TOWARD A ‘MESOPOTAMIAN TURN’:
DISCIPLINARITY AND THE STUDY OF THE
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS OF THE MIDDLE EAST

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The question of disciplinarity in the study of the international relations of the Middle East, in the past, present and future, is the subject of this article, which begins with the observation that contrary to intuitive expectations, the borderland between ‘the River of International Relations (IR)’ and ‘the River of Middle Eastern Studies (MES)’ has in the past been far from an ‘Academic Mesopotamia’. This lack of inter-disciplinary exchange can be attributed to differences as well as similarities between the two academic fields. While belonging to different camps within the Area Studies Controversy has left them with very different if not downright incommensurable approaches and understandings of international relations in the Middle East, both have also been marked by a similar inward-looking ghetto mentality fostering isolation and a lack of academic dialogue. Developments within IR and MES since the 1990s suggest, however, that both fields are experiencing a simultaneous opening which is also expressed in a narrowing of the gap which has divided them in the Area Studies Controversy. This raises the possibility that a ‘joint irrigation’ can turn the borderland between these two academic streams into a prosperous and fertile Academic Mesopotamia.

Introduction

Long before the rise and fall of Saddam Hussein, the land area occupied by the modern state of Iraq was known as Mesopotamia, ‘the country between the two rivers’. The prosperity of this empire, often acclaimed as the ‘cradle of civilisation’, has been attributed to its position between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates, whose waters by means of an advanced irrigation system were used in transforming the area into fertile arable land. This article is not literally about ancient Mesopotamia, however. It deals with the issue of disciplinarity and the past, present and coming status of the study of international relations in the Middle East. In a metaphorical sense, this field of study is also situated between two (academic) streams, namely the ‘River of International Relations’ (IR) and the ‘River of Middle East Studies’ (MES). It is therefore tempting to wonder if this ‘Academic
Mesopotamia’ has been able to take advantage of its position in a similar way, turning the study of the international relations of Middle East into a prosperous area fertilised by both IR and MES.

At an intuitive level, it would be natural to expect a long history of intense and fertile cross-disciplinary exchange between IR and MES. This not only stems from arguments like Leonard Binder’s (1958) claim that any thorough understanding of the international relations of the Middle East required cross-fertilisation between IR scholars and area specialists. Korany goes further to argue that the Middle East should be regarded as ‘an intellectual laboratory offering benefits for both area specialists concerned with micro-level description and understanding, and for political science/international relations generalists interested in empirically based model-building’.5 Similarly, Gause (1998) suggests that the Middle East almost constitutes a kind of laboratory for the study of alliances and alignments, because of regional multipolarity, frequently shifting alliances and intense security conflicts. The analysis of the Middle East has much to offer with respect to some of the post-Cold War concerns of IR, such as supra- and sub-national challenges to the state system, the role of cultural diversity and the politics of ethnic and religious identity. While the ‘ship of culture and identity’ (Lapid and Kratochwil, 1996: 3) only recently entered the port of IR, its cargo has for long been traded in the ‘MES bazaar’, and the analysis of Middle Eastern politics therefore provides, as Barnett and Telhami observe, ‘an important reservoir for theorizing and for contributing to broader debates in international relations’ (Telhami and Barnett 2002: 22).

This being said, the borderland between ‘the River of IR’ and the ‘River of MES’ can hardly be depicted as some sort of arable land, let alone a prosperous Academic Mesopotamia. Indeed, over the years a steady stream of publications on the international relations of the Middle East has appeared, however, it has tended to focus far more on US foreign policy towards the Middle East or regional states with global strategic significance than on less strategically important states or on intra-regional relations (Brand 1999: 134ff.). These studies have often been very policy-oriented and descriptive in nature as well (Korany 1991). Anderson thus describes ‘the virtual absence of theoretically informed analysis of the myriad conflicts among the states of the region’ (1990: 74) as one of the most surprising lacunae in the American Political Science’s study of the Middle East, and Brand similarly calls attention to how it has traditionally been rather unusual for IR scholars to seek a career by applying or testing IR theory to areas as the Middle East (1999: 135). Even within the Constructivist strands of IR, only few5 have focused on the Middle East for theory building despite
wide recognition of the importance of identity and norms in Arab politics (Lynch 1999: 33).

In this ‘theoretical desert’ (Beck 2002: 305), the few theoretically-informed oases that actually do exist (such as Walt’s (1987) seminal study on alliance-making or Hansen’s (2001) analysis of the Middle East in a unipolar world order) are seldom the result of research that draws upon and integrates insights from IR as well as MES. Studies using the Middle East to test general IR theories have only had limited impact within MES, and IR scholars have, in turn, as Gause (1999) observes, largely ignored seminal studies by regional specialists such as Matar and Hilal’s (1983) work in Arabic on inter-Arab politics, or Brown’s (1984) study of the so-called Eastern Question system. Despite the latter’s examination of the impact of the extreme degree of extra-regional great-power intervention in the Middle East, this input remains absent in Hansen’s (2001) examination of how global distributions of power affect regional outcomes. Analogously, theoretically driven studies of international relations in the Middle East have tended to ignore or downplay regional specialists’ insights on the importance of Arabist norms and collective identities, whereas studies within MES on Arabism and its competitors have, as Lynch (1999: 34) remarks, been analysed without the explicit use of theory, and as a consequence with little impact on wider debates within IR.

To be fair, exceptions do of course exist. Just as the Middle East landscape is much more diversified than what the prevalent desert-metaphor suggests, analyses of the international relations of the Middle East drawing on insights from IR as well as MES have existed for some time (e.g. Binder 1958; Korany and Dessouki 1991; Korany, Noble and Brynen 1993; Ismael 1986). However, the borderland between the ‘River of IR’ and the ‘River of MES’ has enjoyed far less ‘joint irrigation’ than what one would expect, and it can hardly be regarded as fertile arable land.

