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Bridging the Gap: IR, Middle East Studies and the Disciplinary Politics of the Area Studies Controversy

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Although International Relations and Middle East Studies share an interest in several aspects of Middle East politics, interdisciplinary research remains surprisingly scarce. This article asks why, despite repeated calls since the inception of these fields, this interdisciplinary gap has never been bridged. It supplements conventional approaches which emphasize a simple intellectual history, with elements of a political economy of the organization and production of knowledge, arguing that while intellectual convergence may be a necessary condition for interdisciplinarity, only a shift in epistemic grounds within which fields understand their scholarship can bring this about, and that this in turn requires a shift in the way knowledge is organized and produced. First, the article provides a genealogy of calls for interdisciplinary scholarship. Second, it locates interdisciplinary relations in the universalist organization of knowledge within which they emerged and which still (re)produce inter- and intra-disciplinary divides today. Finally, it considers the potential for Constructivism to provide an interdisciplinary bridge.

KEY WORDS ♦ Constructivism ♦ disciplinary history ♦ Foucault ♦ International Relations ♦ Middle East Studies

1. Introduction

An unprecedented state of crisis reigns in Middle East Studies. In a post-Cold War era dominated by globalization, many question the continued relevance of Area Studies, and after '9/11' some, particularly on the American right, argued that Middle East scholars failed in their duty to produce policy-relevant

scholarship. In this brave new world of supposedly unprecedented threats and intellectual crisis, all forces in society must put aside their narrow interests in the name of a struggle for the objective good. Area Studies generally and Middle East Studies in particular are called upon to produce a new kind of interdisciplinary and policy-relevant scholarship to the supposedly objective methodological standards of social science. Such new scholarship would simultaneously end the narrow factionalism of traditional academia, and strike a blow in the struggle for 'freedom'. Yet, both 'progressive' and traditional quarters remain cautious, and refuse to acknowledge their methodological irrelevance. In this context, some suggest that an increasingly popular Constructivism offers an intellectual and political middle ground.

This article provides an alternative account of the Area Studies controversy by analysing the way the organization of these academic fields has effectively produced both the interdisciplinary gap and its attendant intellectual and political 'Controversy'. Here, motifs of interdisciplinarity and the idea of science have been used to legitimize particular intellectual positions and the political objectives to which they are related. Thus, although focusing primarily on Middle East Studies, this particular case suggests new ways of approaching interdisciplinary relations, and in particular sheds light on the relationship between the way the pursuit of knowledge is organized and its political consequences.

IR and Middle East Studies share several interests in the region's politics, but also closely related historical and intellectual roots. Despite this, they seem historically unable to build interdisciplinary bridges. Conventionally, this divergence is explained as (in)compatibility between intellectual backgrounds. However, the resilience of a divide with such important implications for the education of policy-makers, academics, and public opinion at large requires a more general explanation. This article attempts to sketch one by analysing the way knowledge is organized and produced. First, it traces these fields' genealogy, noting how the particular division of intellectual labour between Area Studies and Disciplines produces both the sense of 'crisis' in Area Studies, and the very idea of interdisciplinarity. Second, it outlines MES' evolving archaeology and its relation to social science, showing how both calls for interdisciplinarity and the terms in which they are made are not new but have been a regular feature of these fields' histories. Finally, the likelihood of interdisciplinary convergence is assessed based on the way knowledge is organized, produced and validated within these fields.

The results of this analysis suggest that divisions both between and within these fields are the product of a complex political economy of intellectual and political struggles, rather than a straightforward clash of theoretical standpoints. The disciplinary techniques involved in organizing these fields tend to

reproduce rather than undermine divisions, a dynamic which the political topicality of the region has reinforced. Moreover, there is evidence that these dynamics are not specific to MES but characterize Area Studies more generally, and in an era marked by local resistance to global(ization's) power, understanding the implications of the way academia is organized is vital to scholars and practitioners alike.

2. Visions of the Middle East: A Region Like Any Other or Like No Other?

Mainstream Anglo-American IR theory shares certain traits. Epistemologically, it is empiricist, grounded in the notion that 'knowledge' can be inferred only from observable characteristics of reality; and materialist, grounding causation in material variables, and relegating non-material factors to intermediary roles. Ontologically, it assumes the objective knowability of the reality it observes, defending the independence of that reality from any impact the act of observation or description might have. It is (mostly) naturalist, holding the identity of social and natural kinds, and defends the spatio-temporal 'stability' of reality, allowing it to apply (and defend the superiority of) the 'scientific method'.[1] It is thus unsurprising that IR should view the Middle East as a region 'like any other' (Valbjørn, 2004: 52).

