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Theory, Practice and 21st Century
Legacies of Area Studies

Peter A. Jackson

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Spatialities of Knowledge in The Neoliberal World Academy: Theory, Practice and 21st Century Legacies of Area Studies

Peter A. Jackson¹

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OPENING REFLECTIONS

Germany, Australia, and Southeast Asia as Positions to Reflect on Area Studies

Despite their manifest differences, there are nonetheless similarities and resonances between Germany's place in the post-World War II project of the European Union, on the one hand, and Australia's ongoing explorations of its place at the intersection of the multinational, multicultural and multiethnic projects of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the Pacific Islands Forum, on the other hand. As Katja Mielke and Anna-Katharina Hornidge observe in their position paper *Crossroads Studies: From Spatial Containers to Interactions in Differentiated Spatialities*, Germany has a distinctive modern history and position “between the formerly socialist and capitalist blocs” (2014, p. 5). Australia also has a distinctive modern history and position between Asia and the Pacific. As a scholar of mainland Southeast Asia working from Australia, I find Europe a productive source of comparative insights and perspectives on building multinational regional collaborations across diverse political, cultural, ethnic and linguistic divides. The complexities of early 21st century Europe are especially productive in thinking through the complexities of early 21st century Southeast Asia and the Pacific. Understanding and theorising social complexity and the intersections of multiple cultural traditions in the context of globalisation are key issues for scholars in Europe, Asia, Australia and the Pacific, and these issues are at the centre of my reflections here on the legacies of area studies and the ways that global forms of knowledge continue to be inflected in spatial terms.

Two discussion papers on rethinking area studies published as contributions to the discussions of the Crossroads Asia Research Network, by Vincent Houben (2013) and by Katja Mielke and Anna-Katharina Hornidge (2014), have provided stimulating sounding boards for my reflections on area studies. This paper has been written in a spirit of collegial engagement with these studies by Houben, Mielke and Hornidge. In particular, I seek to extend Houben's argument for a new area studies that is analytically more reflective and theoretically more ambitious and self-confident of the important contributions it has to make to knowledge of the 21st century world.

Manuela Boatcă has critically assessed the German Government's Excellence Initiative,² one component of which has been support for area studies research, as "a vector of 're-Westernisation' of the German university" (Boatcă 2012, p. 17). Boatcă expresses hope 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" (Boatcă 2012, p. 17). As a scholar interested in gay, lesbian, transgender and queer studies in Asia, there is much in Boatcă's appraisal of German area studies initiatives that resonates with my critical engagement with area studies in the Anglophone academies of Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States (Jackson 2003c, 2003b). In this paper I also aim to show ways that Houben's call for a new area studies can indeed contribute to opening new spaces for critical analysis, not only in Germany but also internationally.

1 INTRODUCTION

THREE CRITICISMS OF AREA STUDIES

Geopolitics, Theory, Globalisation

As Harry Harootunian states, 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" (Harootunian 2012, p. 8). As a cross-disciplinary study of cultures, languages, societies, economies, and politics, area studies was based on the simplifying assumption that comparative research and analysis can follow the contours of the borders of the historically recent geopolitical entities of nation states. Area studies approaches tended to assume that the borders of nation states contained distinctive patterns of culture, social structure, and political and economic organisation and that these geopolitical boundaries also provided methodologically valid frames for investigations into difference and marked the intellectual and epistemological frontiers between distinct fields of inquiry.

Since the early 1990s, this model has been subject to numerous levels of criticism. However, the several separate criticisms of area studies have at times blurred into a general critique and, as Mielke and Hornidge note, the negative assessments of area studies have at times been marked by "selected obscurities" (2014, p. 11).³ Here I consider three of the major criticisms that have been made of area studies and consider each in turn in the light of the situation in the early 21st century. My aim is to assess the legacies of area studies in light of the fact that, contrary to some predictions made in the early years of the post-Cold War era, spatiality has not been erased as either an empirical phenomenon or an epistemological or theoretical issue, but rather has been reformulated in the context of globalisation. While simplistic area studies approaches that map forms of knowledge onto the borders of nation states need to be abandoned, spatiality remains a central structuring principle of geopolitics and neoliberal global modernity (Dirlik 2005),

² 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).

³ At times, the critics of area studies have constructed something of a straw man that has not matched the academic field as actually practised. For example, Mielke and Hornidge (2014, p. 11) note that in area studies research spatiality has often been treated flexibly and is not always strictly limited to a nation-state model.

and for these reasons location and geography remain key issues in early 21st century theory and comparative epistemology.

The three critiques of area studies that I consider here emerge from studies of geopolitics, transnational critical theory and neoliberal globalisation, respectively. These three critiques of area studies have at times been invoked to argue against studying global forms of knowledge in terms of spatiality or geographically bordered epistemologies. In brief, these critiques are:

- **Geopolitics:** Area studies is a form of knowledge that emerged from and reflected imperialist and Cold War era political agendas of European and American hegemony.
- **Theory:** Area studies is overly empirical, “fetishising facts” and being disinterested in or even resistant to critical theoretical approaches.
- **Globalisation:** Area studies is outdated, reflecting a pre-globalisation era defined by the geopolitics of the nation state. In the post-Cold War era, border-crossing phenomena – of finance, media, information, migration, and tourism – are now the prime determinants of social order and have become the dominant features of early 21st century life.

Intersections of Spatiality, Power and Knowledge: Empirical Starting Point

I here consider inaccuracies and misrepresentations in each of the above critiques of area studies in order to argue for a more analytically sophisticated and theoretically critical “new area studies” that takes as its starting point the empirical reality that knowledge continues to be deeply and fundamentally spatialised under early 21st century globalisation. Globalisation has not erased all borders or overcome what Australian historian Geoffrey Blainey (1983) labelled “the tyranny of distance”. Rather, globalisation has seen a reconfiguration of spatiality in human life based on new forms of border-crossing mobility alongside equally new forms of bordered, monitored and policed immobility. Arif Dirlik describes the new spatialities formed under globalisation in the following terms,

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. (Dirlik 2005, p. 168)

Gayatri Spivak has also reflected on the contemporary global order in which the lines of division between places, peoples, languages, discourses and cultures present us with theoretical and practical problems:

Comparative Literature must always cross borders. And crossing borders, as Derrida never ceases reminding us ... is a problematic affair.

I have remarked ... that borders are easily crossed from metropolitan countries, whereas attempts to enter from the so-called peripheral countries encounter bureaucratic and policed frontiers, altogether more difficult to penetrate....

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)

Positionality: Theoretical Starting Point

The theoretical starting point of the issues considered here is the timely theme of the November 2014 Crossroads Asia conference, namely, the issue of positionality as a basis for rethinking area studies. As feminist theorist Donna Haraway notes,

Positioning is ... the key practice grounding knowledge because 'position' indicates the kind of power that enables a certain kind of knowledge. (Haraway 1991: 193, cited by Rose 1997: 308, cited by Mielke & Hornidge 2014, p. 24)

Positionality is at root a question of power and of hierarchically structured relations of dominance and subordination. It is a matter of where oneself, as researcher, one's objects of study, one's research methods and theoretical orientations, and, equally importantly, one's research publications are all located within global networks of unequal power relations. Positionality refers to the reflexive understanding that we as knowing subjects are embedded within the very nets of power that we seek to describe and understand. This is a study of how positionality, as a theoretical and epistemological issue, remains spatialised and deeply impacted by physical locatedness on this planet under neoliberal globalisation. It is an account of the multiple historical, geopolitical and market-based factors that determine how theorising and forms of knowledge remain located within multiple geographies of power.

The main legacy of area studies is the understanding that forms of knowledge and epistemological systems have been and today continue to be deeply patterned by geographical divides. Indeed, as argued below, neoliberal capitalism is working to entrench certain geographical divides at the same time that some dimensions of economic and social life are being despatialised.

Key failings of 20th century area studies were, firstly, to take the borders of nation states as epistemologically significant boundaries and, secondly, to overlook unequal relations of power as structuring principles both in the formation of geographical divides and also in the deep patterning of forms of knowledge. The challenges then are to respond to these failures by replacing the nation-state with alternative models of the geographies of knowledge under globalisation and to understand the histories and current forms of spatialised epistemologies in terms of the political, economic, cultural and other forms of power that structure the global order. Spatiality, one's geographical location in a global system that is patterned by multiple hierarchies of centres and peripheries, and positionality, one's intellectual location or speaking position in the many networks of power that crisscross the global system, both remain central to the forms of knowledge of the social, cultural, political and economic worlds we inhabit.

This study is a first attempt at responding to these challenges. My approach is to reflect on the three major critiques of area studies detailed above in light of the continuing spatialisation of knowledge under globalisation and from the critical perspective of theories of positionality, that is, that forms of knowledge emerge in the context of forms of power.

My Positionality

In 2003, 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) Those 2003 studies were perhaps marked by a naïve notion of spatiality. However, I am still very much concerned to think about how we are to understand the fact -- perhaps empirically more obvious to those who live and work outside Euro-America than to those living within those metropolises -- that where one is located on this planet has a fundamental impact on one's status and power within the

global system, including the global 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 political as well as intellectual and cultural power.

My academic position is in the critical humanities, and I attempt to employ and rethink critical theory as a basis of qualitative analysis. Through studies of the modern history of religion, gender, and sexuality in Thailand I have aimed to challenge the Euro-Amerocentric assumptions and presumptions of critical theory, which despite its critique of the epistemological bases of previous forms of Western theory nonetheless often remains ensnared within the Western perspectives of its origins. Much of my research has been concerned to investigate the central question as posed by Sanjay Seth, "[H]ow and why is it that we assume that modern knowledge is universal, despite its European genealogy and its historically recent provenance?" (Seth 2013, p. 138)

In collaboration with Rachel Harrison, I have explored how Thailand's semicolonial position in the modern world order, as a never-colonised but nonetheless geopolitically subordinated Asian society, has produced complex and multidirectional forms of cultural intersection (Harrison & Jackson 2010). I am especially interested in exploring the extent to which religious and sexual and gender cultures in Thailand fall outside the explanatory scope of theories on these phenomena that have been produced in the Western disciplines (Jackson 2003c, 2004a, 2004b). A guiding principle in my work has been Foucault's argument about the role of power in constituting the conditions of possibility for forms of knowledge, and I have explored how distinctive forms of power in Thailand's modern history as a semicolony have impacted on forms of knowledge in that country.

2 CRITIQUES OF THE POLITICS OF AREA STUDIES

Area Studies in a Geopolitically Dynamic World

Area studies has been critiqued as being a form of knowledge emerging from and reflecting European imperialist orientalism and Cold War era political agendas of American hegemony (see, for example, Miyoshi & Harootunian 2002). According to Thongchai Winichakul,

As Said famously argued in *Orientalism* (1978), Western knowledge of the East was inseparable from the wider agenda of Western colonial power and its perspectives, despite the fact that 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. (Thongchai 2014, p. xv)

The form of Southeast Asian studies directed under the American tradition differs from a colonial European one in ... that it demonstrates less attention to classicism. Instead, it is driven by a focus on social science and the humanities, such as political science, economics and anthropology.... [America's] interest in area studies was in order to modernize and develop [Asian] countries in the attempt to contain and fight against communism, based on the belief that social evolution would progress to a more secularized development in the region. 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. (Thongchai 2014, pp. xv-xvi)

While valid criticisms of the origins of area studies in the Western academy, are these critiques perhaps more relevant to those who are positioned within the European and American university systems and their immediate spheres of intellectual influence? It is noteworthy that despite these and the other critiques of area studies that have been put forward since the 1990s, area studies has not disappeared from the global intellectual scene. Area studies programs and university departments have not only survived in some places where they were already established, such as SOAS in the United Kingdom and the Australian National University.⁴ Furthermore, at the same time that political critiques of area studies were emerging from sections of the American, British and Australian academies in the 1990s, new area studies research centres and teaching programs were being established in Asia, such as in Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines, Japan and China.