This poses a number of questions which I will examine in three main sections. The first section discusses why IR and MES have invested so little in finding out about each other’s insights in the past. This is attributed not only to differences between these two fields of study, but also to similarities in their disciplinary logic(s). While belonging to different camps within the Area Studies Controversy may have left them with very different, if not downright incommensurable, approaches and understandings of the international relations of the Middle East, both have also been marked by a similar inward-looking mentality which fosters isolation and lack of academic dialogue. In the subsequent section, the present state of affairs is examined as a result. It is argued that the traditionally very universalistic IR discipline
is experiencing a kind of particularisation, whereas the more particularistic MES is becoming more ‘universalistically’ inclined. These two disciplinary developments constitute a kind of opening of two traditionally very inward-looking academic fields. The final section, which turns to the coming state of affairs, asks if such a narrowing of the traditional gap between IR and MES’ approaches to, and understandings of, the international relations of the Middle East is going to bring about what one might call a ‘Mesopotamian turn’ which would not only illuminate our understanding of the region but also contribute to wider theoretical debates in IR. A growing awareness in the recent literature of the need for and utility of greater cross-fertilisation between IR and MES provides on the one hand some support to such an optimistic prognosis. At the same time, it is also clear that such an intellectual irrigation can take place in various ways. The article therefore concludes by suggesting that in order to get further along the road towards a real and lasting Mesopotamian turn, it is not sufficient to make general calls for combining insights from IR and MES: the (de)merits of the various ‘irrigation-strategies’ must also be evaluated.

Section 1: The Area Studies Controversy

In a critical assessment of the state of affairs of MES, Binder once asked:

“If, in Husserl’s terms, meaning depends essentially on subjective intentionality, then the study of another culture is always achieved in terms of our own subjectivity. If our goal is to understand the subjective intentionalities of the other culture, is that understanding possible only in the terms of that other culture, or is there a kind of universal, objective intentionality of scholarly knowledge that transcends particular cultures and that can guide scholars toward synthesizing observational experiences into a statement or a cultural reality acceptable to alien and native alike?” (1976: 10)

This question does not only concern the study of the Middle East. It also refers more widely to the fundamental epistemological issues concerning how to approach and represent Otherness and whether it is possible to observe social phenomena with universal concepts and models. These questions go to the heart of the social sciences and can accordingly be discerned in a number of classic debates of social thought. One of these is what Tessler (1999) has termed ‘the Area Studies Controversy’ and refers to a basic tension between regional specialists and more ‘discipline-oriented’ social scientists about what should constitute the approaches by which scholars construct knowledge about world regions (Tessler 1999: vii).
Among the so-called ‘Disciplines’, such as Political Science, Economics and Sociology, the prevalent approach to this issue has been based on the assumption that:

‘[. . .] to know one society is to know what is essential to all: the rest is merely translation [. . .] the task is to understand man or human nature, and that is essentially the same everywhere’ (Binder 1976: 14).

Accordingly, much less attention has been paid to the distinctive and the unique than to commonalities and regularities (as these are assumed to enable the social scientist to unveil those social laws). Social scientists, Bates argues, should not subscribe to the ‘presumption that political regularities are area-bound’ but seek to ‘identify lawful regularities, which by implication, must not be context bound [. . .] strive to develop general theories and to identify, and test, hypotheses derived from them’ (1997: 166).

This very nomothetic position has met strong criticism from various parts of the Area Studies paradigm. The Disciplines, as a consequence of their strong emphasis on the development of general theoretical insights, universally applicable theories and law-like generalisations, become blind to the potential importance of particularities of the various regions just as they, the criticism goes, have befallen to a form of ethnocentrism (where developments in other parts of the world are perceived and evaluated through an Eurocentric prism that has been framed as universal). As a consequence, the Disciplines have been charged:

‘with faddishness and oversimplifications, with engaging in sterile debates about conceptual and theoretical frameworks, and with constructing highly abstract models that provide little real insight into the complex behaviour patterns’ (Tessler 1999: viii).

This critique can partly be seen as a reflection of the very raison d’être of Area Studies. The justification of geographically compartmentalised studies specialising in the different regions are, as Binder explains, to a large extent based on a belief that:

‘what we know about ourselves is an inadequate basis for understanding others. In a sense, area study casts doubt on the idea of a universal history, the whole of which has some single meaning, or which, taken in its entirety, lends itself to a single definition of man [sic]. At the very least area study argues that there are very significant differences among peoples and cultures, as well as among historical periods, and that for some people at some times the differences are far more important than the similarities’ (1976: 11).
The unique and more idiosyncratic dimensions of a region are accordingly assigned much more attention, and expertise in regional cultures, histories and languages are considered necessary for any thorough understanding of social and political phenomena. For instance, Hall, in his plea for the institutionalisation of Area Studies back in 1948, makes reference to John Stuart Mill’s remark that ‘without knowing the language of a people, we never really know their thoughts’ (Rafael 1994: 93). Thus, if scholars of the Disciplines strive at mastering the literature of a Discipline, serious Area Studies scholarship can in turn be said to be based on the literature on a region combined with field research and the mastery of local languages (Bates 1997: 166). Nevertheless, while this more ideographic and particularistic position may save Area Studies from the kind of charges that the more universalistic Disciplines usually meet, it makes them in turn vulnerable to another sort of criticism. Area Studies are accused of lacking conceptual sophistication and methodological rigour, of favouring description over explanation, of having no interest in parsimony and generalisations (Tessler 1999: viii), and of suffering from a ‘regional narcissism’ (Halliday 1995b: 12) that leaves them almost blinded by regional particularities.

**IR: The Middle East as a Region like any other**

At first sight, it may be difficult to see any common thread within IR relating the Area Studies Controversy to the way the Middle East is approached. Among analyses subscribing to the same major IR tradition or ‘paradigm’, divisions exist depending on whether the Middle East is regarded simply as a loose geographic designation for a group of states buffeted by the big powers, or as a discrete political unit in international affairs (Ismael 1986: 4). Even though Hansen (2001) and Walt (1987), for instance, are informed by the same basic (Neo-)Realist assumptions, their subscription to different regional perceptions leaves them with very different understandings of whether the basic dynamics of the international relations of the Middle East can be derived from a larger international system, or if they rather must be attributed to intra-regional conditions.

In spite of this seeming plurality of understandings of the Middle East, at closer inspection it becomes clear that the different approaches of (mainstream) IR are united on a fundamental level in the assumption that the international relations of the Middle East basically work in accordance with the same kind of logic as international relations elsewhere (Valbjørn 2004b). Regardless of whether regional international relations are attributed to changes in the global polarity (e.g. Hansen 2001),
immanent contradiction of a hierarchical capitalist world-system (e.g. Amin 1991; Mansour 1996), regional multipolarity (Walt 1987), oil-induced interdependencies, or tensions within a regional economic hierarchy (Alnasrawi 1991), the Middle East is perceived as a region like any other and it is accordingly assumed that it is possible to base analyses of regional politics primarily on general IR theory rather than literature specific to the Middle East.