MES has drawn academic and political fire for 'the virtual absence of theoretically informed analysis of the myriad conflicts among the states of the region' (Anderson, 1990: 74), effectively reducing 'explanations' of regional politics to sequences of events, leaders and elites, understanding which means reconstructing the history of such contingencies at best, and at worst resorting to dubious analytical entities such as the 'Arab mind' or 'Islamic civilization'. Such scholarship therefore underestimated the possibility of generalizing about such dynamics beyond both their original spatio-temporal location. Moreover, among the myriad studies on identity within MES, most carried out without the use of theory, and have little impact outside the field (Lynch, 1999: 34).

IR's social scientific project is no more palatable to MES scholarship. MES encompasses an eclectic group of specializations from history to literature, anthropology to politics: aside from a shared geographical focus — to a degree, clearly arbitrary — such an otherwise 'heroic' categorization is usually defended on the basis of shared methodological sensitivities, attention to 'local knowledge' and the need for a strong linguistic, historical and cultural background.

Whether studying sources or patterns of alliances (Walt, 1987; Hansen, 2001), regional politics as a 'penetrated system' (Brown, 1984) where leaderships 'omnibalance' (David, 1991) against both internal and external threats, or deploying Game Theory to understand path-dependency in the evolution

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of interstate relations (Telhami, 1990), IR uses analytical strategies which assume the region's politics can be understood using the same analytical categories and variables as those deployed elsewhere. IR therefore understands regional politics as a *variation* upon a universal set of laws based on 'Western' history. Moreover, because mainstream IR emphasizes training in quantitative rather than qualitative methods (Bates, 1997a: 124), it is perceived as uncritically applying models and concepts developed in and for the 'West'. Where culture and history enter such analyses, they often highlight the region's *exceptionalism* rather than its *distinctiveness*, implicitly legitimizing the pursuit of exceptionalist policies such as the 'necessity' of collaboration with unsavoury regimes during the Cold War. Huntington's (1993) 'Clash of Civilizations' is exemplary: it represents cultural distinctions in such a homogenized and antagonistic fashion as to produce oversimplified objects — 'Islamic', 'Sinic' or 'Western' civilizations — hardly recognizable to area specialists.

Mainstream MES is characterized by three kinds of stances: the first emphasizes what amounts to a hermeneutic understanding of regional politics, grounded in the knowledge of languages, cultures and histories, reconstructing the story of regional politics as told and understood by the agents involved, emphasizing reliance on primary sources and fieldwork.[2] This scholarship focuses on charismatic/authoritarian leaders (e.g. Nasser, Khomeini, Assad), or political ideologies (e.g. Arabism or 'Political Islam'), more or less explicitly emphasizing how the 'Arab street' produces political outcomes which are different from those of the developed, archetypical West.

The second strand seeks to apply models developed by political science and cognate fields in a more consciously 'Disciplinary' vein.[3] This approach also tends to treat the region as a deviation from a model — usually a variant of modernization or development paradigms — based on Western experience.

Finally, post-Orientalist scholarship emerged in the 1960s–70s, critiquing the intellectually and politically problematic assumptions of mainstream MES, responding to decolonization, the Arab–Israeli wars, and related global tensions. Edward Said and others demolished the idea of Orientalist scholarship as a neutral, objective enterprise, showing how the very categories upon which this work was built (re)produced representations of the 'Orient' as inferior, stagnant and despotic (Said, 1995[1978]). Problematizing cultural difference, writing history 'from the margins' and exploring the nexus between academic analyses and political practices is post-Orientalist scholarship's central concern.

Mainstream MES shares post-Orientalist scepticism towards social science's underlying understandings of the social. Social science's reductionist materialism and its quest for 'law-like regularities' transcending spatio-temporal confines, produces work which, to MES, underestimates or misunderstands

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the significance of the symbolic dimension of politics. Hence the emphasis on the distinctiveness of regional politics built into the nature of Area Studies: it produces a representation of a region which, because of qualitative or quantitative differences, appears to be 'like no other' (Valbjørn, 2004: 55).

