Southeast Asian Area Studies beyond Anglo-America: Geopolitical Transitions, the Neoliberal Academy and Spatialised Regimes of Knowledge

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ABSTRACT

Critical theorists and scholars in Asian cultural studies have challenged the political legitimacy and analytical validity of the cross-disciplinary enterprise of area studies. Area studies has been critiqued as emerging from and reflecting imperialist and Cold War era political agendas; as being overly empirical and disinterested in or even resistant to critical theoretical methods; and as being an outdated form of knowledge that reflects a pre-globalisation era defined by the geopolitics of the nation state. I challenge these three criticisms of area studies in light of the fact that, contrary to predictions, spatiality has not been erased but rather has been reformulated in the context of globalisation. Critiques of area studies fail to address dramatic changes in global knowledge production underway as a result of the geopolitical rise of East, Southeast and South Asia, and overlook the ways the neoliberal re-disciplining of the academy is entrenching Eurocentric forms of knowledge. Following Houben’s (2013) call for a “new area studies”, I argue for the validity and importance of 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 by intensifying the spatialisation of knowledge under early 21st century globalisation.

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INTRODUCTION

New Area Studies: Geopolitics, Globalisation, Neoliberalism and Theory

Harry Harootunian (2012, p. 8) observes that area studies, “was founded on the privilege attached to fixed spatial containers, such as geographic area, culture region, or directional locality.... The model for these spatial regularities has undoubtedly been the nation state”. As a cross-disciplinary study of cultures, languages, societies, economies and polities, early varieties of area studies often assumed that geopolitical boundaries mapped methodologically valid frames for investigating difference and also marked epistemological frontiers between distinct, geographically bounded fields of inquiry. Critical theorists and scholars in Asian cultural studies (e.g. Masao & Harootunian 2002) have challenged the political legitimacy and analytical validity of this cross-disciplinary enterprise. Area studies has been critiqued as emerging from and reflecting the imperialist and Cold War era political agendas of first, European, and subsequently, American, hegemony. Harootunian contends that, “area studies ignored the historical experience of colonialism, [and] dismissed the destinies of decolonization by affirming the Cold War strategy of sandwiching new nations between the monologic discourse of two superpowers.” (2012: 9) For Harootunian, area studies is indelibly marked by a “misshapen mission” in which it has been “duplicitous in its capacious desire to serve a state [the United States] that sought to refashion the world through unbound capitalism”. (2012, p.10) Critical theorists have also denounced area studies as being overly empirical, and disinterested in or even resistant to critical theoretical methods. Naoki Sakai argues, “the presumed or explicit hostility to theory among area specialists often results in a refusal to reflect upon the conditions of their discipline. They are afraid of cultural studies and postcolonial studies precisely because they will be forced to reflect upon their knowledge production.” (2012, p. 90) Harootunian maintains that area studies, “has produced no paradigmatic or conceptual breakthrough”, which in his view reflects the “obsolescence” and “bankruptcy” of area-based knowledge systems constrained by an instrumental “purpose to supply the national security state with accurate information concerning the United States’ enemies.” (2012 p. 9) And, thirdly, students of globalisation have argued that area studies is an outdated form of knowledge that reflects a pre-globalisation era defined by the geopolitics of the nation state. These latter scholars contend that transnational border-crossing phenomena are the dominant features of early 21st century life. Malcolm Waters argues, “In a globalised world there will be a single society and culture occupying the planet. . . . Territoriality will disappear as an organising principle for social and cultural life, there will be a society without borders and spatial boundaries.” (1995, p. 3)

These critiques of area studies -- emerging from studies of geopolitics, critical theory and globalisation, respectively -- argue against studying forms of knowledge in terms of spatiality or geographically bordered epistemologies. I challenge these 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 globalisation. Following Vincent Houben’s (2013) call for a “new area studies”, I consider inaccuracies and misrepresentations in the various critiques of area studies and argue for a theoretically sophisticated critical area studies founded on the empirical reality that knowledge continues to be deeply spatialised under early 21st century globalisation. While simplistic approaches that map forms of knowledge onto the borders of nation states need to be abandoned, globalisation has not erased all borders or overcome what Australian historian Geoffrey Blainey (1983) labelled “the tyranny of distance”. Spatiality remains a structuring principle of geopolitics and neoliberal global modernity (Dirlik 2005), with new forms of border-crossing mobility emerging at the same time that equally new forms of bordered, monitored and policed immobility restrict transnational flows. Neoliberal capitalism is entrenching certain geographical divides at the same time that other dimensions of economic and social life are being despatialised. For these reasons, location and geography remain key issues for critical theory and comparative epistemology and Arif Dirlik describes the new spatialities of globalisation as the foundation of a contemporary form of area studies,
Capitalism may be reconfigured by its very globalisation. On the other hand, it is still capital, now distributed around a multiplicity of centres across the Pacific, that shapes the motions of labour and commodities, as well as the fate of the indigenous peoples of the Pacific. Capital has the power to structure the region, and to shape the content of Asia Pacific studies as a contemporary version of area studies. (2005, p. 168)

Many critiques of area studies fail to address the dramatic changes in global knowledge production that are underway as a result of the geopolitical repositioning of Euro-America following the rise of East, Southeast and South Asian polities and academies. Geopolitics continues to impact deeply on knowledge production, and it is for this reason that cross-disciplinary area studies is both politically important and epistemologically valid. In a multi-polar world in which the neoliberalised academy is increasingly dominated by discipline-based global rankings that devalue cross-disciplinary research, comparative area studies assumes a renewed and vital relevance. The critiques have overlooked the markedly different political contexts of the practice of area studies beyond the Anglophone academies of the United States and the United Kingdom. These critiques have also ignored the stultifying impact of the neoliberal disciplining of knowledge in quantified rankings of “academic quality”, which are further entrenching the global authority of Eurocentric discipline-based forms of knowledge. From these critical considerations I argue for the validity and importance of linguistically informed cross-disciplinary area studies in an era when neoliberal managerialism and metrification of research and teaching are casting a conservative pall over the academy internationally.

The Imbrication of Analytical Positionality and Geographical Location

Positionality, as a theoretical issue and as a matter of academic practice, remains spatialised and deeply impacted by geographical locatedness under neoliberal globalisation. Donna Haraway describes positioning as, “the key practice grounding knowledge because ‘position’ indicates the kind of power that enables a certain kind of knowledge.” (Haraway 1991: 193, cited by Mielke & Hornidge 2014, p. 24) Positionality is a matter of where oneself as a scholar, 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. Positionality refers to the reflexive understanding that as knowing subjects we are embedded within the very nets of power that we seek to describe and understand.

I argue here that positionality, one’s intellectual locatedness in the nets of power that pattern forms of discourse, and spatiality, one’s geographical location in a global system structured by multiple hierarchies of centres and peripheries, are intimately related. Intellectual positionality and geographical location both remain central to the forms of knowledge of the social, cultural, political and economic worlds we inhabit.