Such an approach which, to quote Hansen, does ‘regard the Middle East as neither a complex object, nor a comparatively specific one’ (2001: 11) has met a number of charges resembling those associated with the ‘discipline-oriented’ position within the Area Studies Controversy. The perception of the Middle East as a region like any other is, according to the critics only attainable through the neglect of a number of features of this region. On the international level of analysis, Brown for instance criticises IR for paying more attention to the Middle East’s position as ‘the most penetrated regional system in the world’ (1984: 4) than to the more specific impact this exceptional magnitude of influence and intervention from the outside has left on the region. Rather than regarding the international relations of the region as nothing more than a ‘Great Power Puppeteer and Regional Puppets’ game (Brown 1984: 198), Brown shows how Middle Eastern states have defied complete subordination and sometimes even managed to ‘wag the dog’ in what he sees as a unique game with rules of its own played by great powers and the regional states that succeeded the Ottoman Empire.

On a regional level of analysis, IR has moreover been charged with neglecting how the (Arab part of the) region, ‘more than most other regions’, possesses a strong public sphere that transcends state borders (Lynch 1999: 5) and how this has turned it into ‘a vast sound chamber in which information, ideas, and opinions have resonated with little regard for state frontiers’ (Noble 1991: 47). Additionally, this has left the organising principles of the regional system exceptionally contested. Sub-national challenges in the form of calls by minorities for secession compound the anarchical state system in the Middle East, which has also been confronted by supra-national movements promoting Pan-Arabist or Islamist visions. As Barnett argues, the state-sovereignty institution has thus:

‘failed to produce the same stabilizing outcomes in the Middle East as in Africa because pan-Arabism assigned to the Arab state a contradictory role and associated behavioral expectations’ (1993: 290; see also Gause 1999: 27; Telhami and Barnett 2002: 9).
Finally, when it comes to regional actors, critics have also taken exception to the prevalent view within large parts of IR that states are (becoming) ‘like units’. The criticism comes not only from those strands which dismiss the very notion of Middle Eastern states altogether, arguing that these are nothing but ‘tribes with flags’ and that inter-‘state’ conflicts in the Middle East should be analysed as clashes between non-territorially bound dynasties (e.g. Hashemite vs. Sa’ud), between religious entities (Sunni vs. Shi’a; or Muslim vs. Non-muslim) or ethnic groups (Salamé 1994; see also Vatikiotis 1987; Kedourie 1987: 1). Zubaida for instance acknowledges that Middle Eastern states are not only real and important but also modern in terms of organisation, administration and rule (1993: 145), but maintains at the same time that this does not imply that they should be regarded as identical to modern Western states or that their patterns of state formation and consolidation will be alike. Even though the European state model was the ‘compulsory’ model at independence in the Middle East (Zubaida 1993: 121), the conditions for state-building were seen as qualitatively different for Middle Eastern ‘late-comers’ (Lustick 1997). State-building took place in a context of intervening external great powers, but also at a time when the ‘states made war—war made states’ dialectic, supposedly crucial for European state-building (Tilly 1992), was in effect neutralised, or at least qualified. In addition to these global constraints, which are also present in other post-colonial settings (e.g. Herbst 2003; Sørensen 2003), the above mentioned prevalence of strong transnational ideologies, such as Arab nationalism, has made the Arab states’ ‘search for legitimacy’ (Hudson 1977) exceptionally burdensome; not at least for the more or less ‘artificial’ states in the Mashreq, where an Arab identity at times has been much more emotionally compelling to large parts of the population than identification with their ‘own’ state (Hinnebusch 2003: 59).

All in all, by neglecting such alleged exceptionalities associated with the Middle East, IR has, according to critics, become blind to a number of traits that set the Middle East apart from IR’s general expectations. The intense inter-Arab rivalry for instance differs in various ways from that typical of a conventional state system. The objective is not chiefly territory, but the ability to set the normative order, the means are not military power, but ideological appeal, and the theatre of struggle is not restricted to the regional arena but also includes the domestic sphere. Thus, ambitious states have greater potential than elsewhere to meddle in each other’s domestic affairs and use trans-state appeals as instruments of foreign policy, whereas normative constraints of the ‘Arab international society’ (and fear of regional and domestic de-legitimisation) prevent small and weak Arab monarchies
from balancing powerful and threatening radical Arab republics through alignments with Israel, as a narrow raison d’état logic would suggest (Hinnebusch 2003: 64; Hudson 1999: 25).

**MES: the Middle East as a Region like no other**

Area-specialists with expertise in regional languages, cultures, and histories have not had much difficulty avoiding the criticism levelled at IR about being blind to regional particularities. In addition to a long line of studies revolving around some of those very issues, IR scholars have been accused of neglecting—the role of transnational ideologies such as Arab nationalism (e.g. Kerr 1965; Matar and Disuqi 1983) Islamism (e.g. Piscatori 1986; Dawisha 1983; Lewis 1965; 1974; Khadduri 1965), as well as the precarious nature and various forms of the State in the Middle East (Kedourie 1987)—a number of studies are explicitly based on the claim that the international relations of the Middle East can only be properly understood by taking an allegedly unique regional political culture into account, be it an ‘Ottoman diplomatic culture’ (Brown 1984), an ‘Arab culture’ (Matar and Disuqi 1983; Patai 2002; Salamé 1994), a ‘neopatrimonial culture’ (Bill and Springborg 1994) or an ‘Islamic culture’. Lewis, for instance, opens a discussion of the Middle East in international affairs by stressing that the very idea of foreign policy is a European concept “alien and new in the world of Islam”” (1965: 115). Similarly, Kedourie claims that:

> the very notion of a state is quite difficult to fit into the political thought that is traditional to the Middle East, namely, Muslim political thought’ (1987: 1; see also Vatikiotis 1987).

This much more particularistic approach to regional international relations has however also given rise to some of the classic charges often levelled at area specialists in the Area Studies Controversy. In an evaluation of the literature on alliance-making in the Middle East, Brand complains that while the few works on this topic by Middle East specialists contain solid empirical material, they are very descriptive in nature and offer little conceptual guidance (1999: 14). The same applies to the question of identity in Middle Eastern foreign policy-making, where Telhami and Barnett, after having called attention to how ‘scholars of the Middle East have produced a trove of good descriptive studies of how identity politics affects regional politic’, add that these studies ‘would benefit from sharper concepts, greater awareness of how identity can affect foreign-policy outcomes and more analytical
comparisons of hypotheses’ (Telhami and Barnett 2002: 6; see also Lynch 1999: 34). As Gause (1998) observes, a curious result of the limited awareness of, and interest in, the more general theoretical debates within IR is that regional specialists like Kerr (1965) and Seale (1986) have been largely ignored by those working outside MES, although their ‘not self-consciously Neo-classical Realism’ should also be of interest to the broader IR scholarship, as it can be construed as an attempt to straddle the Neo-realist/Constructivist divide.

