads Ahram to conclude that an '[e]xplicit emphasis on contextual boundaries generates important observable implications that can further hone theoretical arguments'.[57] Ahram's marking of the appeal to work together, combined with the clear possibility of profitable collaboration going forward, might hopefully inscribe the beginning of the end of the unproductive and prolonged character assassination of Area Studies.

By 2013, views on *doing* Area Studies had matured further. Claims were routinely made by Area Studies specialists demanding recognition of their work; co-production with local people and distribution of knowledge through local engagement were becoming the norm in terms of expected research progress. Methods had evolved to the extent that examining local practice, and how local networks were included in our plans, marked a significantly improved intellectual collaboration with indigenous peoples and communities. Acceptable practice for Area Studies by the century's second decade became'[k]nowledge production and dissemination about themselves, within and beyond formal academic institutions, within and beyond [the region]'.[58] Inclusion of priorities, thoughts, feelings and meanings of the local was increasingly viewed as commonplace rather than exceptional or gold standard. Graham and Kantor's work marked the arrival of sophisticated multiple research approaches, for

insisting on a rigid division between 'soft' methods of area studies specialists and the 'hard' methods of social scientists [proved] simplistic. Social scientists, whether using quantitative methods or ones yielding replicable results, can make great contributions to the understanding of society and politics … Area studies specialists can also make such contributions, and – in addition – they can sometimes advance our understanding of quantitative methods themselves. The area

studies approach can lead to a deep intellectual understanding of how people think … Both … need to be more appreciative of the intellectual contributions the other may make.[59]

Travelling theory

Some forty years ago, Edward Said suggested that theory undergoes changes in its 'representation and institutionalization' as it undertakes its journey from an earlier 'point of origin' to its later place of arrival.[60] Furthermore, he noted that 'theory in one historical period of national culture becomes altogether different from another period or situation'.[61] The recognition, therefore, that theory evolves and changes in both time and place proves useful in this argument. This chapter has contemplated changes undertaken as Area Studies has undergone a substantial re-examination of its role within the academy and within the societies that it studies. Moreover, such changes of role, remit and research methodologies have marked a growing, even radical, discourse on the usefulness, productivity and advantage of an international academy riven by deep, divisive and entrenched intellectual boundaries (created to protect well-established disciplines and, some might argue, reputable academic careers) rather than to better serve the interests of people or societies studied by addressing difficult, persistent, global problems unconstrained by semantics.

Interestingly, the role of the academy and the disciplines themselves had, some half a century earlier, come under detailed scrutiny in England. Then, a profound and explosive debate had transfixed the academy and the public, concerning the blurring of genres, or its lack, well beyond Area Studies. Within this sometimes-censuring public conversation was an examination of how best to educate the country (including future and professional researchers) especially within and between the natural and the human sciences. Fifty-seven years later, in 2016, Robert Whelan writing in the *Telegraph* noted the dramatic impact of C. P. Snow's 'Two Cultures and the Scientific Revolution' lecture (1959) and the sizzling redoubt three years later by F. R. Leavis at Cambridge University as returning to the fore in the new millennium. Back in the 1950s, according to Whelan, Snow had argued that a 'dangerously wide gap … had opened up between scientists and "literary intellectuals" within the United Kingdom'.[62] Britain at that time, he proffered, was engaging in decadence and false confidence, while the

pernicious class system disparaged the modern and emerging science base and the new technologies. Leavis's castigating riposte lambasted Snow personally and professionally, raging at the tendency of the time to mediocracy within intellectual life. And, as Whelan observes,

> [s]uch was the intensity of debate that it might be supposed that these were age-old themes: but in fact, the idea of separating academic disciplines into groups known as science and humanities was no older than the 19th century. The term 'scientist' was only coined in 1833, and it was not until 1882 that … Matthew Arnold, discussed – under the title of 'Literature and Science' – whether or not a classical education was still relevant in an age of great scientific and technical advance.[63]

