

# ASC 2.0 – The Area Studies Controversy Revisited

## *Interdisciplinary International Workshop*

29 / 30 September 2018

Beirut, Lebanon

**Workshop Venue:** American University of Beirut, West Hall, Auditorium A

**Workshop Organizer:** Dr. Jan Busse, Bundeswehr University Munich

**Workshop Assistance:** Marc-Philip Marouche, Bundeswehr University Munich

**Local Workshop Support:** Peter Nassif, AGYA Regional Coordinator for the Levant

### **Workshop Rationale**

The Area Studies Controversy remains a major point of contention when it comes to the relationship between social sciences and regional studies. While, however, the debate originated some 30 years ago, its content has considerably evolved ever since. By taking the Middle East as its example, the suggested workshops will revisit the Area Studies Controversy, take stock of the debate and exchange innovative ideas in order to yield innovative perspectives.

Originally, the controversy highlighted the alleged incompatibility of social sciences and regional studies. In this sense, it was argued that social science theorizing is often based on a universalism that risks not properly taking into account existing cultural variations of specific regions, such as the Middle East. Regional studies, such as Middle East Studies, in turn, tend to be preoccupied with a particularist perspective that claims that the region is unique and not comparable to other regions in the world.

By contrast, however, it is necessary to take into account the conceptual and theoretical advancements that have been made ever since the beginning of the Area Studies Controversy. Therefore, as with any other region, it can be argued that the “Middle East is not an exception from the global condition, but an inseparable part of its developments” (Dietrich Jung). As a result, the main objective lies in overcoming what Fred Halliday, as one of the most distinguished experts in both the disciplines of International Relations and Middle East Studies has termed the ‘analytic universalism’ and the ‘historic particularism’ of the Middle East.

On this basis, it can be highlight that there is need to move forward the Area Studies Controversy by taking Edward Said’s critique of Orientalism and the subsequent debate more seriously. It follows that the universalism of social sciences rests on Eurocentric foundations and that regional studies are informed by universalist, Eurocentric epistemologies and ontologies, too. Therefore, as what can be understood as a second generation of the Area Studies Controversy, the AGYA workshop problematizes the Western origins of most conceptual and theoretical approaches, be it in social sciences or regional studies.

## Workshop Program

### 29 September 2018

**09:45-10:00 Welcoming Remarks and Presentation of the Rationale of the Workshop**

*Bilal Orfali, American University of Beirut; AGYA Member*

*Jan Busse, Bundeswehr University Munich, Germany; AGYA Member*

**10:00-11:30 Panel I: Revisiting the Area Studies Controversy from Multiple Angles**

**10:00-10:15 Revisiting the (Middle East) Area Studies Controversy through the Lens of the Global IR Debate**

*Morten Valbjørn, Aarhus University, Denmark*

**10:15-10:30 Area Studies: between Islamization and Post-colonial Studies**

*Sari Hanafi, American University of Beirut*

**10:30-10:45 Areas, Disciplines, and “Small Subjects”: Endangered Species?**

*Birgit Schäbler, Orient Institut Beirut; University of Erfurt, Germany*

**10:45-11:30 Open Discussion based on Panel Presentations**

**12:00-14:00 Lunch Break**

**14:00-15:30 Panel II: Area Studies Controversy through the Lens of the Relationship between International Relations and Middle East Studies**

**14:00-14:15 The Useful Controversy, Then and Now: With a special reference to International Relations**

*Bahgat Korany, American University in Cairo, Egypt*

**14:15-14:30 Revisiting the Area Studies Controversy through an Engagement with World Society and Governmentality**

*Jan Busse, Bundeswehr University Munich, Germany; AGYA Member*

**14:30-14:45 Presentation III: Title, TBD**

*Andrea Teti, University of Aberdeen, UK*

**14:45-15:30 Open Discussion based on Panel Presentations**

**15:30-16:00 Coffee Break**

**16:00-17:30 Panel III: Dealing with the Area Studies Controversy in Different Research Contexts**

16:00-16:15 “MENA is the Most Undemocratic Region in the World” –

**Possibilities and Limitations of Measuring Democracy**

*Jan Völkel, Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Belgium; AGYA Member*

16:15-16:30 **Presentation II: Title, TBD**

*Katja Mielke, Bonn International Center for Conversion (BICC), Germany*

16:30-16:45 **Arabic and Islamic Studies between East and West**

*Bilal Orfali, American University of Beirut; AGYA Member*

16:45-17:30 Open Discussion based on Panel Presentations

## **30 September 2018**

**09:30-11:30 Panel IV: Conceptualizing and Rethinking Area Studies: Knowledge Production from Different Perspectives**

09:30-09:45 **Knowledge Production in Area Studies**

*Claudia Derichs, University of Marburg, Germany*

09:45-10:00 **Welcome to Post-Ottomania: Can the Study of Empires Contribute to Polycentric and Historically-Grounded IR Perspective on the Middle East as well as Middle East Area Studies that Know about the Global Condition?**

*Stephan Stetter, Bundeswehr University Munich, Germany*

10:00-10:15 **Whose Controversy?: Area Studies in the 21st Century**

*Seteny Shami, Arab Council for the Social Sciences; Social Science Research Council*

10:15-11:30 Open Discussion based on Panel Presentations

11:30-12:00 Conclusion of the Workshop and Reflection about Further Collaboration