Contextual, Substantive, and Methodological Concerns in The Study of Politics, Comparative Area Studies, and Area Studies

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Abstract
The subfield of comparative area studies within the broader field of area studies is not as well-known as other subfields. A comprehensive assessment of the continuing discussion about comparative area studies is provided by this work. Even though the research is mostly grounded in political science, many of its concepts are applicable to many other areas of study. It is critical to give greater credit to the area studies community for the advancements and scholarly discussions that have taken place after the Cold War ended. After that, we will explain what comparative area studies are and how we understand them, before moving on to examine several contemporary perspectives on the subject. Performing research on both individual regions and comparative ones is emphasized in a substantial portion. Two methodological challenges that frequently arise in comparative area studies are the use of concepts and the selection of research methodologies. The research delves deeply into both of those areas. The previously described issues are examined more thoroughly. An executive overview of the key points made during the investigation is included at the conclusion.
Keywords: Comparative Politics · Comparative Method · Comparative Area Studies Plan for Research

Introduction

Area Studies in a Difficult Setting Scholars and professionals in a particular discipline have encountered significant challenges during the past decade and a half, encompassing both academic discourse and practical progress in the field. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the disintegration of the Soviet Union not only necessitated the development of novel methodologies in the field of Soviet and Eastern European studies, but also opened up fresh areas for scholarly investigation. Social scientists who are interested in studying the mechanisms, consequences, and results of political and economic transformations have found the post-Soviet environment, consisting of fifteen independent republics and the "new" Central and Eastern Europe, to be a captivating area of research (Bonnell and Breslauer, 2003). However, it is worth noting that the global trajectory following the collapse of the Soviet Union did not adhere to a linear progression towards liberal democracy. In contrast, the 1990s witnessed the occurrence of the third wave of democracy, which extended its reach to a significant extent across sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America.

However, this wave encountered setbacks, resulting in the emergence of regimes that might be characterized as transitional forms between democracy and authoritarianism (Carothers 2002; Croissant and Merkel 2004; Schedler 2006). The formation of the political and economic landscape continues to be influenced by the interplay between informal and formal institutions, particularly within the context of hybrid regimes (Lauth 2000; Helmke and Levitsky 2004, 2006; Köllner 2005; Osteuropa 2005). During the 1990s, Asian economies experienced the emergence of new economic powerhouses. The initiation of economic reforms in China during the late 1970s brought about significant transformations in the coastal regions of the country. China has emerged as a prominent destination for foreign direct investment (FDI) in recent times. In contemporary discourse, concerns regarding a perceived resurgence of the historical concept known as the "yellow peril" are being expressed by

a significant number of individuals residing in Western countries. These individuals harbor apprehensions that China's insatiable economic growth and demand for employment opportunities and energy resources may have detrimental effects on their own economic prospects and access to vital energy supplies.

Moreover, there are observers who are primarily focused on domestic affairs and express doubts about China's ability to address its increasing societal pressures. At the same time, neo-realists argue that China's ascent and the resulting geopolitical changes in the region will not occur without conflicts or disturbances (Internationale Politik 2005; Shambaugh 2006). Moreover, it is worth noting that China is not the sole developing economic force on the global stage. India has also garnered recognition as another burgeoning economic powerhouse in contemporary times, as highlighted by reputable sources such as Foreign Affairs (2006) and Internationale Politik (2006). The emergence of Asia's enhanced self-assurance was evident through a robust discussion surrounding the concept of "Asian values" until the onset of the financial and economic turmoil that severely impacted Southeast Asia during the late 1990s. Irrespective of the intrinsic validity of this discourse, the unequivocal conclusion drawn from it was that the "West" must no longer assume that its distinct set of values, if it ever existed, would be universally applicable as the norm for the global community (Mols and Derichs 1995; Thompson 2001).

