

Editorial Introduction

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Authors Bios

Fatima Dhanani is a PhD candidate at SOAS University of London, researching legal pluralism, governance, and civil society organisations in Lebanon. She also contributes to a University of Calgary project on pluralism and Indigenous communities in higher education. Fatima has a background in strategic communications and stakeholder engagement and has lead dozens of academic conferences globally and developed educational programmes and curricula on Muslim societies and civilisations.

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We are thrilled to present Issue 16 of the SOAS Journal of Postgraduate Research (SJPR), celebrating nearly a decade of publishing exceptional research by the SOAS community. While the journal primarily features SOAS researchers, this issue's contributions span global social, economic, historical, and political life. The theme, *Entangled Worlds and Situated Knowledge*, draws on scholarship that views Natural and Social Sciences as interconnected and ever-evolving processes shaped by human and non-human interactions. Inspired by Karen Barad (2007) and Donna Haraway (2004; 2008), this issue reflects on their theories of entanglement and situated knowledge, offering fresh perspectives on our contemporary world.

We chose this theme because of its relevance today. It offers a framework for understanding the interconnectedness and inseparability of humans, non-humans, and the material world. We are confident that the innovative and original contributions in this issue undoubtedly open up the new imaginations in our Entangled and the Situated World.

In physics, particles exhibit a dual nature, behaving both as particles and as waves. This is known as wave-particle duality, a fundamental concept in quantum mechanics. The quantum state of a particle is uncertain until it is observed, or its effects are studied. Once observed, the particle acquires a state. Karen Barad's concept of 'Intra-actions' builds on this by arguing that the act of observation itself alters the state of what is being observed. For instance, when you observe a photon, its energy state changes as a result of the observation. This demonstrates that observation is never passive; it actively influences the state of the material being observed. Barad's theory, rooted in quantum physics and feminist theory, challenges traditional notions of separateness and that entities do not pre-exist their relationships but emerge through their interactions. This furthers the idea of interdependence not just at a human level but at a molecular even sub-atomic level.

Barad's agential realism and her concept of entanglements both challenge the idea of detached observation by suggesting that all matter is part of a dynamic, entangled web of relations. Our actions and observations are not just reflective; they are productive. Barad has called this approach a 'diffraction'. In social science, this means that when we interact with social phenomena, we are not merely describing them; we are entangled in the processes that shape their reality. Thus, entanglement reinforces the idea that material realities and human practices are deeply interconnected, and every act of observation or measurement has material, ethical, and political consequences.

The concept of 'entanglement' is based and has its origins in the quantum theory. At quantum level when two particles are 'entangled' the change in one particle's energy state affects the change in another particle no matter how spatially separated they are. To put it through a simple example, if two twins are born and they grow up as adults at a different place but somehow, they still have maintained some secret code of communication in spite of not having met with each other before. By combining this 'entanglement' and 'intra-action' Barad is able to expand on the idea that observation and interactions are not separate from the material world but are actively part of it. When we observe or measure something, we are not outside the process, as traditional scientific methods might suggest. Rather, we are entangled in it, shaping the reality we are examining. She suggests that entities—whether particles, people, or social phenomena—do not exist independently of one another. Instead, they are intertwined, co-constituted, and mutually affect one another. In this framework, the boundaries between observer and observed, subject and object, are blurred.

This means that observation doesn't simply change the state of a photon or a particle, but it reflects the deep interconnectedness between the observer, the tools used, and the phenomenon itself. The act of measuring or observing is not a neutral or isolated event, but an integral part of how realities – both material and social – come into being.

Building upon Haraway's concept of 'partial perspective', Barad's 'agential realism' goes further. She asserts that when we observe or measure something, we are not just passively recording its state or just gaining a partial perspective. In the very act of measurement, we make a choice of including certain aspects while excluding others. This means that observation or a relation is always a process of inclusion and exclusion by the agents. This act of *choosing by agents* is what separates Barad's and Haraway's conceptual universe.

The standpoint of partial perspectives and agential realism is not about achieving a complete or universal viewpoint but rather recognising the multiplicity of perspectives that shape our comprehension of the world. This recognition is vital as it allows for a more nuanced understanding of how knowledge is constructed and how it can reflect diverse realities. Haraway's situated knowledge framework underscores the importance of recognising the specificities of context, power dynamics, and lived experiences in the production of knowledge. Together, these concepts advocate for an epistemology that is reflexive, relational, and attentive to the complexities of knowledge production in a world marked by entangled realities. Not only this, but Barad grounds her theory in material reality of entanglement phenomenon at sub-atomic level, using the behaviour of photons and electrons—actual, tangible particles—as a foundation. This way it offers an alternative to social constructivism and relativism which often rely on multiple, subjective standpoints, making it difficult to arrive at clear causalities.