It is indisputable that area studies as an academic field is marked by political factors. Critiques of American area studies as emerging from Cold War era priorities to “understand the [communist] enemy” (Mielke & Hornidge 2014, p. 4) and “enabling the enforcement of particular ‘geographies of power’ in line with the geopolitically informed logic of the Cold War” (Mielke & Hornidge 2014, p. 4) are valid, as are critiques that orientalist Asian studies in Europe can be traced back “to studying the societies of the European colonies” (Mielke & Hornidge 2014, p.4). However, the political factors underpinning the recent establishment of area studies in the academies of East and Southeast Asia have not always reflected either European imperialist orientalism or American Cold War policy. Academies outside Euro-America have drawn upon the area studies model, as well as the literatures that emerged from European and American area studies, as bases for establishing new area studies centres that have responded to distinctive local political agendas and 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

⁴ **Note: The Role of Area Studies Departments in Preserving Asian Language Teaching in Anglophone Universities** – Arif Dirlik has noted, “It is important ... to point to some of the more progressive features of area studies that are overlooked or dismissed too readily in more naïve 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 [other languages] at all.” (Dirlik 2005, p. 160)

In many university settings in English-speaking countries scholars in the disciplines often question the need for foreign language studies, on the argument that English is increasingly the international *lingua franca* of academic research. The relatively high cost of teaching foreign languages, which are necessarily more labour intensive than the teaching of large enrolment courses in the disciplines, also means that in times of financial constraint and university budget cuts language departments are often under threat of closure for economic reasons. Under the neoliberal, market-based funding models being imposed on universities internationally, it is becoming increasingly difficult to argue for cross-subsidisation of small enrolment language courses by transferring funding derived from higher enrolment courses in the disciplines. In some countries such as Australia and the United Kingdom, it has at times proved valuable, perhaps even necessary, for university departments responsible for teaching Asian languages to be organisationally structured in terms of area studies labels in order to safeguard the continued teaching of those languages. In the university *realpolitik* of interdepartmental and interfaculty competition for limited financial resources, arguments for the preservation of small-enrolment Asian language courses sometimes have been more successful when these teaching programs have been organisationally based in Departments of Southeast Asian Studies, East Asian Studies, South Asian Studies, Central Asian Studies or Middle Eastern Studies, than when these courses have been based in departments named with labels taken from one or other discipline.

'areas'" (2014 p. 13). I agree, but to be more precise, the debates around area studies have not so much been West-centric as Euro-Amerocentric, as these debates have also ignored the distinctive political context of area studies in non-metropolitan postcolonial Western countries such as Australia. A national academy's geopolitical position in the complex nets of 21st century global power influences the distinctive political tenor of area studies practised in and from that location, and the criticism that area studies reflects imperialist and Cold War policies overlooks the emergence of new forms of hegemony in and from a geopolitically ascendant Asia.

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 [Malaysia and Vietnam are mentioned, but one could also include the Philippines and Thailand]." (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." (Mielke & Hornidge 2014, p. 9n14)

In contrast to the critique that area studies in entrapped within imperialist projects of power, the local political agendas behind the establishment of new area studies centres and programs in Southeast Asia have at times 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, Amero-centrism and Dutch-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. The establishment of Southeast Asian area studies within Southeast Asia can therefore be seen as a postcolonial challenge to Euro-Amerocentrism, not as a slavish kowtowing to residual orientalist or Cold War projects.

However, not all new Southeast Asian area studies programs in Asia can be seen in singularly positive terms. Japan is also a major centre of Southeast Asian area studies. In this case, we perhaps need to ask how the practice of Southeast Asian area studies may relate to or reflect Japan's geopolitical contestation with China and its attempts to counterbalance the rise of China by fostering connections with the countries of Southeast Asia. Recent initiatives by the South Korean academy to engage Southeast Asian studies can perhaps also be seen in a similar geopolitical context of reflecting unstated concerns about China.

And in the case of Southeast Asian studies in China, we perhaps need to ask whether area studies may bear the imprint of that country's increasingly assertive geopolitical stance. For example, in recent decades, Chinese scholars have undertaken major anthropological and linguistic studies of the Dai and Zhuang ethnic minorities in Southern China, whose languages and cultures are closely related to the Thai, Lao and Shan. However, these studies may be appropriated to an expansionist nationalist agenda in which the histories and cultures of the Thai, Lao and Shan are incorporated within a re-imagined greater China. These studies do indeed 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, in the nationalist discourse of greater China, the homelands of the Thai, Lao, Shan and other Tai ethno-linguistic groups are located within the modern borders of the Peoples Republic of China, which is increasingly seeking to reassert its historical role as the dominant geopolitical power in Southeast Asia.

And while Australia is an Anglophone Western society, Asian area studies in that country cannot always be subsumed under the same critique of this enterprise in Europe and the United States. In some respects,

Asian area studies in Australia can be seen as reflecting the ongoing but fitful attempts of a European settler society to come to terms with the facts of its geographical location in the Asia Pacific. While Asian and Pacific area studies in Australia are conducted within the context of the linguistically dominant Anglophone academy in a society that is culturally Western and economically developed, Australia is nonetheless also a former colony on the geographical margins of the world system at the point of intersection between Southeast Asia and the Pacific. Australia, and area studies in Australia, are located at the intersection of diverse nets of power and influence, which in some dimensions position the Australian academy as dominant, yet in other dimensions position it as subordinate in the world system. The Australian academy, like Australian society more broadly, is engaged in efforts to understand what it means to be privileged as economically developed, culturally Western and Anglophone, yet at the same time subordinate in being postcolonial and geographically marginal. Asian and Pacific area studies in Australia thus has a distinctive colour and a complex, indeed multiple, orientation, and can be critically assessed through several lenses.⁵

Area studies in Germany, a country that 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 Great Britain. Manuela Boatcă observes that in Germany the rationale for the recent promotion of area studies as part of the Excellence Initiative of the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (*Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung* or BMBF) and the German Research Foundation (*Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* or DFG) has been “to develop strategic resources for the management of globalisation phenomena such as the growing migratory flows” (Boatcă 2012, p. 25), and in particular to make Germany, and the German academy, more competitive in the global economy. In the view of the

⁵ **Note: Area Studies in the Post-World War II Australian Academy** - The complex, multiple orientation of the Australian academy means that scholars in Australian universities can choose to play one of several academic games. Some academics in Australia pretend that they are in the United States, the United Kingdom or Europe. For these scholars, Asia and the Pacific are often viewed as unfortunately large expanses of intellectually empty land and sea that separate them from what they see as the world’s “real” intellectual centres. Other academics in Australia, such as in history or literature, are localist and focus on Australia itself. Yet others, myself included, emphasise Australia’s geographical, political, economic and intercultural connections to Asia and the Pacific.

To understand the complex positioning of area studies in Australia, it is necessary to appreciate the modern history of the Australian academy. In most academic fields, it has been possible to complete doctoral research in Australia only since World War II. Before the 1950s, Australians wishing to undertake graduate studies had to travel overseas, usually to the United Kingdom. My own university, The Australian National University, was established after World War II in light of the experience of the fall of British Singapore and the existential threat of direct Japanese attack and possible invasion of the Australian mainland. The Australian National University was established in 1946 as an intellectual and higher educational dimension of a postcolonial nation-building project by a government that had decided it could not rely on a war-weakened Britain or a collapsing British empire to ensure the country’s future. While the ANU was established as part of a nationalist program to build a research base in Australia, the first generation of post-War scholars employed in this intellectual nation-building project had almost all completed their studies overseas. When I completed my PhD on Thai Buddhism at the ANU in 1986, I was among the first generation of scholars in Australia to complete postgraduate studies of Southeast Asia in Australia itself. Without exception, all of my Southeast Asian Studies advisors and teachers at the ANU in the early 1980s had completed their doctoral research in Britain, the United States or Western Europe, usually the Netherlands or Germany. The Asian studies that was taught at the ANU in the first decades after World War II thus bore strong imprints of area studies as then practised in Britain (most importantly SOAS, Oxford and Cambridge Universities) and the United States (most importantly at Cornell University). The residue of this postcolonial imprint on the Australian Asian studies academy is still strong.

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)

A Multiplication of World Powers: 21st Century Area Studies and the Need to Theorise Proliferating Hegemonies

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

One of the central methods of 20th century critical theory was to challenge hegemony by deconstructing the unequal power relations underpinning mutually defining binary categories. However, this form of critical analysis alone may not be adequate to the tasks of understanding and responding to the challenges of a multinodal world. Deconstructing the binaries of “self-other”, “straight-queer”, “man-woman”, “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 in competition with the aspiring new hegemonies of China, Russia and militant Islam -- the tools of 20th century critical theory will need to be augmented and enhanced with new forms of analysis that permit us to think in terms of multiplicities as well as binaries. Our academic gaze needs to be just as much on the new hegemonies emerging on the eastern horizon as on the old hegemonies seeking to retain their influence on the western horizon.

In her recent study of religion, secularity and queer critical analysis Nikita Dhawan states that she is 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” (Dhawan 2013, p. 205). In this setting, Dhawan calls for “a more complex, multidirectional politics of critique that is directed at coercive practices across the secularism-religion divide.” (Dhawan 2013, p. 195) Dhawan states that critical theory needs to acknowledge and engage the fact of “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.” (Dhawan 2013, p. 217) Indeed, 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 during the era of imperialism, nonetheless assumed subordinate positions in the Western dominated world order.

3 CRITIQUES OF AREA STUDIES' LACK OF THEORETICAL ENGAGEMENT Dilemmas and Challenges of 21st Century Critical Theory

The discussion in the previous section reveals one aspect of the relationship between spatiality and theory in the early 21st century, and I consider this issue in more detail in a later section in the context of analysing the impact of neoliberal globalisation on contemporary spatialities of knowledge. In this section I wish to consider the critique that the field of area studies is overly empirical and is disinterested in or even resistant to critical theoretical approaches. Naoki Sakai has been especially critical of what he sees as area studies' lack of theoretical engagement,

Today, 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. (Sakai 2012, p. 90)

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 legitimization.... We might as well acknowledge that area studies exists today mainly thanks to institutional inertia that lacks ... intellectual legitimacy. (Sakai 2012, p. 69)

According to Sakai, the empiricism of area studies approaches has meant that this field has failed to engage with critical theoretical 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. (Sakai 2012, p. 83)

There have been several responses from areanists to this criticism, all involving engagement with theoretical issues and contributing to a significant increase in the analytical sophistication of more recent area studies research. Some scholars have argued that while the nation-state does not constitute a valid frame for spatially based forms of knowledge, broader transnational culture regions nonetheless do provide theoretically important foundations for considering distinctive knowledge formations. A second response from areanists to the criticism of lack of theoretical engagement has been the counterclaim that the disciplines, which are usually posited by critics as the alternative to area-based knowledge, are themselves a disguised form of area studies that takes the culture region of the West as their implicit spatial frame. A third major response has been a series of concerted efforts to reimagine the field as not merely engaging in empirical comparison but as drawing on the specificity of non-Western epistemologies and social and cultural formations as a base for a critique of Euro-Amerocentrism and the development of more comprehensive theories of global phenomena.

