Beyond the boundaries of AsiaPacific area studies

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Abstract

The peculiarly American study of the ‘non-Western’ world—going under the rubric of interdisciplinary ‘area studies’—is in crisis. Its origins date back to the postwar and Cold War period and may be best understood as a political and policy-driven scholarly endeavor that flourished in the 1960s, 1970s and well into the 1980s. There have been many critiques from both within and outside the field. This article discusses the impacts of major globalizing trends on the field as well as new directions for the future. It focuses on the ‘Moving Cultures’ project of the School of Hawaiian, Asian and Pacific Studies at the University of Hawai‘i1 that was part of a larger Ford Foundation’s initiative to revitalize area studies. This ongoing project utilizes computer-based and other interactive technologies to link students and classrooms across the Pacific divide as part of a pedagogy intending to decolonize area studies. The promises and perils of technology as a beacon for the future of area studies is critically assessed.

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1 The projects website is www.hawaii.edu/movingcultures/. See also Wesley-Smith [41].
1. The crisis of area studies

It is no secret that the peculiarly American study of the ‘non-Western’ world—going under the rubric of interdisciplinary ‘area studies’—is in crisis. With origins that date back to the postwar and Cold War period, area studies arose simultaneously with the demise of old colonial powers in Europe and Japan and the rise of the United States to assume the mantle of global hegemony. Decolonization, rise of new nations, and a concern to know and win the hearts and minds of the newly freed for the expanding global capitalist economy over that of the communist bloc, were sparks that crystallized into area studies programs. It received generous government and private foundation support. While intended to provide an interdisciplinary (or—as was more likely the case—multidisciplinary) knowledge base about parts of the world now deemed critical to the geopolitical interests of the US, it did succeed in providing a large corpus of material about hitherto ignored regions and countries. Further, scholars who were critical of their government’s policies and actions also played a key role in this knowledge production (e.g. [1]). Area studies in its beginning then, may be best understood as a political and policy-driven scholarly endeavor that flourished in the 1960s, 1970s and well into the 1980s.

The swift collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990 nailed the coffin of any back-stage pretenders to the throne. The years since then have witnessed the flowering of American imperial ambitions and dreams of empire, culminating in a world ‘full of threats of wars and instability unlike anything which prevailed when a Soviet-led bloc existed’ [15]. In addition to the wars against Afghanistan and Iraq, the increasing information of government

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2 Area studies are not to be confused with that other venerable, and much older, field—Oriental Studies—that began in Europe and later spread to the United States. There still exist many academic departments and institutes of Oriental Studies both in the U.S. and elsewhere. Unlike the contemporary, global, and predominant social science perspective of the former, the latter concerns itself more exclusively with the “great traditions” and civilizations of Asia and the Islamic world. The roots of orientalism, to use Edward Said’s felicitous phrase and critique [31] lie in European colonial conquests of those regions. However, as Palat [28] notes, “the metamorphosis of Orientalists into Asianists did not fundamentally challenge the essentializing procedures of Orientalist conceptions on Asian societies”. On the contrary, as will be seen, area studies are placed squarely within postwar, geopolitical concerns of the US Calhoun [2] also draws attention to the importance of recovering some of the partially erased history of focus on race and development in order to explain some of the ways in which the very ideas of international (or foreign) affairs and international studies were constituted.

3 For example, the NDEA, passed in 1958 providing aid to education in the United States at all levels, public and private and instituted primarily to stimulate the advancement of foreign language and area studies, among other areas. The Fulbright Program for Educational and Cultural Exchange was established in 1946 and aims to “increase mutual understanding between the peoples of the United States and other countries, through the exchange of persons, knowledge and skills”. These have morphed into the National Security Education Act of 1991 created the National Security Education Board, and the National Security Education Program. Its mission is to “lead in development of the national capacity to educate US citizens, understand foreign cultures, strengthen US economic competitiveness, and enhance international cooperation and security”. The NSEP requires recipients “to seek employment with a federal agency or office involved in national security affairs. If, after making a ‘good faith’ effort, a federal job is not identified, NSEP award recipients may fulfill the requirement by working in the field of higher education in an area of study for which the scholarship was awarded”.