These concepts closely align with Haraway's notion of situated knowledge and partial perspectives, emphasising the context-specificity of knowledge production. Both theorists argue against the notion of objective knowledge as a detached perspective (Haraway argues that only partial is truly objective), highlighting that what we observe is inherently influenced by the observer's position and the specific context in which the observation occurs. Haraway's critique of traditional epistemology—that it often overlooks the significance of the observer's standpoint—resonates with Barad's assertion that the act of measurement or observation entails an inherent act of inclusion and exclusion.

Entanglements are also connected to the idea of palimpsests. It offers a compelling way to think about how layers of meaning, materiality, and history interact and reshape one another. A palimpsest, traditionally, refers to a manuscript that has been written over but still bears traces of its previous inscriptions. It's a layered object, where past texts remain partially visible beneath new ones, each layer contributing to the whole. The potential of a palimpsest rests on the ethical entanglements of the body, memory, and space-time and afterlives with respect to existing tendencies and reliable possibilities (Okello et al. 2021).

In Barad's framework, different phenomena—whether they are physical particles, social interactions, or historical events—do not exist independently but rather co-create each other. In a palimpsest, this is akin to the way earlier layers of text cannot be fully erased or separated from the new writing that overlays it. Both concepts stress the ongoing and intertwined nature of existence, where past and present continuously shape and reshape one another.

When thinking of society, history, or even knowledge as a palimpsest, it aligns with Barad's theory that no phenomenon stands alone; each one is constituted by interactions with other phenomena across time. Every 'layer' of social practice, cultural formation, or material reality is built upon previous ones, just as in a palimpsest, traces of what came before are never fully erased. Instead, they are reconfigured by new interactions, which in turn are shaped by the history they are layered upon.

In this sense, both entanglements and palimpsests highlight the complexity of reality: they remind us that nothing exists in isolation, and that each new layer of meaning, knowledge, or observation always carries the imprints of what came before, actively shaping what comes next.

This issue features engaging, interdisciplinary articles on the themes of Entanglement and Situated Knowledge, each offering unique contributions to this conceptual framework. Bernardo Amaro Monteiro examines the dual role of artificial intelligence and social media in Egypt, showing how these technologies, both enable activism and facilitate state surveillance. Ondine de Gaulle explores how podcasts create spaces for Iranian migrants to shape and express diasporic identities. Khadija Nda Yakubu's article ventures into the entangled worlds of security infrastructure in sub-Saharan Africa, shaped by unique historical legacies and local dilemmas, while Rachel Min Leong underscores the role of affect in reorienting the relationship between law and social change. Sophie-Anne Mullen draws on artists' use of material culture—here, the plaid carry-all bag—to elicit the tensions and transnational implications of belonging and notions of home.,

Katherine Gordon vividly demonstrates the politicisation of art, focusing on Ayman Baalbaki's *Al Moulatham* and its censorship by a leading auction house in light of the

ongoing Israel-Palestine conflict, while Morgan Taillefesse-Barbosa examines the repatriation of Okinawan artifacts and their layered significance in local and national modes of identity-making. Sarah Rakotonirina questions the objectivity of DNA testing as a basis for ethnic belonging, drawing on her own Malagasy heritage to juxtapose top-down categorisations with relational modes of being.

Victoria Allen Stainsby addresses the persistence of colonial "ghosts" incarnated in decades-long appeals for justice unfolding in the UK Supreme Court, while Muhammad Nabil delivers a pragmatic analysis of Sino-Russian veto power in the UN, highlighting differing approaches to global intervention along lines of liberal democracy and regional/national alliances. Jessie Rayner's article explores how politically right-leaning British broadsheets, specifically *The Times*, frame transgender identities through the case of teenager Brianna Ghey's murder which Yi Zheng looks at *Chinese Characteristics* and how their interpretation represents an evolving, entangled canvas of experiences and relations, offering a complex view of East-West and intra-East Asian dynamics. Finally, Beatriz Freitas critiques the commodification of gender and sexuality in Brazil, advocating for a more holistic approach to social liberation.

This issue offers a rich exploration of entangled worlds, pushing the boundaries of our understanding of these dynamic concepts.

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