Religion, Language and Culture as Bases for Transnational Regional Studies

Mark McLelland and Vera Mackie (2015) note in their introduction to the *Routledge Handbook of Sexuality Studies in East Asia* that this edited collection takes a geo-cultural focus on those countries that share the historical experience of the deep impact of Confucianism, neo-Confucianism and Buddhism. While the publication is titled a handbook of East Asian sexuality studies, it also includes Vietnam, geographically part

of Southeast Asia, as well as Mongolia, which borders Central Asia. What links the societies included in this book is not their location within any tightly bordered regional space but rather their common religio-cultural heritages and their use at some point in their histories of Chinese ideographs, which McLelland and Mackie note has facilitated the formation of sexual terminologies and translations, “in much the same way as many European languages use Latin and Greek roots in creating new terminologies”. (McLelland & Mackie 2015, p. 3) All the countries included in this collection have also been deeply impacted by the rise of Western power and also by Japanese imperialism in the first half of the 20th century.

The principles that McLelland and Mackie have used in selecting the countries to be represented in *The Handbook of Sexuality Studies in East Asia* cannot be dismissed by any superficial critique of area studies. The principles underpinning the compilation of this book could equally be drawn upon to argue for a regional approach to studies of sexuality in many of the countries of Southeast Asia, which collectively share a deep history of Hindu and Buddhist religious influences emanating from India, many of which use scripts based on Indian systems of writing, and draw on the ancient Indian languages of Sanskrit and Pali as the bases of their technical vocabularies, including in the study of sexuality. The principles employed by McLelland and Mackie can equally be applied as the basis of a critique of the Eurocentrism of the field of sexuality studies as it has emerged from studies in the West. While now an international field of comparative research, sexuality studies has in fact emerged from reflections on those societies that have been deeply impacted by Christianity and which use Latin and Greek as the bases of their technical vocabularies. Like the disciplines, many of the terminologies and concepts of Western analyses of sexuality, which often misrepresent themselves as general or universal, are in fact based on Latin and Greek and bear the implicit imprint of this history of Christian moral doctrine even when they are presented in an ostensibly secular frame. The regional cultural and linguistic perspectives that McLelland and Mackie bring to their survey of the new field of sexuality studies in East Asia reflect a general problem of blindness to geography in disciplinary knowledge in the Western academy. While scholars in the disciplines, including new disciplines based on critical theory, have critiqued area studies for its lack of interest in theory, they have often failed to acknowledge the geographical, historical and cultural locatedness and boundedness of the theories they put forward.

The Disciplines as Disguised Forms of Western Area Studies

Houben argues that, “It has become increasingly clear that the disciplines themselves are area studies, since they basically describe the processes and structures of a Western world” (Houben 2013, p. 4). I agree with Houben’s contention that because the disciplines are in fact geographically based forms of knowledge – effectively constituting a field of Euro-American studies -- then concepts and theories produced from these disciplines often fail to provide the tools we need to understand places beyond Euro-America. Mielke and Hornidge similarly observe that it has been argued that area studies “exist due to the Western-centric nature of the disciplines” and the disciplines would not be in a position to produce general theories without the empirical findings of area studies (Mielke & Hornidge 2014, p. 12). Indeed, the disciplines are forms of Western area studies in which the geographical location of the site of knowledge production has been obscured as an epistemological effect of the geopolitical hegemony of the West in modern world history. As 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) In a similar vein, Allen Chun comments, “The epistemological dilemma of Asia invokes a need to problematize the West and Western studies.” (2008, p. 691) In the disciplines, as they have been constructed in the centres of intellectual power

in the West, the West itself is almost always an unmarked site of the universal and of general theory, while the non-West is almost always marked, named and labeled as a site of the particular and of empirical detail.

Area Studies VS Critical Theory in Studies of Asia: Beyond Interdisciplinarity in Responding to the Euro-Amerocentrism of Theory

The criticism that area studies is disinterested in, or even resistant to, theory, and the counter-claim that the proponents of discipline-based theorising are themselves practitioners of a disguised form of area studies, namely Western studies, have often been framed in terms of a debate between disciplinary forms of knowledge and cross-disciplinary or interdisciplinary area studies methodologies.⁶ Mignolo relates this spatialised epistemological divide between a theoretical West and an empirical non-West to the history of global 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 truth with universal values.” (Mignolo 2002b, p. 79)

Mielke and Hornidge (2014 p. 12-13) note that issues of interdisciplinarity, crossdisciplinarity, and transdisciplinarity have been a central focus of debate 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. (Houben 2013, p. 4)

⁶ **Note: Area Studies Vs the Disciplines, Stalemate in Studies of Asia and the Pacific at the Australian National University** - In a Crossroads Lecture presented in Bonn on 12 June, 2013, Vincent Houben detailed the ongoing divide between “Arealists” and “Disciplinarians” in the study of Asia (Mielke & Hornidge 2014, p. 3n2). In some universities this debate has reached something of a stalemate, with scholars of Asia divided between those who reject area-based approaches and those who, often for pragmatic reasons, champion the continuing relevance and educational and institutional importance of area studies (see footnote 3 above). In 2010, my own university, the Australian National University, underwent a major organisational restructure to integrate previously separate units of postgraduate research and undergraduate teaching. A new College of Asia and the Pacific was formed bringing together the formerly separate Faculty of Asian Studies with the Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies. One of the largest units in the new College of Asia and the Pacific is the School of Culture, History and Language, which provides the organisational umbrella for almost 80 academic staff working in anthropology, archaeology, history, linguistics, literature, media, gender and cultural studies. In a series of lengthy meetings of academic staff to collectively decide organisational arrangements for the new amalgamated school, a key issue of debate was whether to form into disciplinary departments or area-based units of Southeast Asian Studies, Japanese Studies, Chinese Studies, and so on. At four hotly debated meetings held across 2010, the 80 academics in the new School were divided equally into two groups – half arguing strongly for disciplinary departments and the other half arguing equally strongly for an organisational structure based on area departments. No majority consensus was arrived at. In the end, a compromise arrangement was instituted by the then School director, with a dual structure of parallel area-based and disciplinary departments being formed, and each staff member being required to affiliate with at least one discipline and one area department. I provide this anecdote to indicate that in the largest centre of Asian and Pacific studies in Australia there is no consensus on how to conduct research or organise teaching on Asia and the Pacific. At the time of writing, the School of History, Culture and Language is undergoing periodic review, which may result in a further reorganisation of the parallel area and discipline departmental structure.

Mielke and Hornidge make a similar point in referencing Sayer's work on the imperialism and parochialism of the disciplines (2014 p. 22) to argue that the issues that confront us cross not only spatial borders but also the intellectual boundaries of the disciplines. Mielke and Hornidge suggest that, "there is validity in strategically ignoring the disciplines and their boundary shuffles in academic reasoning" (2014, p. 23).⁷ Mielke and Hornidge refer to gender studies and film and media studies as examples of interdisciplinary forms of knowledge that have the potential to respond to the limitations of strictly discipline-bound analysis (2014, p. 5). However, more than interdisciplinarity is required if we are to overcome the Euro-Amerocentrism of the disciplines. It is indeed the case that these new fields cross the borders of established disciplines. However, to define gender studies, film studies and so on as "interdisciplinary" perhaps gives the impression that they merely try to combine the methods of the established disciplines in new arrangements. This is not the case. Many scholars in these emerging fields see their methods as distinct from, in opposition to, and an alternative to the established disciplines. What is missing from Mielke and Hornidge's account of these new fields is the term "critical", which signals the fact that in their very foundation these emerging fields adopt a distinctive epistemological approach. A key point that separates the established disciplines from the new fields that draw on critical theoretical methods is not only their interdisciplinary character but also their shared view that knowledge is intimately and indelibly marked by power. I take the word "critical" in "critical theory" – which in its diverse forms is the methodological foundation of all the new fields in the critical humanities -- as marking the epistemological position that knowledge is as much about power and the critique of hegemony as it is about accounts of reality or truth. It is this epistemology that also forms the basis of the theories of positionality that are the starting point of this paper and which framed discussion at the November 2014 Crossroads Studies Conference on rethinking area studies.

A key question in my work has not so much been how established disciplines relate to area studies but rather how the new fields based on critical epistemologies relate to area studies. This was the question that I began to reflect on in my 2003 studies (Jackson 2003a, 2003b). The rise of critical methods in studies of Asia has seen a new divide open up in addition to that which Houben describes as the debate between areanists and disciplinarians. Critical analysts see themselves as being in opposition to both empirical area studies and to the Euro-Amerocentrism of the established disciplines. In my work I have argued both that much area studies research has failed to engage critical theory, and also that some critical studies of Asia have remained Eurocentric by continuing to apply Western-derived theory as if it were universal (Jackson 2004c, 2005). I have been interested in the question of the extent to which critical theory, and with it theories of positionality, remain Euro-Amerocentric in their presumptions and generalisations.

⁷ **Note: Disciplinary Imperialism and Parochialism** - This is indeed my own position, and reflects movements I have made in my academic career. My undergraduate and Masters level studies were in Western philosophy, focusing on critical epistemology. My PhD was in Thai Buddhist philosophy (Jackson 2003), and I undertook postdoctoral studies in the political history of Thai Buddhism at the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies in Singapore (Jackson 1989). For 20 years I was a member of the Division of Pacific and Asian History at ANU, but in 2013 I relocated to the newly created Department of Gender, Media and Cultural Studies in the College of Asia and the Pacific. While I believe that methodological rigour is essential in academic research, I often find strictly disciplinary thinking less than insightful. The often-narrow methodological concerns of the disciplines can set up barriers that prevent intelligent people from engaging in productive dialogue on matters of genuine global importance.

Critical Sexuality Studies: Challenging the Epistemological Borders of the Disciplines

In their introduction to the *Routledge Handbook of Sexuality Studies in East Asia*, editors Mark McLelland and Vera Mackie state,

Our authors come from a range of disciplinary and interdisciplinary backgrounds. They are historians, ethnographers, medical anthropologists, sociologists, specialists in law, film, literature and new media, drawing on cultural studies, media studies, gender and sexuality studies, gay, lesbian and transgender studies, as well as queer theory. (McLelland and Mackie 2015, p. 2)

This summary reflects clearly how the new field of sexuality studies has emerged at the intersection of a wide range of disciplines and analytical approaches. However, sexuality studies are significantly more than a cross-disciplinary or interdisciplinary form of study that simply brings together the findings of existing disciplinary approaches. Sexuality studies ask questions and take analytical focuses that previously were not considered or were even actively excluded from analysis within established disciplinary approaches. As McLelland and Mackie observe, “sexuality can only be understood through its embeddedness in particular local cultural and social formations.” (McLelland and Mackie 2015, p. 2) Sexuality studies begin from the foundational principle that sexuality is not only about bodies, behaviours and biomedical analysis but rather is a dimension of human life that we are only ever aware of and which is only ever experienced through social and cultural meanings that are deeply patterned by forms of power. It is this distinctive analytical lens that integrates the diverse disciplinary perspectives on sexuality and forms the basis of the transdisciplinary intellectual coherence of the field of sexuality studies.