The conclusion of the Cold War did not symbolize the cessation of historical events with regards to security and peace. The notion of achieving global democratic peace has proven to be an illusory one. The field of peace and war studies has redirected its focus towards countries characterized by violence, particularly sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East, as well as the possible threats emanating from these regions. According to the research conducted by Collier et al. (2003), the region of Africa located south of the Sahara has been associated with the manifestation of failed states and internal conflicts. These conflicts often arise due to the exploitation and dependence on natural resources such as oil or diamonds, leading to a recurring cycle of violence and instability commonly referred to as a "conflict trap." Western diplomats and think tanks are currently preoccupied with the issue of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), particularly nuclear weapons, in the regions of Asia and the Middle East. Undoubtedly, the events of September 11th, commonly referred to as 9/11, have exerted a profound impact on the academic community and policymakers, potentially marking the onset of a significant era in global history.

According to Huntington (1996), the presence of transnational terrorism and the subsequent "war on terror" can be interpreted as indicative of a "clash of civilizations." However, it is indisputable that the pursuit of understanding the underlying causes of terrorism has generated heightened attention towards regions such as the Middle East, South Asia, and Southeast Asia. These improvements have provided area studies with a significant amount of new motivation. Nonetheless, area studies encountered criticism from various sources simultaneously. Initially, there was an inquiry into the continued relevance of area studies within a society that was undergoing increasing globalization. The proponents of globalization believed that it would mitigate regional differentiations and foster convergence and homogeneity in various domains, as seen by the proliferation of the Internet. Rather than placing emphasis on local or national particulars, which may become less relevant due to globalization, it is now imperative to prioritize global patterns, complete theories, and analytical frameworks that may be effectively applied universally. These assumptions have been consistently challenged and disproven. Drake and Hilbink (2003: 26) argue that the manner in which societies respond to the challenges brought about by

globalization is influenced by the dynamics of local and regional politics, as well as longstanding cultural traditions. Although many locations may encounter similar challenges, there are inherent variations in the approaches taken to address these concerns.

In order to fully grasp the interdependent nature of the global and the local, it is imperative to engage in a comprehensive examination of their dynamic interaction. The establishment of a strong theoretical framework in area studies is essential for comprehending the multifaceted phenomenon of globalization. A comprehensive understanding of local impacts, expressions, and reactions to global occurrences is contingent upon possessing area knowledge, as it entails being well-versed and attuned to particular locations. In alternative terms, globalization has led to an increase in the need for specialized knowledge in specific domains, as supported by previous studies (Prewitt, 2003; Sassen, 2003). However, globalization has been demonstrated to be a resilient notion that suggests that practices and tendencies in politics, industry, society, and culture are propelled towards a singular point of convergence.1. Divergent viewpoints have also been articulated in dissent of area studies. Cultural critique has been generated from the perspective of postmodernism and the humanities during various historical periods.

One aspect to consider is the emergence of the "Orientalist" critique within the Middle Eastern studies community in the United States during the mid-1970s (Mitchell, 2003: 13-14). This critique subsequently led to the proposition of reframing area studies via the lens of post-modern or post-structural theory. The objective of this activity was to address and challenge any biased interpretations of the subject of study. There was a prevailing belief that deeply entrenched academic concepts of "in-group" and "out-group" not only fostered persistent endeavors for power and control in the tangible realm, but also shaped the perceptions and comprehension of non-Western regions and their populations. The research designs were enhanced by integrating endogenous understandings and conceptions, while also considering perspectives from European social theorists such as Bourdieu, Foucault, Giddens, Gramsci, Habermas, and others. Additionally, insights from South Asian and other "subaltern" perspectives were incorporated. These solutions aimed to challenge and overcome the lingering effects of late-colonialist and supremacist perceptions that had shaped the understanding of specific regions. (For further references, please consult Drake and Hilbink's work from 2003, pages 22-24, as well as Szanton's publication from the same year.) In relation to the discourse on globalization, it has been proposed that area studies should relinquish their conventional and advantageous concentration on nation states.