Today, the nature of public and higher education in the United Kingdom remains a matter of debate and contestation.[64] Beyond this lies the residue of arrangements for acceptable research conduct within the academy and the persistence of acknowledged, and sometimes unchallenged, divisions in disciplines, cultures and methods. Notwithstanding, academics around the world have begun once again to reflect on what has (or has not) changed since the infamous Cambridge spat nearly five decades earlier. Careful thought has gone into what we have learned in the intervening years. Building on the exchange between Snow and Leavis, Jerome Kagan, in his magnificent book *The Three Cultures* in the series on *Revisiting CP Snow*, ruminates upon the development of methods of research and (mis)understandings between the natural sciences, the humanities and the social sciences post-millennium.[65] Close to sixty years after the initial debate, he proclaims the need for a 'passionate plea to scientists, humanists and artists to break out of the cocoons of premises that separate them'.[66] Having surveyed all three elements of the modern academy, Kagan petitions scholars today 'working in all domains of inquiry who have something to contribute to a deeper understanding of the human condition'[67] and, citing J. D. Barrow, argues '[t]here is no formula that can deliver all truth, all harmony, all simplicity. No theory of Everything can ever provide total insight.'[68]

Struggling with similar, and seemingly perpetual, intellectual challenges, Paul Feyerabend argued that ideas and entrenched traditions must not be allowed to have sole rights to the manipulation of knowledge, for 'No theory ever agrees with all the facts in its domain, yet it is not always the theory that is to blame.'[69] He goes on: '[f]acts are constituted by older ideologies, and a clash between facts and theories may be proof of progress'.[70]

In *Against Method*, Feyerabend argues that all methodologies contain their limits.[71] And he posits, in relation to method, that rationality and intellect acknowledge 'there is only one principle that can be defended under all circumstances and in all stages of human development. It is the principle: [of] anything goes.'[72] This, or some version of this approach, is the crux of the argument presented in this chapter. And, to paraphrase Feyerabend, it is still true that when we engage in social research (and not scientific absolutism) we discover that the shape and style of concepts are always ambiguous and inevitably constructed.[73]

Other eminent scholars have grappled with overcoming the challenge of the 'multitude of warring sects' within the academy.[74] Many have laboured with the motives, intentions and interpretation of texts and their makers. Some have gone as far as to conclude that 'using the methods of the natural sciences in the human sciences is [no more than] comically improper'.[75] There has also been the growing but urgent introspection concerning the very purpose of the modern university laid bare by Inglis 'to sustain the conversation of the culture, to keep in circulation in a nation's bloodstream certain moral lymphocytes whether transmitting human or natural science, thereby to make them tell in everyday life'.[76] Within the current maelstrom of scholarly introspection wrapped up in the ever-expanding, some might say, malevolence of the new technologies, changes in practice of the very enterprise of research have been unavoidable. Indeed, personal accounts of the experience of the undertaking of work in place, over a career, prove captivating. We read, with rather grim fascination, of the changing academic practice through enforced norms dressed up through managerial practice and bureaucracy, which has, step by step, overwhelmed the effectiveness of the modern academy.[77] We take note of Duffield's sound warnings that the digital collapse of distance in our twenty-first-century work will inevitably be accompanied by a dangerous terrestrial pulling apart.[78]

Nonetheless, and positively, other appeals to a broader diversity of subject and specialist are coming to the fore as the new century matures. And, as Acharya has demanded of colleagues in International Relations, we must struggle to 'celebrate the differences among[st] … different theoretical, epistemological, and methodological approaches. But in so doing, [we] should … strive for greater respect for diversity in our knowledge sources and claims, historical experiences, and beliefs and approaches about world

order'.[79] Moreover, by seeking out such diversity, those of us in Area Studies (like International Relations) 'will become [more] … vibrant, innovative, and inclusive … reflect[ing] the voices, experiences, interests, and identities of all of humankind'.[80]

In its twenty-first-century incarnation, Area Studies has gone back to the future, returning to the earlier ideas of classical studies including culture in its fullest sense as literature, art, religion, philosophy, politics, architecture and mathematics. From this perspective, pursuing Area Studies offers enormous benefits, allowing scholars to eschew the traditional pre-set, deadening, disciplinary boundaries by addressing the everyday and messy complexities of the lives of places and peoples.[81]