A further reason that new fields such as sexuality studies situate themselves in contrast to the established disciplines is the fact that the disciplines have often acted as intellectual gate keepers, wielding their institutional authority in the academy to exclude certain topics from consideration. For the distinctive perspectives of sexuality studies -- which draw upon but go beyond the analytic approaches of the established disciplines -- to gain a voice within the academy it has been necessary to overcome intellectual barriers as well as moralising exclusions set up by some in the disciplines. The field has had to forge its own academic forums – distinctive research networks, conferences, journals and publication series devoted specifically to sexuality studies.

Furthermore, even though sexuality studies is a relatively new field and has had to work against a series of exclusions in order to become established, it has nonetheless at times perpetuated a range of exclusions in other dimensions. Non-heterosexual sexualities were often excluded in earlier forms of sexology, and LGBTQ studies emerged in opposition to the heteronormative focus of early research. Even critical queer studies, which only emerged in the early 1990s, has itself at times perpetuated forms of ethnic and racial privileging – of white gay men and women -- with those from diasporic and indigenous ethnic groups as well as those living with disability being excluded. Another frontier of intellectual challenge today is the negotiation of queer sexualities and queer genders – with the need to rethink the intersections and differences of cisgendered sexualities – both hetero- and homosexual – and transgendered sexualities.

Theoretical Practice as East-West Comparison

Mielke and Hornidge discuss the place of area studies in what they call the intellectual “quest for comparison” (2014, p. 15), and in this context Houben notes, “Comparison is more than just the

juxtaposition of cases in the search for similarities or differences.” (Houben 2013, p. 6) I agree that in responding to the Euro-Amerocentrism of the disciplines and of theory we need frameworks to guide international and cross-cultural comparison and, like Houben, I do not believe that mere empirical comparison, of country X with country Y, or of ethnic group A with ethnic group B, provides an adequate basis for comparative research. Theory, as the systematisation of general concepts and hypothesised influences and causal relationships, is in essence a comparative exercise. At the most general level, theory is the enterprise to describe, define and understand what is common among superficially diverse and observationally distinct events and situations. In this context, a central issue is not empirical comparison as such, but rather the origin, status and character of the theory that we adopt in making comparisons.

To draw on established forms of theory in analysing the non-West is already to engage in a form of comparison. This is because, as noted above, most theory as currently formulated and as emerging from the disciplines is already implicitly Western. To bring concepts derived from disciplinary Western Studies into conversation with the cultures and histories of non-Western societies is then to engage in a form of transnational comparison.

Dilemmas in Challenging Euro-Amerocentrism: Alternative Strategies of Engaging Theory in Studies of Asia

However, the structural inequalities between knowledges of the West and non-West as outlined above mean that scholars engaged in thinking theoretically and critically from non-Western locations and positionalities are confronted with significant challenges. How are we to challenge the forms of power that have constituted and which continue to uphold the epistemological gulf between, on the one hand, a West implicitly marked as a site of universally valid knowledge and general theory and, on the other hand, an Asia that is always explicitly marked as local, specific and empirical? Can Asian histories and cultures become sites for the production of generalisations of global and/or universal relevance, and can generalisations made from Asian positionalities ever assume the status of general theory while global knowledge production continues to be structured by spatially based inequalities in power, influence, prestige and cultural capital? Concretely, what methodological strategies should we adopt in challenging the Euro-Amerocentrism of theory?

- Should we seek to reformulate existing, West-derived theories by bringing in critical perspectives from Asian history and culture? Can this approach ever genuinely challenge the universalist presumptions of Western theory?

OR

- Should we seek to develop altogether new models that generalise from the empirical distinctiveness of Asian histories and cultures? However, if we follow this strategy does it risk being re-appropriated to essentialising nativist and nationalist agendas of “Asian ideas for Asian studies”?

Negotiating the Multiple Hegemonies of Metropolitan Euro-Amerocentrism and Local Essentialist Nativism

Ayman El-Desouky succinctly states the dilemma confronting us,

The challenges here lie between the resistance of ‘the local’, particularly when voiced on unreflective nationalist and essentialist grounds, and the encroachments of hegemonic critical and theoretical

discourses whose modes of knowledge production, and the conceptual languages in which they are cast, often gloss over intrinsic, and indeed hermeneutically fruitful, differences. (El-Desouky 2014, p. 241).

Houben argues for a new approach to area studies that is “underscored by detailed case studies on non-western phenomena and from which differentiated and contextual medium-range concepts are to be derived.” (Houben 2013, p. 9) I agree that non-Western locales can and indeed must become sites for generating general concepts and categories that challenge Euro-Amerocentrism. However, at the same time, we need to be cognisant and wary of conservative nationalist agendas in some Asian academies that may link even constructive critiques of Euro-Amerocentrism with essentialist nativism. Many Asian academies exist within totalitarian political regimes, or at least regimes with highly restricted democracies where free thought and criticism are policed and even subject to criminal prosecution. Thailand in 2014 saw some conservative academics support a military coup that toppled the democratically elected government of Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra by arguing that democracy is a Western imposition inappropriate for the Thai political and cultural setting. Does a localist approach to developing theory risk being appropriated to such conservative and autocratic political agendas? As Rachel Harrison observes of the situation in the fields of comparative literature and literary studies in semi-colonial Thailand, “‘local’ or ‘nativist’ theory, which might otherwise be envisioned as the centre of defiance against colonial rule, instead serves to confirm the conventional authority of internally colonising forms of power.” (Harrison 2014, p. 25) Harrison argues that in Thailand, while “the development of local theory is laudable from the postcolonial perspective of countering the hegemony of Western thought, it nevertheless risks merely reasserting conservative nuances and hence consolidating its own form of colonial convention.” (Harrison 2014, p. 29)⁸

⁸ **Note: Radical and Conservative Effects of Critical Theory in Different Disciplinary Contexts** – In this context it is important to be aware that while Western-derived critical theory aims to challenge hegemony and unequal power relations, it does not always have unambiguously critical effects. In recent years, this has been a much-debated issue in feminist and queer studies, with critical women’s studies and LGBTQ studies at times having been challenged as reflecting the political agendas of Western identity politics (see Dhawan 2013). In different fields of Asia studies research, critical theory can variously have radical effects in challenging local power hierarchies within Asian societies as well as the conservative effect of reinforcing metropolitan Euro-Amerocentric power and intellectual authority. In the case of Thailand, situated in a semicolonial position of international subordination and domestic intellectual hegemony (see Harrison & Jackson 2010), two distinct forms of epistemological power must be considered and engaged. One is local hegemony such as found in nationalist literary studies and official historiography, where the key task of criticism is to challenge local structures of conservative power. Another is at the international level, where Thai cultural logics may be overwritten or erased by the implicit Euro-Amerocentrism of critical theory that is applied unreflectively. In fields of Asian studies dominated by nationalist essentialism, such as studies of national literatures and official state histories, the implicit universalism of critical theory is valuable for its ability to lift analysis out of nationalist essentialism and anti-comparative localism. In these fields, too strident a critique of the residual Euro-Amerocentrism of critical theory may at times have the unwanted effect of aligning this otherwise well-meaning critique with nationalist nativism. However, in other fields of Asian studies, such as queer studies, where critical theory is already strong and perhaps even dominant or foundational to the emergence of that field, then the implicit Euro-Amerocentric universalism of critical theory becomes much more problematic and indeed a major object of critique. In these latter fields, not to challenge the implicit universalism of unreflective critical theory is to align oneself with Euro-Amerocentrism. My own work, in particular on the history of Thai same-sex and transgender cultures, is most strongly positioned in this second domain, with my main emphasis being on reappraising and reformulating Western critical theory by revealing its historical, cultural and linguistic specificity.

Critically Engaging Western-derived Theory from Asian Sites

I believe that the strategy of critically engaging Western theory from Asian sites is the most productive strategic approach to challenging the Euro-Amerocentrism of theory. To avoid the risk of critiques of Euro-Amerocentrism becoming appropriated to conservative agendas of nativist isolationism, mid-range concepts that emerge from local sites need to remain in intellectual dialogue with broader level ideas to retain the critical edge of comparative potential. It is for this reason that my own strategy has been to aim to reformulate Western critical theory, not to replace it or start from scratch with purely locally derived ideas. I have followed this approach in my attempts to bring analyses of Thailand's semi-colonial position in the Western-dominated world order into dialogue with postcolonial studies (Jackson 2005, 2010a, 2010b) and in rethinking Foucault's history of sexuality in the West in the light of the distinctive forms of semi-colonial power that have been hegemonic over gender in modern Thai history (Jackson 2003c, 2004a, 2004b). Indeed, as I argue above, engaging theory that has emerged from the disciplines, or Western studies, in studies of Asia is at root already a comparative enterprise. As Houben observes,

[T]here is [now] something like a globalised language of the humanities and social sciences, which may have had its origins in western science but is no longer necessarily specific to the West, and is now shared by a worldwide community of scholars. (Houben 2013, p. 9)

In the light of "this globalised language" of research and analysis, Mielke and Hornidge observe that area studies can now engage in productive dialogue with the categories of the Western disciplines, "This is not a quest to abolish the mentioned categories completely, but rather to raise awareness of their contextual situatedness." (2014, p. 36) Sanjay Seth arrives at a similar conclusion,

There are many reasons for continuing to operate with and within what I have been calling modern, Western reason, the most compelling of which is that it is closely associated with a modernity that is now global, and encompasses all people, albeit in differing ways. (Seth 2013, p. 144)

The genealogy of modern knowledge ... is undeniably Western.... But that knowledge is now global and, with differences of degree, is the heritage of most people. (Seth 2013, p. 149)

The reasons for beginning with and critically engaging Western theory are therefore practical and pragmatic, reflecting the current world situation and do not follow from any strictly theoretical justification, for Western-derived knowledge cannot in any way be argued to possess an inherent epistemological superiority. It is for contingent historical reasons, rather than theoretical or epistemological reasons, that Western-derived forms of knowledge are currently the globally dominant frames for understanding social and cultural life. And it is the historically contingent situation of the imperialism-conferred global epistemological authority of Western thought that requires critical analysis to engage this intellectual setting if it is to be successful in challenging forms of hegemony. Seth outlines this position in detail as follows:

'Global' ... is not the same thing as 'universal'. It is not that this [Western-derived] knowledge has risen above the circumstances of its production and revealed that it is true for all – on the contrary, the failure of attempts to ground modern Reason ... are more apparent today than ever before.⁹ Rather, this knowledge and historical processes with which it is closely associated have, for good or ill, refashioned the world. While they have served to constitute a world in common --- our global modernity – this world continues to sit alongside other ones, worlds to which the social sciences are only a limited guide. And so, I conclude by submitting that modern knowledge and the social sciences

⁹ I have also explored the failure to ground modern Reason in a recent DORISEA working paper (Jackson 2014).

that formalize it, have constituted our modernity and are at once indispensable – but also inadequate – to making sense of it. (Seth 2013, pp. 149-150)

Postcolonial theorists such as Dipesh Chakrabarty and Gayatri Spivak point to the paradoxical heritage of the West, and the double-edged sword of the legacy of the Enlightenment, as providing both opportunities along with challenges. The Western tradition presents the paradox of providing tools for liberation within a setting of subordination. Nikita Dhawan summarises this view as follows,

[T]he challenge [is one of] coming to terms with the irony that even as we critique the violent legacy of the European Enlightenment, it provides us with some of our most powerful tools... If European thought is both indispensable and yet inadequate in understanding the experiences of political modernity in the non-Western world, how may the European Enlightenment be appropriated *from* and *for* the postcolonial world? (Dhawan 2013, p. 220, emphases in original)

The relation of postcoloniality to the Enlightenment – and its legacies of modernity, secularism, democracy, human rights, science, technology, hegemonic languages – is diagnosed as a ‘double bind’, whereby Spivak advises that one should neither accuse European philosophers nor excuse them; rather one ought to enter the protocols of the canonical texts of the Enlightenment to see how it can be used if turned around on its own terms toward a more just and democratic postcoloniality. (Dhawan 2013, p. 221, citing Spivak 1994, p, 259)

The issue then is not whether or not we begin with ideas and theories that emerge from the Euro-American disciplines. Rather, the key issue is whether theory, whatever its origin, is open to being reformulated in genuine conversation with the non-West, and in which the non-West is an active interlocutor and equal agent in knowledge production and theory reformulation.