4 For example, the Ford, Rockefeller, and Luce Foundations. The Ford Foundation granted $270 million to universities and other institutions to start areas studies programs between 1951 and 1966 alone [38].
duplicity in the case of the latter, and saber-rattling elsewhere, a major proclamation and a key report underscore these designs for world dominance: the Bush doctrine of strike first embodied in the National Security Strategy of the United States of America [37] and the September 2000 report of The Project for the New American Century, a neo-conservative think tank with close government ties, entitled ‘Rebuilding America’s Defenses: Strategy, Forces and Resources for a New Century’ [13; see also 18, for an excellent summary]. This has led Gabriel Kolko [15], a leading historian of modern warfare, to declare, ‘the world has reached the most dangerous point in recent history’. One need not be overly pessimistic to agree with this assessment and to worry about the future of all peoples on earth.

In such a period of increasing uncertainty and momentous changes, how are area studies and, specifically, that relating to the Asia Pacific region, to chart a course for the future? Arif Dirlik, an astute commentator on the state of area studies and historian of China, recently indicated the impossibility of predicting where the future might be ‘two decades down the road, let alone the next millennium or even the next century’ [8]. A far more instructive course, he suggests, is to look at some recent trends that attempt to understand the forces now shaping the region and the meanings assigned to them. This is not a purely academic exercise, but squarely rooted in the politics of knowledge and how we view the past, present, and hoped-for future. Despite romantic visions of ‘knowledge for knowledge sake’ and ‘objectivity in scholarship’, all knowledge is both political and situated. This is most clearly evident with the rise and development of area studies. While there have been many critiques of area studies from both within and outside the field (e.g. the seminal papers of Palat [25,26], Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars special issue on ‘Asia, Asian Studies, and the National Security State: A Symposium’ [1], and Rafael [30]), it was not, ironically, until 1997, when the Ford Foundation undertook to fund a larger effort to rethink area studies in the United States, that many programs were forced to peer more closely into the looking glass.

This article discusses several key features of area studies programs and their critiques, the impacts of major globalizing trends on the field, and new directions in area studies. It focuses on the ‘Moving Cultures: Remaking Asia-Pacific Studies’ project of the School of Hawaiian, Asian and Pacific Studies at the University of Hawai‘i5 that was part of the Ford Foundation’s ‘Crossing Borders: Revitalizing Area Studies’ initiative. This ongoing project utilized computer-based6 and other interactive technologies to link students and classrooms across the Pacific divide as part of a pedagogy intending to decolonize area studies. Section 4 addresses the promises and perils of technology as a beacon for the future of area studies.

1.1. Rethinking area studies?7

Critiques have been leveled from all directions—area studies is a product of cold-war security interests; it is merely descriptive; it is parochial and oblivious to changing global forces. Its basic building blocks are nation states, where the dominant and hegemonic

5 The projects website is www.hawaii.edu/moving cultures/. See also Wesley-Smith [41].
6 The first initiative utilized the University of Hawai‘i’s Manoa Advanced Interactive Learning Environment [MAILE] and subsequently, all connections were made via the widely used Blackboard system for distance education.
7 Parts of this and the following sections draw upon Sharma and Whimp [33].
culture (often called ‘Great Tradition’) and values are taken to represent the essence of a particular state. It often privileges written texts over oral traditions, elite cultures over subaltern voices. The regional divisions—e.g. into East, South, and Southeast Asia—represent artificial and ahistorical boundaries. In the case of South Asia (which most often slides into meaning India), this led to cultural constructions that viewed caste as the overarching determinant of its social formation to the exclusion of political and economic relations\(^8\) and to a view of Islam as foreign and exogenous to Indian civilization.\(^9\) Perhaps the most interesting critiques have emerged from within the field.\(^10\) Many scholars have observed that ‘areas’ of study in the American academy, such as ‘Africa’ or ‘Latin America’, have been generated through a combination of colonial cartography and European ideas of civilization. They are now asking questions such as:

What are the processes through which civilizations, nations, communities, or ‘areas’ are defined, both historically and in the present? And defined by whom? How do we understand particular societies or cultures, with all the deep knowledge that requires even as we examine the wider processes from global capital flows to transnational labor markets that affect us all? \(^{38}\).