3. Genealogies of Divergence: Science and Interdisciplinarity

The language of current calls for MES reform suggests that the field is in an unprecedented state of crisis. Yet, closer inspection yields a strikingly different picture: such calls have been made regularly, and have — perhaps even more surprisingly — regularly gone unheeded. This section sketches the genealogy of those calls and of potential sites of convergence, introducing features of the institutional environment within which they were made. This history suggests that MES and IR are embedded within a single way of understanding the political, a single framework for organizing, producing and validating knowledge, and that '[t]he genealogy of area studies must be understood in relation to the wider structuring of academic knowledge and to the struggles not of the Cold War but of [social science] as a twentieth-century political project' (Mitchell, 2003a: 2).

The emphasis on interdisciplinary fault-lines above obscures important points of convergence between MES and IR, as between Area Studies and Disciplines generally. Despite methodological disagreements, both fields are empiricist, both are predicated more or less explicitly on the fixity and observer-independence of the real, and both defend the unique nature of that reality.[4] Certain conceptual categories — state, elites, etc. — provide further foci for convergence. In IR, the state can be understood as a (more or less) 'unified rational actor' as focal point in a network of groups and institutions generating policies as a result of bargaining processes, or as subservient to economic structures. This has obvious counterparts in MES: Seale's work on Syria, for example, is compatible with Constructivism or a modified Realism (Valbjørn, 2004: 56). The fact that this shared territory remains under-exploited despite calls for interdisciplinary convergence underscores the abnormality of this situation.

As with other Area Studies, contemporary calls for interdisciplinarity often imply that it is a simple matter of rallying scholars to an intellectual banner for such research to appear (Tessler, 1999; Khalidi, 1994; Mitchell, 2003a). Despite the shared foci mentioned above and otherwise important recent work, however, no change in disciplinary centres of gravity has materialized. This suggests that conventional accounts are incomplete, requiring closer investigation of both the intellectual feasibility of interdisciplinary convergence, and of the conditions under which scholarship has been undertaken.

For Mitchell, disciplinary divisions are rooted in the complementarity of roles Disciplines and Areas had in the way knowledge came to be produced

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either side of World War II (Mitchell, 2003a, 2003b). During the interwar period, these fields emerged from an intellectual project explicitly separating theoretical and empirical enterprises: while Area Studies systematically gathered data, Disciplines made sense of these (Mitchell, 2003a: 2–5; Valbjørn, 2003, 2004), with their common objective remained discerning 'universal laws'. Divisions between IR and MES can therefore be read as a result of competitive dynamics — the 'bureaucratic politics' — generated by the complementarity of these new sites of knowledge production, as well as by the heated political dimension of intra-disciplinary debates between the 1940s and 1970s.

Some suggest that IR and MES's inability to produce interdisciplinary scholarship is, aside from IR's universalism and MES's particularism, due to 'a similar inward-looking mentality which fosters isolation' (Valbjørn, 2004: 50). Such differences, however, are symptoms of deeper causes of the existence and spatio-temporal persistence of these divisions. These causes may be sought at the roots of the same processes that brought about the original division between 'Disciplines' and 'Areas'.

Valbjørn (2004) begins this search distinguishing between culture-*blind* Disciplines, and culture-*blinded* Area Studies: one aiming for 'universal' knowledge, the other emphasizing the limits to generalization. While a useful distinction, what is striking about the intricate internally contradictory similarities and differences across (infra)disciplinary boundaries is that, on closer inspection, *both* fields are *both* culture-blind *and* culture-blinded. As well as being culture-blind, mainstream IR is also culture-blind*ed* because it is predicated upon the unwarranted universalization of a specific Western-centric experience. Similarly, MES' unacknowledged embeddedness in a universalist and Orientalist organization of knowledge, and its inability to confront and overcome such tensions both suggest a deeper-seated culture-blindness.[5]

This 'double blindness' and related hysteresis in (inter)disciplinary scholarship are rooted in historical trajectories in the organization of academia as the privileged site of knowledge production during the 20th century.

4. Sovereign Structures of Universal Knowledge

Anglophone Middle East Studies evolved from a complex interaction between the histories of academic fields in Europe and North America. While the latter provides an innovative division of academic labour based on the separation of universalist and abstract 'Disciplines' from 'Areas' concerned with the particular and the empirical, from the former contemporary MES inherits the idea of the region's socio-political, cultural and religious unity.