In previous studies I argued for “a theoretically sophisticated area studies based on the idea that forms of cultural and discursive difference remain bounded within multidimensional spatialities” (Jackson 2003a, p. 7, also Jackson 2003b). I remain concerned to think about how we are to understand the fact -- perhaps empirically more obvious to those who work outside Anglo-America than to those living in the metropoles -- that where one is located on this planet has a fundamental impact on one’s status and power within the global system, including within the international academy. One’s geographical location in the world system has a direct relation to whether one’s voice is or can be heard within the corridors of intellectual authority. Theories of positionality propose that forms of knowledge emerge in the context of forms of power, and the new area studies contends that under globalisation power, and hence knowledge, continue to be spatialised in hierarchical ways.
PART 1 - MULTIPLE VARIETIES OF AREA STUDIES IN A GEOPOLITICALLY DYNAMIC WORLD

Katja Mielke and Anna-Katharina Hornidge (2014, p.4) note that orientalist Asian studies in Europe can be traced back “to studying the societies of the European colonies”, while American area studies has been critiqued (e.g. see Miyoshi & Harootunian 2002) as emerging from Cold War era priorities to “understand the [communist] enemy” and as “enabling the enforcement of particular ‘geographies of power’ in line with the geopolitically informed logic of the Cold War” (2014, p. 4). In discussing European area studies Thongchai Winichakul observes that while individual Orientalist scholars were not themselves proponents of colonialism, “Nevertheless, the knowledge that they produced was inextricably linked to the system of knowledge produced in the colonial era.” (2014, p. xv) And Thongchai observes of American area studies, “The legacies of the anti-communism era still remain in area studies scholarship, even among those scholars who personally opposed this Cold War ideology, because they are embedded in a system of knowledge production that emerged from that period.” (2014, pp. xv-xvi)

While valid as criticisms of the origins and practice of area studies in the British and American academies, these judgements are perhaps less relevant to the forms of area studies that have emerged outside those university systems. Despite the critiques advanced since the 1990s, area studies has not disappeared from the global intellectual scene. At the same time that area studies was being challenged by sections of the American, British, Canadian and Australian academies, new area studies research centres and teaching programs were being established across Asia: in Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines, Japan, Taiwan, Korea, China and elsewhere. Mielke and Hornidge note that a distinctive feature of Southeast Asian area studies has been the promotion of this field, “in the region itself, ... through the creation of ... institutes like the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) in Singapore in 1971 ... or the Asia Research Institute at the National University of Singapore in 2001 and interdisciplinary programs of [Southeast Asian Studies] in several countries.” (2014, p. 9) Mielke and Hornidge also observe that, “[T]he Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN, founded in 1967) has been a driving force in the establishment of the ‘discipline’ [of Southeast Asian area studies] in Southeast Asia itself.” (2014, p. 9n14) And area studies programs and departments continue to be active in many Western universities, such as SOAS in the United Kingdom and at the Australian National University.

Political factors indeed mark the practice of area of studies. However, the politics underpinning area studies programs in the academies of East and Southeast Asia do not necessarily reflect either European imperialist orientalism or American Cold War agendas. Asian academies have drawn upon the area studies model, as well as literatures produced by European and American area studies scholars, as bases for establishing new centres and programs that respond to regional political contexts and local exigencies. As Mielke and Hornidge note, the debates around area studies have been “largely Western centric with an embarrassing ignorance of how other, non-Western knowledge orders try to make sense of ‘areas’” (2014 p. 13). While decrying area studies for imperialist ethnocentrism, some critiques of the field have remained caught within American- and British-centred positions that overlook the practice of area studies in former colonies and in societies beyond Euro-America. Indeed, the debates around area studies have not so much been West-centric as Anglo-Amerocentric, as they have also often ignored the distinctive political context of area studies in non-metropolitan postcolonial Western countries such as Australia. The criticism that area studies reflects imperialist and Cold War policies overlooks the possibility that in some situations this cross-disciplinary enterprise may be practised as a form of resistance to historical projects of hegemony as well as the fact that new forms of hegemony in and from geopolitically ascendant Asian countries, notably China, may now constitute more significant influences. The new area studies contends that a national academy's geopolitical position in the increasingly multipolar networks of 21st century power influences the distinctive political tenor of area studies practised in and from that location. This critical project then seeks to appreciate the multiplicity of different area studies
approaches that exist internationally in terms of the specific forms of political, economic and discursive power that intersect in each academic location.

Diverse Imprints of Power on Asian Area Studies beyond Anglo-America

Southeast Asian Area Studies in Southeast Asia as an Anti-Imperialist Project

In contrast to the critique that area studies is ensnared within imperialist projects, the political agendas behind the establishment of new area studies centres and programs in Southeast Asia have often been anti-hegemonic and anti-imperialist. In Thailand, the Philippines, Singapore and elsewhere in this region, new Southeast Asian area studies programs have challenged the Anglo-centrism, Franco-centrism, Dutch-centrism and Amero-centrism of the academies in the former colonies and semi-colonies. These regional academies previously had stronger relations and intellectual engagement with the geographically remote metropolitan academies of their former imperial overlords than they did with their immediate Southeast Asian neighbours. As Gayatri Spivak observes, “An important infrastructural problem of the restricted permeability of global culture is the lack of communication within and among the immense heterogeneity of the subaltern cultures of the world.” (Spivak 2003, p. 16) The establishment of Southeast Asian area studies within Southeast Asia is therefore a postcolonial challenge to Euro-Amerocentrism, not a kowtowing to residual orientalist or Cold War projects.

Hegemonic Imaginings and Asian Area Studies in China

The imprint of Chinese state power on the content, form and practice of area studies in that country was made clear in 2017 with attempts to censor international publishers. In 2017, representatives of the Chinese Government asked Cambridge University Press and Springer Nature to block Internet access to articles in their journals on topics such as the Cultural Revolution and Tibet for users within China. This indicates the ways that Chinese hegemonic aspirations and attempts to exercise power over foreign publishers are already impacting knowledge flows. The Chinese Government’s efforts to maintain a virtual Internet firewall around its borders reflects the new forms of spatialised power over information and knowledge that have emerged in this century.

And in the specific case of Southeast Asian studies in China, we perhaps need to ask whether this field of area studies may also bear the imprint of that country’s increasingly assertive geopolitical stance. In recent decades, Chinese scholars have conducted major anthropological and linguistic studies of the Dai and Zhuang ethnic minorities in Southern China, whose languages and cultures are closely related to Thai, Lao and Shan. The Chinese studies reveal that many of the ethnic groups in modern Thailand, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam originated in China and migrated to their current locations in Southeast Asia over the past two millennia. However, may these studies perhaps be incorporated within an expansionist nationalist agenda in which the histories and cultures of the Thai, Lao and Shan are brought within a re-imagined greater China? The project of critical new area studies needs to ask to what extent China’s stance of seeking to assert geopolitical power in Southeast Asia impacts on Southeast Asian area studies within the PRC.

Contrasting Dimensions of Asian and Pacific Area Studies in Postcolonial Australia

While Australia is an Anglophone Western society, area studies in that country cannot always be subsumed under the same critiques that have been made of this enterprise in Europe and the United States. In some respects, Asian and Pacific area studies in Australia reflect the fitful attempts of a
colonial European settler society to come to terms with its geographical location in the Asia Pacific. While area studies in Australia is conducted in the context of the globally dominant Anglophone academy in a society that is culturally Western and economically developed, the country is nonetheless a former colony on the geographical margins of the world system at a point of intersection between Southeast Asia and the Pacific. Australia, and Asian and Pacific area studies in that country, are located within overlapping nets of power and influence, which in some dimensions position the Australian academy as dominant, yet in other dimensions locate it as subordinate in international contexts. Asian and Pacific area studies in Australia have complex, indeed multiple, orientations, and can be critically assessed through several lenses.

For example, the Australian National University (ANU) was established in 1946 in the immediate aftermath of World War II as the intellectual dimension of a postcolonial nation-building project. Following the fall of British Singapore to Japan in 1942 and Japanese wartime attacks on the Australian mainland, the post-War government determined it could not rely on a war-weakened Britain or a declining British empire to ensure the country’s economic future or national security. Asian and Pacific area studies programs were established at the ANU as part of a nationalist program to build an independent research base in Australia that reflected the country’s changed geopolitical priorities. However, almost all the first generations of scholars employed in this intellectual nation-building project completed their studies in Britain, the United States, the Netherlands or France. Asian and Pacific area studies taught at the ANU in the first decades after World War II thus bore strong imprints of area studies as practised in Britain (especially SOAS, Oxford and Cambridge Universities), the United States (especially Cornell University), the Netherlands (Leiden) and France. The residues of these (post)colonial imprints on Australian Asian and Pacific area studies academy remain strong today.