Besides being charged with favouring description at the expense of explanation, conceptual sophistication and an awareness of broader theoretical debates, Middle East specialists have also been confronted with the classic accusations of suffering from ‘regional narcissism’. They are so focused, the critique goes, on what appears as unique and exceptional to the Middle East that they end up blinded by these regional idiosyncrasies, and as a consequence risk missing the obvious and more general explanation of a phenomenon. When Brown (1984) attributes the frequently shifting alliances in the Middle East and the regional ‘homeostasis’ to a unique set of rules originating from a ‘Ottoman diplomatic culture’, he does, Gause argues, miss how what appears as unique, culturally determined outcomes can be explained more parsimoniously as the expected workings of an anarchical system characterised by multipolarity. Brown also overlooks how this phenomenon is by no means restricted to the Middle East but in many ways resembles the frequently shifting alliances in the classic period of European balance of power diplomacy (1999: 24).

**Divided by Commonalities – IR as an Area Study**

By situating MES and IR within the Area Studies Controversy, the reasons why these two fields traditionally have not had much time for each other become less puzzling. MES and IR belong to different ‘camps’ in the Area Studies Controversy and this has left them with divergent views on what should constitute knowledge about world regions, and different approaches to, and understandings of, international relations in the Middle East. To paraphrase Bill, while area specialists have tended to content themselves with gathering different grains of sand in the Middle East desert, the region has for IR theorists mostly appeared as large dry desert blurs (1996: 506). But, while MES and IR almost appear as each other’s opposites, they are in some ways also quite similar, and these commonalities may paradoxically also throw light on the lack of substantial ‘joint irrigation’ by the ‘River of MES’ and ‘the River of IR’.
As discussed in the previous section, one of the standard charges against MES has been that Middle East specialists suffer from a sort of regional narcissism. Besides making them almost blinded by what appears as unique and exceptional to the Middle East, this has also led to the field’s self-exclusion from broader theoretical debates, just as it has produced what Khalidi (1995; 2003) labels as a ‘ghetto mentality’ where MES is left out of touch with developments within the general Disciplines as well as other Area Studies. At first sight, such a mentality seems to be something reserved to various subfields of Area Studies. If different regions are perceived as distinct spheres with dynamics of their own, and if emphasis is more on field studies in, and literature on, a region rather than the literature on a discipline, or on developments in other regions, it is not difficult to understand why Area Studies constitute a:

‘balkanized set of fields, each one in some measure separated from the others, and all of them suffering from a greater or lesser degree of isolation from much of what is going on in the broader realm of the social sciences and the humanities’ (Khalidi 2003: 176).

The Disciplines, by contrast, take much more interest in more general political, economic or social phenomena *across time and space*, and they can therefore hardly be charged with this kind of regional narcissism. Nonetheless, on closer inspection a similar insularity also seems to mark the Disciplines. As Mitchell (2003a; 2003b) suggests, they can then be regarded as area studies in their own right. While the various Disciplines of the Social Sciences in earlier decades were distinguished by the different kinds of social questions they addressed (partly as an expression of a professionalisation where claims to scientific authority were built upon exclusive control of new theoretical objects of knowledge), the social sciences invented objects that marked the exclusive territory of each Discipline and defined boundaries with others in the mid-20th Century (Mitchell 2003b: 6; see also Wallerstein et al. 1996). Economics invented the term ‘the economy’, Political Science came up with ‘the political system’ and Sociology had the ‘social system’ as the object of its knowledge. By this process, the social sciences themselves became a kind of area study nebula. While the ‘traditional’ form of Area Studies was constructing the Middle East and other regions as distinct geographical objects of knowledge, the Disciplines in turn attempted to define and delimit themselves by asserting academic sovereignty over a particular area of social reality. Different academic fields were thus legitimising their existence through claims on the existence of distinct ‘areas’ (be it different geographical areas or areas of social reality) with a logic of their
own, demanding a particular sort of scholarship. For the Disciplines, this gave rise to a process not dissimilar to the ghetto mentality of Area Studies: they too developed in increasing isolation from each other and became prey to overspecialisation which left them in danger of cutting themselves off from one another and from the real world (Rafael 1994: 94).

Mitchell’s analysis of the Social Sciences as area studies does not involve IR, but his argument seems also to apply to this branch of the Social Sciences. This becomes clear through more critical examinations of IR and its basic assumptions. In his analysis of how the character and limits of political communities have been discussed within mainstream IR, Walker (1993; see also Ashley 1987; Wight 1966) argues that IR is constituted on an ‘inside/outside’ dichotomy distinguishing two distinct realms or areas. The area inside political communities constitutes the ‘national’ realm, where progress, justice and politics as ‘striving for the good life’ are perceived as attainable. Outside political communities, one finds the ‘international’ realm, where an anarchical quasi-state of nature marked by perpetual insecurity leaves no room for principled choice. ‘One has to do what one has to do’ in order to survive and as a consequence only ‘relations’ are possible; hence the term ‘international relations’ rather than ‘international politics’. By this, the ‘international’ is constituted as a separate and distinct area with dynamics of its own, dynamics which can only be accounted for by reference to qualities in this realm. Herein lies the raison d’être of IR as an independent academic discipline since explanations of international phenomena must from this perspective be based on a distinct theory of survival rather than theory of the good life, as the case is inside political communities (Wight 1966).

While IR and MES are very dissimilar in some respects, when it comes to their ‘academic identity’, some basic similarities are also visible. Both have traditionally rested on the notion that their respective objects of knowledge, the ‘Middle East’ and ‘the international’, constitute a distinct sphere which necessitates a separate academic field concerned with studying the assumed distinctive logic of that particular area. As a consequence, the international relations of the Middle East have been attributed to characteristics of the Middle East, which is perceived as a region like no other, or they have been related to the logic of the international system, which the Middle East is part of, but only as ‘just another’ region. Most importantly, these similarities are fostering isolation rather than academic dialogue, and as such, they can paradoxically be seen as a key reason why so little effort has traditionally been put into collaborative irrigation of the rather barren land of the international relations of the Middle East.
Section 2: The Crisis of Area Studies – and the Social Sciences

If not only differences but also similarities, are keeping IR and MES isolated from each other, a pure ‘desert mirage’ may appear as the proper metaphor for the idea that the two ‘academic streams’ could transform their borderland into a prosperous and fertile Academic Mesopotamia. Before turning to this pessimistic conclusion, it is however worthwhile paying attention to a number of developments that both fields have experienced since the end of the Cold War, as these might be conducive for a process where IR and MES are breaking out of their traditional isolationism.

