
Introduction

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Since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, academic regional and area studies in the United States have lost much of the government-associated funding that directed scholastic focus toward US foreign policy. Free of those constraints, area studies specialists have fractured their focus and emerged in cultural fields such as history, language studies, and library special collections and archives. Current area studies practice is diverse in terms of method, subject, and geography, and numerous journals on area studies now combine multiple themes in their publications.¹ As Susan Hodgett and Thomas Ruys Smith understand, area studies 'scholars have worked to reorientate Area Studies to make it responsive to a world that is increasingly interconnected and unbounded.'²

The faculty gathered in this volume met in the Arizona State University (ASU) Global Latin American Studies Workshop, which was initially conceived as a history methodology workshop in 2018. The following year, the group expanded to include ASU faculty from social sciences and language studies departments. Together, the group has held workshops to share original research, reviewed new literature, and hosted an in-person event, 'The Future of Latin America in U.S. Universities.'³ This group of faculty teaches and works on three separate ASU campuses in Glendale, Phoenix, and Tempe, Arizona, and rarely meets in person. Online meeting platforms

¹ Andrew Alexander, 'A Critical Overview of the Area Studies Model: A Brief Study of the Current Trends in Area Studies', *Cappadocia Journal of Area Studies* 2, no. 1 (June 2020), 82–91.

² Susan Hodgett and Thomas Ruys Smith, 'Welcome', *New Area Studies* 1, no. 1 (2020), 4.

³ 'The Future of Latin America in U.S. Universities', with presenters Ramona Pérez and Lenny Ureña Valero, hosted by the Global Latin American History Workshop, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ, 8 April 2022.

are key tools for hosting the monthly workshops and discussions. Working together in this fashion has allowed us to leave our departmental silos and find commonality across the campuses.

As faculty at ASU, we are deeply engaged with area studies pedagogy, and in this special issue on modern Latin America, we focus on the ways in which five of our faculty are evolving their teaching and research in area studies beyond 20th-century practices, which often focused on policies for responding to the Cold War in Latin America. Gathered in this volume are essays by faculty from the departments of History, Portuguese, Spanish, and Special Collections, who work on topics examining various aspects of Latin American culture by employing frameworks of feminism, literary theory, class studies, postcolonial studies, and the history of the book. Together, these essays show that modern area studies can take a cultural approach toward understanding the larger forces that impact everyday life. Two of the essays demonstrate institutional changes in teaching and research that focus on approaching students and researchers with the outlook that their personal understanding is an important part of the educational process. Four of the essays demonstrate the tensions that arise from international shifts in economy, migration, and religion, and one essay describes the way in which women push against the static economic and sexual constraints imposed upon them by societal pressures. While sharing themes of religion, Indigeneity, feminism, and representation, the articles also each address specific, unique issues across Latin America and draw on a range of theoretical approaches that include literary theory and historical methodology.

This volume is organized in two sections. The first group of writers, composed of historians, discusses migration and stagnation in the context of food, manuscripts, and religion, embracing a chronological range that stretches from the colonial period to the modern era. In 'Gastrohistories of Migration, Race, and Class in Peru', Kathleen Kole de Peralta describes her efforts to teach the history of Latin America through exploring food history with her students. Kole discusses food as a tactile and critical pedagogy that creates a space for students to understand the impact of the 'history of migration, class, and race in Peru from 1530 to the present'. In 'Accessing the Archives: A Case Study on the *Popul Vuh*', Seonaid Valiant uses the example of the Mayan sacred

text to discuss the migration of manuscripts from Latin America to libraries in Europe and the United States. Valiant approaches the topic both from a historical perspective, tracing the provenance of the document, and as an archival insider. Valiant also examines the efforts of special collections research libraries to provide access to the document for the descendants of the creators through teaching and digitization, shifting the focus of area studies away from foreign policy and toward a model centered on preserving the history of culture. In 'Latinoamérica Religiosa: Understanding Modern Latin America through the Study of Religion', Matthew Casey reviews the literature on aspects of modern religion in the Americas. He argues that although Catholicism has been one of the key practices that has created a cohesive culture in Latin America 16th century, current challenges are breaking down that unity.

The second group of writers in this volume comprises literary and language scholars who focus on themes of racial representation, immigration, and individual identity in the 20th and 21st centuries. In 'Losing the *Locus*, Recovering Ideologies: Displacements in Peruvian and Bolivian Literature of the Post-Cold War', Lorena Cuya Gavilano examines the lives of immigrants in the Andes through the frameworks of literature and area studies. Cuya explores the themes of political identity and challenges to class and culture by examining the experience of 20th-century immigrants to the Andes who were met with politically powerful rhetoric that implied backwardness on the part of the new arrivals. In 'Girls from Rio: Brazilian Identity from Bossa Nova to Funk', Ligia Bezerra discusses how the Brazilian funk singer Anitta has adapted and modernized the vintage bossa nova song 'Girl from Ipanema'. Bezerra explores how Anitta, in the music video for 'Girl from Rio', challenges 20th-century constructions of social class, race, and gender forged by bossa nova musicians both lyrically and visually. Bezerra also addresses ways in which the new funk genre and Anitta's performance in particular perpetuate problematic views of Brazilian identity outside of Brazil, while recognizing that the artist is herself constrained by the modern music industry and racialized perceptions of women.

The approaches taken by each of the contributors are distinct, but what draws them together is a shared commitment to deepening our understanding of Latin America. This journal aims to convey a sense of area studies at ASU as an ongoing conversation



and community, one in which disparate concepts of migration, race, postcolonialism, pedagogy, and religion can intersect and be explored with imagination and empathy. The goal of area studies at ASU is to nurture and sustain an ongoing engagement with Latin America, both politically and culturally, that ultimately reaches out to illuminate, celebrate, and improve the lives of Latin American people.

Works Consulted

Andrew, Alexander. *A critical overview of the Area Studies model: A brief study of the current trends in Area Studies*. DOAJ Directory of Open Access Journals (2020).

Hodgett, Susan and Thomas Ruys Smith, 'Welcome', *New Area Studies* 2020;1(1): 1-9.