'Disciplines' and 'Area Studies' emerged as complementary fields of enquiry in the USA during the interwar period thanks mostly to private

foundations, and to the post-war National Defense and Education Act (1958). The divisions are rooted in the reorganization of American universities separating Disciplines (economics, political science, etc.) which asked universal questions, from fields which investigate the particular (Mitchell, 2003a: 6). The development of 'Area Studies' itself is usually explained by the onset of the Cold War, the US' need for policy-related scholarship and the consequent passing of the NDEA (Johnson and Tucker, 1975: 3–20; Gendzier, 1985; Hajjar and Niva, 1997: 2–9). This over-emphasizes the US government's role, underestimating earlier changes catalysed by private funding. The Ford and Rockefeller Foundations played a key role during the 1920s–30s, laying the groundwork upon which MES emerged in the post war period. J.H. Breasted founded Chicago's Oriental Institute in 1919 with funds from John Rockefeller Jr and the Rockefeller-sponsored General Education Board. The Institute was to provide a locus where 'art, archaeology, political science, language, literature and sociology … shall be represented and *correlated*' (McCaughey, 1984: 101; emphasis added). Philip Hitti founded the Department of Oriental Languages and Literatures at Princeton in 1927, and organized the interdepartmental Committee on Near Eastern Studies, sponsored by the Arabic–Islamic Committee of the American Council of Learned Societies (of which the Ford and Rockefeller foundations were part). After the war, the interdepartmental Committee became the first US Programme in Near Eastern Studies. The Middle East Institute was founded in 1946 as the first US institute for regional studies, while the *Middle East Journal*, first published in 1947, was the first US journal on contemporary regional politics.

The stated intention of both public and private funding was to examine regional politics to produce policy-relevant work to supplement the US' dearth of expertise. However, the key feature of this organization is the way the quest for universal knowledge was embodied in the organization of academic enquiry. Anticipating the idea of social *science*, this formulation understands what counts as 'knowledge' to be propositions which may be universally valid. This organization of knowledge was based on the binary separation of theoretical/universal from empirical/particular, which was felt to be unproblematic because it supposedly reflected 'natural' taxonomical principles. Moreover, the 'social *sciences*' did not yet exist: economics, politics and sociology were still often studied together, and had not consolidated claims to separate spheres of 'the political system', 'the social system', etc.[6] Nonetheless, these reforms were predicated on theoretical/empirical and universal/particular dyads, reflecting particular epistemic assumptions which *de facto* institutionalized hierarchy between 'Disciplines' as producers of universal knowledge by devising and testing theories (e.g. Hitti, 1941) and epistemologically subservient fact-collecting 'Areas'.

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These institutional developments lagged behind Europe, which was busy producing experts on contemporary politics by building on traditional strengths in ancient civilizations. France created the Mission Scientifique au Maroc (1904) which published the *Revue du Monde Musulman* (1906), and the Société d'Economie Politique in Cairo (1909) which published *L'Egypte Contemporaine* (Mitchell, 2003a: 4). The watershed in terms of MES' intellectual history was the Royal Institute of International Affairs' (RIIA) commission in the 1930s of an '*organic* study of the life of Moslem societies, and the force, ideals and tendencies at work in them' (Gibb and Bowen, 1950; emphasis added). Its organization provided a template for what would be labelled Area Studies, establishing the spatial, temporal and empirical taxonomies which infused MES: a tripartite temporal taxonomy into 18th century, 1800–1900, and contemporary 'conditions and forces at play'; a twelve-fold 'vertical division' ranging from family and village, to government and religion (Gibb and Bowen, 1950: 3–14) and, crucially, the institutionalization of the (Orientalist) representation of the region as a unitary socio-political object.

Among others, Bowen, Breasted, Gibb and Hitti crossed the Atlantic either side of World War II. This migration embedded into North American literature 'the idea that the Islamic world formed a cultural unity, based upon a common cultural core that only the Orientalist was equipped to decipher' (Mitchell, 2003a: 5). Once its exceptionalism was established, this unity could then be understood only in the 'broad context and long perspective of cultural habit and tradition' (Gibb, 1964, in Johnson and Tucker, 1975: 7), the linguistic-historical-cultural tools to access which the Orientalist alone possesses. Thus, while the representation of the 'Middle East' as a culturally and politically exceptional entity is rooted in the 18th century and earlier (Said, 1995[1978]), only in the early 20th is this embedded into the way academia organizes and produces knowledge, and only at this stage is a specific group of individuals singled out as having privileged access to — and thus authority to speak about — the Middle East.

