

Thomas Alberts,<sup>1</sup> Chairperson, Steering Committee 2008/9

## REGIONAL STUDIES AND CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON REGIONS: THE FIRST SOAS RESEARCH STUDENTS' SOCIETY CONFERENCE

The Research Students' Society conference in May 2009 was the first inter-faculty conference of research students at SOAS, organised by research students for research students. The theme 'regions' was deliberately broad to be as inclusive as possible, and over two days we learned about borders and frontiers, identities and making regions, religions and representing regions, migration and traffic between regions, Occidentalism and Orientalism, and the regional character of human rights. It is not my intention to synthesise a single statement from this range, suffice to draw attention to the enormous breadth of interests and methodologies. By way of introducing this volume, I would like to give some background to the conference and what it means for the future.

A research students' conference was suggested at the 2008/9 meeting of the RSS. Several students volunteered and following several exploratory meetings, a steering committee was formed comprising Thomas Alberts, Zayra Badillo, Joanna Hoare, Sophia Hoffmann and Seraphin Kamdem. The broad goal was to organise a forum for scholarly exchange where we could share our research and receive input and feedback from our peers. So began the work of planning the conference. This required much time and effort and the members of the steering committee deserve special commendation for giving of both, even as upgrades loomed. Without their commitment, this event would not have taken place, let alone been a success. Also vital to the conference's success was the support of the Learning and Teaching Unit (LTU), particularly Desmond Thomas, whose calm pragmatism was reassuring and sustained enthusiasm helped get us through some difficult moments. More generally, institutional support was critical to the event's success, and we thank Prof. Stephen

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Chan for his keynote address and the faculty and teaching staff who attended over the two days. Finally and most importantly, thanks to the RSS collective and the students who attended, for listening to and engaging with the panellists and each other.

The conference's achievements can be measured in several ways, for example that 18 papers were delivered over the conference's two days, or that it was the first school-wide research students conference in the school's 92 years. More significant, however, is the precedent. The goal was to establish the RSS conference as an annual event of the SOAS calendar and this goal has been realised in March 2010 with the 2<sup>nd</sup> RSS Conference. We look forward to reading those papers here soon. The conference is becoming an annual event and the RSS can be proud of their achievement.