The End of the Cold War, of History – and of Area Studies?

Although the academic and specialised study of the ‘Orient’ in its Orientalist incarnation was of European origin and invented during the last part of the 18th Century (Rodinson 1974; 1987), contemporary MES is an American child of the Cold War. Even though the Area Studies program might already have been on its way (Mitchell 2003b), its development was closely connected to US engagement in World War II and the subsequent rising global rivalry between the superpowers. Contrary to European colonial powers, which had already developed considerable scholarly expertise in various areas of the world, there was at that time almost no American body of expertise on world regions (Khalidi 2003: 177). These shortcomings were supposed to be offset by the proliferation of area studies centers producing regional specialists with knowledge on those foreign regions that became of increasing strategic importance with the elevation of the United States to global power status.

Bearing this genesis in mind, it is hardly surprising that the collapse of bi-polarity also affected Area Studies. The 1990s were marked by significant debates on whether the end of the Cold War also meant the end of Area Studies. This anxiety was further exacerbated by another ‘end’ debate. The euphoric claim that the end of the Cold War also marked the ‘End of History’ (Fukuyama 1989) condensed the idea that globalisation more or less meant homogenisation, so that all would ‘be speaking English and eating Big Macs soon, if they are not doing so already’, as Khalidi characterises the spirit of that time (2003: 183). In this brave new post-Historical globalised world, the prevalent belief was that Area Studies had lost its purpose (Anderson 2003: 97) since cross-regional studies on democratisation, liberalisation and globalisation now seemed of much greater relevance than expertise in languages, cultures and histories of individual regions. As a result, during
the 1990s some of the large American foundations withdrew their support to Area Studies just as the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) and the American Council of Learned Societies (ACLS) dissolved their joint area studies committees (Mirschpassi, Basu and Weaver 2003a: 2) on the grounds that Social Science now called ‘for less attention to in-depth studies of regional particularisms and more attention to themes of global relevance’ (Tessler 1999: x). In this new and much less accommodating atmosphere, it was generally believed that Area Studies could only hope to survive by amalgamating into their Disciplinary partners thereby accepting their junior position vis-à-vis academic progress (Mitchell 2003b: 16).

This ‘crisis of Area Studies’ also affected MES (though it was by no means the sole victim of this type of argument⁹). The field had already been on the defensive since Said’s scathing critique of the profound Orientalism of MES (1978). Yet, in his Presidential Address at the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) convention in 1994, Khalidi went further and asked: ‘Is there a future for Middle East Studies?’ He did not only give the audience to understand that MES was in ‘serious trouble’ as a consequence of its ghetto mentality (1995: 1f.). Very much in line with Green’s (1994: 517) call on MES to put the ‘conceptual horse’ in front of the ‘area cart’, Khalidi also answered the question by suggesting that, if MES had any future, it ‘lies in being part of departments of comparative literature, political science or whatever, and not in remaining in a Middle East Ghetto [we must] learn to speak the languages of our disciplines […] we should be part of the internal discourse within the disciplines whereby these new ideas are resisted or accepted, instead of standing outside in splendid isolation’ (1995: 5).

**The ‘Cultural Turn’ within IR**

The notion of crisis at the end of the 20th Century has usually been reserved for Area Studies whose problems, area specialists often were told, could only be solved through their absorption into the Disciplines. Herein lies a sort of irony, Mitchell notes. Those very transnational processes, identities and forces of globalisation that allegedly had made the notion of self-enclosed regions as legitimate fields of knowledge unattainable, did at the same time undermine the confidence of the post-war period that economic, social and political systems could each be object of a separate Social Science. As a response to this, the Disciplines had slowly abandoned the attempt to define themselves by laying claim to academic sovereignty over a particular area of social reality 2003b: (Mitchell 2003b: 17). Thus, the so-called
‘crisis of Area Studies’ is in Mitchell’s opinion ‘better understood as a crisis in the ability of both kinds of objects to delimit and legitimate a field of scholarship’ (2003a: 156). This ‘crisis of the social sciences’ (2003b: 16) did also concern the Disciplines’ claim to represent the universal. Post-Cold War triumphalism (Anderson 2003: 96) was quickly replaced by a growing awareness that the end of the Cold War hardly meant the end of History, just as globalisation did not necessarily imply homogenisation since societies appropriated modernity differently. Because of this, there might be an even greater need for a deeper study of specific geographies, histories and languages in order to make the fluid concept of globalisation more precise and meaningful. Mirsepassi et al. argue that:

‘globalization in itself by no means calls for the abandonment of area studies. Rather, it has brought to the fore cultural differences that can be understood only through rigorous place-based knowledge’ (2003a: 13).

While these doubts in self-enclosed Disciplines had already been on their way before September 11, 2001, they were further reinforced by the terrorist attacks, giving rise to a lot of soul-searching in, among other places the Social Sciences. In one of the journals published by the American Political Science Association (APSA), Diamond (2002), one of its ‘grand old men’, was calling for a re-evaluation of Political Science to deal with the challenge of comprehending the causes of ‘9/11’ and in engaging in the search for responses and solutions. One of the reasons why political scientists were not better prepared to understand the terrorist attacks, was, Diamond argued, that Political Science for decades had been too focused on ‘rational choice, game theory and related mathematical and formal approaches to the study of politics’ (2002: 2), whereas Area Studies’ interest in ‘deep empirical knowledge’ of specific countries and regions had been delegitimised as non-scientific or ‘soft’ science without value for ‘real’ political scientists. While these ‘gaping holes in the capacity to understand countries and peoples whose politics, passions, grievances and suffering are intimately bound up with our own’, there was an urgent need, Diamond argued, for a re legitimisation of insights of Area Studies and more generally encouragement for more ‘pluralism in the types of knowledge, tools, and theoretical approaches that are valued’ (2002: 2).