In turn, both the Disciplines/Areas separation in US academia and the constitution of the region as a socio-politically exceptional unit in Europe are rooted in the universalization and normalization of the Western experience. As a result, the non-Western Other, Middle Eastern or otherwise Oriental, comes to be understood as deviation — both analytical and moral — from a Western-defined norm.[7] The shift in the academic balance of power towards the US also meant that the (philosophically) realist basis upon which the Middle East was understood became 'nocturnal', buried under a triumphant instrumentalist, universalist and scientific definition of what counts as knowledge.

This separation, coupled with the intellectual confluences in which US MES was grounded, creates the very conditions for the gap between 'humanistic' Area Studies and 'scientific' Disciplines to come about. This 'gap' must therefore be understood as embedded *in*, literally produced *by* a particular way of organizing and validating knowledge. The emergence of Area Studies (and Disciplines) is not therefore a reaction to the Cold War, but part of a broader trend towards the establishment of 'sovereign structure[s] of universal knowledge' (Mitchell, 2003a: 9; Wasby, 1997). As such, it is unsurprising that the bridging of this gap has been perceived as a problem ever since.

The roots of this gap also afford an insight into the reasons for its recalcitrance despite efforts to transcend it. What allowed Disciplines and Areas to become autonomous fields of inquiry was not simply the different realms they assigned themselves: perhaps more importantly, their viability was predicated on the legitimacy of their respective distinctive epistemological and methodological cores. The very definition of their object of knowledge required Orientalists to be endowed with, and frame their knowledge in terms of, interpretive tools: knowledge of language, history, and culture which allowed them to read the 'Arab mind'. These tools, and the unitary and exceptionalist understanding of the object of inquiry, produce a kind of knowledge which resists the universalization desired by Disciplines, since universalization would by definition transcend those dimensions of locality upon which Orientalism is predicated. Conversely, the distinctiveness and legitimacy of Disciplines is rooted in the universality of their methods and their results: to particularize either would defy their ability to claim a separate 'territory' of society as their own, thereby challenging their very existence. Finally, the division between Areas and Disciplines itself creates the conditions for 'forgetting' their shared foundations in a single Positivist intellectual project, since the legitimization of a distinct body of knowledge — and with it a profession — requires a discourse of ontological and/or epistemological distinctiveness.

From this moment, Area Studies took on a dual function rooted in the implicit analytico-moral hierarchy suggested above. First, its role was to verify/falsify 'knowledge' generated by Disciplines. Second, it would help overcome any bias inherent in Disciplines' 'territorial' exclusivity:

> The conceptual schemes upon which these disciplines are based are, in large measure, the product of Western thought and institutions . . . *If there be a provincialism within these disciplines, it will be quickly revealed when the expert applies his formulations to alien cultures.*[8]

As suggested by the terms of the Area Studies Controversy, this framework for the organization, production and validation of knowledge remains intact.

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With those frameworks have been reproduced both the interdisciplinary divide itself, the calls for bridging it, and the disciplinary politics of relations between and within these fields.

5. *Making Disciplines Scientific*

A 1949 ACLS survey revealed that there was no full professor in US institutions whose primary expertise was in contemporary Middle East politics, economics or sociology.[9] This changed during the 1950s, marking the beginning of the crystallization of the Areas/Disciplines separation. The 1950s see the early institutionalization of these fields, with consensus being built around (the narratives of) their remit and methods, and with the appearance of professional associations, conferences and publications. This period also witnessed the first identification of the 'gap' between Disciplinary and Area scholarship: it was for the first time perceived to be problematic, and solutions remarkably similar to those of contemporary debates were suggested.

