DOI: 10.1355/sj32-3l

Area Studies at the Crossroads: Knowledge Production after the Mobility Turn. Edited by Katja Mielke and Anna-Katharina Hornidge. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017. xxiii+363 pp.

Debates on area studies have turned into something of a frenetic scholarly enterprise. This book is yet another offering on the rationale for and future direction of the study of areas or regions. It contributes to a steady stream of work that has appeared on this subject regularly during the past fifteen years. The anxiety among scholars in and practitioners of area studies to justify what they do and what they have been doing for seventy years, since the American government and academy decided that area studies were worthy of scholarly attention, has not diminished; indeed, it has grown prodigiously. Now this volume, primarily comprising papers from German scholars, seeks to remake and develop the case for area studies, with the support of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research and as part of its promotion of interdisciplinary projects in what is termed the "Global South". Having received government funding, scholars feel a need to argue for the importance of what has been funded. The case for area studies is well rehearsed here. The foreword by James D. Sidaway suggests that area studies are "an enduring source of fascination" and that this book "marks a coming of age" (p. v). I think that this language exaggerates the argument for area studies, but the volume does give us considerable food for thought.

The volume is divided into six parts, with a mix of chapters by well-established scholars in social sciences and area studies and by other researchers relatively new to the field. Introduced by the co-editors, Katja Mielke and Anna-Katharina Hornidge, followed by the formidable Peter A. Jackson, the first section, "Area Studies at the Crossroads", presents the main themes and the persuasive case for the continuing importance of area studies. Then part II, rather enigmatically entitled "To Be or Not to Be Is Not the Question. Rethinking Area Studies in Its Own Right", moves globally across

the Americas with Olaf Katmeier to Southeast Asia in the company of Christoph Antweiler, and then to Conrad Schetter's contemplation on area studies and policy. The third section focuses on the theme of "Knowledge Production after the Mobility Turn" and leads us into the ways in which an area studies perspective might cope with "mobility". It is primarily focused on South and Central Asia, with Andreas Benz's contribution on student migration to Gilgit-Baltistan, northern Pakistan; Henryk Alff's ethnography of "fixity, mobility and positionality" at the Braokholka bazaar in Almaty, Kazakhstan; and Deepra Dandekar's examination of Muslim and Sufi shrines on the Konkan coast of Maharashtra in western India. This is perhaps the most disappointing section of the book in area studies terms in that, although the case material is interesting and valuable, the conceptual focus on the relationships and tensions among socio-spatial fixity, movement and encounter provides nothing that is surprising or new.

Part IV is extraordinarily ambitious and attempts to connect "local realities" to "concepts and theorizing". The central proposition is for the development of mid-range concepts, but again there is nothing novel in this enterprise. Katja Mielke and Andreas Wilde attempt to relate area studies to "theory production" based on "mid-range concepts". This is a position that I have been arguing for several years in area studies, and I can only support their propositions, although the mid-range concept of "social order" seems to be somewhat old-fashioned. Gudrun Lachenmann then attempts to link mid-range concepts to what is referred to as "global ethnography"; this seems to me to be an extraordinarily difficult task. Anna-Katharina Hornidge reinforces the theme of mid-range concepts in her study of Khorezm, Uzbekistan. Vincent Houben continues to press his argument persuasively for a "new area studies", examining the relationship between cross-cultural translation and mid-range concepts. However, the examination of these mid-range concepts requires much greater clarification and a more detailed specification of which concepts are useful in an area-studies context.

The fifth section, entitled "De-Streamlining Academic Society: Pedagogy and Teaching", concentrates on issues to do with the

delivery of area studies courses and programmes. Cynthia Chou's chapter sits uneasily in this section and it could have served as one of the introductory statements. Arnika Fuhrmann gives us an entry into Southeast Asian studies through a study of cinema, which is an increasingly enticing way of addressing area studies through transcultural studies. Epifania A. Amoo-Adare proposes that we be "post-disciplinary", but I do find the call to action somewhat opaque. She argues for something that is difficult to interpret:

> critical, post-disciplinary readings of the contemporary world that subvert epistemic violence by decolonizing knowledge production processes, so as to co-construct situated knowledges … that contribute to a pluri-versal landscape of theories — rooted in empirical data and in constant dialogue with each other. (p. 280)

I find it difficult to grasp what this means or what actions I am supposed to take to attain these objectives.

We then move to the final section, "Anticipating the Future of Area Studies", with Matthias Middell providing the concept of "transregional studies", which seems to me to be a mid-range concept between regions and globalization. In my view, this concept does not appear to resolve the dilemma of area studies, which will of necessity have to continue to grapple with the problem of boundary formation, definition and maintenance; movement across permeable boundaries; boundary transformations and shifts; and, in some cases, the collapse of boundaries. Heike Holbig then argues for collaboration between the social sciences and cultural studies in capturing "the moving target of Asia". And, finally, the co-editors in their useful "Concluding Reflections" provide various suggestions about the contribution that area studies might make to knowledge production and dissemination.

There is much in this volume to stimulate our thinking about the conceptualization and construction of regions, and it engages with the problems that the delineation of space and the demarcation of boundaries must address in an era marked by the mobility of people, commodities, capital, ideas and images and by the rapid

transfer of the last three of these in electronic communication. Yet boundaries and nation-states that still maintain some control of their borders continue to obstruct globalizing processes. Reassuringly, this volume confirms the importance, in area studies terms, of linguistic competence and grounded knowledge of regions and communities and the value of inter- or multidisciplinary approaches. These practices have been the rationale for area studies since their emergence in academic deliberations in the late 1940s. The volume also engages in a dialogue with the academic disciplines, but it does not, in conceptual terms, suggest to me that area studies can produce something that it is arresting and distinctive. In my view, the mid-range concepts proposed in this volume have already been generated within disciplines. They are not the product of a multidisciplinary area studies approach or perspective.

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DOI: 10.1355/sj32-3m

A History of Southeast Asia: Critical Crossroads. By Anthony Reid. Malden, Massachusetts: Wiley Blackwell, 2015. xxv+450 pp.

The principal challenge of writing general histories of Southeast Asia lies in the construction and justification of this heterogeneous region as a concept. Thomas Pepinsky (2016) referred to this challenge as the "fundamental anxiety" of Southeast Asian studies. Moreover, the further one goes into the past, the more difficult it becomes to give coherence to an area with such great variation in culture, governance, language and religion. There is also the danger of projecting the existence of modern states back into earlier periods. In *A History of Southeast Asia: Critical Crossroads*, Anthony Reid satisfactorily addresses these problems to produce an excellent textbook that covers over a thousand years of the region's history.