This is due to the fact that global, regional, and local developments are eroding the territorial boundaries of previously stable geographic entities, which may have never been entirely stable. Moreover, there was a prevailing belief that a worldwide disconnection between culture and location was emerging. In light of these observed patterns, scholars have recommended a greater emphasis on transnational phenomena such as diasporas, transnational social spaces, regional commerce, finance, and social networks. Additionally, scholars have highlighted the significance of transnational flows of media, culture, and related entities in shaping local identities (cf. Katzenstein 2001; Prewitt 2003; Eckert 2005; King 2005). During the latter half of the 1990s, a notable academic controversy emerged regarding the connection between the "scientific" disciplines and the field studies that were perceived to lack a theoretical foundation. Comparative politics, which has long been considered a fundamental aspect of area studies rooted in social science, has resurfaced as the predominant

discipline in the United States within this domain. The study of comparative politics has always been characterized as a "broad-tent affair." Previous endeavors to establish coherence within this realm of political science field, by means of a specific framework of analysis or technique (such as behavioralism or structural functionalism), have proven unsuccessful. Another endeavor of this nature took place throughout the 1990s, with the guise of rational choice theory, a comprehensive theoretical framework that offered the prospect of "methodological rigor" and, thus, scientific credibility.

The endeavor to mold comparative politics in a particular manner was perceived by numerous scholars in the discipline as exhibiting characteristics of imperialism. The authors argued that the pursuit of empirical and topical relevance has resulted in the sacrifice of theoretical coherence, which will have negative implications for the field of comparative politics (Bates, 1997; Katzenstein, 2001). In recent times, there has been a noticeable decline in the intensity of the methodological disputes within the field of American comparative politics, giving way to a more relaxed and tolerant approach characterized by a "live-and-let-live" attitude. This phenomenon has been facilitated by an increasing recognition that while rational choice approaches offer distinct analytical advantages, particularly in explaining political phenomena within stable institutional contexts, they are not the sole or even exclusive scientific instrument within the comparative politics discipline. Moreover, Munck and Snyder (2007: 25) have pointed out that characterizing area studies research as atheoretical or "merely descriptive" is inaccurate. The user's text does not contain any information to rewrite in an academic manner. While there may be variations in research goals and methodology between area studies and non-area studies, it is important to note that area studies do not constitute a different approach within the realm of comparative politics.

Since the terrible events that occurred on September 11, 2001, the level of criticism leveled towards area studies has significantly decreased, particularly within the field of social sciences. This is particularly true. According to the findings of a study that was carried out by Wibbels (2007), after the events that took place on September 11, 2001, a sizeable number of people had a heightened awareness of the significance that is connected with acquiring knowledge that is specific to a certain nation or location. This was demonstrated to be the case. We can now breathe a sigh of relief because the vehement calls to halt study in this field have faded. The ongoing difficulties associated with the "implementation" of democracy in Iraq, the acts of terrorism targeting the United States and other nations, and the pervasiveness of militant Islam have all contributed to a heightened public desire for region-specific knowledge that is firmly rooted in historical and cultural contexts, while also addressing contemporary developments. This desire has been fostered by a collective increase in the number of terrorist attacks targeting the United States and other nations.

Even the most persistent proponents of the idea that globalization tends to homogenize nations have conceded that there are more complexities to be considered in this topic as a result of the events that transpired on September 11, 2001 and the subsequent developments that followed. Even though it is undeniable that area specialists enjoy the recognition that area-based studies have not become obsolete just because the Cold War has come to an end, complacency is not something that can be excused. An unquestionable fact is that discussions regarding the nature of the future of area studies, the interconnections between area studies and other academic fields, and the particular topics and research methodology utilized by area specialists are always continuing.

Area studies and comparative area studies are two types of studies.

