



AN * TI AT * LAS

towards a
critical area studies

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Anti-Atlas is positioned at the intersection of several publishing genres: a reader, an edited collection, a manifesto and a travel guide. It will provide its readers with a diverse set of intellectual resources, provoking them to think critically about the ways in which we – scholars, decision makers, producers and consumers – divide the world up into pieces, fencing off certain areas from other ones. Although planetary in scope, *Anti-Atlas* is compiled from an explicitly East-European point of view, rejecting the usual perspective that hovers, god-like, above the world (but that can also usually be traced to a metropolitan Euro-Atlantic origin).

Anti-Atlas is intended as a critique of conventional area studies assumptions and investments, and as a manifesto for a new Critical Area Studies. At the same time, it weaves new nets in which to catch the world in all its complexity. It offers new insights, a guide to exemplary research, and an adaptable toolbox for use in other circumstances; though it makes no claims to the universal validity of its particular perspectives.

Although skeptical of the possibility of impermeable borders, *Anti-Atlas* does have its own bounded sections. We ask that contributors think carefully about how their essays fit into the categories described below, and that they comment explicitly on how their insights will advance the project of a Critical Area Studies. It is important to stress that we are addressing readers who may not be familiar with our particular part of the world – unlike scholars who can assume that their particular expertise is also universal. Please consider the need to communicate with a non-specialist audience.

Anti-Atlas comprises over 40 essays, Canon entries, and an array of visual and cartographic material. Estimated publication date: **Fall 2019**.

The book is divided into four core sections: **Continents; Critics; Cartography; Canon**.

1. Continents

There are more areas to study than the seven continents we think we know, and the linguistically-defined or post-imperial husks we name our departments and institutes after. It is time to recognize the existence of other spaces, mapped according to different principles. While we aim to deconstruct global projections centered on Paris or New York, we do not intend to replace these with a single, definitive world map. Rather we argue for multiple, overlapping categories that will allow us to grasp the patterns, practices and aspirations that shape human lives across the planet. Some of these have a distinct place in time (the Second World), others are reformed and reborn in new conditions (Eurasia; the Republic of Letters), others exist only in retrospect or prospect (the Former West; Pangaea); still others are virtual spaces shaped by technology (radio broadcasting's airwaves) or institutional frameworks (the University?) Others force us to reassess our preconceptions: the Inter- or Trans-imperial; the order of Chaos; the Red Adriatic. As well as 'the West', and the 'Global South', we propose a 'Global East', whence many of our categories spring: an interstitial space rather than the settled location of an adversarial or incommensurable Other.

2. Critics

All continents – dogmatic and critical – are known, inhabited, traversed and transgressed by those whose paths reveal or deny their boundaries. These are – despite (or thanks to) their lack of academic credentials – our de facto critics, the vanguard scholars of Critical Area Studies. We are particularly interested in highlighting trajectories that conventional Area Studies often fails to capture, and those lives that such scholarship doesn't know what to do with – the peripatetic scholars, people traffickers, transhumant shepherds, professional translators and practical polyglots, refugees, exiles, and children of diaspora. Looking at their lives can unveil both the political and economic logic of state and regional frontiers, and the ways in which individuals and groups may operate according to a different logic. The new continents we identify above also come into focus through the trajectories – and sometimes also the critical voices – of such figures. We are less interested here in the savants and public intellectuals who have pronounced on these issues; they may better be placed in our Counter-Canon. We are, however, interested in those who take advantage of spaces and frontiers in ways that we might consider opportunistic, reactionary or reprehensible: a Critical Area Studies is not solely concerned with heroes and victims.

3. Cartography

Maps are not neutral representations of place, and cartography reflects social, political, and ideological positions as well as communicating spatial information. This section has two purposes: we wish to deconstruct a few representative maps, underlining their preconceptions, purposes and effects; but we also propose new cartographies (with new agendas attached), corresponding – directly or indirectly – to the counter-continents, crossroads and networks laid out in the *Anti-Atlas*. These heterodox mappings are intended to illustrate the trajectories, intersections and impasses that tend to escape the (uncritical) mapmaker's gaze. A conventional atlas organizes landmasses according to an underlying hierarchy (Western Europe comes first), and puts state entities front and centre. The *Anti-Atlas* recognizes that maps have power, but aims to contribute to charting some of the uneven (and, perhaps, *East-blind*) ways that power is distributed. It highlights peripheries as well as centres, and gives space to border zones as well as to bounded entities.

4. Canon

What genealogies do we draw on? This section brings together short essays and excerpts from pre-existing texts, primarily – but not solely – rooted in a Global East: our intellectual forebears in the project of Critical Area Studies. We see this as a ‘counter-canon’ in that many of the excerpts stand against, and polemically engage with, variously defined ‘canonical’ area studies positions. One example might be the Belgrade Declaration of the first summit of the Non-Aligned Movement in 1961, which took issue with the idea of a world defined and imperiled by Great Power rivalry, and called for ‘peaceful cooperation between peoples’ (though nonetheless defined in terms of ‘old established and the new emerging nationalist forces’).¹ However, this may also be a place for texts related to the essays in the other sections: for instance, verses from Ovid illustrating his subject position not just as an exile from civilization but as an ‘area studies’ expert on the wild Gets and Sarmatians of Tomis.

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Collage: *Keine Grenzen*, by Jan Dziaczkowski, 2008.

¹ <http://namiran.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Declarations-of-All-Previous-NAM-Summits.pdf>