Case Study: Queering Asian Studies and Reformulating Western Theories of (Trans)Genderism and (Homo)Sexuality

The strategic approach outlined above is the one that I have taken in my own research, and also reflects the methodology of many others working in Asian cultural studies, such as the Inter-Asia Cultural Studies project, which hosts both a biennial international conference in Asia and produces the *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* journal. This is also the approach that my colleagues and I in the AsiaPacifiQueer project (see Martin et al. 2008) and the Queer Asia monograph series at Hong Kong University Press (www.hkupress.org) have adopted. We have not seen our intellectual task as aiming to replace notions of “gender”, “sexuality”, or the methods of queer studies, but rather to engage in collaborative research that expands the empirical base of analysis to Asia in order in to re-think concepts such as “gender” and “sexuality” and the methods of queer studies in international settings. The aim of our collaborations has been to reflect on what these concepts and methods mean when they are stretched so as to encompass phenomena and contexts beyond the West. This does not necessarily lead to an abolition of categories such as “gender” or “sexuality”, but it almost always requires their reformulation.

The methods of queer theoretical analysis have also been adapted and reformulated in Asian intellectual settings. Queer studies starts from the insight of deconstructionist analysis that the dominant and subordinate poles in hierarchically structured binary relations are mutually defining. “Male” and “female”, “masculine” and “feminine”, “homosexual” and “heterosexual”, “cisgender” and “transgender”, are not self-existing categories, but rather only assume meaning in their mutually defining relations of inclusion and exclusion. A central method of queer studies is to take the position of minoritised and subordinated

categories in binary hierarchies of power as an intellectual fulcrum point to reflect back upon dominant categories. This approach aims to expose aspects of those dominant categories and unequal power relations that might otherwise remain obscure. In specific terms, queer studies argues that studying homosexuality tells us as much about heterosexuality as about same-sex sexualities, and that studying transgenderism tells us as much about gender normative notions of masculinity and femininity as about those who transition across these categories. The aim of queer studies is to queer heterosexuality and gender normativity, to reveal the exclusionary forms of heteronormative power that position the homosexual as an excluded other and which stigmatise and exclude those who fail to conform to one or other idealised notion of binarised gender identity. This method of queer studies has been adapted and developed in the Sinophone academy, not by borrowing Western categories such as “gay” or “queer”, but rather by queering a key term in the discourse of the Communist Party of China, *tongzhi* or “comrade”, and imbuing this term with homoerotic and gender transgressive connotations (see Huang 2011, pp. 15ff; Tang 2011, pp. 8-9).

Asian Queer Studies as “Border Thinking” and “Border Epistemology”: Reversing Global Theoretical Flows Across the “West”/“Rest” Epistemological Divide

The method of queer studies is very similar to what postcolonial historian and theorist Walter D. Mignolo calls “border thinking, border gnosis, or border epistemology” (Mignolo 2002a, p. 942). Border thinking is Mignolo’s term for activating what he sees as the “epistemic potential” of “subaltern perspectives” (Mignolo 2002a, p. 948), and he defines border thinking “as an epistemology from a subaltern perspective”. (Mignolo 2002b, p. 71) Border thinking aims to challenge the epistemological effects of the power relations set up by binary categories such as “modernity” versus “tradition”, “global” versus “local”, by making the subordinate position “a locus of enunciation as legitimate as the first” (Mignolo 2002a, p. 942). For Mignolo, the method of border thinking draws on,

... [a]n 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. (Mignolo 2002a, p. 948)

As Chun pointedly observes, “The [non-Western] other may have been silent, but only in Western discourse” (Chun 2008, p. 695). Mignolo’s method of border thinking or border epistemology draws on Argentine-Mexican philosopher Enrique Dussel’s (2002) notion of transmodernity, “by which he means that modernity is not a strictly European but a planetary phenomenon, to which the ‘excluded barbarians’ have contributed, although their contribution has not been acknowledged.” (Mignolo 2002b, p. 57)

4 AREA STUDIES WITHIN GLOBAL CAPITALISM

The Role of the Neoliberal University in

Entrenching the Global Immobility of Theory Production

A third major criticism that has been leveled against area studies is that this approach is outdated and reflects a pre-globalisation era defined by the geopolitics of the nation state. According to this argument, in the post-Cold War era, despatialising border-crossing phenomena of finance, media, information, migration, and tourism are now the prime determinants of social order and the dominant features of early

21st century life. However, this critique of analysing knowledge in terms of spatiality and bordered epistemologies is based on pre-21st century predictions of the supposed despatialisation of social life under globalisation that have not in fact come to pass, or at least have not been fully realised. First generation globalisation theory as put forward in the early years of the post-Cold War period described the phenomenon as a series of processes of world cultural homogenisation and Americanisation (for example see Waters 1995). However, this account has since been revealed to reflect an inaccurate and decidedly Amerocentric view of the world. Yes, homogenisation is taking place in some domains of financial, social and cultural life. However, rather than leading to complete deterritorialisation and conformity to American cultural models, globalising processes are also producing new spatialities of difference. These new 21st century spatialities of difference may not conform to the borders of nation states as imagined in 20th century forms of area studies. Nonetheless, in many cases the new spatialities of neoliberal globalisation are working to reinforce rather than undermine older geographically based forms of domination that emerged in the era of imperialism and are entrenching established divides between metropolitan centres of power and marginalised societies and social groups on the global periphery. This is as true at the epistemological level of academic analysis and theory production as it is in terms of human movements and migration. Neoliberal globalisation is not leading to a despatialisation of theory production but is entrenching spatialities of knowledge and the global division of academic labour. As 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.” (Chun 2008, p. 694)

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

As discussed above, responding to the geographies of power, the emerging structure of multiple, spatially patterned centres and peripheries, of early 21st century globalisation requires concerted theoretical engagement, and presents us with dilemmas in deciding which epistemological approaches may provide the most effective strategic responses to the dual challenges of Euro-Amerocentrism and local hegemonic power. This will require the development of more complex theories of multiple hegemonic powers that are in competition with each other on the world stage at the same time that they impose structures of unequal power relations within the domains over they are respectively dominant.

However, more than theoretical responses are needed to challenge the forms of power that form the conditions of possibility of knowledge production today. We also need to be cognisant of the extra-epistemological conditions under which even critical theory is formulated and develop strategic responses that go beyond critical analysis and theory as such. In reflecting on these challenges, it is instructive to begin by considering how some concepts and theories emerging from studies of Southeast and South Asian societies have achieved something of a generalised status and become part of the international intellectual currency. This reflection reveals that ideas and mid-range concepts emerging from area studies require more than merely epistemological validity in order to succeed in crossing the intellectual border from the non-Western global periphery to the centre of Western-dominated intellectual life. That is, for Mignolo’s method of border thinking to be successful more than strictly theoretical practice is required.

Southeast Asian studies has been an academic site for the production of a number of concepts and analytical categories that have been adopted internationally beyond the borders of this field of area studies, including in the Euro-American centres of intellectual production. Benedict Anderson has 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 (Anderson, 1991, p xv).

Mielke and Hornidge observe that of all the fields of area studies, Southeast Asian studies perhaps has the greatest potential to bridge the “West-Rest divide” and advance “local concepts on an international scholarly scene” (2014, p. 10). In this regard, 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 concept 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 this 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 emerging to a significant extent from reflections on South Asian culture, history and politics.

However, while Southeast and South Asian studies may be academic sites from which general concepts and theories of international relevance and importance have emerged, it is nonetheless the case that all the internationally influential theorists in these fields have been based at, and produced their analyses from, universities that are located either in the Euro-American metropolises or Australia. In the case of 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 since graduation he has been based at the University of Madison, Wisconsin. In the case of 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 could perhaps also add the critique of Orientalism to the list of big ideas that have emerged from regional or area studies, with Edward Said having produced his influential analysis while based at Columbia University in New York City.

To summarise, all of the influential ideas to emerge from area studies have been developed by academics based at influential universities in the West, overwhelmingly in the United States, not in the regions themselves. This is not in any way to impugn the intellectual astuteness or to question the analytical power and applicability of their ideas. It is, rather, as Ariel Heryanto (2007) puts it, to ask, “can there be Southeast Asians in Southeast Asian studies?” The answer is undoubtedly yes, but only if they leave Southeast Asia, relocate to the West and produce their analyses and reflections 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 professorial positions at some of the most elite universities in the United States and United Kingdom. This brief history 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.

The Global Division of Intellectual Labour

Allen Chun argues 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.” (Chun 2008, p. 695) Chun provides as an example of the global division of intellectual labour 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. (Chun 2008, p. 699)

Chun notes a remark by Arif Dirlik (1994) that postcolonial studies began as an intellectual enterprise “when Third World intellectuals became embraced and celebrated in the First World” (Chun 2008, p. 694),

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. (Chun 2008, p. 705)

Chun argues that an implicit ethnocentrism, even racism, continues to structure 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. (Chun 2008, p. 705)

The academic fields of South and Southeast Asian studies may have achieved international significance, but the actual spaces and locations of South and Southeast Asia remain marginal epistemological sites on the periphery of global theoretical production. An intellectual’s geographical location as a scholar in the 21st century global order -- whether at a prestigious Western or a low ranked Asian university -- directly influences the status 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.¹⁰ In the next section, I consider how neoliberal policies of university management are working to entrench theoretical production in the West.

Despite globalisation, indeed, as I argue below, because of neoliberal globalisation, we continue to face intense barriers to theoretical innovation. Overwhelmingly, theory still travels in only one direction. Like luxury brand names in fashion and cosmetics, theory is a value-added export from Euro-America. Theory may be produced by diasporic intellectuals who were born and began their education in Asia, the Pacific, Africa or Latin America. However, the theoretical work of these diasporic intellectuals only achieves value in

¹⁰ Some 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.

the global intellectual market place if it comes with the label of being a genuine product of one or other of the elite intellectual fashion houses of Harvard, Chicago, Cornell, Columbia, Oxford, Cambridge, and so on. Neo-liberal performance policies and quality assessments are further entrenching the international division of intellectual labour and perpetuating what Chun calls the caste-like divide between “local” and “global” intellectuals.