The academic discipline of area studies suffers from an insufficient amount of coherence. To begin, it is important to point out that there are many objects of regional study, all of which are, nevertheless, open to the possibility of being debated.Other people are connected to bigger geographical areas, such as the subregions of the world and the diasporas that can be linked to these particular locations. These diasporas can be found all over the world. There are some notable outliers, but the regions or countries indicated above are, for the most part, characterized by linguistic uniformity. For the sake of academic investigation, a vast variety of academic study on a variety of locations, including the Middle East, Latin America, Africa, Southeast Asia, Japan, China, Korea, Eastern Europe, and Russia, amongst other regions, is easily available. In this investigation, we will concentrate on the following five important aspects: (1) an intensive study of the local language(s), (2) conducting in-depth field research in the local language(s), (3) paying close attention to local histories, perspectives, materials, and interpretations, (4) testing, elaborating, criticizing, or developing grounded theory based on detailed observation, and (5) engaging in multi-disciplinary conversations that frequently transcend the boundaries between the social sciences and the humanities.

According to Szanton (2003), the phrase "Area Studies" incorporates a wide variety of academic subjects and activities, which results in a comprehensive grasp of the subject matter. In a similar spirit, Prewitt (2003: 8) makes a distinct distinction between "traditional area studies" and "area-based knowledge," as stated by the American Council of Learned Societies and the Social Science Research Council (United States). This distinction is similar to the one made by the American Council of Learned Societies and the Social Science Research Council (United States). One approach that is taken by academics who are interested in acquiring a thorough understanding of a particular region of the world, including its languages, history, cultures, politics, and religions, places an emphasis on the investigation of regions as a whole and views them as the primary component of the analyzing process. On the other hand, another viewpoint begins by centering its attention on the accumulation of information pertaining to a single place, but later applies this information to broader patterns and occurrences that transcend the confines of any one particular area. Because different nations make use of various criteria, the definition and scope of regional studies can be varied in each of those countries. Although it is not always taken into account when computing certain metrics, an individual's place of origin may on occasion be taken into account in other settings. This is despite the fact that there are situations in which such information is useful.

Research on Western Europe or the European Union (EU), for example, may be categorized as area studies in certain countries; but, in Western Europe, such studies are typically viewed as being part of the academic canon and are not considered area studies. It is not uncommon for the various subfields that fall under the umbrella of area studies to be connected with distinct institutional structures and prevalent research methods. According to Szanton (2003), it is correct to say that the Area Studies disciplines lack similarity to one another and demonstrate internal heterogeneity. This is because the Area Studies disciplines do not exhibit internal homogeneity. It is clear, upon closer inspection, that these entities' political histories, institutional histories, philosophical histories, and disciplinary histories, in addition

to the histories of their relationships with one another, display substantial distinctions. The presence of large institutional divides and variations within the various area studies disciplines serves to steer and structure the accompanying academic discourses and research agendas. This is the case because of the presence of these institutional divides and variations. In a nutshell, the phrase "area studies" refers to a wide variety of academic investigations that are distinguished by their narrow and particular focus on a single nation or geographic region. These investigations are together referred to as "area studies." The field of area studies does not have a concrete definition that is based on a particular disciplinary foundation or the application of a particular research approach. It is possible to trace the origins of the academic field of area studies back to the fields of the humanities, social sciences, and cultural studies. Area studies also incorporates a wide variety of methodological and philosophical frameworks.

Area studies anchored in the social sciences can be extremely useful in the examination, enhancement, development, or evaluation of both localized and universal conceptualizations and theories (for further details, refer to section 5). These studies are based on extensive observations of particular local phenomena. It has been argued that intrinsic conditions for area studies should not include things like substantial language study, thorough fieldwork conducted in the local language, and collaboration with several or interdisciplinary fields of study. Rather than that, these components ought to be regarded as the strengths of unique researchers or preferred approaches, and the necessity of utilizing them ought to be chosen by the precise study issue that is at hand.

What Are Area and Comparative Area Studies? Why Do They Happen?