Other questions arise—whether the regions or areas of study that have been previously accepted as naturalized spatial configurations even exist. Such angst is exhibited by the proposal for a special issue of positions: East Asia cultures critique that deals with the ‘problematic’ of ‘Asia’. In its call for papers, the editors note the intensification of flows of capital and labor in the region and the recent growth of transnational networks and organizations both as products of and responses to globalization. ‘Surely’, they continue, “there is an ‘Asia’ out there, but ‘Asia’ is also variously signified in these and other discourses and practices, and is involved in the production and negotiation of new visions”\(^{29}\) of economy, capital, politics of culture, and emerging political alliances. The aim is to ‘re-energize and help transform the practice of Area or Asian Studies’ [\textit{loc. cit.}] Therefore,

This is to say, then, that older debates about “the Asia question”, or of how and what “Asia” means or matters, today know a new lease on life. In the current context of globalization and its discontents, the problematic of “Asia”, because of the imaginary and contestable status of its referent, is on the agenda of critical, intellectual inquiry\(^{29}\).

Such area studies soul-searching is also exemplified by the recent, and often quite heated, discussion and debate on the H-Asia website\(^{11}\) over “does ‘The Orient’ still exist?”

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\(^8\) Dumont [9]. The near-obsession with caste was a dominant view of the Chicago School of Indian studies.

\(^9\) This colonial vision, enshrined in scholarly writings, has serious repercussions in the rise of Hindu Nationalism today.

\(^10\) The critiques of Ravi A. Palat are perhaps the earliest and most seminal [25,26]. It is also interesting that the charge that area studies is apolitical and ahistorical, and built upon eurocentric concepts of analysis, is similar to that levied against modernization theory. But then, again, perhaps it is not surprising as both area specialists and modernization theorists (often, one and the same) are rooted in liberal classical economics.

\(^11\) H-Asia is a member of H-Net Humanities & Social Sciences OnLine. Its primary purpose is to enable historians and other Asia scholars to easily communicate about current research, teaching interests, and to facilitate a wide-ranging discussion on all issues pertinent to the field and to scholars of Asia.
Here, the impetus was a colleague’s call for help in finding “strong arguments for a change of name of Sweden’s main Asian studies department, the Department of Oriental languages at Stockholm University, where many faculty members proudly and gladly use academic terms like ‘oriental’, ‘the Orient’ and ‘orientals’”. This became a political and ethnic conflict there. H-Asia Internet responses ranged from: ‘It never existed, nor did Asia, nor does East and West as cultural terms, all are products of Orientalism, which does exist, indeed widely, mainly in Western (especially American) scholarship. Orientalism may be defined as the cultural inflection of colonialism. Asia, East, etc. are its own terms of choice’. Others commented on whether the term was offensive or not and the matter of changing it merely ‘political correctness’. One writer astutely observed:

…it’s easy to be glib, as several authors in this discussion have been, about the role that questions of ethnic identity play in this debate, and to dismiss the particular challenge posed by those who propose an awareness of the politics of identity; however, I strongly feel that it is those who only see within the question of name-changing an end to the dialogue about representation who are missing the point. For in the end, this question shouldn’t be about the rectification of past wrongs—it should be about their uncovering, and about how our awareness of the work that ‘Orientalist’ scholarship does can change the approaches we’ll take in the future.

2. Impacts of globalization: what’s Ford got to do with it?

It is the ‘spectacle of capital unbound, free to pursue its own devices, [that] constitutes the globalizing imaginary’ ([21]; see also [7]). Globalization, for the most part, has focused on economic transformations wrought by an enabling technology, a global manufacturing system, and the ‘eclipse of the production and distribution of goods and services by that of credit, debt, and currency exchange’ [21]. As the buzzword of the new millennium, some would see this as ‘globalbaloney’ [22] or, at least, as not marking a radical break with a past that has been globalizing and undergoing dramatic technological advances since the 16th century [27].12 Others see more than the imagination at work, and posit that economic globalization involves ‘the most fundamental redesign of the planet’s political and economic arrangements since at least the Industrial Revolution’ [19]. Mander [19] also presents a credible critique of our educational institutions and the mass media for not presenting a critical description and analysis of what is actually going on. However, one thing has become quite clear. The expected demise of the nation-state has not occurred though globalizing forces have added political pressures—often in the form of religious, ethnic, or indigenous demands and separatist movements. Nor is globalization inevitable or out of the control of human agency. In fact, pressures of globalization and critiques from those opposed as well as those wedded to the idea have highlighted just how fragile

12 Martin points out that international flows of money and goods comprised as large a part of total exchange in the early part of the last century as they do today [21].
the system is. It is subject to highly volatile forces as well as to competition and protectionism of individual countries. Earlier rapid gains in cross-border flows of goods and investments have already declined since the last decade [16]. Nor has global penetration curtailed local cultural variation or checked and made futile opposition.