**Area Studies in Globalising Germany: Opening Spaces for Critical Analysis**

Area studies in Germany, which lost its colonial empire in the aftermath of World War I, also does not conform to the critiques of the political embeddedness of area studies in the United States and the United Kingdom. Manuela Boatcă observes that the rationale for the recent promotion of area studies in Germany as part of the Excellence Initiative of the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung [BMBF]) and the German Research Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft [DFG]) has been, “to develop strategic resources for the management of globalisation phenomena such as the growing migratory flows” (2012, p. 25). In the view of the BMBF, “to maintain and improve competitiveness in the globalisation process, it is essential that Germany’s … expertise with regard to different regions of the world be further developed. Only when a broad range of expertise is available will it be possible to successfully communicate with other world regions.” (BMBF 2008, cited and translated Cited by Boatcă 2012, p. 25)

In critically assessing the support for area studies within the German Government’s Excellence Initiative, Boatcă argues that these initiatives, “may also in some cases open up new spaces in the German academy for the development of critical approaches to migration studies and ethnic and racial studies” as well as “gender studies and attention to minority politics” (2012, p. 17). Houben’s (2013) call for a new area studies in Germany and internationally is also framed in terms opening new spaces for critical analysis. In contrast to the image of area studies as an intellectually

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3 The stated aims of the German Excellence Initiative, promoted by the German Research Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, DFG) are to: promote cutting-edge research; create outstanding conditions for young scientists at universities; deepen cooperation between disciplines and institutions; strengthen international cooperation of research; and enhance the international appeal of excellent German universities (www.excellence-initiative.com, accessed 10 February, 2015).
conservative empiricist endeavour, Boatcã contends that the development of area studies in 21st century Germany is taking place in critical and theoretically engaged settings.

A Multiplication of World Powers: Proliferating Hegemonies and Diverse Forms of 21st Century Area Studies

The diversity of geopolitical positionings of area studies in different 21st century academies shows the need for more nuanced accounts of the multiplicity of hegemonic influences at work today. We need theories of power and hegemony as multinodal, and we also need more complex models of how geopolitical power intersects with spatialised forms of knowledge. A singular emphasis on critiquing the legacies of 19th century European colonialism and 20th century American neocolonialism will blind us to the need for multidimensional analyses of the operations of power in this century, whose geopolitical contours already mark it as an era of multiple, competing hegemonic and proto-hegemonic influences emanating from America, Europe, China, Russia, Japan, and elsewhere.

A central method of 20th century critical theory was to challenge hegemony by deconstructing the unequal power relations that underpin mutually defining binary categories. However, deconstruction may not be a sufficient form of critical analysis in responding to the challenges of a multinodal world. Deconstructing the binaries of “self-other”, “queer-straight”, “woman-man”, “Black-White”, “Orient-Occident”, “believer-infidel”, remain as urgent as ever. However, in a multinodal world with multiple, competing centres of power – when older forms of European and American hegemony are competing with the aspiring hegemons of China, Russia and militant Islam -- the tools of 20th century critical theory will need to be augmented with forms of analysis that permit us to think in terms of multiplicities as well as binaries. Our academic gaze now needs to be focused just as much on the new hegemonies emerging on the eastern horizon as on the old hegemons seeking to retain their influence from positions in the west.

In analysing religion, secularity and queer critical analysis Nikita Dhawan contends that we need to be wary of “unidimensional understanding[s] of operations of power and violence” because, “Power and violence do not flow only from the Western liberal states; rather they have multiple sources that are deeply entangled” (2013, p. 205). Dhawan calls for, “a more complex, multidirectional politics of critique that is directed at coercive practices across the secularism-religion divide.” (2013, p. 195) Dhawan states that critical theory needs to acknowledge and engage “the existence of other forms of violence that are not reducible to Western racism and imperialism even as they are not entirely disconnected from them.” (2013, p. 217) A multinodal approach to critiquing hegemony is also needed to analyse the multiple forms of power that transect semicolonial Asian societies such as Thailand, which while avoiding becoming direct colonies of Western powers nonetheless assumed subordinate positions in the Western dominated world order (Harrison & Jackson 2010).

In the 21st century, the forms of power over area studies, and indeed over all forms of academic discourse and intellectual practice, are diverse and operate in multiple directions. In some political settings, such as Southeast Asia, area studies may constitute an anti-imperialist project to decolonise knowledge or, as in Germany, it may provide an opportunity to introduce new critical perspectives within a conservative academy. However, in other settings, such as China, area studies may provide a vehicle for hegemonic imaginings. The diverse political contexts of the contemporary forms of area studies practised beyond Anglo-America do not conform to either the colonial era or Cold War projects that are the focus of many current critiques. There is therefore a need for a new critical project that understands the varieties of area studies in different 21st century academies as being imbricated within the geopolitical stances of their respective national polities. Critical analyses need to be based upon more complex models of geopolitical power in order to trace the actual political positionings of area studies in each national academy.
PART 2 - CROSS-DISCIPLINARY AREA STUDIES: CHALLENGING THE DISCIPLINARY LIMITS OF EUROCENTRISM

The Disciplines as Disguised Forms of Western Area Studies

A second criticism made of area studies is that the field is overly empirical and disinterested in or resistant to critical theoretical approaches. Naoki Sakai is especially critical of what he regards as area studies’ lack of theoretical engagement,

By and large, area specialists have failed to answer ... questions about the legitimacy of area studies; to a great extent it has become apparent that area specialists have proven incapable of answering them in an adequate way and consequently find no other option but to be silent on their own academic legitimation.... We might as well acknowledge that area studies exists today mainly thanks to institutional inertia that lacks ... intellectual legitimacy. (2012, p. 69)

Sakai claims that area studies approaches have failed to engage with critical approaches that reveal the effects of power on knowledge production,

The most symbolic moment for the history of area studies came when Edward Said published *Orientalism* in 1978. Area studies as a field refused to engage Said’s scholarship for some time, but the book’s impact was nevertheless deep; since its publication, area specialists have been preoccupied with disavowing the impacts of Said’s analysis. (2012, p. 83)

Sakai does not acknowledge the significant numbers of scholars (e.g. Dirlik, Houben, Spivak) who have reimagined area studies as drawing on non-Western discourses, epistemologies, societies and cultural formations to critique Euro-Americancentrism and develop more comprehensive theories of global phenomena. Critiques of area studies such as Sakai’s champion the disciplines as alternative, ostensibly epistemologically valid forms of knowledge production. However, these accounts overlook the extent to which many discipline-based forms of knowledge are themselves implicated within, and reflect, Euro-American intellectual and geopolitical hegemony. Critical areaanists point out that the disciplines are in fact disguised forms of area studies that take the culture region of the West as their implicit spatial frame. Houben argues, “It has become increasingly clear that the disciplines themselves are area studies, since they basically describe the processes and structures of a Western world” (2013, p. 4). In a similar vein, Sanjay Seth asks, “[H]ow and why is it that we assume that modern knowledge is universal, despite its European genealogy and its historically recent provenance?” (2013, p. 138) Mielke and Hornidge (2014, p. 12) observe that, rather than being opposed, alternative approaches to knowledge production, the disciplines and area studies exist in symbiotic relationships, because the disciplines would not be in a position to produce ostensibly general theories without area studies’ accounts of non-Western societies.