Despite the commonplace criticisms of Area Studies referred to earlier in this chapter, this more diverse work encourages positive innovation in both theory and method. Peter Jackson, in reviewing the importance of Area Studies to the understanding of modern Asia, noted the critique of what he called the 'classical form of area studies based on the notion of culture-language areas'.[82] While observing that the death of Area Studies 'would leave students of Asian societies in a theoretically and politically fraught situation',[83] Jackson convincingly makes the argument for the necessity of Area Studies, claiming that what was necessary was a full-blown post-structuralist Area Studies to assuage the impact of cultural homogenization (in Asia). In this way, he offers a serious challenge to the economic determinism of Western post-structuralist theory based on the belief that cross-cultural analysis and post-structuralism itself can benefit from the methodological cross-fertilization within the broader and wider Area Studies rubric. So, Jackson argues, the Euro-American theoretical hegemony may be resisted and perhaps overturned for the benefit of broader populations and cultures.[84]

In the oft-tarnished glow of the new millennium, and with increasing recognition of globalization in every aspect of our everyday lives, it is unsurprising that peoples in every corner of the world seek to shape their own future.[85] That this may be achieved through influencing the nature of research undertaken by academics in their regions and communities should be unremarkable. Neither is it astounding that communities should try to actively shape that research or treat with suspicion those who resist local

knowledge and significant contributions to what academics seek to understand in depth.

Blurring genres

So, it seems that a new genre-blurring epoch is upon us. A plethora of scholars have made innovative and important contributions, which together prove significant for the discipline of Area Studies. Gillian Hart has shown how historical ethnography can assist us with relational comparison,[86] Arjun Appadurai[87] has focused on the importance of circulatory processes, while Clifford[88] presents the case for ethnography to escape the local and Burawoy[89] envisages a global ethnography taking account of broader external forces. Importantly, and marking a significant departure, Marcus has argued for a polyvocal and multi-sited ethnography that is both policy related and theoretically informed,[90] while Gibson-Graham suggests Area Studies itself is 'a rich resource for the *theorization*, observation and enactment of economic difference' (emphasis added). Horschelmann and Stenning have advocated a Cosmopolitan Area Studies that 'seeks to provincialize universal western knowledge claims and … become[s] more inclusive of, as well as relevant to, the concerns of people in the majority world'.[91] They have also made essential distinctions, presenting the importance of polyvocality with a critical edge, while practising deep reflection 'on the intimacy that engagement with the lives of others over sustained periods of times affords'.[92] Seeing the world from this altered perspective allows the development of place in a more complete context, while recognizing and acknowledging the new historicist and interpretivist directions available in a broader academic understanding.[93]

Some within the academy have already appreciated the significance of such developments. Kubik has marked the changes already in place, noting that 'today's political science often rewards the work by generalists-cum-area-specialists who are fluent in the most recent theorizing and have … mastered … cutting edge methodological tools … because they possess a thorough empirical knowledge of their "areas"'.[94] His work on Eastern Europe demonstrates the point that Area Studies expects scholars to consider relationalism (to include structure and agency), historicism (the study of

history in politics), constructivism (considering meaning, interpretation, processes and culture), formal–informal hybrids (structures and networks) as well as localism (including the micro in social and political processes). Through his theory of contextual holism Kubik articulates the dramatic but current success of dialogue with the contextualists.

One such example can be seen in the work of Kay and Oldfield, who have demonstrated that multidisciplinary Area Studies can provide a stimulating context to advance our understanding of the role that emotions play within the research process itself.[95] Having suggested that the nature of such studies draws people together, allowing the passions, anxieties and emotions of the researcher (and the researched) to be acknowledged within fieldwork, their work reveals how the researcher's history, characteristics and emotions matter in the nature of their subjective research. They take apart the actual experience of undertaking such work in Russia by generously giving of themselves.[96] Among their considerations are the lived experiences and emotional subjectivities of researcher and researched, bolstered by the central necessity of making time for critical reflection as part of the total research process.[97] Such personal insight, combined with a good dollop of professional bravery, demonstrates that post-millennium Area Studies scholars have considered the import of their studies, and also the significance of their chosen methods and the consequence of the research outcomes to others. Acknowledging the early foresight of some of our number, Vincente Rafael, at the turn of the century, made the case that