In 1950, the RIIA commissioned a successor project to Gibb and Bowen's. Although their original project was abandoned, it made a strong impact on the intellectual agenda of US MES. In 1952, the SSRC's Committee on the Near and Middle East hosted a conference at which papers strongly reflected the spatial, empirical and temporal taxonomical categories (as well as goals and methods) of Gibb and Bowen's project (Fischer, 1955). This framework was retained by the SSRC, sponsoring projects locating themselves squarely within that same research agenda (Berger, 1967). During 1954–55 the Committee studied the most suitable direction for future research and training in areas like Middle Eastern politics, sociology, history, economics and law.[10]

For its part, the Ford Foundation established the Foreign Area Fellowships Program (1951) and a Division of International Training and Research, providing $270m to 34 universities during 1952–66, the mandate of which was to establish area studies centres in universities. Domestic political obstacles delayed the US National Defense in Education Act (1958),[11] but over 1959–67, NDEA allocated $167m, of which 13.4% was for Middle East Studies.[12]

This research was published through journals and disseminated at conferences of nascent professional organizations. *Middle Eastern Affairs* began publication in 1950, *Middle East Studies* in 1958, and the American Association for Middle East Studies was set up as the first US association for Middle East scholars. The first interdisciplinary programmes also appeared in North American universities,[13] although 'interdisciplinarity' in the early 1950s meant supplementing training in philology and ancient history with contemporary politics and history, rather than in social science.

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These research priorities were mirrored elsewhere. France, for example, sponsored a series of research institutes throughout the Middle East through which research reflecting the Gibb and Bowen agenda also began to percolate.[14] The 'percolation' of this intellectual agenda was aided during the 1950s by US universities hiring more European scholars such as Gibb himself, von Grunenbaum, Rosenthal and Lenczowski (Mitchell, 2003a: 5).

This pursuit of 'interdisciplinarity' understood as the crossing of Orientalism with contemporary history, was driven by the active collaboration of key scholars — particularly Gibb, von Grunenbaum and Smith — whose explicit intention was to arrive at 'a new kind of Orientology' (Halpern, 1962: 111). The first 'interdisciplinary' monographs in this vein were published in the mid-1950s (Halpern, 1962: 109).[15]

The Disciplines/Areas divide in which new scholarship was framed led scholars to criticize conventional Orientalism for a supposedly incomplete understanding of the links between internal and external forces in the region. In 1958, Binder argued that any thorough understanding of Middle East regional and international relations required cross-fertilization between IR and Area specialists (Binder, 1958).[16] This new approach, involving the adoption of 'scientific' methods, was necessary because 'while most Orientalists have remained interested in the past, Orientals themselves have become intent upon modernization' (Halpern, 1962: 111). Echoing the debate between nomothetic and ideographic approaches in contemporary political science, this 'New Orientology' identified an interdisciplinary 'gap' between humanities and social science, and saw itself as bringing the canons of the latter to a field stuck in the former. This represents the second instance in which a cross-disciplinary 'gap' was identified and perceived as problematic, and is followed by repeat prescription of 'interdisciplinarity'.

Henceforth, the function of MES remained to achieve a systematically organized body of knowledge, *de facto* accepting the role of taxonomical Cinderella to the analytical Disciplines (Gibb and Bowen, 1950, 1957). It is therefore unsurprising that the terms of the debate concerning this interdisciplinary 'gap' and its purported solution remained substantially unchanged. Indeed, from Binder in the 1950s to Khalidi in the 1990s this entailed attempting to subsume Area Studies within the Disciplines.

6. *Institutionalization and Division*

The 1960s marked the completion of the institutionalization of MES, the emergence of political *science* as its methodological standard, and the emergence of those political and intellectual cleavages which still characterize the field today.

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Having identified methodological and thematic 'gaps' in scholarship, mainstream US MES pressed for a 'New Orientology'. First, conventional scholarship was accused of focusing on over-particularistic variables rather than on socio-political changes, thus undermining 'humanist' scholarship and its interpretive methods. Second, supporters of social scientific scholarship within MES argued that it was still relatively rare, having scarcely begun to notice the relationship between 'diplomacy and society' (Halpern, 1962). Adopting a strict definition of 'political science' — explicit hypothesis speci-fication, models, hypothesis testing, etc. — in 1967 very few studies could be so classified. Of these, 9.3% adopted comparative approaches, 5% were statis-tical, and 1.4% quasi-experimental (Brynen, 1986: 409). Until 1960, no US MES centre was headed by a social scientist or numbered a majority of social scientists on its staff (Halpern, 1962: 110). In general, 'new Orientologists' lamented the sheer scarcity of scholars specializing in the region (Halpern, 1962: 119).