Many humanities and social science disciplines are geographically based forms of knowledge, effectively constituting fields of Euro-American studies in which the location of knowledge production has been obscured as an epistemological effect of the geopolitical hegemony of the West. Walter Mignolo observes, “While capitalism moved from Europe to the United States, then to Japan, and now to China, epistemology apparently remains located in Europe, which is taken, simultaneously, as the nonplace (or transparently universal) locus of enunciation.” (2002a, p. 938) Allen Chun similarly argues, “The epistemological dilemma of Asia invokes a need to problematize the West and Western studies.” (2008, p. 691) In the disciplines as constituted in the centres of intellectual authority in the West, the West itself is almost always an unmarked site of the universal and of general theory, while the non-West is marked as a site of the particular and of empirical detail. Mignolo relates this spatialised epistemological divide between a theoretical West and an empirical non-West to the history of capitalism, “Universalism, as the ideological keystone of historical
capitalism, is a faith as well as an epistemology, a faith in the real phenomenon of truth and the epistemology that justifies local [i.e. Western] truth with universal values.” (2002b, p. 79)

The Failures of Social Analysis in Asia: The Eurocentrism of Discipline-bound Theory

Criticisms that area studies is disinterested in or resistant to theory, and counter-claims that discipline-based analysis is a disguised form of Western area studies, have at times been framed in terms of a related debate between strictly disciplinary forms of knowledge, on the one hand, and the cross-disciplinary methods championed by area studies, on the other. Mielke and Hornidge (2014 p. 12-13) observe that issues of interdisciplinarity, crossdisciplinarity, and transdisciplinarity have been a central focus of debates about area studies, and Houben argues that breaking through the epistemological borders set up by the established disciplines is necessary if we are to transcend the Euro-Amerocentrism of these fields,

Their contextuality in the spatial and temporal sense makes the disciplines ... inappropriate to explain processes of intertwinement between globalisation and localisation beyond the West.... It seems that the most promising zones of scientific innovation are located at the interstices of several disciplines rather than at their cores. (2013, p. 4)

While critics of area studies have also challenged the cross-disciplinary methods that are at the heart of these diverse fields of study, discipline-based analysis has nonetheless often been singularly unsuccessful in developing theories that explain globalising processes beyond the West. Seth reflects on the failures of social theory produced from the West to explain the forms or predict the directions of social, cultural, economic and political change in the 21st century,

[A]n acknowledgement of the historicity of our knowledge ... leaves us with the recognition that our intellectual categories are historically and culturally produced, but with no compelling reason to regard them as superior to those deriving from a different history. This conclusion needs to be embraced ... because it explains why the analytical categories of the social sciences are so often inadequate when employed to understand the non-West. (2013, p. 139)

Seth emphasises forcefully that, “[What] has been staring us in the face for a very long time but has not been accounted for [is] the inadequacy of the social sciences when they are used to understand the non-Western world.” (2013, p. 144) Seth also observes that not only are the Western social sciences “inadequate to their non-Western objects”, they may also “inhibit rather than advance understanding” (2013, p. 144). These failures follow as consequences of the geographically, historically and culturally limited scope of the empirical bases from which discipline-based social theories have been developed, meaning that there are chasms of ignorance at the centre of supposedly “general” Western theory. Given the limitations of discipline-based analysis in producing theories that genuinely enlighten us about 21st century global modernity, the cross-disciplinary methods of area studies assume theoretical importance as potentially fruitful sources of insight into processes that extend beyond Euro-America.

Area Studies Departments and Preserving Asian Language Teaching in Anglophone Universities: The Theoretical Importance of Languages

Dirlik also highlights the importance of area studies’ emphasis on the analysis of non-Western languages and discourses to critiques of Eurocentrism, and the crucial role that area studies programs have played in supporting language study and research,
It is important ... to point to some of the more progressive features of area studies that are overlooked or dismissed too readily in more naive critiques. The teaching of foreign languages has been crucial to area studies programs – in the case of many institutions, it has been their raison d’être. For all the problems of interpretation involved, moreover, area studies have been based on the premise of intensive reading into diverse texts, textual traditions, and histories. It is easy to lose sight of the significance of this task when attention shifts from reading to interpretation. Whatever the deficiencies of readings distorted by unequal relations of power, there is also a price to be paid, as we seem to be seeing these days, for not reading [Asian languages] at all. (2005, p. 160)

In Anglophone academies such the United Kingdom and Australia area studies departments and faculties have played vital roles in preserving the teaching of foreign languages. In some English-speaking countries scholars in the disciplines have drawn on critiques of areas studies, and the argument that English is now the international academic lingua franca, to question the need for foreign language studies. The relatively high cost of teaching foreign languages, which is necessarily more labour intensive than the teaching of large enrolment courses in the disciplines, means that in times of financial constraint and university budget cuts language departments have increasingly come under threat of closure. Under market-based funding models being imposed on universities internationally (see more below), it is becoming increasingly difficult to cross-subsidise smaller enrolment language courses in area studies departments by transferring funding derived from higher enrolment courses in the disciplines. In Australia, the United Kingdom and elsewhere at times it has proved valuable, even necessary, for university departments that teach Asian languages to be organised in terms of area studies in order to safeguard the teaching of those languages. In the university realpolitik of interdepartmental competition for declining financial resources, arguments for preserving small-enrolment language courses have at times been more successful when these programs have been based in area studies departments -- of Southeast Asian Studies, East Asian Studies, South Asian Studies, Central Asian Studies, Middle Eastern Studies, and so on -- than when these language courses have been based in departments organised around one or other discipline.

**Challenging the Epistemological Borders of the Eurocentric Disciplines**

In Western universities area studies departments have at times become bastions of resistance to the Eurocentrism of the neoliberalised disciplines. In the Anglophone academies proficiency and expertise in Asian and other non-Western languages is much more than a matter of “skills” or “training”. Directly engaging non-Western discourses is methodologically and epistemologically central to critical postcolonial studies. Spivak emphasises the central place of fluency in non-Western languages in negotiating the structures of power/knowledge that pattern the 21st century Western academy, arguing that, “the politics of the production of knowledge in area studies (and also anthropology and the other ‘human sciences’) can be touched by a new Comparative Literature, whose hallmark remains a care for language and idiom.” (2003, pp. 4-5) Spivak contends that we need, “to make the traditional linguistic sophistication of Comparative Literature supplement Area Studies (and history, anthropology, political theory, and sociology) by approaching the language of the other not only as a ‘field’ language…. We must take the languages of the Southern Hemisphere as active cultural media”. (2003, p 9) Ayman El-Desouky similarly observes,

The distinctions between ‘areas’, ‘language regions’ and ‘nations’ that have historically plagued the disciplinary formations of area studies ... must now be reconceived. This target can only be achieved through strong, comparative acts that are informed by the expertise of area studies, which are then able to turn around and radicalize or transform altogether the critical paradigms of disciplines such as comparative literature, postcolonial studies and cultural studies. (2014, p. 240)
The organisation of university teaching and research in area studies departments and faculties has been key to preserving the teaching of languages that are central to education and research in critical postcolonial studies. The very possibility of engaging in epistemological critiques of Eurocentrism is based upon the practical existence of foreign language programs, which at times have only been able to survive attacks from Anglophone disciplines by the collective strength provided by an organisational structure based on areas. In summary, rather than being invalid forms of knowledge, the cross-disciplinary methods of area studies are epistemologically important in developing non-Eurocentric forms of analysis.