This trend is also present within IR, where prophesies following the end of the Cold War on the ‘End of History’ (Fukuyama 1989) were replaced later on by predictions on the ‘The coming Anarchy’ (Kaplan 1994) or an emerging ‘Clash of Civilizations’ (Huntington 1993). The unexpected collapse of the bipolar world order and the subsequent new (attention to) ethnic,
religious and cultural conflicts exacerbated the critique of IR’s universalistic self-conception, which since the late 1980s had been addressed from the margin of IR by post-positivist ‘dissidents’ (Ashley & Walker 1990) (Ashley and Walker 1990). Contrary to the prevalent assumption, IR was, the critics argued, neither universal nor culture blank but ethnocentric and culture blind—blind to the diversity of international relations, and blind to its own culturally-specific perspective as an ‘American Social Science’, as Hoffmann (1977) once stated.13 Besides giving rise to more attention to the diversity of international relations, this critique also contributed to an opening of IR to various sorts of inspiration from other parts of the Social Sciences and the humanities. During the last decade this has been expressed in developments within IR such as the so-called ‘cultural turn’ (e.g. Lapid and Kratochwil 1996; Berdal-Jacquin and et. al. 1998), a growing interest in other previously neglected issues such as the role of identity, religion, and ethnicity in world politics (Thomas 1995; Petito and Hatzopoulos 2003), and the re-evaluation of various core IR concepts. The ‘state’ (e.g. Sørensen 2001), ‘anarchy’, (e.g. Wendt 1992) and ‘sovereignty’ (e.g. Bartelson 1995) have all become objects of critical enquiry rather than fixed assumptions. This has been coupled with attempts to import theoretical approaches from outside IR, including Gender Studies (e.g. Tickner 1992), Post-Structuralism/Modernism (e.g. Ashley and Walker 1990; Der Derian and Shapiro 1989), Post-Colonialism (e.g. Darby and Paolini 1994), Social-Constructivism (e.g. Wendt 1992) and Historical Sociology (e.g. Hobden and Hobson 2002). Some have even suggested that the study of international relations should be transformed into ‘Anti-Disciplinary Global Studies’ (Rosow 2003) just as there have been calls on IR to ‘forget IR theory’ in favour of examinations of how poetry, popular movies, music and art can contribute new insights to the understanding of international relations (Bleiker 2001b; see also Bleiker 2001a; Weldes 2003).

Section 3: The Irrigation of the Middle East Borderland

These developments, whereby IR has become more attentive to the diversity of international relations, and MES has become more comparative and theoretically inclined, are of interest to the present discussion. The particularisation of the traditionally very universalistic IR and universalisation of the traditionally very particularistic MES are, thus, not only indicating a simultaneous ‘opening’ of two traditionally very inward-looking fields, but also a narrowing of the gap which has divided them within the Area Studies Controversy. In this light, the idea that a ‘joint irrigation’ can turn
the borderland between these two ‘academic streams’ into a prosperous and fertile Academic Mesopotamia no longer appears as nothing but a ‘desert mirage’.

The probability that such a Mesopotamian turn in the study of the international relations of the Middle East might occur have improved, but this does not imply that this shift is inevitable. It may be possible to find indications of this trend in some of the more recent literature on international relations and foreign policy in the Middle East. What is the explicitly stated purpose of studies like these? Do they deliberately relate to the present discussions on IR and MES’ tradition of mutual exclusion? Do they draw on insights from seminal works from IR as well as MES? And if they aim at bringing IR and MES closer together how is this supposed to take place? It is far beyond the scope of this article to attempt providing thorough answers to these questions. Yet, even a cursory examination offers at least two tentative findings of relevance for the future course of the current discussion.

First of all, it actually seems to be possible to find some support for the idea that there is a growing awareness of the need for, and usefulness of, more cross-disciplinary exchange between IR and MES. While Gause (e.g. 1999) may have been the most vocal advocate of such a potential development in recent years, he is by no means alone. As part of an examination of ‘Middle Eastern Alliances’ (1999; see also 2001; 1994), Brand, as a result of her dissatisfaction with the existing literature within IR and MES, calls attention to the

‘need for those who do labor in the vineyards of intensive field research to spend time with the works of the more disciplinarily powerful in order to better explain what happens in our region, but also, ideally, to help enrich international relations theory’ (Brand 1999: 145).

In his study on Dialogues in Arab Politics (1998), Barnett is explicit on his aims at ‘reacquaint[ing] international relations theory and the study of the Middle East’ (1998: 24), and this ambition, which is reiterated in his and Telhami’s examination of Identity and Foreign Policy in the Middle East (2002), is also visible in Hinnebusch’s comprehensive examination of The International Politics of the Middle East (2003; see also Hinnebusch and Ehteshami 1997; 2002) where IR theory, various seminal studies from MES and a wealth of empirical data and case studies on the region are combined. Though Buzan and Waever do not restrict themselves to the Middle East, they examine Regions and Powers (2003) through a ‘regional security complex theory’ which is described as ‘a matrix for area studies’
It is supposed to bridge the gap between IR generalists so ‘obsessed with the global level’ that the regional level has ‘been neither adequately conceptualised nor sufficiently taken into account as a distinct element in the seamless web of global politics’ (2003: 468), and area specialists who ‘tend to emphasise the uniqueness of their region’ (2003: 468) but ‘without any coherent theoretical framework’ (2003: 51). This line of thought is also present in Lynch’s study of *The International Politics of Jordan’s Identity* (1999; see also 2002), and his ‘Public Sphere Approach’ which works as an alternative to those approaches where international relations in the Middle East are either regarded as so culturally exceptional that they cannot be explained by the same concepts and theories used elsewhere, or are forced into general models that ignore the more distinctive traits of the Middle Eastern state system (1999: 5).

Thus, it seems to be possible to identify a growing awareness of the need to integrate insights from IR and MES. Nonetheless, this does not entail any consensus on how to do this. Put differently, when it comes to the question of how collaboration can bring about a Mesopotamian turn, very different ‘irrigation strategies’ are suggested, running along a continuum between the traditional IR and MES approaches.

At one end of the continuum, one finds Buzan and Wæver who assume that ‘whatever their differences, regions are fundamentally comparable in terms of the elements of basic structure’ just as it is possible to use ‘the same theory across time and space’ (2003: 468). Their regional security complex theory is, thus, a ‘general theory’ aimed at people working empirically on specific regions (2003: 468), and is primarily functioning as a framework for organising empirical studies of regional security (2003: 51). Even as credit is given to area specialists ‘on whose work we have drawn heavily’ (2003: 468), the nature of exchange employed here bears strong resemblance to what Weldes *et al.* describe as an ‘economic model of interdisciplinary engagement’. Area specialists are most of all perceived as owners of local empirical data that can be purchased and appropriated for a substantially unaltered Discipline (1999: 21; see also Mitchell 2003b: 18; Rafael 1994: 95). Thus, MES—like other Area Studies—appears most of all as an appreciated ‘assistant’ or ‘junior partner’, whose local and particular knowledge is valuable for the application of a general theoretical framework for regional security.

