

Special Edition: The Insider and the Outsider

Entries in this year's journal are united by a common theme: the insider and the outsider. Each article explores the spaces between, interplay and arbitrariness of these designations but is not limited by perspectives from any single topic or subject. And in many ways, there is a big overlap with the contribution that SOAS itself makes to academia.

First created in 2005 under its former name *Polyvocia*, the Journal was re-launched in 2010, and has been published annually ever since. It aims to showcase the sheer diversity and breadth of postgraduate research undertaken at SOAS. Many of our students have personal experiences of negotiating the boundaries between 'inside' and 'outside' in multiple contexts, be they social, economic, cultural, religious, gendered or political, and our research interests reflect this, sometimes directly, but often in more subtle ways. But this dichotomy also comes loaded with positive and negative connotations. 'Outsiders' or 'others' are often thought of as marginalised, hidden and voiceless. Yet the reality is more nuanced; outsiders also have the power to act as mediators of change and each of the articles bring out these finesses.

This edition features four substantive articles and two fieldwork reports. We have papers in history, ethnomusicology, art history, philosophy, and politics, and the papers cover areas from medieval China to modern Burma, Britain and the Western Sahara, among others.

Laura Hassan writes on Islamic intellectual history, and more specifically about the work of Sayf al-Dīn al-Āmidī, a thirteenth century Ash'arī theologian. She discusses how he is an insider to the kalām *tradition*, while simultaneously being under the 'outside influence' of falsafa, and what this means for the encounter between the two traditions. Janine Nicol's article is also about an encounter, but this time a specific encounter between Buddhism and China. She describes how medieval Chinese Buddhists grappled with the notion of being a 'borderland' in relation to the centrality of Northern India in the Buddhist world view, and how this played out specifically in Shi Daoxuan's 釋道宣 (c. 596-667) *Shijia fangzhi* 釋迦方志 (*A Record of Buddhist Places*). Boundaries and borders are also a critical theme in Eva Betcheva's study of the 'New Art History' in relation to the work of Indian-born artist Sutapa Biswas and her boundary crossing performance artwork *Kali* (1985). Our final article, by Carol Ann Boshier, analyses Leslie Fernandes Taylor's 'lost' linguistic and ethnographical survey of Burma, and shows how 'inside' and 'outsideness' impacts the production and distribution of knowledge – in this case how one man's outsider status to the elite at the colonial era Burma Research Society meant that his work could never be finished or distributed. Despite their disparate specialisations, they all address the gulf between marginal and dominant

positions and show how these encounters structured the production of knowledge in four very different contexts.

Our two research reflections discuss the challenges of contemporary field research in two very different settings. Violeta Ruano-Posada writes about her work among Saharawi refugees and the challenges of researching music in a semi-permanent settlement. Indrė Balčaitė writes about the challenges of finding, and keeping, a suitable interpreter for her work with Plong Karen migrants living in Thailand, and how this difficulty was actually revealing of her subject and a valuable source of knowledge in itself. Both of these articles helpfully illuminate the challenges and opportunities of being an ‘outsider’ conducting ethnographic research, and serve as valuable guides for future researchers.

We hope you enjoy reading the journal,

All the best,

The *Journal of Postgraduate Research* editorial team

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