Comparative and area studies (also known as CAAS) are not intended to serve as the end goal in and of themselves. It is essential that they carry out the roles that have been assigned to them. This does not indicate that conducting study in the field of area studies in order to get additional insights into certain topics of interest is either impossible or inappropriate. The study of global actors, structures, and processes, as well as the myriad ways in which political, economic, social, and cultural occurrences might manifest themselves, is recognized as a valid and potentially fruitful area of research in the scientific community. To put it more precisely, the provision of exact and reliable portrayals, drawn from a thorough grasp of the unique circumstances, can strengthen our comprehension of individual cases and lay the framework for more general explanations that go beyond the immediate example at hand.Six as a numerical value. In point of fact, these specific descriptions, which are frequently ignored by social scientists who limit science to the accumulation of theories, play a vital role as first phases in the establishment of comprehensive theoretical and analytical frameworks, along with the creation of transferable ideas (for further details, see section 5).

In addition, the process of explaining happenings within other contexts tends to boost comprehension of one's own context, while also serving to promote comprehension of the contexts that were previously stated. According to Sartori (1994: 16), an individual who possesses knowledge just of a single nation is misinformed about all other nations even if they know everything there is to know about that nation. If research that is exclusively focused on utility is excluded entirely or receives only a portion of the available funds, one could argue that this would lead to a reduction in the wealth of the entire society as a whole. Despite this, our position is that the ACAS, which has its roots in the field of social science, ought to strive for goals that go beyond merely satisfying a person's desire for aesthetic fulfillment. It is absolutely necessary for ACAS to work in close conjunction with the relevant academic fields and to place

an emphasis on those fields above all others. It is necessary that persons participate in these activities with the goals of: a) increasing the existing knowledge base in these disciplines; and b) benefiting from the development achieved in their analytical capacities. It is imperative that individuals engage in these activities with the goals of: a) increasing the current knowledge base in these fields. It is impossible for the motivation behind the existence of area studies to be the same as it was in the United States after World War II, which was to improve the social sciences with the intention of developing a comprehensive social science (Mitchell, 2003: 8, 23-24). The ever-increasing disarray that can be found within the fields of social sciences and area studies makes it difficult to realize this goal. If the social sciences are willing to take on the challenge of establishing theories that span global views within their many subject domains (such as the state, society, and economics, amongst others), then area studies have the potential to take on an integrative role.

This, of course, is contingent upon the social sciences undertaking the effort of formulating such theories. According to Mitchell (2003: 16–20), some researchers have made the decision to prioritize the methodological rigor of their own study in order to advance their careers in the scientific community. The previous strong linkages that these researchers had with local studies have been weakened as a result of the focus that has been placed on the rigor of the individual researcher. Despite this, certain fundamental notions concerning the interaction between different fields of study and regional studies continue to be relevant. Both of these individuals are steadfast in their commitment to actively engage in fruitful debates. According to Mitchell (2003:8), the integration of area studies and comparative area studies into social theory has the potential to successfully eradicate provincialism. Interrogating, and, ideally, refining and enhancing theoretical claims that are proven by empirical evidence and normative frameworks that originate from Europe and North America can be accomplished with the help of ACAS, which can serve as a beneficial instrument.

The process of developing scientific knowledge through the formulation of generalizations is separate from the practice of calling into question long-held beliefs. It is absolutely necessary for scholars who are interested in a particular academic field to carefully investigate the relevant literature within that field in order to have any hope of comprehending the scope of these generalizations. On the other hand, utilizing comparative area studies can show to be quite beneficial in terms of adding to the existing body of material within the field of social sciences. According to Huber (2003: 1), there are potentially three different reasons to make use of cross-regional comparisons. This study has three main goals: (1) to refine and clarify conceptual frameworks and theories by taking contextual variables into consideration; (2) to enhance the validity of existing concepts and theories by identifying similar processes in a variety of contexts; and (3) to highlight the presence of multiple pathways that result in the same outcome, thereby necessitating the development of new theoretical frameworks.

