

Introduction

Ayesha Siddiq & Lawrence Gerstein

American Studies has a long history in the United States. Its roots can be traced to Parrington's 1927 three-volume publication, *Main Currents in American Thought* (Parrington, 1987 a,b,c). Over time, the philosophy and paradigm embraced by American Studies has expanded to include a diverse foundation of disciplines including, for instance, the humanities, arts, and social sciences. What began as a field grounded in a cultural lens linked with only American History and Literature now incorporates a broader cultural perspective informed by an interdisciplinary conceptual, theoretical, methodological, and application framework. Further, and importantly, American Studies has expanded beyond the borders of the United States (U.S.) and a U.S. based investigation of America to a global examination of America. That is, an exploration of America shaped by knowledge, values, and beliefs held by scholars living outside of America and by how American culture has influenced and is experienced by persons and cultures not situated in America.

The scholars affiliated with the Area Study Centre for Africa, North and South America at Quaid-i-Azam University (QAU) in Islamabad, for example, have an extensive history of publishing literature that integrates both a Pakistani and American cultural perspective in their pursuit of American Studies scholarship. They also have incorporated these two perspectives when educating their MPhil and Ph.D. students. Additionally, this emphasis of the Area

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The current special issue of the *Pakistan Journal of American Studies (PJAS)* entitled, “American Studies in Pakistan: Research Initiatives and Curriculum Paradigms” reflects yet another significant outcome of this long-standing relationship between QAU and BSU, and the more recent partnership grants just mentioned. Moreover, this special issue extends the literature published in an earlier *PJAS* special issue, “U.S. and Pakistani Perspectives on American Studies: Status and Future Directions” (Gerstein, Holland, & Sattar, 2016), co-edited by faculty members affiliated with the QAU Area Study Centre and BSU. The current special issue of *PJAS* features articles co-written by faculty members associated with four additional Pakistani universities who participated in one of the 2021-2022 partnership projects, and faculty members employed by BSU and QAU.

In the first article, “The Importance of Art and Visual Media in American Studies,” Christine Satory and Sania Siraj explore the political use of visual imagery in art, education, and media. Tracing the history of the use of visual imagery to marginalize different communities from the Civil War up until the contemporary U.S., the authors illustrate how visual media can be used to shape collective identities and reinforce specific ideologies. Drawing on neuroscientific studies on the human brain’s processing of images, the authors demonstrate how visual learning is far more effective than conventional learning given the human brain’s efficiency to acquire information through images. The authors thus make a case for an interdisciplinary pedagogical paradigm that incorporates visual media alongside more traditional content and methods. Such an interdisciplinary approach will allow

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an in-depth analysis of complex phenomena that are otherwise reduced to social media memes through an appropriation of visual imagery. The authors argue that the curriculum that is currently equipped to practice this methodology is American Studies. As the interdisciplinary theoretical and methodological framework of American Studies provides inclusive, holistic, and critical knowledge, the future of education needs to shift toward the American Studies paradigm.

In the second article, “The Use of Critical Discourse Analysis to Explore the Representation of Parents as Disciplinarians in Jeff Kinney’s *The Last Straw: An Interdisciplinary Teaching-Oriented Approach*,” Shumaila Ashee and Maria Staton’s teaching-oriented article demonstrates the use of Norman Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis as an interdisciplinary method of teaching literature as part of American Studies. Using Jeff Kinney’s *The Last Straw* as a sample teaching text, the authors outline the step-by-step methodology of Critical Discourse Analysis using various techniques such as thematic selection, coding, and interpretation. The purpose is to demonstrate that an interdisciplinary analysis allows students to understand implicit themes that are not immediately evident at the surface level of the text. Employing a teacher-oriented approach as the main lens within the framework of Fairclough’s model of CDA, the article provides sample assignments on the application of Fairclough’s approach in teaching textual analysis. The article concludes with providing methodological recommendations for an interdisciplinary teaching of literary texts in an American Studies class.

The next article in the special issue, “The Failure of Afghan National Army: The Haqqani Network Factor,” is a primary research study in which Sheraz Ali and Kenneth Holland explore the impact of the Haqqani Network on the failure of the Afghan National Army. The study is based on the surveys conducted with 190 Afghan nationals residing in Jalalabad and Peshawar. Utilizing

multinomial logistic regression to identify the impact of the Haqqani Network on the failure of the Afghan National Army, the study notes that the strength of the Haqqani Network in terms of its strong organization was higher than the weakness of the Afghan National Army in terms of its internal fragmentation. The study concludes that a long history of active and relentless engagement in war, a clear sense of direction, and effective (re)grouping strategies rendered the Haqqani Network an undefeated group of the Taliban with a strong organizational base. In contrast, the primary limitations of the Afghan National Army that were also exploited by the Haqqani Network were internal fragmentation and lack of trust in the Afghan government. The study uses an interdisciplinary framework relying on primary data and an historical review in the context of American Studies.

In the fourth article, “Reinventing Identities in Sheila Abdullah’s *Saffron Dreams* (2009),” Sadia Nazeer and James Connolly explore the diasporic identities of South Asian American women in *Saffron Dreams* from an interdisciplinary perspective based in literary, theoretical, and historical perspectives. The paper analyzes Pakistani American women’s struggle for identity in the aftermath of 9/11 through a specific focus on the protagonist, Arissa’s character. Exploring the process of identity formation from the perspective of Burke and Stets (2009), the paper foregrounds the multiply marginalized position of a Pakistan American Muslim woman and her unique search for identity in a world shaken by the tragic events of 9/11. The article argues that Abdullah constructs a cross-cultural, diasporic identity for her protagonist that disrupts homogeneous identity categories imposed from without. Challenging conventional understandings of the immigrant experience in popular discourse, the article explores a complex, individualistic identity that Abdullah creates for Arissa that is grounded in her cultural heritage, her religious values, and her American experience.

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In the last article of this special issue, “American Studies in the Post-Pandemic Era: Reflections on Higher Education in the U.S. and Pakistan and Considerations for Future Collaboration,” David Roof studies the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on higher education and cross-cultural partnerships within the context of American Studies in the U.S. and Pakistan. The article argues that the post-pandemic period poses challenges that are similar to those faced in the post-war periods of the twentieth century, which include but are not limited to inequalities in student access to learning, the provision of technological support, and the facilitation of educational opportunities. The article provides recommendations for the enhancement of higher education partnerships through academic projects based in cross-cultural collaboration that emphasize teaching and research. The article also urges higher education institutions to address the economic and social impact of the pandemic through collaborative research, long-term partnerships, and mutually beneficial relationships. Given the interdisciplinary and transnational dimensions of American Studies, the author notes that one way the above can be achieved is through encouraging collaborative projects focused on American Studies in Pakistan and Pakistani Studies in the U.S.

Taken together, the articles in this special issue illustrate the unique and significant contribution that the interdisciplinary discipline of American Studies offers to the investigation of America. The issue also illustrates the benefits of cross-national collaboration in terms of understanding and respecting diverse cultural perspectives in the pursuit of scholarship. We welcome your feedback on this special issue and encourage the submission in the future of articles that are grounded in an interdisciplinary framework of American Studies and written by teams of authors, representative of different countries and/or cultures.

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