In responding to the intellectual hegemony of the Euro-American disciplines, Vincent Houben proposes “constructing hypotheses from insights [in area studies] in a first step in order to come up with evolving mid-range concepts that could potentially be tested in other locations or multi-sited research and translocal settings.” (Mielke & Hornidge 2014, p. 23) To some extent, this has already happened. Benedict Anderson’s account of print capitalism as the basis of imagined national communities, and Clifford Geertz’s notions of the performative basis of political power in the theatre state, have already been taken up and applied extensively beyond Southeast Asian studies.¹¹ However, in a world where knowledge production and the circulation of theory is still insistently Euro-Amerocentric how can ideas that emerge from reflections in one field of area studies be communicated or gain traction beyond that field? How can ideas from non-Western area studies cross the epistemological border that separates, and isolates, them from the Western centre of theoretical production? Spivak’s observation, that “borders are easily crossed from metropolitan countries, whereas attempts to enter from the so-called peripheral countries encounter ... policed frontiers altogether more difficult to penetrate” (2003, p. 16), is as true for non-Western ideas as it is for non-Western peoples seeking to travel to the West. As noted above, Anderson’s and Geertz’s ideas have not been taken up internationally merely on the basis of their inherent insightfulness, but just as much because of the intellectual cultural capital deriving from these scholars’ respective positions in halls of intellectual power in the United States.

The extra-epistemological forces that have underpinned the success of certain ideas from Southeast and South Asian studies on the world stage indicates the need for extra-epistemological strategic responses to augment critical theoretical interventions – such as queer studies or border thinking – that remain at the level of analysis. While theoretical critique is important, we need to do more than analyse. It is also necessary to engage in forms of academic activism that challenge the extra-epistemological barriers that hinder and obstruct the emergence of a level playing field in the global academy. However, before considering possible extra-epistemological strategic responses to the regime of power over global knowledge production it is important to appreciate the ways that 21st century neoliberal policies of academic management are further entrenching the global division of intellectual labour that emerged as an epistemological result of European imperialism and American neoimperialism.

The Bordered Geographies of Global Academic “Quality” under Neoliberalism

In the 21st century world of the neoliberal university, the previously diffuse and purely qualitative notion of intellectual prestige has been subject to measurement and quantification and has been relabeled as “academic quality”. The reputed “academic quality” of universities is now assigned a numerical score, and on this basis all world universities are ranked from one to one thousand by commercial organisations that

¹¹ I have also followed a similar approach to that outlined by Houben in some of my own work. In my accounts of the Thai regime of images (Jackson 2004a) and Thailand as a performative state (Jackson 2004b) I drew on the findings of anthropological research on Thailand, together with Foucauldian and Geertzian theories of power, to propose a model of institutional power in semicolonial Thailand that polices public surface images but has little interest in controlling private behaviour.

produce annual global university rankings. The increasingly global imposition of neoliberal managerial policies in universities based on these types of measures has become a hegemonic framework that is entrenching global inequalities in academic prestige value and is working to recentre theoretical production in the West. The transnational regime of so-called “academic quality assessment” opposes and negates the epistemological force of critical theory, constituting an extra-epistemological form of power that patterns the production and dissemination of all forms of theory, including theory which is ostensibly critical of this very phenomenon. Indeed, the new global geography of academic “quality”, as measured by university rankings systems, is entrenching both Euro-American intellectual dominance and Euro-Amerocentric forms of thinking.

Three of the internationally most influential university rankings systems are: (1) QS World University Rankings, published by the British company Quacquarelli Symonds; (2) the Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings; and (3) Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU), also known as the Shanghai Ranking, an annual list of university rankings published by Shanghai Ranking Consultancy. While the QS and THE rankings are produced from the United Kingdom, the ARWU ranking was first compiled by Shanghai Jiaotong University in 2003 and is backed by the Chinese government to provide a global benchmark for Chinese universities. In all of these now highly influential rankings systems, the top ten positions of the supposedly highest global quality universities are all located in either the United States or the United Kingdom (see Appendices).

In the 2014-2015 QS World University Rankings, American and British universities hold all the top ten positions. A further five American and two more entrants from the United Kingdom appeared in the universities in the QS top 20, with US universities accounting for 28 of the top 100 places, and UK universities 19 in the top 100. In the 2014-2015 QS rankings Switzerland’s ETH Zurich, in 12th position, was the highest-ranked institution from outside the US and the UK. The highest ranked Asian university was the National University of Singapore (NUS) at 22 (the second highest ranked Asian University was the University of Hong Kong at 28) and the highest ranked Australian university was the Australian National University at 25. The top ranked German university in the QS rankings was Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg at 49.¹² In the 2013-2014 THE rankings, the top Asian universities were Tokyo University at 23 and the National University of Singapore at 26. The highest-ranking Australian university was the University of Melbourne at 34 (ANU was ranked second in Australia at 48 in the THE global list) and the top ranked German University was Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München at number 55.¹³ In the 2014 ARWU rankings, the top Asian university was Tokyo University at 21, the highest ranked Australian University was the University of Melbourne at 44 (ANU was ranked second in Australia at 74 in the ARWU global rankings) and the highest ranked German university was Heidelberg University at 49.¹⁴

The globalisation of higher education has not led to the emergence of an academic level playing field across national borders. On the contrary, the managerialist neoliberal regime of continuous quantified measurement of performance, together with numerically scored rankings of disciplinary research quality and listings of universities’ relative status in terms of these measures, currently work to entrench Western countries’ control over and dominance of the considerable wealth associated with the global knowledge

¹² <http://www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings-articles/world-university-rankings/top-universities-world-201415> (accessed 10 October, 2014)

¹³ <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/world-university-rankings/2013-14/world-ranking> (Accessed 10 October, 2014)

¹⁴ <http://www.shanghairanking.com/ARWU2014.html> (Accessed 10 October, 2014)

economy. Quality assessment and performance measures privilege and reward publication with presses and publishers in the old centres of power, overwhelming the United States, the United Kingdom and Western Europe, entrenching established patterns of academic privilege. The neoliberal assessment of even qualitative humanities research in terms of numerically ranked quantitative scores has become an increasingly dominant form of power over global theory production and circulation. In the early 21st century, the imposition of neoliberal policies in universities, in particular, the worldwide rush to institutionalise academic performance indicators and regular quality assessment exercises, constitutes an insidious form of power over global knowledge production and circulation.

Neoliberal assessment based on ranking of research publications according to whether they are published in so-called “quality” journals and monograph series is a regime of power over the global academy that determines the renewal of academic contracts, whether or not tenure or promotion is awarded, and whether or not a scholar is regarded as being sufficiently “competitive” to be awarded research grants. In 2011, the La Trobe University Branch of the National Tertiary Education Union of Australia published a discussion paper that concluded that the “research performance evaluation system” proposed to be used at that university required the “research output”, that is, the publications, of academic staff to rank in the top 25% to 35% worldwide in order to be considered ‘satisfactory’ and would have “dire implications for workloads, promotion, reputation and academic freedom” (NTEU 2011). The system proposed to be used at La Trobe University employed a range of “metrics”, that is, mathematical algorithms that produce numerically ranked scores of supposed research quality based on “Key Performance Indicator” or KPI points.

In these assessment exercises -- 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 journal or monograph series in which it is published, with the overwhelming majority of so-called “quality” publishing houses being located in the old metropolises. Citing the work of Andrew Oswald (2007), Suzanne Young et al. (2011) observe,

[W]ith such a scheme there is potential that where an academic publishes will become more important than what they have to say. This is based on the presumption that the value of academics’ outputs is measurable; introduced as part of an auditing and benchmarking framework now found across [universities] and public agencies as part of a neoliberal agenda of accountability. (Young et al. 2011, p. 78)

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 (Key Performance Indicator) regime now imposed upon the Thai academy. These governments, and university administrators and deans in these countries, often insist that scholars in their national university systems publish with “quality” presses. The following anonymous blog entry from an academic in an unnamed “developing” country reflects the intense pressures that result from the imposition of 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.¹⁵

There are now considerable disincentives to publishing in so-called “low quality” journals and with university presses from institutions that have low scores in the global rankings systems.

This system is centralising wealth in a few Western publishing houses, contributing to the monopolisation of economic control of the global circulation of academic knowledge by increasing the profit margins of Euro-American publishers and undercutting the ability of 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 the educational bureaucracies in both Western and non-Western countries are effectively working to monopolise Western universities’ and Western academic presses’ control of this sector of the global economy.

Quality assessment exercises work to resist the border crossing impact of globalisation in higher education. They are interventions in the free flow of academic knowledge that, rather than erasing the spatialities of knowledge demonstrate the ways that neoliberal capitalism operates to reinforce colonial- and neocolonial-era geographical-cum-epistemological boundaries between the West as a site of the production of high value knowledge/theory and the non-West as a site of low value information/empirical data. In the era of quality assessment, “high” research quality and “high” university ranking have become new synonyms for (universal) “knowledge” and (general) “theory”, both overwhelmingly monopolised by 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 the global rankings have become marked as sites of (local) empirical information and data. Quality rankings and performance assessments are thus recentring the West in the international knowledge economy, both economically in terms of control over international academic publishing and epistemologically as the global centre for the publication and marketing of so-called “quality” academic knowledge, or in other words, theory.

Truth Value VS Prestige Value in the Colonial-Neoliberal Global Division of Intellectual Labour

The international impact of ideas emerging from South and Southeast Asian studies noted above does not merely reflect their intellectual significance or epistemological status as accurate or true but, just as importantly, also reflects their prestige. And the prestige of an idea or theory has no necessary relationship to its empirical accuracy in analysing actually existing conditions in the world. As shown by the examples from South and Southeast Asian studies considered above, the prestige of an idea in the early 21st century academy often emerges as an effect of the history of Western imperialism and American neocolonialism, which together have conferred on elite British and American universities the intellectual cultural capital of being accorded the status of the highest quality tertiary institutions in all neoliberal global rankings of universities.

Despite their power over the careers of all academics employed in universities across the planet, these quantitative rankings of academic quality have no necessary relationship to the intellectual accuracy or

¹⁵ Anonymous. 2014. “Confessions of an Academic in the Developing World”, Higher Education Network, *The Guardian*, 26 May 2014, (www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/blog), accessed 28 May 2014.

epistemological status of the ideas, concepts, analyses, theories or critiques developed by scholars based at any given university. What these rankings do reflect in the most transparent way is the prestige that even in the early 21st century continues to be accorded to the elite universities of the small number of countries that have exercised global economic and geopolitical dominance over the past two centuries. And, paradoxically, the newly instituted neoliberal regime of quantified global rankings of university quality is re-entrenching the prestige of a small number of American and British universities, despite the fact that other world regions, notably Asia and Latin America, are rapidly acquiring international economic power and geopolitical influence. In other words, the neoliberal regime of academic management that is now the global norm in universities, and which reflects the impact of globalisation in the tertiary sectors of education and research, is reinforcing pre-globalisation era intellectual borders and epistemological boundaries between Euro-American universities, on the one hand, and institutions in the rest of the world, on the other. In summary, this neoliberal regime is entrenching Euro-Amerocentrism.