And yet the world has changed and this has left its mark on the need for scholarship that may make sense of current and future directions. More specifically, the US national economy, of which the Ford Motor Company and its many subsidiaries are an integral part, now requires a different sort of knowledge of the ‘other’. It is a knowledge based on the rhetoric and realities of the globalization of the last two decades. This has encouraged a widespread sense that geographic differences across the globe, whether defined according to relatively fixed borders such as those of nation states or more nebulous cultural borders, are of diminishing importance. It is a world without borders. The motor of this ‘reinvigorated’ or ‘reimagined’ area studies is now the economic engine of the US that needs to know how to remain preeminent in the war of economic competition and for global hegemony. Current government initiatives in study of the other—such as the US National Education Security Program and the more recent $24 million poured into the study of the ‘stans’ (as in, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, etc.), the Arabic language, and Islam—are clear indications of the direction of government interest in supporting academic programs. Geopolitical interests still predominate; what have changed are the spatial dimensions requiring study. For those of us who are students and teachers, however, our goal is to redefine area studies to make it an empowering and liberating endeavor and one that squarely recognizes the political dimensions of all knowledge.

At a recent conference, marking the culmination of the Moving Cultures project (December 2–5, 2002), a number of prescriptions were given for a future reconfigured area studies. Some of these include: engaging the subjects of our study in the endeavor (or, ‘inviting them to the party’), rethinking (and being careful of our slippage into) instrumental knowledge, reconceptualizing spatial categories and scales of analysis, utilizing a multiplicity of paradigmatic approaches, being interdisciplinary, comparative, and multicultural—and, being ‘honest’. This last point may perhaps better be rephrased as recognizing that cultures are expressed through a diversity of ideas, persona, and interests, and that—regardless of one’s positionality in relation to the culture—it is imperative to maintain a critical stance.

Dirlik [8] noted several specific innovative trends that mark new directions and seem to have particular relevance to Asia Pacific studies. They also engage with issues raised by theoretical turns in cultural studies, postcolonial criticism, and globalization ([8]; see also [6]). None are regarded as candidates for a new paradigm to single handedly chart the future of area studies; rather it is the interplay among these that may best reveal the complex and contradictory nature of unfolding events. Further, Dirlik [8] argues that these trends are not without drawbacks themselves and may act to service ‘the consolidation of power as much as they do to its deconstruction in the service of social welfare and democracy’. Ultimately, they do not signal the end of area studies as the detailed
knowledge of specific places, but may perhaps provide better alternatives to its older incarnation [8].

Of these trends, civilizational studies mark a conservative approach that began in the early 1990s and are particularly driven by geopolitical concerns that envision a ‘clash of civilizations’ [11] as inevitable. Islam and neo-Confucian capitalism (especially from China) are seen as the greatest threats to the west. Indigenous studies call into question eurocentric and ‘modernity’s way of knowing’ [8] and privileges an ‘insider’s view’. At its core, this represents the quest to transform power relations in the creation of knowledge—and, ultimately, history and identity—and to decolonize the very act of knowledge creation. Diasporic studies—intimately related to the unprecedented mobility of labor—most clearly challenge essentialist ideas of boundaries, nations, and belonging through concepts of ‘hybridity’ and ‘borderlands’. While seminal studies have focused on the historical and present-day transmigrations of the Chinese (e.g. [24]), there is growing interest in reexamining global and local dimensions of Asian American communities and their links to patterns and processes of migration and settlement among Pacific Rim nations.14

Other trends and considerations may be added to the above. One is the need to deal with the rapidly changing post Cold War global politics and events since the Gulf War that raise a host of questions about America’s present and future role and the implications for rethinking area studies. Wang [39] mentions some of these in an interesting article on ‘The Cold War, Imperial Aesthetics, and Area Studies’. He asks:

How does America’s express intention to realize the imperial dream of the New World Order relate to its relentless practice of maintaining its dominion and national self-interest? Does the global imperial rhetoric elide the secret imperialist agenda? Or are these dual tendencies the inherent contradictions in the state-sponsored global expansion of capital? [39].

