



University of East Anglia
New Area Studies Research Centre Inaugural Colloquium

Wednesday 8 November 2023
Council Chamber, Arts and Humanities Building

New Area Studies: Under Construction

0900-0910 Professor Susan Hodgett, Director of Area Studies, UEA (In person)

ACTION

0910-0935 Dr. Sylvia C. Frain, Whitinga Research Fellow, Te Ara Auaha, Auckland University of Technology - *Indigenous Resistance to United States Militarization in the Marianas Archipelago in Micronesia* (Online)

0935-1000 Assoc. Professor Hazel Marsh, UEA, *Strengthening Romani Capacity in Colombia* (In person)

1000-1025 Professors Sarah Barrow (PVC, HUM) and Eylem Atakav, UEA, British Academy, GCRF and UEA funded *Women of Influence Project Peru* (including screening of short film 'Ojos de Agua') (In person)

1025-1050 Assoc. Professor Iokine Rodriguez-Fernandez, UEA, *Peace-abilities: strengthening bottom-up peacebuilding in Colombia* (In person)

1050-1100 Questions

BREAK

CONCEPTS

1115-1200 Assoc. Professor Philip Wilson, UEA, *Not Only Rivers and Mountains: New Area Studies and Storytelling* (In person)

1200-1245 Professor Mandy Sadan, University of Warwick, *Territory, Identity, and Power in Area Studies* (In person)

1245-1330 Professor Vincent Houben, Humboldt University of Berlin, *New Area Studies as an Emerging Discipline* (In person)

1330-1345 Questions

LUNCH

THEORY

1415-1500 Professors Susan Hodgett UEA (In person) and Pat James, University of Southern California (Online), *Developing New Area Studies in the Post Pandemic Age*

1500-1545 Professor Zoran Milutinovic, University College London, *Area Studies in the 21st Century*, (In person)

1600-1645 Professor Rudra Sil, University of Pennsylvania, *The Survival and Adaptation of Area Studies* (Online)

1645-1700 Questions

1700-1705 Professor Tom Ruys Smith, Deputy Director, Area Studies, UEA (In person)



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Abstracts

Sylvia Frain

Indigenous Resistance to United States Militarization in the Marianas Archipelago in Micronesia

I highlight an understudied region of our world – Micronesia in the Pacific. I focus on the local, everyday experiences and perspectives rarely included in academic spaces. I am dedicated to regional interconnections and international efforts of decolonization and demilitarization, specifically the Marianas Archipelago, working within trans-disciplinary research.

Through my (white) settlers' responsibility lens, incorporating Participatory Action Research and centering collaborative community engagement, I produce academic writing and trans-media projects for the community, scholarly institutions, and real-world contexts. My research builds upon a practical framework for non-Indigenous scholars to employ a qualitative and emancipatory design that prioritizes creative, critical, and practical methods in open and public scholarship. This form of academic activism is designed as politically engaged research spanning several Area Studies subjects, including a large "area" missing from the search section: Pacific Studies.

I begin with American Studies and Asia Pacific Studies to reflect on a region of the world most Americans are unaware of; the Marianas Archipelago in Micronesia consisting of Guam and The Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands (CNMI). While the islands are divided into two separate political entities, the residents are US citizens who do not have democratic representation and are literally left off maps. I incorporate Gender Studies with Indigenous Studies to understand Pacific approaches to feminism(s); I employ International Relations, International Politics, and Security Studies to unpack the geopolitical power dynamics of neighboring superpowers, foreign policies in the Pacific, plus History and International Law to amplify local Indigenous perspectives on decolonization and demilitarization.

Hazel Marsh

Strengthening Romani Voices in Colombia

Latin America's diverse Romani populations are seldom represented in policy debates, and frequently misrepresented in popular culture and the mainstream media. In Colombia, organisations such as the *Proceso Organizativo del Pueblo Rrom* (Organisational Process of the Rrom People, *Prorrom*) and *Unión Romani* (Romani Union) were established to promote Romani inclusion in the country's multicultural policies. But despite legal recognition of Romani populations in Colombia, their identity continues to be framed officially in aesthetic terms that reinforce prevailing stereotypes.

This talk offers a critical reflection on collaborating with *Prorrom* in the organisation and delivery of a two-day workshop in Bogotá in June 2023 as part of an ongoing impact project, 'Strengthening Romani Voices in Colombia' (2022-2025). In Bogotá, 39 *referentes* (cultural mediators) are employed by the government to provide input, on behalf of Romani communities, around policy actions. Yet although government agencies rely on *referentes* for decision-making, they receive little or no training for their role, and in their interactions with state institutions often find it difficult to overcome stereotypes that stigmatise or exoticise.

Our collaborative workshop addressed these problems, using participatory, arts-based methods to create opportunities for *referentes* to identify issues of priority for Romani communities, and to co-create tools and resources that would support them in their work with government bodies.