And this neoliberal Euro-Amerocentrism is not merely a matter of bureaucratic practice or research management that determines funding levels or the economics of international education, notwithstanding the fact that education has indeed become a major global industry. The global neoliberal regime that now institutionalises the imperial/neocolonial-era phenomenon of intellectual prestige in terms of measured and ranked “academic quality” has real theoretical and epistemological effects. While this regime is not in itself an epistemological phenomenon, it nonetheless has the power to ensure that ideas that emerge from a very small number of universities located in only one part 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 emerging from other centres of learning in other countries.

The Limits and Limitations of Critical Theory in the Neoliberal Academy

To emphasise, the spatialities of intellectual prestige and the epistemological divides between a “theoretical” West and an “empirical” non-West that emerged in the era of imperialism are now being reinforced by a regime of quantification that labels them as “metrics” of quality. Under the neoliberal managerialism now imposed internationally on universities, Euro-Amerocentrism has become much more than an epistemological phenomenon. Euro-Amerocentrism is an intellectual hierarchy of spatialised knowledge formations that is supported and held in place both by colonial-era ways of thinking and by neoliberal forms of power that now dominate the 21st century university. As a double phenomenon that is simultaneously epistemological and institutional it requires a two-fold critical engagement, both of Euro-Amerocentric analyses and of the practical forms of power that confer prestige upon so-called “quality” Euro-Amerocentric theories and concepts.

Most criticisms 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 cultural-historically restricted basis of the experience of the West. Postcolonial analysis has also critiqued the colonial era power inequalities that saw the epistemological distinction between theoretical analysis and empirical description being mapped onto regions of the world, with the imperialist West as imputed locus of universal knowledge and the colonised Rest as sites of local empirical detail. However, neoliberalism now constitutes a hegemonic setting that defines the extra-epistemological conditions within which all theory,

including critical theory, is produced, marketed and distributed. While globalisation, as a phenomenon of intensified border crossing, has challenged 20th century nation-state varieties of area studies, the neoliberalisation of the global university sector means that theory production, including the production of theories of globalisation, has remained trenchantly impervious to the otherwise decentring effects of these transnational processes. The empirical phenomena of globalisation reflect accelerating mobility. However, in marked contrast, the sites of the production of theory about these mobilities remain insistently immobile and are overwhelmingly centred in the old imperial and neocolonial metropolises. As discussed above, established inequalities in the global geography of intellectual prestige are being further entrenched by the now hegemonic transnational regime of so-called “academic quality assessment”, which works in direct opposition to and undercuts the epistemological force of critical theory. The global imposition of neoliberal policies upon the international academy has produced the contradictory situation of influential theoretical critiques of Euro-Amerocentrism circulating within global networks of academic prestige that nonetheless persistently recentre Euro-American academies as privileged sites of theoretical production.

To date, theoretical critiques of Euro-Amerocentrism have failed to redress these institutional global imbalances in theory production. This is because, by remaining at the epistemological level of critique, they have usually overlooked the increasingly powerful extra-epistemological effects of imbalances in the global geography of academic “quality”, which condition the production of even these critical theories. Despite the much-touted “rise of Asia”, struggles for intellectual independence to decolonise global knowledge production have failed to overturn the institutionalised centralisation of theoretical production in the old Euro-American metropolises. 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 person’s ideas.

To understand why critiques of Euro-Americanism fail to overturn the global centralisation of theoretical knowledge production in the West we need to look to the extra-epistemological conditions under which critical theory is now produced. 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 geographical contours of global intellectual production than the epistemological effects of theoretical critiques of Euro-Amerocentrism, which, by comparison, have proved singularly ineffective in challenging global imbalances in knowledge production.

The extra-epistemological and extra-theoretical character of the forces that now constitute the conditions of possibility for all theoretical production, including the production of critical theory, means that strategic critical responses must also come from outside the fields of epistemology and theory as such. I will return to consider possible forms of activism against the neoliberalisation of the world academy in the final part of this paper. However, before turning to that issue, I first reflect on how the neoliberal recentralisation of intellectual authority in the old Euro-American metropolises has become a key contributor to the ongoing failure of social and cultural analysis to adequately explain the globalised world we inhabit.

Neoliberal Externalities as Barriers to Theoretical Innovation: Why Critique is Not Enough

The ranking of academic journals and publishers according to supposed “quality” has the potential to stifle the intellectual innovation and experimentation that is a hallmark of all new fields of inquiry. In the neoliberal academy, the label of “academic quality” is almost always reserved for older, well-established

journals and publishers, and is an intellectual status symbol that is only ever achieved after several decades of publication. New and exploratory forms of inquiry that challenge established ideas often face resistance, and scholars working in these fields may face difficulties having their work accepted for publication in older journals and with publishers whose editorial boards are committed to the intellectual and methodological status quo. For emerging disciplines and new fields of inquiry to achieve recognition in the academy, it is often necessary for scholars in these fields – who are often younger academics in the early stages of their careers -- to establish their own journals and venues for academic publication. This has been the situation in the case of many of the emerging disciplines based on critical theory. Since the 1970s, new generations of scholars in the fields of postcolonial studies, gender studies, queer and trans studies, film and media studies, cultural studies, including Inter-Asian cultural studies, have all found it necessary to establish new journals devoted specifically to their respective fields of critical inquiry in order to build new international communities of scholarship. Many journals in these fields have now achieved widespread respect in the international academy. However, in their early years of publication all these newer publication venues lacked the forms of intellectual cultural capital that are now the basis of the assignment of the label of “quality journal” or “quality academic press” in neoliberal research quality assessment exercises.

We have no way of predicting what new forms of intellectual inquiry may emerge in the years and decades ahead. However, if the recent history of the formation of new critical disciplines is any guide, it is almost certain that any new field will need to establish its own journals and publication outlets, which in their formative early years will lack the label of “quality”. Yet in a neoliberal university environment in which younger scholars are required to publish with “quality” publishers -- that is, with established journals and presses -- in order to attain tenure and promotion there are strong disincentives to publishing in newer, experimental venues.

Neoliberal quality assessment exercises have the potential to entrench and formalise established fields of inquiry, namely, the disciplines. This is because they effectively punish research and publication in fields that fall outside the epistemological boundaries of the disciplinary categories that managerialist “quality” assessment schemes set up as the basis for quantitative measurement. While quality assessment procedures have been instituted on the argument of supposedly contributing to improving the quality of university research, they may have precisely the opposite effect of stifling the innovation that is the basis of genuine advances in thought and analysis. As Young et al. note, 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”. (Young et al. 2011, p. 78) By reducing academic “quality” to quantitative scores for defined disciplinary fields, quality assessment schemes entrench the epistemological borders that separate established fields of inquiry and research and have the potential to inhibit and stifle innovation within the global academy. In this situation, genuine intellectual, theoretical and methodological innovation may perhaps only become possible outside the formal university sector.

Failures in Social Theory: Consequences of the Euro-Amerocentrism of Theoretical Production

The intellectually stultifying effects of the formalisation of knowledge under colonial-neoliberal Euro-Amerocentrism can perhaps already be seen, being reflected in the failures of social theory emerging from the West to explain the forms or predict the directions of social, cultural, economic and political change in the 21st century. As Seth observes,

[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. (Seth 2013, p. 139)

Seth forcefully emphasises the final point above when he states, “[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.” (Seth 2013, p. 144) Seth observes also that not only are the Western social sciences “inadequate to their non-Western objects”, they may also “inhibit rather than advance understanding” (Seth 2013, p. 144). Like Seth, I believe that these failures -- such as the failure to adequately theorise the relationship of religion and modernity and new forms of cultural differentiation that are emerging under 21st century globalisation -- follow as direct consequences of the geographically, historically and culturally limited scope of the empirical bases from which social theories have been developed. Euro-Amerocentrism means that there are great chasms of ignorance at the centre of supposedly “general” Western theory. The cultural and historical experience of the West has not given us adequate intellectual tools to comprehend the totality of the world we inhabit, much less to be able to predict in what directions it may move in the near or medium term future. The failures of social theory show us that analysis based solely on the history of the West is inadequate to the task of producing general concepts that genuinely enlighten us about 21st century global modernity.

5 STRATEGIC RESPONSES

A key reason we lack adequate social theories of the current world setting is because theory production remains based in a geographically limited part of the globe, namely, Euro-America. Theory production is subject to the same nets of institutional and intellectual power that entrench the global divide between metropolitan centres and regional peripheries, and only when the development of theoretical analysis and conceptual frameworks, as opposed to empirical research and Third World data mining, becomes genuinely global can we expect to arrive at concepts that adequately describe and analyses that accurately interpret the actual conditions of the globe. However, at this transitional point in world history when extra-epistemological factors inhibit the multidirectional mobility of theory, how can or should a critical scholar respond to the influences that exist outside of and which envelope theoretical production?

Thinking Back to Euro-America: Border Thinking

In reflecting on the place of theories of positionality in area studies, Mielke and Hornidge argue that,

[W]ith the consideration of positionality the idea of universal knowledge is rendered invalid and it is rather about the situatedness of knowledge and its production, epistemological assumptions fray and we could expect their multiplication, because they would have to take account of and reflect the situatedness of knowledge production. (Mielke and Hornidge 2014, p. 32)

This is perhaps too pessimistic a view of the consequences of the unavoidable situatedness of knowledge production. Yes, knowledge is situated, but it is nonetheless still possible to expand the epistemological bases of the intellectual positions from which generalisations are produced. The task then is to produce forms of general knowledge that emerge from genuinely wider bases of information and in which the

patterns and structures revealed in Asian and other non-Western histories, cultures, polities and economies have equal epistemological value to those coming from reflections on Europe and North America. I do not agree that, “an acknowledgment of the situatedness of knowledge production does not allow generalizing and the drawing of universal conclusions (anymore).”¹⁶ (Mielke and Hornidge 2014, p. 25) The end of the Euro-American monopoly on global theory and knowledge production, and the opening up of Euro-America to intellectual competition from the former global margins, has the potential to lead to new generalisations that include both the West and the non-West. Indeed, ideas emerging from studies of the non-West are often valuable, if not essential, in helping us better understand the West itself. This is a central idea underpinning Enrique Dussel’s notion of transmodernity (2002) and Walter D. Mignolo’s critical epistemological method of border thinking. Benedict Anderson’s comparative study of the rise of national languages through the medium of print capitalism, drawing on examples from both Southeast Asian and European history, also shows the potential of the colonies and semicolonies not just to write back or speak back to empire, but also to provide the bases of thinking back to empire and of understanding the imperial and neocolonial centres for what they are in the light of ideas emerging from former colonies.

Collaborative Cross-Border Research Practices

Collaborative research is also an important practical response to redressing the Euro-Amerocentrism 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) I agree completely: collaboration across the borders of national academies is essential. However, Mielke and Hornidge go on to ask, “whether serious collaboration and exchange can actually be realised on [an] equal partnership basis”. (2014, p. 33) In a world of persistent inequalities, perhaps not. Nonetheless, one 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 not only to be cognisant of ethics protocols with regard to the people whom we research, we also need to be aware of and follow appropriate ethical protocols in the cross-cultural relationships between and among the scholars who come together to form collaborative research teams.