PART 3 - CRITICAL AREA STUDIES WITHIN GLOBAL CAPITALISM

As discussed above, Seth highlights the inadequacies of social theory in explaining the non-Western world and traces the source of the problem to the dominance of Western-derived forms of analysis. Houben contends that the disciplines that dominate the intellectual and organisational structures of Western universities are fundamentally Eurocentric and the cross-disciplinary research of area studies is better equipped to provide genuine insight into global processes. Spivak argues that to challenge the Eurocentrism of Western analyses, the languages and discourses of non-Western societies need to become active sites of theoretical production. Walter Mignolo makes a similar argument and for calls “border thinking, border gnosis, or border epistemology” (2002a, p. 942), which he defines as activating the “epistemic potential” of “subaltern perspectives” (2002a, p. 948; 2002b p. 71). For Mignolo border thinking is a critical method that challenges the power relations within binary categories – such as: “metropolitan modernity” versus “colonial tradition”; “global” versus “local” -- by making the subordinate position “a locus of enunciation as legitimate as the first” (2002a, p. 942). For Mignolo, order thinking aims to realise,

An epistemic potential grounded in what for modern epistemology has been silence and darkness. The silence of the epistemically disinherited by and through the emancipatory claims of modernity … and the darkness to which the world was reduced in order to sustain the epistemic privileges of modernity, its enduring enchantments. (2002a, p. 948)

In this respect, Chun pointedly observes, “The [non-Western] other may have been silent, but only in Western discourse” (2008, p. 695), and he argues that scholars in Asia and other non-Western societies need to challenge the global division of intellectual labour (see below) by achieving recognition as active producers of general knowledge.

Taken together, these arguments demonstrate the theoretical, methodological and organisational importance of the cross-disciplinary practice of area studies in academies beyond Anglo-America in challenging Eurocentrism and developing comprehensive analyses of global processes. However, area studies’ cross-disciplinary methods and scholars working at universities outside Euro-America confront new challenges from neoliberal managerialist policies in universities, which are privileging disciplinary knowledge and entrenching theoretical production in the West, in the process reinforcing the Eurocentrism of the disciplines that is a legacy of the orientalist discourses of imperialism.

A third criticism leveled against area studies is that spatially informed approaches to knowledge are outdated and reflect a pre-globalisation era defined by the geopolitics of the nation state. According to this argument, despatialising border-crossing phenomena of finance, media, information, migration, tourism and so on are the dominant features of early 21st century life. However, this critique is based on predictions of the despatialisation of social life under globalisation (for example, see Waters 1995) that have not come to pass, or at least have not been fully realised. While deterritorialisation and homogenisation are taking place in some domains of financial, social and cultural life, globalising processes are also producing new spatialities of difference. 21st century
spatialities of difference may not conform to the borders of nation states, but neoliberal
globalisation is nonetheless reinforcing many of the geographically based forms of domination that
emerged in the era of imperialism and is also entrenching divides between metropolitan centres of
power and marginalised groups on the global peripheries. This is indeed the case at the
epistemological level of academic analysis and theory production. Globalisation is not leading to a
despacialisation of the theory production that is a defining feature of the disciplines, but rather is
entrenching spatialised forms of knowledge and the global division of academic labour. We continue
to face barriers to forms of theoretical innovation that can challenge the Eurocentric hegemony of
the disciplines because neoliberal performance measurement and quality assessments, among other
things, are hardening the geographically based international division of intellectual labour that is a
legacy of imperialism and which Chun (2008) contends forms a caste-like divide between “local” and
“global” intellectuals.

The Global Division of Intellectual Labour: Legacies of Imperialism in the 21st Century International
Academy

Chun laments the situation of critical scholars based at Asian universities, arguing that a,
“hierarchical division of labour” structures the global academy in which “a celebratory
multiculturalism and emancipatory postcolonialism” in critical academic discourse “disguise[s] …
inequities of the speaking position that harden existing regimes of academic practice and discourse.”
(2008, p. 695) Chun wryly observes, “I find it ironic, especially in an age of increasing transnational
flows and cultural hybridity, that identities (academic ones, too) have hardened instead of softened.”
(2008, p. 694) He provides as an example the fact that,

[T]he vast majority of Third World anthropologists end up studying their own society.
A textbook definition of anthropology is the study of other cultures, but only if one
happens to be a white European. For all others, once a local, always a local…. The
same displacement that invites Third World anthropologists to study their own
culture also legitimizes the epistemic authority of Western anthropologists to study
other cultures. It is the same for area studies. (2008, p. 699)

Chun notes Dirlik’s (1994) observation that postcolonial studies began as an intellectual enterprise,
He continues,

For those of us (including myself) who tend to be classified as postcolonial, the term
really refers to a species of ‘native’ academic who publishes on the international
circuit (and in English), and who, more facetiously, walks the walk and talks the talk.
If I identify as postcolonial as such, albeit reluctantly, then it is mostly out of aversion
to what I understand to be nativism. (2008, p. 705)

Chun argues that an implicit ethnocentrism, even racism, structures the global academy in caste-like
patterns based on the binary opposition of “global” and “local”,

My personal aversion to anything global is thus related to my fierce refusal to accept
the role of local. It is a curse created by the global. The very use of the terms [‘global’
and ‘local’] in a dualistic sense unwittingly maintains the caste-like hierarchy in a
larger global division of labour. It is also a trap played unwittingly on both sides. I
have been to too many conferences in Asia where ‘we’ Asians complain incessantly
about the fact that we are relegated to being the local area specialists, while
Western area specialists are ipso facto considered theorists. (2008, p. 705)
A scholar’s geographical location in the 21st century global order -- whether at a prestigious Western or a low ranked Asian university -- directly influences the status and prestige of his or her ideas. The cultural capital of the West, and of diasporic intellectuals in the West, remains central to the internationally recognised capacity to speak of, analyse and define the non-West.⁴

**Ideas from Southeast Asian Studies on the World Stage: The Extra-Epistemological Effects of Euro-American Intellectual Capital**

The deep impact of Western power on the production of knowledge of the non-Western world is revealed in the processes by which some concepts and theories emerging from studies of Southeast and South Asia have achieved a general status and become part of the international intellectual currency of discipline-based forms of knowledge. Mielke and Hornidge observe that of all the region-based fields of area studies, Southeast Asian studies has significant potential to bridge the “West-Rest divide” and advance “local concepts on an international scholarly scene” (2014, p. 10). Benedict Anderson observed that the Southeast Asian region, offers splendid opportunities for comparative theorising since it comprises areas formerly colonised by almost all the great imperial powers (England, France, Holland, Portugal, Spain and the United States) as well as uncolonised Siam. (1991, p xv)

Indeed, Southeast Asian studies has proved to be an academic site for the production of a number of concepts and analyses that have been adopted internationally beyond the borders of this field in the Euro-American centres of intellectual production. Mielke and Hornidge list: Clifford Geertz’s ethnographic methodology of “thick description” and his theory of the “theatre state” based on research in Indonesia; Benedict Anderson’s concepts of “imagined communities” and “print capitalism” as sources of nationalism, based on his comparative history of Southeast Asia and Europe; and James C. Scott’s notions of “weapons of the weak” and his studies of the upland region called Zomia, a term coined by Willem van Schendel at the University of Amsterdam. To Mielke and Hornidge’s list we could add Thongchai Winichakul’s notion of the “geobody” of a nation based on his history of modern Thailand formed at the intersection of local political regimes and colonial and semicolonial forms of power. South Asian studies has also had a major theoretical impact internationally, with Ranajit Guha’s “subaltern studies”, Homi Bhabha’s theory of “cultural hybridity”, and more broadly postcolonial studies to a significant extent emerging from reflections on South Asian culture, history and politics.