Sarah Barrow and Eylem Atakav
Women of Influence Peru

The Women of Influence project (www.women-of-influence.co.uk) is an interdisciplinary, transnational collaboration between researchers and young women from the Junín area of Peru who are members of the National Council of Indigenous Women of Peru (OMIAASEC). It takes its starting point from an acknowledgement that although indigenous women play a fundamental role in the preservation of biodiversity and ancestral knowledge, their contributions often go unrecognized and underdeveloped (Marcelo, 2018), to the detriment of the very culture and environment that should be preserved. Our women-led participatory project uses film (production, screening, analysis) to highlight the potential and importance for active and organised participation by these young women in their communities in order to protect and nurture their natural resources. This work seeks to demonstrate the value of young female involvement in community decision-making, overcoming the cultural and societal inequalities that may disrupt their path to leadership and influence.

This screening of some of the short films produced by our project partners allowed us to highlight some of the themes explored including those to do with leadership, identity and discrimination. We reflect on how our indigenous partners have helped us rethink issues of sustainability, resilience, decolonisation, gender dynamics, societal difference, political ecologies and environmental challenge.

Iokine Rodriguez Fernandez

Peace-abilities: strengthening bottom-up peacebuilding in Colombia.

War and peace have been extensively researched in Colombia for decades. However, there has been little work in the role of research as an engine of change in the transition from war to peace when conducted with actors that have been part of the conflict dynamics. This presentation will share the results of a three-year participatory-research: the “School, Territory and Post-conflict (STPC)” project, carried out by UEA, Universidad de Ibagué and Eureka Educativa between 2018-2022 through the UKRI (Newton Fund)-Colciencias call for research on sustainable peace in Colombia. The STPC project sought to make visible, enhance and nourish peacebuilding strategies that community organizations of women, youth, environmentalists and coffee growers have locally implemented in Southern Tolima, both during the armed conflict and after the 2016 peace agreement.

The presentation will focus on some of the impacts the project has produced so far. A key aspect of the STPC project was its commitment to the co-production of non-academic outputs that would be locally relevant and thus ensure the social appropriation of co-produced knowledge. Hence, research activities were strategically designed to facilitate the production of 10 community led, creative and art-based outputs. These include five community co-authored books and three participatory videos about local visions of peace, a traditional women’s dress peacebuilding prototype and an interactive online map about the meanings of peace and the territory to the Tolima folk. These products can be found in the project’s website (www.pluriversodepazentolima.net). Additional to sharing these outputs we will discuss key aspects in which our community co-researchers say the project has helped to enhance their peace-building capabilities from the ground up.

Philip Wilson

Not Only Rivers and Mountains: The Role of Narrative in Area Studies

Area Studies has been accused of storytelling, apparently an academic crime that merited its so-called demise. I argue that storytelling is an integral part of academic writing in the humanities and that the successful advent of New Area Studies can be at least in part explained by its stress on narrative. I compare the chronicle with the history in order to illuminate the different ways in which events can be captured and argue that story is basic to how we think, following the work of Mark Turner on the literary mind, and I illustrate how story can be developed as a plot and framed as a narrative. Translation theory and practice are used to show how interdisciplinary investigation of storytelling can help New Area Studies consolidate itself, because theoretical work can both describe and drive practice. Why, however, should storytelling have been seen as a crime in the first place? I suggest two reasons: to keep emotion out of enquiry in an aim for scientific objectivity; and to counter the threat that ‘anything goes’. I use the later philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein to refute both these charges and conclude that storytelling is both a research tool and a research source. Far from being an embarrassment to New Area Studies, narrative should be at the heart of its methodology and should be further examined so that scholars can tell new stories and tell them well.

Mandy Sadan

Territory, Identity, and Power in Area Studies

This presentation reflects on an article that was previously published in *New Area Studies* titled ‘Why Decolonising Area Studies is Not Enough: A Case Study of the Complex Legacies of Colonial Knowledge Making in the Indo-Myanmar Borderlands’ and makes connections with a new research project focused upon the industrial and post-industrial landscape of poverty and health in the UK. The original paper considered the problematic intersections of colonialism, postcolonialism, identity claims, and academic hierarchies in researching a highly marginalized area at the meeting point of multiple Areas (South, East, and South East Asia) in northern Myanmar and the extent to which Area Studies itself made research problematic, especially for local researchers seeking to make their histories visible to a wider audience. This presentation reflects on those themes and the challenge of visibility for marginal spaces and communities in institutionalized academia but extends them to a different marginalized space in the UK – the Black Country in the modern West Midlands. My current research considers the cultural and social development of the Black Country's obesogenic environment through its history of poverty and industrialization, with resultant poor health outcomes. For this presentation, I reflect on how nearly three decades of research into the history of the Kachin region of Myanmar has informed my approach to this new research and the challenges and opportunities that Area Studies brings to uncovering the histories of these very different regions.

