

# Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East

## *Mission Statement*

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**C**omparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East (*CSSAAME*) seeks to bring the study of region into sustained conversation with the humanistic and social science disciplines. How the theories and methods of these disciplines relate to regions, and how regions generate theories and methods of their own, are issues of great interest, even urgency, to the contemporary academy. The journal is committed to publishing original research in such areas as well as critical reflection on major debates; comparative or connective scholarship, especially where comparison or connection is itself a subject for theorization; and studies of particular regions where these contribute to larger arguments. Although the focus of the journal will be on the early modern, modern, and the contemporary, work from all historical periods will be considered.

### **Background Statement**

*CSSAAME* was created in 1981 by social scientists as a journal of contemporary academic-political engagement. Over the following three decades fashions and interests in what was then called area studies have changed—beyond recognition. The transfer of the journal to Columbia University offers an opportunity to fundamentally rethink its mission. This is a task the editorial collective views as a global and collaborative opportunity, since we hope that, properly reconstituted, *CSSAAME* can become an international venue of choice for high-quality scholarship in our fields. We therefore invite responses from scholars to the set of tentative propositions here below about the relation of regions and discipline, and their relevant theory and method.

Developments in the social sciences and humanities in the past three decades have radically altered the self-understanding of regional specialists and of the disciplines themselves. Region as source of theory as well as of data has been repeatedly demonstrated during this period by bravura scholarship. The bounded areas created by US federal agencies that acted as silos for scholarship for a generation have given way to unfamiliar and exciting transregions, where hitherto unknown forms of economic interaction, religious faith, literary culture, and the like are being discovered. The very weakening of competence in historical languages during these decades and the new and disheartening pressures being placed upon philology have opened the door to theories of philological renewal and a reinvigoration of deep historical scholarship. The departure of regionally located social science specialists from departments such as political science or sociology has enriched the new post-areal, even postdisciplinary, formations emerging in Western universities. Though the developmental trajectory of non-Western universities has been different, they too are on the brink of explosive growth and could contribute decisively to this ongo-

ing redefinition of the organization of knowledge. And while many have spoken in the past decade of the exhaustion of critical theory and more recently of postcolonial theory, these new linkages of regions hitherto kept separate, and new appreciations of the possibilities of theoretical innovation in comparative or connective history, present a research agenda of vast scope and promise.

How can this exciting moment of transition be captured in the pages of *CSSAAME*'s journal and through the richer media possibilities of its website? How can we best conceptualize our journal's purpose, the kinds of submissions we should seek, the special projects we should commission, the sorts of review essays we should encourage, the conferences we should organize? We seek your thoughts and advice on these and any other relevant questions so that we collectively create the kind of journal that will best serve the most important new scholarship in our fields. ■■■■