Wang posits the idea of an ‘imperial aesthetics’ which serves to frame a ‘global imaginary that is supposed to work for everybody and has no regard for cultural and geographical differences’ [39]. Area studies, then, needs to confront globalization and its associated discourse of free markets, liberalism, development, and universal prosperity that engender “a form of subjectivity that is aesthetically ‘disinterested’” [39]. This universal cosmopolitan identity would level out local and particular interests but, as he continues,

the aesthetic subject somehow convinces itself that the whole world is unified and centered toward me. So it is unnatural and unaesthetic not to love Hollywood or McDonald’s, for the beauty of McDonald’s is not a personal affair; it is deep in human nature itself, deeply consistent with universal normal behavior. The beauty of McDonald’s is consonant with other beauties: world markets, consumption, democracy, freedom…[39].

This vision of a world as a seamless web of images, coursing through the a borderless globe on the wings of a gigantic mass media, has impacted area studies and marked a turn from considerations of strategy and power to that of individual narratives and culture. The challenge for future studies, then, is how area specialists may maintain a critical edge and become aware that current interpretive stances, ‘indentured previously to national security interests’, [39] may now well be tied to those of global capital (e.g. [6]). A possible antidote to this is for area studies to pay particular attention to ‘subaltern globalization’. These are ways that localized, anti-global forces, resistance movements (such as the zapatistas), labor organizing, and religious movements are crossing borders and creating new forms of belonging and community. Mitchell [23], for example, provides a fascinating analysis that foregrounds some of the contradictions and ‘deficiencies’ of global capitalism by linking the rise of powerful Islamic religious movements to the earnings on oil—the world’s most profitable commodity. Unlike Barber’s ‘Jihad vs. McWorld’, Mitchell shows the two intimately related as ‘McJihad’. Similarly, Shohat [34] looks at the ways in which gender and area studies may be placed in critical dialogue with each other through new ways of imagining places and regions and mapping knowledge within academic institutional practices.

With all the concern focused on rethinking the content of area studies, there is also the need to rethink the delivery of such information. This calls for pedagogical interventions that place a ‘high priority on remaking educational systems as vehicles to restructure society’. It calls for interventions in the learning process and in the classroom that address strategies of teaching and learning and the nature of educational authority. The ‘Moving Cultures’ project at the University of Hawai‘i, under funding from the Ford Foundation initiative, was designed specifically to reexamine the boundaries between Asia and the Pacific region. It privileged the development of a critical pedagogy that would utilize the development and spread of technologies to extend learning opportunities hitherto bounded by the space of the classroom. While these borders have always been porous, permitting a continuous flow of peoples, material goods, ideas, and cultures, globalization, of course, has both accelerated and intensified such flows.

In the past, a narrow area studies approach had overlooked the rapidly evolving relationships between Pacific Islands and Asian states. Pacific Island cultures, in fact, are routinely thought to be ‘disappearing’, exemplifying the assumed plight of indigenous peoples worldwide. Far from disappearing, however, Pacific Island peoples today live in newly independent states that affirm the value of traditional cultures, and are engaged in movements for decolonization or indigenous rights (in Hawai‘i). Vibrant new diasporic communities are being created in the metropolitan cities of the Pacific Rim. The most significant forces of change affecting islanders today clearly stem from such transnational interactions, increasingly involving Asian governments, corporations, workers, and tourists. The development policies of some island nations attract large

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15 Imtiaz Ahmed used this term during the discussion following the talk by Sharma [32].

16 Call for Papers for a conference on “Revolution & Pedagogy: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Change”, Ohio State University, April 18–20, 2002.
numbers of migrants and capital from Asia, radically altering the local cultural, social, and physical landscape.