However, ideas emerging from Asian area studies have required more than epistemological validity to succeed in crossing the intellectual border from the non-Western epistemological periphery to the metropolitan centres of Western-dominated discipline-based intellectual life. While Southeast and South Asian studies may be academic sites from which general concepts and internationally important theories have emerged, it is nonetheless the case that almost all the internationally influential theorists in these fields have been based at, and produced their analyses from, universities located either in the Euro-American metropoles or Australia. In Southeast Asian studies, Clifford Geertz was based the Institute of Advanced Study at Princeton, Benedict Anderson was at Cornell, and James C. Scott is at Yale. Thongchai Winichakul produced his work on the Thai geobody as part of his doctoral studies at the University of Sydney, and until recently he has been based at the University of Madison, Wisconsin. In South Asian studies, Ranajit Guha held positions at the University of Sussex and the Australian National University, while Homi Bhabha has held several positions in the United Kingdom and United States, most recently at Harvard. We should perhaps

⁴ A small number of internationally influential theorists are based outside the West. For example, the Argentinian anthropologist Néstor García Canclini has produced internationally influential accounts of cultural hybridity from his position at the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana in Mexico City. For an account of Canclini’s work see Jackson 2008.
also add the critical theory of Orientalism to the list of big ideas that have emerged from regional studies, with Edward Said having produced his globally influential analyses while at Columbia University in New York City.

To summarise, almost all of the internationally influential ideas to emerge from area studies have been developed by academics based at universities in the West, overwhelmingly in the United States, not in the non-Western regions themselves. This is not to impugn the intellectual astuteness or to question the analytical power and general applicability of the ideas listed above. It is, rather, as Ariel Heryanto (2007) asks, “can there be Southeast Asians in Southeast Asian studies?” The answer is undoubtedly yes, but it would appear to be the case only if they leave Southeast Asia, relocate to the West and produce their analyses from prestigious Western universities. Ideas emerging from studies of South and Southeast Asia have only achieved international importance when they have been produced from academic sites located outside these regions themselves, and indeed only when influential scholars of these regions have secured tenured or professorial positions at some of the most elite universities in the United States and United Kingdom. Overwhelmingly, theory still travels in only one direction. Like luxury brands, theory is a value-added export from Euro-America, even if it may be produced by diasporic Asian intellectuals who have taken up jobs in Western universities. Theory may be produced by scholars who were born and began their careers in Asia, the Pacific, Africa or Latin America. However, the theoretical work of these diasporic intellectuals only achieves value in the global intellectual market place if it comes with the imprimatur of having been produced when they have become an academic at one or other of the elite intellectual fashion houses of Harvard, Chicago, Cornell, Columbia, Oxford, Cambridge, and so on. This summary reveals the existence of spatially based forms of power that lie outside the epistemological domain of theory per se but which nonetheless deeply structure the global production of theory, including critical theory that seeks to challenge global hierarchies of power.

The Neoliberal Redisciplining of the Global Academy: Bordered Geographies of “Academic Quality”

The linguistically and discursively informed cross-disciplinary methods of area studies are not only important epistemologically in challenging the Eurocentric disciplines. The practice of critically reflective area studies in academies beyond Anglo-America is also crucial in responding to the extra-epistemological forces that condition global knowledge production. Neoliberal policies of academic management are further entrenching the institutional status and influence of Eurocentric discipline-based knowledge as well as the global division of intellectual labour that emerged as an epistemological result of European imperialism and American neoimperialism.

In the neoliberalised 21st century global academy a range of commercial organisations are now engaged in measuring and quantifying the once qualitative notion of intellectual prestige and relabeling it as “academic quality”. This process is based on a system of “metrics”, mathematical algorithms that produce numerically ranked scores of research and teaching performance based on “Key Performance Indicator” or KPI points. The metric of “academic quality” is a numerical score that is used to rank departments, faculties and indeed entire universities both nationally and internationally. The now global imposition of university management policies based on these measures has become a hegemonic framework that is solidifying the global inequalities in academic prestige noted by Chun and Dirlik and is recentring theoretical production in the West. The transnational regime of so-called “academic quality assessment” also works in opposition to the force of critical theory, constituting an extra-epistemological form of power that patterns the production and dissemination of all forms of knowledge, including theory that is critical of this very phenomenon. In this context, the need for area studies’ cross-disciplinary methods of analysing non-Western societies becomes even more urgent.
The system of neoliberal measurement and ranking of research is entrenching the place of the established disciplines in the global academy. To measure academic performance, research and teaching are first be classed into quantifiable units such as numbers of journal articles published per year, numbers of competitive research grants awarded, numbers of students who achieve specified grades, and so on. To manage this information at broader levels, the data is aggregated into larger quantified categories. Most systems of metrics use academic disciplines as the broad-level categories for aggregating data and ranking quality. The data analysts who have devised these metrics have drawn up extensive, numbered lists of disciplinary and sub-disciplinary fields, and scholars and university departments and faculties are required to assign their publications, research grants, teaching and other academic activities to one or other of the pre-determined disciplinary fields. It is sometimes possible to assign cross-disciplinary research to more than one data-gathering category: for example, a publication may be classed as 50% anthropology, 25% cultural studies, and 25% history. However, many academic administrators discourage reporting research and publications as cross-disciplinary because this often makes data management more complex and may not produce as clearly defined numerical scores as outputs that are recorded against a single disciplinary field. To make research outputs “legible” and easily quantifiable and ranked by the algorithms that are the central technology of neoliberal academic metrics, scholars are encouraged, at times coerced, to make their publications conform to the predefined disciplinary categories. Managerialist quality assessment and ranking processes effectively punish research and publication in fields that fall outside the boundaries of the disciplinary categories that these schemes institute as the basis for their metrics.

While introduced in the name of supposedly improving the quality of university research, it may have precisely the opposite effect by stifling the innovation that is the basis of genuine advances in thought and analysis. Young et al. (2011, p. 78) contend that these schemes produce, “a set of perverse and dysfunctional reactions that threaten to undermine research quality in the long-term”, as academics “realise that careers now depend on publishing in journals attributed with high rank”. This system is putting pressure on scholars to confine their research within established and more easily quantifiable disciplinary categories, at the same discouraging cross-disciplinary research. As argued above, given the established disciplines are largely Eurocentric knowledge forms, then a consequence of the neoliberal privileging and entrenchment of disciplinary research is also a further buttressing of Eurocentrism. And given that it is the Eurocentrism of the disciplines that lies behind the failure of social analysis to adequately theorise the non-Western world, then this system is also contributing to the failure of social theory.

By reducing academic “quality” to quantitative scores for a predefined set of disciplinary fields, quality assessment schemes entrench the epistemological borders separating established fields of inquiry and research, and may inhibit innovative thinking that transgresses established categories and methods of analysis. This institutional recentralisation of research within the Eurocentric disciplines, and its contribution to entrenching intellectual authority in the old Euro-American metropoles, underpins the ongoing failure of social and cultural analysis to adequately explain the globalised world we inhabit. It is for these reasons that the cross-disciplinary methods of area studies now assume renewed critical importance for the development of comprehensive comparative theory and analysis.

The regime of continuous measurement of academic performance and quantified ranking of research quality is also entrenching Western countries’ dominance of both the intellectual and financial capital associated with the global knowledge economy. Ranking of “research outputs” is based on publication in so-called “quality” journals and monograph series, which are overwhelming produced by publishers located in the old centres of power in the United States, the United Kingdom and Western Europe. This system has become a regime of power that is entrenching colonial-era structures of geographically defined academic privilege because it is now the basis for determining the renewal of academic contracts, deciding whether or not tenure or promotion is awarded, and
regulating whether or not a scholar is regarded as being sufficiently “competitive” to be awarded research grants. As Cohen et al. (2016, p. 1) observe, appointment and promotion procedures in universities are increasingly based on metrics that are interlocked with a publication regime centred around a few major publishing houses in the West, regulating scholarly publication in both the West and internationally.