Thus, despite efforts to institutionalize a constructive relationship between a 'descriptive' MES and an 'analytical' political science, 'truly' interdisciplinary and analytically-driven scholarship remained elusive. Halpern, for example, praised Vatikiotis' efforts towards analytical enquiry, yet chided him for remaining 'at a loss as to how to translate these new interests into concrete achievements'.[17] Orientologists were again criticized for emphasizing 'words' over 'actions': 'traditional Orientologists suffer from the vices of their virtues[:] so great is their contribution to documen-tation that Middle Eastern actions are neglected' (Halpern, 1962: 116). Thus, the tension between the two souls of 'new Orientology', materialist and interpretivist, was fought out on the terrain of social scientific method-ological rigour.

Accusations of political bias were also used to delegitimize traditional schol-arship. Some European scholars were involved in colonial administrations, and to their American counterparts this entailed a professional interest in internecine divisions of colonial peoples incompatible with understanding the importance of contemporary socio-political changes (Halpern, 1962: 117).[18] Within this debate, the scientific nature of Disciplinary scholarship was cru-cial, because it provided tools for objective knowledge, therefore capable of overcoming what Herring charitably called 'provincialism'.

In 1962, Halpern made the third 'call for interdisciplinarity', arguing that the field had until then devoted itself 'to a kind of stamp-collecting, neglect-ing to identify the essential structures and relationships or to assay prelim-inary synthesis' (Halpern, 1962: 118). Lest the 1950s' advances become the 'Indian summer' of Middle East Studies, Halpern called for a shared research agenda between political science and 'Orientology' through the adoption of universalist methodological tools 'so as to advance valid comparative analysis

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among institutions and relationships across Middle Eastern time and space' (Halpern, 1962: 118).

Two things are clear from these debates: first, that the European under-standing of the region's cultural-religio-political unity had been implicitly accepted by US academia (translating into its 'nocturnal realism'), and second, that the terms upon which solutions to the 'problem' of interdisciplinarity were offered effectively entailed the rejection of the interpretive methods which legitimized the very existence of MES.

Just how entangled MES' history is in outright politics becomes clear from the early efforts at institutionalization. The dissemination of this new scholarship was to take place through *Middle East Studies* (1958–64) under the sponsorship of the American Association for Middle East Studies (AAMES). The editorial board of *Middle Eastern Affairs*, a pro-Israeli and pro-American journal, included several senior faculty at Berkeley, Harvard, Yale, Columbia and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem who were also AAMES members (Winder, 1987: 59–60; Mitchell, 2003a: 10–11). Both *MES* and AAMES closed in 1964 after allegations of funding from pro-US and pro-Israeli political sources (Zartman, 1970: 5). A second *Middle East Studies* began publication in October under LSE's Elie Kedourie (Mitchell, 2003a: 11). A year later, the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) was established with a five-year $56,000 grant from the Ford Foundation.[19]

Associated with this process of institutionalization was the rise in the prominence of social scientists within MES departments and the regulation of the political dimension of scholarship. A few months after the Six-Day War, scholars were asked to withdraw papers on Israel at MESA's annual confer-ence (Mitchell, 2003a: 10), with Morroe Berger, MESA's first President, incongruously declaring that the region was 'receding in immediate political importance' (Berger, 1967: 16). Aside from the explicit political agendas of some MESA members, this predicament resulted from 'New Orientologists', attempt to ground its scholarship (and political authority) in the objectivity of social science despite the fact that the Palestine Question 'reveal[ed] the precarious nature of their detachment' (Mitchell, 2003a: 10). Again in 1973 there was no discussion of Arab–Israeli troubles, not because the issue was not controversial, but, in MESA President Leonard Binder's words, because of supposed the difficulty defining 'what one might appropri-ately say in this context' (Binder, 1976: 10). Such clear signs of transgression of the political into academic enquiry challenge both claims to ideological neutrality and to the objectivity of knowledge produced by either Area Studies or Disciplines.

In response to such controversies, 1967–68 also saw the creation of the Association of Arab-American University Graduates (AAUG), which organ-ized conferences and publications in competition with MESA's (Mitchell,

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2003a: 12). In 1971, the Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP) began publishing *Middle East Report*. Thus, while 1966–68 marks the full institutionalization of MES in the US, it also marks the institutionalization of the political and intellectual division between a mainstream based on an 'alliance' between (materialist) political science and (interpretivist) 'Orientalists', and a politically 'progressive' opposition including both Marxian and post-structuralist perspectives.