3. ‘Moving cultures’ and ‘globalizing’ education: decolonizing area studies

A focus on pedagogy is central to ‘Moving Cultures’. We were concerned with how to construct a curriculum that better reflects the movements of peoples and ideas across boundaries as well as the complexities of global–local relations. Designed specifically to accelerate the process of remaking Asia Pacific studies through the development of a new collaborative model of area studies teaching, we focused on the classroom with the hope of somehow challenging and enhancing the learning process in several ways. We utilized web-based, interactive technologies to link our students in Hawai‘i with others overseas. Our hope was to encourage students to learn from each other about their own places and cultures. The idea is that by communicating directly with someone in another space, we may replace isolated, abstract, or idealized learning with something more ‘real’ and, in the process, reconfigure the knowledge-power nexus. The professor would no longer be the sole ‘authoritative’ purveyor of knowledge. Activities have been directed to the site, where the ‘cultures’ of area studies are reproduced—the classroom—and attempt to create an innovative pedagogy and curriculum through a collaborative teaching model. In a word, we hoped that use of this technology would enable us to decenter the classroom and the learning process.

This experiment seemed to hold the promise of establishing a more equitable and empowering learning environment, yet several issues and premises of teaching in cyberspace remain unexplored. One of these issues relates to the content of what is being taught and whether it reflects the sorts of concerns and new approaches outlined above. Academia is most at ease with the ‘add-mix-and stir’ approach when it comes to incorporating different and potentially innovative knowledges and, now, technologies. For example, a new field looms on the horizon—women’s/gender studies, ethnic studies, subaltern studies—and it becomes part of the ongoing curriculum as another layer of study. In this way, the addition of new material does not really challenge existing paradigms in the field. The possibility exists that the promise of a distance education that links universities and students in different parts of the globe may similarly be derailed unless it is accompanied by an interrogation of both the content and use of this new technology. This is because of the (perhaps unacknowledged) premise that the use of web-based distance learning as an adjunct of ‘globalizing’ or ‘internationalizing’ education will automatically result in breaching borders.

Yet the question of exactly what it means to globalize or internationalize education was not specifically addressed. Participants at a recent SSRC ‘Roundtable in Rethinking International Studies in a Changing Global Context’ (Washington, DC, Spring 2002) note, for example, that

‘globalization’ of American universities may mean simply offering American programs and teaching American models to foreigners at home or abroad—as in “We have a campus in Singapore” or “We offer programs in London” or...
“International students are 30 percent of our class”, ergo, we are “global...”. [M]erely replicating or extending in “their” territory what we already do here, and conducted in our language, not theirs” (Linda Lim, Associate Director at the University of Michigan’s International Institute, quoted in 14).

Sometimes this has meant the presence of foreign scholars in our classrooms that may globalize our personnel, but not necessarily globalize our knowledge or intellectual milieu. This is particularly the case for fields or theoretical perspectives where ‘global’ content is essentially American or western in form and origin (as, for example, in cultural studies or even Pacific Islands Studies) as well as in cases where the scholars are American-trained. Such forms of ‘globalization’ may well raise suspicions of being a ‘smokescreen for American domination’ [14]. Further, as Michael Kennedy (vice provost for international affairs and director of the International Institute at the University of Michigan) warns, “the hegemonic US university’s ethnocentric and parochial misidentification of the intellectual challenge of globalization could actually diminish our capacity to understand, interact with, and enrich the ‘globalized’ world in which we live” ([14]; reiterated in [3]).

Pacific Islands area studies—especially here at the University of Hawai’i—have taken a leading role in addressing some of these implications for knowledge production [41,40]. Much of the conversation revolves around ‘indigenous knowledge systems’ and the need to take up the mantle of ‘decolonizing’ Pacific Studies. Konai Helu Thaman, who holds the UNESCO Chair in Pacific Education and Culture at the University of the South Pacific (Fiji), asks us to consider the impact of colonialism on people’s minds—particularly their ways of knowing [36].17 She points out that Pacific Islander scholars have themselves been trained in western traditions of research and scholarship and that much of what constitutes the field is a result of western researchers who have studied the Pacific region, often with interests that conflicted with those of the people they studied. In a section of her article on ‘Western Discourse and Power,’ she avers with honesty that a field of study—so defined by others—is fraught with difficulties.