In 2011, the La Trobe University Branch of the National Tertiary Education Union of Australia (NTEU) reported that the “research output” of academics to rank in the top 25% to 35% worldwide in order to be considered “satisfactory”, with “dire implications for workloads, promotion, reputation and academic freedom” (NTEU 2011). In these types of assessment systems -- which entrap even the most critical academics who wish to remain employed in the university sector -- the “quality” of research is not determined by any epistemological criterion but rather by the purely formal measure of the assessed standing of the journal or monograph series in which it is published, with the overwhelming majority of so-called “quality” publishing houses being located in the old metropoles. Citing Andrew Oswald (2007), Suzanne Young et al. (2011, p. 78) have observed, “[W]ith such a scheme there is potential that where an academic publishes will become more important than what they have to say.”

Cohen et al. highlight the neo-colonial implications of this disciplining process, observing that, “The academic publication regime is culturally, institutionally and linguistically rooted in the West, and bears a distinct Western, or Eurocentric, or even Anglocentric character.” (2016, p. 5) Even ostensibly postcolonial Asian governments are complicit in this neoliberal regime, as evidenced by the Chinese government’s support for the Shanghai ranking system and the intense KPI regime now imposed upon the Thai, Singaporean and other Southeast Asian academies. These governments, and university administrators and deans in these countries, often insist that scholars in their university systems should publish only with “quality” presses. The following anonymous blog entry from an academic in an unnamed “developing” country in Southeast Asia reflects the intense pressures that result from the imposition of these neoliberal policies in non-Western universities,

Universities in my country request at least one high-ranking international journal publication per year – without providing the necessary time or materials. Books are not available at national libraries and practically impossible to get via the Internet. We get stuck in traffic on average two hours a day and teach at least nine hours a week. Our student to faculty ratio is approximately 40 to 1. Under these conditions, how can we produce the quality of work that is expected of us? .... This produces an environment similar to a racetrack. Everybody runs and competes anxiously.⁵

As Cohen et al (2016, p. 13) observe, “Academia has ... increasingly come to resemble professional competitive sports practised on the global level”.

There are now considerable disincentives for academics to publish in so-called “low quality” journals or with university presses at institutions that have low scores in global rankings systems. This is centralising wealth in a small number of Western publishing houses, contributing to the monopolisation of economic control of the global circulation of academic knowledge, effectively increasing the profit margins of Euro-American publishers and undercutting the ability of more recently established Asian and other non-Western publishing houses to survive economically. In an era when the knowledge economy is an increasingly important source of wealth production, the quality assessment rankings imposed by educational bureaucracies in both Western and non-

Western countries are working to monopolise Western universities’ and Western academic presses’ control of this sector of the global economy.

Data-based quality ranking procedures work in opposition to the border-crossing impacts of other dimensions of the globalisation of higher education. They intervene in the free flow of academic knowledge and are reinforcing colonial- and neocolonial-era geographical-cum-epistemological boundaries between the West as a site of production of high value knowledge/theory and the non-West as a site of low value empirical information/data. In the era of quality assessment, “high” research quality and “high” university ranking are becoming new synonyms for (presumptively universal) “knowledge” and (supposedly general) “theory”, both overwhelmingly centred in the United States, the United Kingdom and Western Europe. In contrast, research marked as being of “low quality” (because of its publication in non-metropolitan journals) and universities given low scores in global rankings have become marked as sites of “local” empirical information and data.

**Truth Value Vs Prestige Value in the Global Division of Intellectual Labour**

Despite their power over the careers of academics, quantitative rankings of academic quality have no necessary relationship to the intellectual insightfulness or epistemological status of the ideas, concepts, analyses, theories or critiques developed by scholars. What these rankings do reflect is the prestige that continues to be accorded to elite universities in a small number of countries that exercised economic and geopolitical dominance in recent centuries. And this neoliberal Euro-Amerocentrism is not merely a matter of educational or research management. This now global regime has theoretical and epistemological effects. While not in itself an epistemological phenomenon, this regime nonetheless has the power to ensure that ideas that emerge from a small number of universities located in only a few parts of the globe have an unfair advantage in the international marketplace of ideas. Despite the eclipse of the British Empire, and growing challenges to America’s global dominance, ideas that emerge from elite American and British universities still possess a degree of prestige that, while unrelated to their epistemological status, nonetheless ensures that they circulate more widely across linguistic and discursive borders and achieve greater international standing than ideas produced by scholars in centres of learning in other countries. Cohen et al. contend that the neoliberal publishing regime silences, “the voices of those who seek to participate [in the international academy] on alternative premises, based on local [non-Anglocentric] intellectual traditions.” (2016, p. 15) And they argue that university management policies now, “de-emphasise intellectual speculation and creativity …. The present thirst for prestige might thus stand in the way of the contribution of academics from the emerging regions to fundamental processes of scientific progress.” (2016, p. 15)

**Limits and Limitations of Critical Theory in the Neoliberal Academy: Why Critique is Not Enough**

Under the neoliberal managerialism now imposed on universities internationally, Euro-Amerocentrism has become much more than an epistemological phenomenon. Euro-Amerocentrism has been transformed into an intellectual hierarchy of spatialised knowledge formations that is supported both by colonial-era ways of thinking and by the neoliberal forms of power that dominate the 21st century university. As a double phenomenon, which is simultaneously epistemological and institutional, it requires a two-fold critical engagement, both of Euro-Amerocentric analyses and of the quantifying forms of power that confer prestige upon so-called “quality” Euro-Amerocentric theories and concepts.

Responding to the multiple, spatially patterned centres and peripheries that constitute the geographies of power of early 21st century globalisation requires concerted theoretical engagement. It will necessitate developing more complexly nuanced theories of the multiple hegemonic powers that compete on the world stage at the same time that each imposes hierarchically structured power relations within the domains over they are respectively dominant. However, more than theoretical
responses are needed to challenge the forms of power that constitute the conditions of possibility of knowledge production today. We also need to be aware of the extra-epistemological conditions under which even critical theory, as a form of disciplinary knowledge, is formulated and develop strategic responses that go beyond critical analysis and theory as such.

**The Global Immobility of Theory Production**

Most critiques of Euro-Amerocentrism focus on the epistemological issue of the limited truth-value of purportedly general analyses that have been produced from the geographically and culturally historically restricted basis of the experience of the West. Postcolonial analysis also critiques the colonial-era power inequalities that mapped the epistemological distinction between theoretical analysis and empirical description onto regions of the world, with the imperialist West as imputed locus of general knowledge and the colonised Rest collectively constituting sites of local empirical detail. However, neoliberalism now constitutes a hegemonic frame that defines the extra-epistemological conditions within which all theory -- including postcolonial analysis and critiques of Eurocentrism -- is produced, marketed and distributed. While globalisation has challenged 20th century nation-state varieties of area studies, the neoliberalisation of the global academy means that theory production, including the production of theories of globalisation, has remained impervious to the otherwise decentring effects of transnational processes. While the empirical phenomena of globalisation reflect accelerating mobility, the sites of the production of theory about these mobilities are insistently immobile and overwhelmingly remain centred in the old imperial and neocolonial metropoles. Indeed, the now hegemonic transnational regime of “academic quality assessment” undercuts the epistemological force of critical theory, producing the contradictory situation of theoretically influential critiques of Euro-Amerocentrism circulating within global networks of academic prestige that persistently recentre Euro-American academies as privileged sites of theoretical production and publication.

Theoretical critiques of Euro-Amerocentrism have failed to redress the institutional character of these global imbalances in theory production. By remaining at the level of critique they do not engage the powerful extra-epistemological imbalances in the global geography of “academic quality”, which condition the production of even critical theories. Despite the much-touted “rise of Asia”, efforts to decolonise global knowledge production have not overturned the centralisation of theoretical production in the Euro-American metropoles. This is because solely theoretical critiques of Euro-Amerocentrism fail to address the fact that the geographical location of an intellectual in the early 21st century world system and, just as importantly, the location of the home offices of the journals and publishing houses in which her/his work is published, have a direct relationship to the international impact and influence of that scholar’s ideas. In the early 21st century, the institutional culture of bureaucratically enforced neoliberal performance indicators and quality measures has become a more powerful determinant of the global geography of intellectual production than the epistemological force of theoretical critiques of Euro-Amerocentrism.