While this irrigation strategy puts MES under the patronage of IR, at the other end of the continuum it is possible to identify a group of studies that appears to almost *collapse IR into Area Studies* (Mitchell 2003a) as they are rejecting the very ambition of applying or building theoretical
models with validity across time and space. In the introduction to The International Relations of the Middle East in the 21st Century (Ismael 2000), it is stressed that studies of the international relations of the Middle East must not be ‘sacrificing depth of analysis for parsimony’ and the various empirical case-studies in this volume are, just as in The International Relations of Regional and Outside Powers edited by Brown (2001a), left without a common—and in most cases any\textsuperscript{14}—theoretical framework just as there is no attempt to make generalisations that relate to more general IR debates.

Between these two positions, which, in some sense, represent ‘lite’ versions of the more classic IR and Area Studies approaches,\textsuperscript{15} it is also possible to discern a number of approaches which appear analogous with Weldes et al.’s model of interdisciplinarity as conversation where the exchange takes a form of a conversation or a dialogue ‘in which the disciplinary subject is at least potentially liable to be transformed through the encounter with the other [. . .] Implied here is not only a sense of coming better to know the other, but also a sense of coming better to understand ourselves’ (1999: 24). Rather than collapsing IR into Area Studies or seeing the latter as nothing but a provider of local empirical data, the exchange is regarded as potentially influencing and changing both fields, including IR’s concepts and theories. When Barnett (1998) combines Constructivist IR theory and regional specialists’ readings of the historiography of Arab politics, he is, for instance, describing this exchange as a ‘two-way street’ (1998: 24), and he explains in this regard that:

‘by building a theoretical bridge between the history of Arab politics and theories of international politics, my modestly ambitious goal is to suggest how IR theory can help us to better understand the making and unmaking of Arab politics and how its making and unmaking can help scholars of IR-theory think more analytically and creatively about global politics’ (1998: 24).

Jacoby and Sasley (2002) explain in a similar way that they do not aim at Redefining Security in the Middle East only to ‘better understand events and processes in that particular geographical area’ (2002: 3), but that they also see it as ‘a means by which to develop alternative approaches to security’ (2002: 3) and by this contribute to the rising field of Critical Security Studies in IR.

This kind of conversation can take more forms. One strategy, MES contextualized IR theory, is starting from a specific theoretical framework within IR, which under the influence of insights from MES then is adjusted or contextualised in order to make the theoretical approach more flexible
and by this be able to address various supposedly exceptional traits of the Middle East. This can be a kind of ‘contextualized historical sociology’ as with Lustick’s (1997) discussion of the absence of Middle Eastern great powers, which is informed by Charles Tilly/Michael Mann but without assuming that the pattern of state formation in the Middle East will follow the European example. Another version takes the form of a ‘soft constructivism’ as seen in Barnett’s (1996, 1998; 1999, 2002) discussion of inter-Arab politics and Israel’s ‘road to Oslo’, and in Lynch’s (1999; 2002) examination of Jordanian foreign policy (where an exchange between a general Constructivist IR approach and MES translates into a notion of a plurality of overlapping global, regional and domestic ‘intersubjective institutions/public spheres’). Others employ a more eclectic strategy picking various elements and insights from (very) different IR theories and seminal MES studies. After having discussed the shortcomings of various IR theories and concluded that ‘Middle East international relations in the twenty-first century will not be adequately explained by paradigmatic chauvinism’, Hudson for instance suggests that ‘disciplinary eclecticism offers a more promising path’.16

A similar line of thought is presented by Gause (1999; 1992) who suggests that we combine insights on the Middle East from IR and MES figures as different as Walt, Brown, Barnett and Matar and Hilal. Hinnebusch similarly explains that ‘because the Middle East’s unique features defy analyses based on any one conceptual approach to international relations’, it is necessary to deploy ‘a combination of several to capture its complex realities’ (2003: 1; see also Hinnebusch and Ehteshami 2002; 1997). Finally, it is also possible to identify a more meta-theoretical strategy that takes as its point of departure those very fundamental ontological and epistemological questions of the Area Studies Controversy that traditionally have left IR and MES separated. An example might be Halliday’s discussion on ‘The Middle East and International Politics’ (1995b) where he takes issue with the problems of universalist and particularist approaches, which he suggests should replaced by an approach matching ‘an analytic universalism with a historical particularism’ (1995b: 15; see also 1987; Bromley 1994).

Thus, even a brief and cursory examination leaves us on the one hand with support for an argument on an emerging exchange between IR and MES with regard to the international relations of the Middle East. On the other hand, it is also clear that very different opinions exist as to which kind of ‘irrigation strategy’ one should adopt in order to precipitate a ‘Mesopotamian turn’.
In Conclusion: An Emerging Mesopotamian Turn?

Contrary to intuitive expectations, the borderland between ‘the River of IR’ and ‘the River of MES’ has been in the past far from fertile. This lack of inter-disciplinary exchange can be attributed to differences as well as similarities between the two academic fields. Developments within IR and MES suggest, however, that both fields are experiencing a simultaneous ‘opening’ which is also expressed in a narrowing of the gap which has divided them within the Area Studies Controversy. This leaves us with the idea that joint irrigation can turn the borderland between these two ‘academic streams’ into a prosperous and fertile Academic Mesopotamia. A growing awareness in the recent literature of the need for, and utility of, greater cross-fertilisation between IR and MES provides on the one hand some support for such an optimistic prognosis. At the same time, it is also clear that very different strategies can be employed when it comes to how such ‘irrigation’ is supposed to take place.

To bring us further along the road towards a real and lasting Mesopotamian turn, a general call to reacquaint IR theory with the study of the Middle East is, therefore, far from enough. Since this kind of joint irrigation can take place in various ways, different irrigation strategies must also be examined carefully and their respective (de)merits and viability must be evaluated. Moreover, it seems necessary to bring issues that relate to the sphere of meta-theory, the philosophy of science and the sociology of knowledge into the current discussion. Thus, there is a need to address questions pertaining to the balance between parsimony and depth, and between explaining and understanding. What are the (dis)advantages of eclecticism and is it possible to mix theories based on very different ontologies? Is it really possible (and necessary) to establish a new meta-theoretical foundation that transcends the universalist/particularist divide, or is this a dead-end to be avoided in favour of more pragmatic approaches? Finally if the study of the international relations of the Middle East has traditionally suffered from a Western-centric bias, will this at all be altered by a meeting of two fields emanating from the American Social Science and Areas Studies traditions?