Nor does Thaman postulate an undifferentiated ‘us’ (native/insider) and ‘them’ (non-native/outsider). Her self-inclusion, in the last sentence, among those with the power to define others points to an honest ambiguity and multiplicity in her own circle of belonging.

17 See also the special issue of The Contemporary Pacific on “Back to the Future: Decolonizing Pacific Studies” (2003).

18 She also goes on to say, “If we were to apply Said’s suggestions about the Orient to the Pacific, we might conclude that what we delineate as ‘the Pacific’ has been produced politically, socially, ideologically, and militarily by westerners [36].
Decolonizing Pacific studies becomes critical, she continues, because globalization—however, defined—'concerns the global spread of mainly Anglo-American knowledge, values, and practices...Globalization, like colonization, is once again disempowering many Oceanic peoples' [36]. She underscores a UNESCO warning that 'the mass export of the cultural practices and values of the industrialized world, including their languages, communication, and entertainment networks and unsustainable consumerism, may well contribute to a sense of dispossession and loss of identity among those who are exposed to it' (loc. cit.). If we do not interrogate this model of ‘global’ education we are exporting, we do stand to replicate colonialism and a form of intellectual monoculture (as is occurring in agriculture).

The specific U.H. ‘Moving Cultures’ project is situated within this broader context. In order to explore how it may rethink or remake area studies, it must attend to the longer historical perspective on the rise of area studies knowledge from the mid 20th century as well as the reasons for the current thrust to redefine the field. The present reformulation of area studies is no more an innocent academic exercise than was its previous reincarnation. And, its expansion into cyberspace, as well, should be understood in terms of this historical context and present events. My own particular involvement was through a three-week collaborative web-based module on ‘Militarism and Tourism: Engendering the Asia Pacific Region’. (March–April 2002) that linked my upper division Asian Studies class on ‘Gender Issues in Asia’ with an entry-level class on ‘The Pacific Heritage’ at Victoria University at Wellington in Aotearoa/New Zealand, taught by Dr Teresia Teiawa. The aim of the course was to encourage students to think critically about militarism and tourism as two pervasive factors affecting the lives of many ordinary people throughout the Pacific and Asia region. It became clear early on, however, that while we tried to be innovative, things did not look or quite work out as expected.19 There were different anticipations from each of the 11 students who participated at each university and between teachers and students. The majority of the Victoria students were of Pacific Island ancestry; those from UH were even more varied—including students from Asia, the continental US, as well as local students of haole [European] and Asian ancestry.

A number of difficulties related to: timing, obtaining student participation in cooperative assignments and skewed levels of participation both between and within our two campuses [some of the Victoria students felt ‘intimidated’ by those at Hawai’i who were more advanced toward their degrees]. Considerable technical obstacles were encountered with the distance-learning program; some as a result of deficiencies in design and implementation, others as a result of lack of experience and/or training on the part of those involved—including the instructors. A considerable problem was the matter of unequal access to computer use. There was free and unlimited access for Hawai’i students from a multiplicity of campus computers while those in Zealand had fewer computers available, had to pay for Internet connections, and had less training and support for use of the program.

19 Graeme Whimp’s thoughtful analysis of this attempt is incorporated into Sharma and Whimp [33].
4. Technology, not democracy: promises and perils of global education in cyberspace

This article began with some well-worn ideas about the relationship between knowledge and power and may extend these thoughts to the relationship between technology, content, and power. The module was unable to bridge the gap between the unequal access to and familiarity with the computer technology involved. This is important when we consider that future modules may occur at places with even fewer facilities. If care is not taken to interrogate the content as well as use of this new technology, the promise to provide a more equitable educational environment may also be undermined (or compromised). I remember reading once that 'changing a curriculum is like moving a graveyard'. While the reference was to the resistance of many faculty members to engage in innovative course content, it may also refer to the embeddedness of certain ways (western ways) of thinking. These are more difficult to make apparent and root out as they lie deep within our teaching paradigms. Konai Helu Thaman’s words about the rocky road to decolonizing our minds are recalled once again.