Vincent Houben

New Area Studies as an Emerging Discipline

Ever since the rise of Area Studies during the Cold War era, there has been a lively debate on the field of Area Studies, particularly their weaknesses and potentials vis-a-vis the major academic disciplines. The global dynamics of today have, however, changed dramatically and neither the established disciplines nor classic Area Studies offer satisfactory explanations. It is clear that neoliberal globalization has come to an end and the rise of the Global South has led to a return of the multipolar world. In order to be able to understand the multiple, non-linear transformations across the globe, New Areas Studies carry great innovative potential.

Based upon some of my recent publications¹, I will try to outline what New Area Studies are, how they can be practiced and to what kind of knowledge they lead to. In my presentation I will respond to a set of apparently simple yet deep and interrelated questions: what is an area? How should New Area Studies be done? What do New Area Studies produce in the form of new kinds of explanations?

Susan Hodgett and Patrick James

Developing New Area Studies in the Post Pandemic Age

This presentation examines progress on development of *New Area Studies, Capabilities, Well-Being and Health: The State of Play After the Pandemic* (Routledge, forthcoming 2024). It considers the current state of the literature, looks at innovations in research methodologies moving beyond the humanities and the social sciences into new approaches including visual graphic data. It argues for the need for New Area Studies to adopt a distinctly interdisciplinary approach ranging from ethnography to big data to understand complex and wicked social and political problems. It develops an innovative theoretical approach, for the first time combining the Capability Approach to wellbeing, and New Area Studies using our novel research methodology, systemism, to examine where we are post pandemic. Putting into practice our interdisciplinary research method we apply comparative approaches to New Area Studies. Allied to this, we look ahead beginning to outline our hopes for the future of the field of New Area Studies, its evolution and changing everyday practice in place.

¹ ‘New Area Studies, Translation and Mid-Range Concepts’, in: Katja Mielke and Anna-Katharina Hornidge (eds.), *Area Studies at the Crossroads. Knowledge Production after the Mobility Turn* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan 2017) 195-211; ‘New Area Studies as an Emerging Discipline. The Way Ahead for Southeast Asian Studies’, in: *International Quarterly for Asian Studies* vol. 513-4 (2020) 67-78

Zoran Milutinović

Area Studies in the 21st Century: A Sum of Areal Knowledges, or a Field of Theoretical Innovation and Experimentation?

The speaker will argue that Area Studies should generate questions which no single discipline can ask. Their proper object will keep appearing as a result, not as a starting point. In order to do this, Area Studies should become metaphorical rather than metonymical. The former abandons the pretence of offering total, integrated knowledge and full comprehension, and substitute it with intensity of insight. Area Studies should not become a sum total of areal knowledges, but a meta-discipline which inspires disciplinary efforts, a field of theoretical innovation and experimentation in which new questions are asked, conceptual vocabularies proposed, and new perspectives tested. This would mean being in a permanent crisis, constantly seeking subversion of themselves, always looking for a proper object and being in a perpetual state of methodological uncertainty.

Rudra Sil

The Survival and Adaptation of Area Studies

Area specialists in a humanities discipline feel no need to justify their investments in expertise on a country or region. The subject matter –the history, literature, art, or culture of a region – is presumed worthy of study in its own right. Within the social sciences, however, the value and status of area studies has grown more tenuous over the past quarter-century. Area specialists appointed in social science disciplines must contend with simultaneously engaging two kinds of scholarly communities, one representing the *discipline* or one of its subfields and one in terms of an interest in a *geographic region*. The problem stems largely from the growing gap in assumptions about which skill-sets are crucial and what constitutes ‘good’ or ‘useful’ scholarship. An area specialist's efforts to generate social scientific knowledge on a given country or region is likely to run up against questions about whether and how that knowledge speaks to theories or matches with methodological ‘best practice’ within one's home discipline, such as Political Science. In addition, since the end of the Cold War, challenges have emerged, both in terms of the resources available to area studies research and methodological currents in the discipline of Political Science. As the geopolitical agendas and theoretical frameworks of the Cold War recede, some of the newer intellectual and methodological currents intensify the trade-off between investing in approaches and theories touted within political science and accumulating contextual knowledge about socially constructed spaces called ‘areas’. Yet area studies scholarship has not disappeared, as once feared (or hoped for), but survived as part of a more globalized political science within the United States, Europe, and elsewhere. Scholars have formed new strategies in their effort to manage both the methodological and practical dimensions of the trade-off between investments in deep area expertise and their disciplinary skill-sets. This process has been assisted by the emergence of new rationales and designs for cross-regional qualitative research, including what my colleagues and I call “comparative area studies (CAS).”