Unless we also begin addressing these sorts of questions as an integral component of the various calls for integrating insights from MES and IR, the recent promising initiatives might end up not being first signs of an emerging Mesopotamian turn, but a transient desert bloom.
Notes

1. An earlier version of this article was presented at the panel ‘After certainty: Exploring the post-positivist nexus between (international) political theory, identity, and Middle East Area Studies’ at the annual BRISMES conference, University of Exeter, 12–15 July 2003. I would like to thank Andrea Teti, Claire Heristchi, Rolf Schwarz, Emma Jørum, André Bank, Lars Erslev Andersen, Birthe Valbjørn and colleagues in the IR section at Department of Political Science, University of Aarhus for comments on various ideas expressed in this paper.

2. In the following the term ‘IR’ will refer to the academic discipline of International Relations, while ‘international relations’ refers to the object of inquiry.


4. I have discussed the (de)merits of the so-called cultural turn within IR elsewhere. I suggested that the long experience within Area Studies, including MES, of dealing with the dilemmas of cultural diversity and the representation of Otherness should be of interest to those who aim at constructing an approach to international relations which is neither culture blind to nor blinded by cultural diversity. See Valbjørn (2004a; 2004b).


6. For further elaboration on the differences and commonalities among various approaches to Middle East international relations within mainstream IR, see Valbjørn (2004b).

7. The frequent use of the term ‘global politics’ within the more critical parts of IR can in this respect be read as a twofold rejection of mainstream IR. By talking of ‘politics’ instead of just ‘relations’, the possibility of progress and emancipation outside the political community is stressed, and by the use of ‘global’ instead of ‘international’, the privileged status of the nation-state as the sole organising unit is rejected.

8. When the CIA was established in 1947 it was the first American intelligence service with international scope. Moreover, before World War II, with a few exceptions, there were no programs for the study of the modern languages, history and society of other regions besides Europe—and to some extent parts of Latin America, the Caribbean, and the Philippines, which had been under US influence (Khalidi 2003: 177ff.). Thus, at the end of 1940s, ‘The Committee on Near Eastern Studies’ could report that ‘at no university does there appear to be a person who would claim to be an expert in the economics, sociology, or politics of the present-day Near East’ (Kramer 2001a: 12). One year after the ‘Sputnik crisis’ in 1958, the so-called Title VI of the National Defense Education Act was passed by the US Congress. This marked the beginning of a true proliferation of Area Studies centres, among these on the strategically important Middle East region. In 1977, about 30 years after the mentioned statement from ‘The Committee on Near Eastern Studies’, there were 530 full-time faculty member in Middle East Studies, and the number of Middle East programs expanded from five to thirty-six programs from 1951 to 1970.
(Kramer 2001a: 12). For a further account of the genesis and development of the modern Area Studies, see for example, Wallerstein (1997), Mitchell (2003a; 2003b), Mirsepassi et al. (2003a), Anderson (2003), Tessler (1999).

9. On MES see for example Khalidi (2003), Mitchell (2003a; 2003b), Kramer (2001a), Hajjar and Niva (1997), Tessler (1999), and for South East Asian Studies, African Studies, Japanese Studies, Soviet and Post-Soviet Area Studies, China Studies, see, for example Rafael (1994), Cumings (1997) and the various contributions in Szanton (2003), and in Mirsepassi et al. (2003b).

10. Besides discussions that explicitly address this issue such as Wallerstein (1997), the so-called ‘cultural turn’ within the Social Sciences can also be interpreted as an expression of the growing acknowledgement that even in a post-Cold War globalised world, is it not possible to ignore the role of diversity and otherness, and the need for grounded area-based knowledge.

11. The events of September 11, 2001 did also leave their marks on MES, which came under a new kind of attack. While the subsequent ‘why-do-they-hate-us’ debate and discussion on the causes of terrorism and inter- and intra-civilisational relations did pretty much close the debate on whether regional specialists and expertise in languages, cultures and histories of foreign regions were obsolete in a post-Cold War world order, at the opening of the 2001 MESA convention Kramer levelled a ferocious attack on MES calling on the US Congress not to give ‘an additional penny of support for this empire of error’ (Kramer 2001b). His critique was, however, not based on the traditional argument that MES was paying too much attention to idiosyncrasies of the Middle East. On the contrary, MES had in Kramer’s opinion failed due to neglect of what he saw as unique to the Middle East, so rather than seeking absorption into the general Disciplines, MES should turn more attention to its ‘Orientalist’ past. It is moreover worth noticing how MES in the US, Kramer’s critique notwithstanding, have experienced a 26% decrease in funding after 9/11, and that the enrollment into MES courses has grown by 100% (Beinin 2003). For further discussion on similarities and differences in the way MES was criticised before and after 9/11, see Valbjørn and Andersen (2003; see also Bilgin 2004).

12. It is a matter of controversy whether we are witnessing a global resurgence of ethno-cultural dynamics (e.g. Thomas 1995) or if it is only a new resurgence within the social sciences, among these IR, since religion and related ‘new’ phenomena have always been important in the ‘real’ world (e.g. Sjørup 1997).

13. I have examined the question of IR as culture-blind rather than culture blank more thoroughly elsewhere: Valbjørn (2004a).

14. For an exception, see Brand’s re-examination of Jordan’s foreign policy, which is based on her ‘budget security theory’ (2001).

15. I have elsewhere discussed how the volume edited by Brown (2001a)—with some exceptions—bears strong resemblance with the classic Area Studies approach. It is thus also vulnerable to the traditional Area Studies Controversy charge that regional specialists favour description over explanation, lack analytical cumulativeness and show no interest in parsimony and generalisation; see Valbjørn (2003).
16. This view was expressed at the ‘20 Years Jubilee-conference’ at Centre for Middle East Studies, University of Southern Denmark in September 19–20, 2003. The citation stems from the presented paper ‘American Hegemony and The Changing Terrain of Middle East Politics’ which in a revised version is going to appear in a volume edited by Salloukh and Brynen (forthcoming).

References