> [i]t is precisely the accidental nature of area studies, or more precisely the accidental ways by which their practitioners stumble into studying specific areas, that makes them worthwhile as sites for encountering *regions of otherness* the disciplines tend to discount. In this sense we can think of the putative weakness of area studies … as their actual strength … What … we have in common is the fact that we not only study 'otherness' but often find ourselves through our travels and our readings in foreign languages to be an 'other'.[98] (italics added)

Isabell Schierenbeck, in contemplating the other, has also recommended that Area Studies must today examine different approaches to the 'local turn', making the most of our context-based methods through innovative research designs and interdisciplinary research involving locals.[99] By finding others, as well as ourselves, we know now that the development of an Area Studies methodology *must* involve institutions, actors and their goals. Such contextualized knowledge, Schierenbeck proffers, involves examining the

local, including institutions and agency. The advantage of such work is, of course, its ability to question the common local/global binary, while creating new methods through inter-epistemological research in context. Simultaneously, too, we will refine and rethink older methodological approaches and analytical tools in our search to obtain deeper knowledge on local actors and their available agency. Such primary concerns have led others, including Somer, to speculate whether Area Studies, and in this case Turkish Studies, are, at this point in history, theory-consuming or theory-producing. After careful weighing up, Somer concludes: 'theory-developing critical case studies may present the most promising way Turkish Studies can utilize to simultaneously become more theoretically relevant and achieve a better understanding of Turkish society and politics'.[100]

Somer's local but insightful consideration of what Area Studies means in place (and to people – including, of course, scholars) offers a modern recognition that theory and practice needs must go hand in hand. Such collaboration proves necessary to address the deep complexities that trouble our societies as they struggle with challenges crossing borders, cultures, times and ethnicities. Most recently, it seems that ideas on theory production have expanded; and Area Studies itself has been able to assist with new vistas on old problems, combining comparative elements across countries and peoples. Atlas,[101] for example, strives to achieve a three-part conceptual framework (consisting of the Turnerian discourse, the Lipset Thesis and Borderlands Studies) in examining the history of the United States–Canada North American frontier while utilizing a range of scholarly literature, and to apply that knowledge in comparative analysis of national policies towards Indians and First Nations in the post-Civil War and post-Confederation period on the Great Plains and the Prairies.[102] Other scholars, including the author, have crossed disciplinary boundaries seeking an explanation of thinking and feeling of those studied in place but ranged across continents, while seeking a deeper emphasis on meaning or agency.[103] The development of prolonged interest in these boundary-crossing forays in the United Kingdom, and beyond, has been evident in the establishment of the Blurring Genres Research Network, supported by the United Kingdom Arts and Humanities Research Council, seeking to bridge established disciplinary boundaries between Area Studies, Political Science, History, Anthropology, Philosophy and Drama, and including the work of policy-makers.[104] Interest

in participating in such innovative scholarship has been international, including both speakers and attendees of this seminar series.

Area Studies in the twenty-first century is back to the future. Our work today has important public benefit. Academics and the academy are increasingly demonstrating this truth through research and impact. Our work is not done but rather, beginning anew. In 1978 Edward Said remarked in *Orientalism* that the Orient was 'almost a European invention now … disappearing'. Its time was over and 'it seemed irrelevant that Orientals themselves had something at stake in the process'.[105] For Said, in the 1970s, the Orient was the place of Europe's many colonies and 'the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the other'.[106] Presciently, in the introduction to his seminal work, he refers to Orientalism and Area Studies interchangeably, with an Orientalist (and an Area Studies scholar) 'being one who teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient … whether the person is an anthropologist, sociologist, historian, or philologist – either in its specific or its general aspects'.[107] And, moreover, invoking Foucault's concept of discourse, he comments: 'without examining Orientalism as a discourse one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage – and even produce – the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period'.[108] It is this notion of *discourse* that nearly forty years later remains imperative. Said's insight proves as important today as it was in the 1970s. Area Studies continues to be crucial to deep and satisfactory understanding of place and people in addressing difficult, modern and persistent problems. At best, it involves a frank conversation with power, intellect, policy, culture, morals, about 'we' and 'they' and why we *still* do not fully understand each other. And it addresses matters of the local, including structures and institutions, as well as the inevitable evolution of societal norms.