While my New Zealand colleague is located in and of the Pacific, we are both products of American academia. It may be said that we interrogated the issue of militarism and tourism in Asia and the Pacific, but perhaps it cannot be said that we offered a view that might particularly have been located outside of US scholarship. The majority of our readings were based on western scholarship, albeit of a critical and progressive kind and an indigenous group made only one of the three films shown, while Japanese and Filipina women made the other two. One response might be that there are multiple ways of expressing indigeneity and that the critical issue is not so much the sources used, but who uses them and how. Another counter-balance might have been coming from students’ reactions to them—especially from the Pacific Islanders. However, the difficulties encountered (and described, above) precluded this. What then, may be the promise of ‘new pedagogical possibilities available through technology?’

We are told, ‘professors should embrace technology in courses...’ and that this holds the promise of displacing the power of the professor to control the flow of information. It will empower students to search for their own knowledge and explanations (loc. cit.). We are also told that this very same technology promises to ‘promote equal access to communication and information technologies in the developing world, and foster global citizenship and understanding’ [12]. One such endeavor is the Alliance for Global Learning created by Schools Online, I-Earn, and World Links for Development, a division of the World Bank. It would be interesting to know whether the World Bank (and the other partners) are truly willing to give up their ‘control of the flow of information’. Similarly, a panel composed of five high-tech executives and analysts (including representatives from Sun Microsystems, Oracle Corporation, and CNet) were among those ‘hundreds of the world’s most influential people’ who gathered at the 1998 fourth annual World Forum in San Francisco (‘Crystal Ball for a Blue Planet’ [4]). Amidst calls to overcome digital

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20 She has had all her higher education in the US (at Trinity College in Washington, DC, the University of Hawai‘i, and the University of California at Santa Cruz), while I studied at Brooklyn College, University of Virginia, University of Hawai‘i, and the Graduate Center of the New School for Social Research in New York.

21 As in, IBM “blue?”
apartheid at home and abroad, was discussion of a project to wire Palestinian and Israeli schools together in the effort to promote understanding and peace. What a great potential!! High hopes were dashed, however, when I read further that ‘content from the New York Times can be translated into 30 Arab [sic] dialects’ [5]. Are they going to give equal time to Arab publications?

Such projects as *Moving Cultures*, that looks to technology to aid in a libratory pedagogy need realistically and critically to evaluate what may be achieved. Technology is as much rooted in power relations, as is knowledge production. There are intrinsic biases built into the telecommunications and computer revolution as clearly as there have been in the previous energy, transport, and media revolutions [20]. Sclove maintains that in the economic sphere, for all the hype in the media about how the new technologies will enhance democracy, what we are getting is not individual empowerment but a new empowerment for multinational corporations and banks, with respect to workers, consumers, and political systems (1994; quoted in 20).

The Internet is the icon of the global [21]; it is synonymous with David Harvey’s postmodern compression of time and space [10]. But this does not mean the erasure of the importance of past history nor the significance of place. Gerald Sussman [35] makes a convincing argument for the persistence of place through the spatially uneven spread of the infrastructure of information and communication technology. New boundaries are reinscribed through the concentration of ICT resources while the importance of the local is maintained through the ‘info-poor and huddled masses’ left out of the queue to get online [21]. He points out that ‘current representations of technology as the deus ex machina of the late 20th century’ [35] are similar to previous exalted claims made about electricity, the automobile and roadway, the motion picture, radio and television. They were all presumed to rewrite prior definitions of time and place and of spatial and social (i.e. class). Sussman challenges

the notion that a posthistorical and posturban epoch has arrived, rendering immaterial past organizational and locational forms of economic exchange and power relationships. It offers in its place a critical political economic reading of social change in a heavily information-lubricated, urban-based economy [35].

If we keep in mind that the web is not the great equalizer and may provide many opportunities for misunderstandings and conflict we may be better equipped to realize its potential to provide a liminal space for contention, negotiation, and agreement and opportunities for significantly different power relationships. An important lesson learned from our experiment in web-based learning is the need to encourage students to search out alternative views, to access different websites, and to teach them how to evaluate those different writings—much as we would teach about evaluating materials from books. We also need to encourage them to range widely—to access newspapers and other websites located in different countries—22—and locate hegemonic as well as counter-hegemonic sources of information. Because all of this is just a click away, the potential promise of

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22 I provide those in my introductory class on contemporary India with a list of all the websites to online newspapers and journals available from the region and require weekly reports on news articles.
how technology may radicalize not only the way we teach, but what we teach, may become more possible.

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