Problems with the Way Comparative Area Studies Are Done

The application of a complete strategy is essential in order to make the most of the possibilities offered by ACAS. To be clear, the purpose of this research is not to carry out an exhaustive investigation of all of the methodological challenges that ACAS has faced. This is an essential point to keep in mind. When one takes into consideration the field of political science, this constraint becomes especially apparent. Because of this, the focus of the following paragraphs will be on two primary themes that are typical of the aforementioned three categories of comparative area studies13. It is important to point out that these concerns are not just relevant to the discipline of area

studies in its whole, but that they also extend to other academic fields that are not related to political science. A intriguing challenge lies in the selection of appropriate comparative research methodologies and the implementation of pertinent ideas. Comparative area studies are fraught with difficulty from every angle, including their literal and symbolic components. Comparisons made inside an area can occasionally be made with factors in the context that are reasonably consistent, in contrast to comparisons made between regions or across regions, which provide difficulties due to the apparent differences in contextual circumstances. Comparing phenomena in a variety of settings for the purpose of descriptive analysis is typically not a very difficult endeavor. The use of comparative analysis to determine whether or not a causal relationship exists presents additional obstacles. Every comparative project absolutely needs to have a well thought out and carefully prepared study design.

Summary

Following the end of the Cold War, a variety of events have served as impetuses for academic research in the field of ACAS, specifically concentrating on the political elements of the topic. The events described above mark the end of the third stage of democratization, which is now understood to be non-teleological in nature. In addition, it is important to notice the rise to power of China and India, as well as the emergence of new global threats, such as the spread of nuclear weapons and transnational terrorism. In the 1990s, area studies came under fire for what was believed to be a lack of methodological and theoretical rigor, as well as the use of what was perceived to be ethnocentric or late-colonial terminology and perspectives. Concerns were also voiced over the continued relevance of regional studies in the context of the modern day and age of globalization. In recent years, namely in the years following the events of 9/11, there has been a noticeable trend toward a mild drop in the level of criticism directed toward area studies. Despite this, discussions are still going on about the path that area studies should take and the ways in which it could connect with other academic subfields.

The term "area studies" can refer to a number of different things; nonetheless, they are all united by the fact that the primary focus of their attention is placed on a particular part of the world. Due to their foundation in the comprehensive analysis of local phenomena, area studies are able to facilitate the advancement, evaluation, enhancement, and interrogation of both localized and universalistic concepts and ideas. This is possible because area studies are based on comprehensive analyses of local phenomena and can be conducted using a variety of disciplinary and methodological approaches. Comparative area studies are a subfield of area studies that is often overlooked despite the fact that they share comparable characteristics and combine comparative research methods with an all-encompassing understanding of one or more distinct locations. There are three distinct categories that can be applied to this type of research: (1) comparative studies that were carried out within a particular location; (2) interregional comparisons that encompass entire regions as entities within a comparable framework; and (3) cross-regional comparisons that involve the selection of empirical entities from a variety of regions all over the world. Automated Content Analysis Systems (ACAS) are not in and of themselves self-contained goals; rather, they have the potential to make significant contributions to the systematic delineation of political and other occurrences, as well as the examination and refinement of conceptual frameworks and the comprehension of both domestic and foreign territories. Because of this, they are able to offer those who make decisions a solid scientific basis for their considerations.

However, both area studies and comparative area studies run into methodological roadblocks that need to be surmounted in order to be successful. The meticulous selection of appropriate research procedures and conceptual frameworks is the most obvious component, and it is also one of the most important. The existence of methodological rigor is of the utmost importance, particularly when researchers are attempting to discover causal relationships across the myriad of circumstances that are typically encountered in cross-region comparative studies. However, adopting a varied variety of research approaches may assist reduce the restrictions that are associated with depending primarily on a single strategy. The process of conceptual creation involves a communal perception of events.

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