Conclusion

At the turn of the century, in his inimitable fashion, Clifford Geertz tried to reckon up his life and its 'piled up' learning. He observed that 'the study of other people's cultures … involves discovering who they think they are, what

they think they are doing, and to what end they think they are doing it'.[109] To achieve this, Geertz noted the need to 'gain a working familiarity with the frames of meaning within which … [people] enact their lives … learning how, as a being from elsewhere with a world of one's own, to live with them'.[110] *Living with those we seek to understand* is surely the most urgent undertaking of Area Studies. It remains as necessary today as it was at the end of the Second World War when it was established to engage in deep examination of place and people. Today, three notable additions must be added to the achievements of modern Area Studies. First is the full involvement of local people in the creation of our research, enabling us to get *under the skin of those we seek to know* and to *better understand place*. Second is the realization that how *people feel* in undertaking such work impacts upon the being and doing of that work and our capability to excel at the work which we undertake, and the consideration of its reception. Thirdly, a new generation of scholars are emerging, deeply instilled with profound intellectual inquisitiveness, who are willing to risk careerist censure to find out what it feels like to *be there*. And, as Mairead NicCrath and Emma Hill have perceptively pointed out in an excellent article on this topic, *being there* is sometimes all that we can reasonably hope to achieve.[111]

In the twenty-first century, Area Studies scholars have renewed their belief in the fundamental power of their research. They have regained their confidence in the inductive weight of their studies of peoples and place. In this process, Jung (2014) has recorded how they have necessarily questioned social scientists' claims that they failed to create theory-driven research being overly preoccupied with culture, history and description.[112] Significantly, too, Jung notes that in the end all scholars, including social scientists, must, like Weber, acknowledge that 'each of us knows that what he has accomplished will be antiquated in ten, twenty, fifty years … the very meaning of science is to engage in a chain of scientific progress that will completely outdate one's own achievements within the course of time'.[113]

This chapter has charted the resurrection of Area Studies in the early twenty-first century, explored the self-examination of Area Studies scholars in the doing, and presented an account of a renewed and reinvigorated discourse, a theory-borne discipline, in the first eighteen years of this century. It has argued that this revitalized *conversational scholarship*, taken as a whole, positively *blurs the genres* between the traditional disciplinary

boundaries in the social and human sciences. And it acknowledges that our understanding becomes ever more complex and insightful as Area Studies scholars have proposed, disposed, discussed, redefined and renegotiated this important intellectual and theoretical shift. As Duffield has concluded from his experience as both researcher and practitioner in the field, much is today at stake to 'control a world that is no longer understood'.[114] In outlining our unending and, some might say, foolish drive to capture and objectify, Duffield argues that we must once again strive to 'regain … what has been taken and made distant'.[115] In such imperative, indeed dangerous, circumstances the need for a modernized, contextual and multi/interdisciplinary Area Studies proves more urgent for a restored humanity and subjectivity in our everyday work.

The reach and fundamental importance of today's Area Studies is clear. Recently, Acharya appealed to International Relations specialists to explore regional worlds, in their full diversity and interconnectedness, to engage with their subjects and to use methods requiring deep and substantive integration of both disciplinary and Area Studies knowledge.[116]

Abrahamsen, too, in considering the future of the study of Africa, noted that bringing the continent into the study of International Relations cannot just be a case of 'add Africa and stir',[117] as the 'continent does not enter the discipline as a neutral object of study'.[118] Moreover, she argues, the case for the necessary negotiation on epistemological and methodological challenges *between the disciplines* and of 'making it possible to study Africa simultaneously as a place *in* the world and *of* the world' (italics added) proves crucial. Such ability is necessary in the final analysis for the capture of the continent's politics and societies as both unique and global.

Today, Area Studies scholars share with International Relations specialists (and other academic colleagues) the belief that the academy needs the profound motivation to examine ideas and norms and their circulation between *all* levels of a shrinking globe, both local and global. Despite all the odds, and in a new century, we continue discussing the significance of area to our lived world, in our everyday stories and lives, in our commonplace studies. And, increasingly, in what some have claimed a post-truth world,[119] the need for an ever-deeper *knowledge* and *experience* of *place* and *peoples* achieved through informed and scholarly discourse simply will not go away.

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