**PART 4 - STRATEGIC RESPONSES**

The extra-theoretical character of the forces that now constitute the conditions of possibility for all theoretical production means that critical responses must also come from outside of theory as such. How can or should a critical scholar respond to the regimes of power that exist outside of, envelope and condition the very possibility of theoretical production?
Collaborative Research Practices

Collaborative research is one important practical response to redressing the Eurocentrism of theory. As Mielke and Hornidge note, “joint research programs could be a first step in forming new and more inclusive epistemic communities which would then – in the long term – bear the potential to transform western views” (2014, p. 33) Collaboration across the borders of national academies is indeed essential. However, Mielke and Hornidge (2014, p. 33) go on to ask, “whether serious collaboration and exchange can actually be realised on [an] equal partnership basis?” In a world of persistent inequalities, perhaps not. Nonetheless, critical scholarship in the 21st century global academy must start from an ethical foundation of collaboration. This is not only an epistemological issue of research methodology and theoretical validity. Scholars working in the academies of Asia, Europe, Australia, the United States and elsewhere live, work and conduct research under diverse regimes of power. We need to be cognisant not only of ethics protocols with regard to the people whose lives we study, we also need to be aware of and follow appropriate ethical protocols in the cross-cultural relationships between and among the scholars from diverse countries who come together to form collaborative research teams.

Academic Activism: Publishing Beyond Euro-America

Debates of area studies versus the disciplines, or of area studies versus critical theory, will not be resolved solely at a meta-level through analyses conducted within Euro-American universities, no matter how astute or challenging such analyses may be. These issues cannot be resolved solely within the old centres of hegemonic intellectual authority. The conditions of possibility for the development of genuinely global theory do not lie in intellectually more astute analyses produced from within the elite universities of Euro-America and published by Euro-American academic presses. They reside in a radical geographical redistribution of the forms of power over knowledge production. Mignolo observes,

To imagine possible futures beyond the enduring enchantments of the differential colonial accumulation of binary oppositions would imply a redressing in the direction in which the coloniality of power has been implemented in the past five hundred years. And that process is already taking place. It is not, however, a project consisting of a mere reversal of the epistemic privilege of modernity ... (2002a, p. 941)

Chun contends that the international division of intellectual labour that structures the global academy continues to follow implicit Euro-Amerocentric hierarchies that, “are part and parcel of the constitution of those institutions that unwittingly tie all of us within a global division of intellectual labor.” (2008, p. 694) He argues that, given this situation, we need to consider our “institutional situatedness” (2008, p. 690) and “the sources of institutional resistance” to challenging Euro-Amerocentrism (2008, p. 692). In this Chun contends,

We should really be deconstructing underlying institutional regimes and not simply conceptual representations. (2008, p. 696)

While critical subjectivity of all kinds does serve a seminal function, it must be tempered with a critique of the institutions that bind us, sometimes beyond our power and despite our best intentions. (2008, p. 705)

Epistemic subjects in various places in the world will continue to be separated by their positionalities with a [global] hierarchy of power. How we define the nature of epistemic method will be decided ultimately by how we are able to negotiate our interests or aims within this larger order of things. (2008, p. 707)
The issues discussed here will only be resolved when emerging centres of intellectual production outside Euro-America achieve a sufficient agency that they can in fact, and not only in theory, reverse the historical regime of intellectual power -- what Mignolo terms the “reversal of the epistemic privilege of modernity” -- that constructs everyone outside Euro-America as objects of Western knowledge rather than as active subjects and producers of knowledge. These issues will only be taken forward in concrete analysis of cultural and social phenomena conducted by and through research and publishing practices that cross national borders just as much and just as intensely as the transnational phenomena of globalisation we urgently need to understand.

Critical analyses of Euro-Amerocentrism alone will not save the day, especially for scholars struggling to maintain academic careers in neoliberalised universities on the global peripheries beyond Euro-America. We also need to confront the power of the Euro-American publishing industries, whose global dominance is now bolstered by the neoliberal regime of university rankings and quality assessment. Critiques of Euro-Amerocentrism that appear in journals or books published by Euro-American presses can in fact participate in entrenching Euro-Amerocentrism. What is the point of developing a brilliant critique of Euro-Amerocentrism if one publishes that analysis with a company based in Euro-America whose cost structure limits the circulation of one’s ideas within the geographical space of Euro-America? Critical theorists need to engage in greater reflexivity upon their own academic praxis of publishing and conference participation. We need to acknowledge that the practical dimensions of Euro-Amerocentrism can remain unchallenged even by the most astute and pointed intellectual critiques of that power.

CONCLUSION

Thinking, Working and Publishing across Linguistic, Discursive and Epistemological Borders

Despite the theoretical failures and inadequacies of many Western-based concepts and analyses in the humanities and social sciences, by and large, we still await the emergence of more broadly based categories and theories with genuine epistemic authority on the global intellectual stage. This will only happen once non-Western societies have genuine socio-economic and cultural power and the extra-theoretical and extra-epistemological barriers detailed above are overcome. Extra-theoretical factors will also determine the future geographies of global epistemologies, not only analysis or critique.

Unresolved issues in the debates of area studies versus the disciplines, and of area studies versus critical theory, reflect the transitional status of knowledge production in the current world order. Despite decades, if not centuries, of financial and cultural globalisation, we are only at the very earliest stages of moving out of the era of Euro-American intellectual hegemony to a genuinely multinodal world theoretical order. Only when knowledge production becomes genuinely global and multi-sited, and a sufficiently large number of universities and publishers outside Euro-America achieve acknowledged “global quality” ranking and status, will we move past the current stage of merely critiquing Euro-American hegemony into a genuinely multinodal world in which these intellectual tensions will be able to be resolved. It is not simply a question of multi-sited empirical research to overcome the limitations of single-sited studies. We also need multi-sited theory production in order to be able to fully comprehend and interpret the empirical results of multi-sited research, and for the publication of the results of that research to be found in multi-sited publications both within and outside Euro-America.

The unrestricted multi-directional mobility of theory, and its reformulation by those living, working and thinking at geographical sites of intense border crossing is a critically important form of movement with the potential for dramatic transformation. Only when theory production becomes genuinely global, as global as the empirical phenomena of the globalised world, will we arrive at
analyses that actually map the world we inhabit and struggle to understand. To achieve this will require more than critical theory alone. It will also require an academic praxis capable of genuinely confronting and challenging the Euro-Amerocentrism of the neoliberalised world academies.

What Houben (2013) calls the “new area studies” has a central role to play in this challenging task, because it reveals the ways that forms of knowledge, including critiques of area studies coming from the ostensibly “general” and “universal” disciplines, are based on hierarchically structured patterns of spatiality. The new area studies understands that the spatiality of forms of knowledge emerges from effects of power, whether Euro-American imperialism, the hegemonic aspirations of a geopolitically ascendant Asia or neoliberal capitalism. The new area studies understands that the spatiality of knowledge emerges as a contingent effect of inequalities of power that have historically existed and which continue to exist between peoples located in different parts of the planet. From this understanding the new area studies takes an activist epistemological position that resists and challenges the power inequalities that anchor forms of knowledge, and some academics, to certain spaces and locations on the planet. Most particularly, the new area studies aims to position areas beyond Euro-America as sites of general knowledge and active theory production, not as passive objects of the Euro-American intellectual gaze or as mere markets for Euro-American publishing houses.
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