Academic Activism: Publishing Beyond Euro-America

I do not believe that the debates of area studies versus the disciplines, or for that matter of area studies versus critical theory, will be resolved solely at a meta-level through analyses conducted within Euro-American universities. These issues cannot be resolved solely within the old centres of hegemonic intellectual power. As a Foucauldian (Jackson 2006), I regard the conditions of possibility for the development of genuinely global theory as not lying in intellectually more astute analyses produced from the elite universities of Euro-America, but rather as residing in a radically reformed geographical distribution of the forms of power that currently exist over knowledge production. Mignolo observes,

¹⁶ Houben makes a similar point when he says that he regards concepts emerging from a new area studies as no longer being “aimed at producing universal theory but should rather elucidate ‘structured difference’.” (2013, p. 9)

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 colonality 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.” (Chun 2008, p. 694) Chun argues we need to consider our “institutional situatedness” (Chun 2008, p. 690) and “the sources of institutional resistance” to challenging Euro-Amerocentrism (Chun 2008, p. 692). In this, “It is not enough to attribute this to a failure of imagination.” (Chun 2008, p. 692) Rather, Chun argues,

We should really be deconstructing underlying institutional regimes and not simply conceptual representations. (Chun 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. (Chun 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. (Chun 2008, p. 707)

The issues discussed above will only be resolved when emerging centres of intellectual production outside Euro-America achieve a sufficient degree of agency that they can in fact, and not merely in theory, reverse the historical regime of intellectual power -- what Mignolo terms the “reversal of the epistemic privilege of modernity” -- that has constructed everyone outside Euro-America as objects of Western knowledge rather than as active subjects and producers of knowledge. These issues will only be negotiated and taken forward in concrete analysis of cultural and social phenomena conducted by and through research methodologies that cross national borders just as much and just as intensely as the transnational phenomena we urgently need to understand.

Critical analysis of Euro-Amerocentrism is not enough, especially if one is a scholar struggling to maintain an academic career in a neoliberalised university on the global periphery outside Euro-America. We also need to find ways to confront the power of the Euro-American publishing industries, whose global dominance is bolstered by the institutional Euro-Amerocentrism of the neoliberal system of global university rankings and quality assessment. Critiques of Euro-Amerocentrism that nonetheless appear in journals or books published by Euro-American presses can in fact participate in entrenching Euro-Amerocentrism. It is not sufficient to develop a brilliant critique of Euro-Amerocentrism if one publishes that critique with a company based in Euro-America and whose cost structure limits the circulation of one’s analyses within the geographical space of Euro-America. Critical theorists need to engage in greater reflexivity on their own academic praxis of publishing and conference participation and acknowledge that the practical dimensions of Euro-Amerocentrism can remain unchallenged even by intellectual critiques of that power.

My participation as one of the editors of the Queer Asia monograph series published by Hong Kong University Press has been informed by my own political ethics of publishing. I write on Asia, and I believe that my work should be published in and be accessible in Asian academies. I have had to be strategic in my academic career and in order to secure tenure and gain promotion at ANU I have at times played the Euro-

Amerocentric game of publishing in “quality” European journals and with “quality” American university presses. However, I believe that those based in Euro-America can and should come to Asian academic presses to find my work.

6 CONCLUSION

Working, Thinking and Publishing

Across Linguistic, Discursive and Epistemological Borders

I agree with Cynthia Chou that minimum requirements for comparative research are the possession of “good mastery of at least one local language based on the lived experience among native speakers of the language in their place.” (Chou 2006, p. 133, Cited by Mielke & Hornidge 2014, p. 37) Thinking across linguistic boundaries is central to the research methods supported by the Inter-Asia Cultural Studies and Queer Asia projects. Yes, we use English as an academic lingua franca for our publications and discussions. However, in Asian queer studies our method is to bring Euro-American categories into conversation with Asian discourses and concepts in research sites located in linguistic and discursive borderlands at the intersection of English, Chinese, French, Thai, German, and so on. Our task is to engage in the intellectual work of rethinking both Euro-American and Asian categories from these sites of cultural-linguistic-discursive intersection. Gayatri Spivak has also emphasised the central place of fluency in non-Western languages in negotiating the configurations of power/knowledge that pattern the 21st century Western academy:

I continue to believe 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. (Spivak, 2003, pp. 4–5)

The new step that I am proposing would work 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 ... (Spivak, 2003, p 9)

And as Ayman El-Desouky 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. (El-Desouky 2014, p. 240)

Despite the theoretical failure and epistemic inadequacy 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 power and 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-epistemological factors will also determine the future of global epistemologies, not only analysis or critique.

Unresolved issues in the debates of area studies versus the disciplines debates, and also 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.

Epistemological boundary crossing is potentially a powerful and transformative form of mobility in a globalising world. 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 now 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 academy.

In order to develop adequate understandings and theories of global modernity it is essential to overcome the intellectual hindrances of Euro-Amerocentrism, which is both an intellectual legacy of imperialism and a very contemporary form of neoliberal power over global knowledge production. What Houben (2013) has called the “new area studies” has a central role to play in this challenging task. In this paper I have considered the limitations and some of the major critiques of area studies, revealing the ways that forms of knowledge, including even critiques of area studies coming from the disciplines, are based on structures and patterns of spatiality. A key difference between the old and new area studies is that the old area studies accepted the spatiality of knowledge as given, usually being content to merely describe that situation, and in the process effectively reinforcing the power differentials that have tied forms of knowledge to certain locations. In contrast, the new area studies take a critical stance. The new area studies understands the spatiality of knowledge emerging from historical effects of power, both imperialism and neoliberal capitalism. The new area studies understands that the spatiality of knowledge is not natural or inevitable but emerges as a contingent effect of the inequalities in power between peoples located in different parts of the planet. From this understanding the new area studies takes an activist epistemological position that seeks to resist and challenge the power inequalities that anchor certain forms of knowledge to certain spaces and locations on the planet. Most particularly, the new area studies aims to position areas as sites of general knowledge and active theory production, not merely passive objects of the Euro-American intellectual gaze.

APPENDIX
Rankings of World Universities

Top 10 Universities in the World according to 2014-2015 QS World University Rankings¹⁷

	Country	Position in 2014/15	Position in 2013/14
<u>Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)</u>	US	1	1
<u>University of Cambridge</u>	UK	2=	3
<u>Imperial College London</u>	UK	2=	5
<u>Harvard University</u>	US	4	2
<u>UCL (University College London)</u>	UK	5=	4
<u>University of Oxford</u>	UK	5=	6
<u>Stanford University</u>	US	7	7
<u>California Institute of Technology (Caltech)</u>	US	8	10
<u>Princeton University</u>	US	9	10
<u>Yale University</u>	US	10	8




¹⁷ Based on the QS World University Rankings® - <http://www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings-articles/world-university-rankings/top-universities-world-201415> (accessed 10 October, 2014)

Times Higher Education World University Rankings for 2013-2014¹⁸

<u>Rank</u>	<u>Institution</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Overall score change criteria</u>
1	California Institute of Technology (Caltech)	United States	94.9
2	Harvard University	United States	93.9
2	University of Oxford	United Kingdom	93.9
4	Stanford University	United States	93.8
5	Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)	United States	93.0
6	Princeton University	United States	92.7
7	University of Cambridge	United Kingdom	92.3
8	University of California, Berkeley	United States	89.8
9	University of Chicago	United States	87.8
10	Imperial College London	United Kingdom	87.5
11	Yale University	United States	87.4
12	University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA)	United States	86.3
13	Columbia University	United States	85.2
14	ETH Zürich	Switzerland	84.5
15	Johns Hopkins University	United States	83.7
16	University of Pennsylvania	United States	81.0
17	Duke University	United States	79.3
18	University of Michigan	United States	79.2
19	Cornell University	United States	79.1
20	University of Toronto	Canada	

¹⁸ <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/world-university-rankings/2013-14/world-ranking> (Accessed 10 October, 2014)

ARWU (Shanghai) World University Rankings for 2014¹⁹

1	Harvard University		1	100	100
2	Stanford University		2	72.1	41.8
3	Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)		3	70.5	68.4
4	University of California-Berkeley		4	70.1	66.8
5	University of Cambridge		1	69.2	79.1
6	Princeton University		5	60.7	52.1
7	California Institute of Technology		6	60.5	48.5
8	Columbia University		7	59.6	65.1
9	University of Chicago		8	57.4	61.4
9	University of Oxford		2	57.4	51
11	Yale University		9	55.2	48.8
12	University of California, Los Angeles		10	51.9	30.2
13	Cornell University		11	50.6	37.6
14	University of California, San Diego		12	49.3	19.7
15	University of Washington		13	48.1	21.7
16	University of Pennsylvania		14	47.1	32.4
17	The Johns Hopkins University		15	47	38.7
18	University of California, San Francisco		16	45.2	0
19	Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich		1	43.9	30.2
20	University College London		3	43.3	28.8
21	The University of Tokyo		1	43.2	31.6

¹⁹ <http://www.shanghairanking.com/ARWU2014.html> (Accessed 10 October, 2014)

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Information on the competence network Crossroads Asia

The competence network Crossroads Asia derives its name from the geographical area extending from eastern Iran to western China and from the Aral Sea to northern India. The scholars collaborating in the competence network pursue a novel, 'post-area studies' approach, making thematic figurations and mobility the overarching perspectives of their research in Crossroads Asia. The concept of figuration implies that changes, minor or major, within one element of a constellation always affect the constellation as a whole; the network will test the value of this concept for understanding the complex structures framed by the cultural, political and socio-economic contexts in Crossroads Asia. Mobility is the other key concept for studying Crossroads Asia, which has always been a space of entangled interaction and communication, with human beings, ideas and commodities on the move across and beyond cultural, social and political borders. Figurations and mobility thus form the analytical frame of all three main thematic foci of our research: conflict, migration, and development.

- Five sub-projects in the working group "Conflict" will focus upon specific localized conflict-figurations and their relation to structural changes, from the interplay of global politics, the erosion of statehood, and globalization effects from above and below, to local struggles for autonomy, urban-rural dynamics and phenomena of diaspora. To gain a deeper understanding of the rationales and dynamics of conflict in Crossroads Asia, the sub-projects aim to analyze the logics of the genesis and transformation of conflictual figurations, and to investigate autochthonous conceptions of, and modes of dealing with conflicts. Particular attention will be given to the interdependence of conflict(s) and mobility.
- Six sub-projects in the working group "Migration" aim to map out trans-local figurations (networks and flows) within Crossroads Asia as well as figurations extending into both neighboring and distant areas (Arabian Peninsula, Russia, Europe, Australia, America). The main research question addresses how basic organizational and functional networks are structured, and how these structures affect what is on the move (people, commodities, ideas etc.). Conceptualizing empirical methods for mapping mobility and complex connectivities in trans-local spaces is a genuine desideratum. The aim of the working group is to refine the method of qualitative network analysis, which includes flows as well as their structures of operation, and to map mobility and explain mobility patterns.
- In the "Development"-working group four sub-projects are focusing on the effects of spatial movements (flows) and interwoven networks at the micro level with regard to processes of long-term social change, and with a special focus on locally perceived livelihood opportunities and their potential for implementation. The four sub-projects focus on two fundamental aspects: first, on structural changes in processes of transformation of patterns of allocation and distribution of resources, which are contested both at the household level and between individual and government agents; secondly, on forms of social mobility, which may create new opportunities, but may also cause the persistence of social inequality.

The competence network understands itself as a mediator between the academic study of Crossroads Asia and efforts to meet the high demand for information on this area in politics and the public. Findings of the project will feed back into academic teaching, research outside the limits of the competence network, and public relations efforts. Further information on Crossroads Asia is available at www.crossroads-asia.de.

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