7. *Crystallizing Dissent*

If the 1960s saw the institutionalization of the field, the 1970s marked the crystallization of its current political/intellectual divisions. The decade opened with MESA's 'New Orientologists' concerned with displacing or co-opting remaining traditional Orientalists and the increasingly vocal 'fringes' in the AAUG, and closed with the publication of *Orientalism* and *Arab Studies Quarterly*, sealing the failure of this fourth attempt at 'bridging the gap'.

Mainstream scholarship retained its focus on modernization theory, paying more attention to the political economy of oil, and supplementing it with a concern with the state/power, interest groups and elites, while interest declined in ideology. This mirrors the passing of one generation of 'Orientologists' with their historico-cultural approach, and the emergence of the 'Young Turks' of social science.

In this context, calls for interdisciplinary bridges were renewed. At MESA's 1973 Research and Training Committee, 12 years after Halpern, Binder accused MES of being 'beset by subjective projections, displacements of affect, ideological distortion, romantic mystification, and religious bias, as well as by a great deal of incompetent scholarship' (Binder, 1976: 16). He hoped the field might, again thanks to social scientific methods, finally 'come of age'.

Yet again, social science's alleged ability to produce objectivity was deployed, undermining one kind of knowledge and legitimizing another. This discursive strategy was central to mainstream preoccupation, not only with regard to 'European' understandings of 'new Orientology', but also with increasingly critical voices of the new opposition from both materialist Dependencia,[20] and post-structuralist/postcolonial critiques made famous by Said (1995[1978]). Indeed, 1977–78 marked the definitive rupture between mainstream and critical approaches to Middle East politics. Friction on issues of method, epistemology, and the political dimensions of scholarship was such that the AAUG and later the *Alternative Association for Middle East Studies* emerged as rival professional associations to MESA. In 1978 the AAUG funded Ibrahim Abu-Lughod and Edward Said to set

up the Institute for Arab Studies. Said's *Orientalism* was also published in 1978, as were the first volume of *Arab Studies Quarterly* and the influential though short-lived *Review of Middle East Studies* (Mitchell, 2003a: 12).

The 1970s therefore saw both the definitive institutionalization and professionalization of MES as a field, and the emergence of internal divisions across two dimensions: first, between social scientific and humanistic approaches; second, between approaches which accepted the region's socio-political unity and exceptionalism and those which questioned it. It is no coincidence that these are precisely the lines along which the Disciplines/Areas division of labour is based.

By the end of the decade, it was clear that despite calls for bridge-building MES was intellectually and politically more divided than ever. Moreover, it is clear that the spatial, temporal and empirical taxonomies embedded in the emergence of MES as a field coupled with the role of Area Studies within a universalist organization of knowledge played a central role in these splits.

8. Still a Pseudo-discipline? Disciplines and Areas beyond the Cold War

The 1980s repeated calls for 'methodological rigour': MES remained apparently unable to move beyond 'inadequate conceptualization, overemphasis on historicism and the uniqueness of the Islamic-Arab situations, and neglect of a truly comparative outlook' (Korany and Dessouki, 1982: 2). Green described it as a 'pseudo-discipline', at best an 'oncology' among social sciences, since it 'cannot make very encouraging prognoses, and wishes it knew far more than it does' — shortcomings which, in classically Orientalist fashion, were attributed to the region's sheer 'complexity' and 'unpredictability' (1986: 611).

The mainstream response reaffirmed the emancipatory potential of the objectivity afforded by social *science*. Thus, 'emotional and subjective belief systems can and should be studied objectively, dispassionately, and systematically' (Green, 1986: 616) — indeed, that 'Arab politics can be understood in the same social-scientific terms as politics elsewhere; what is needed is an ability to recognize and distinguish what is unique about Arab politics from what is not' (Green, 1986: 613).

Attempting to bypass the culturalist critique, and echoing contemporary debates, there were also calls for a methodological pluralism combining 'old Orientology's' case study approach with political science. While MES remained relatively theoretically underdeveloped, what convergence had occurred by the 1980s was felt to have produced a corpus of scholarship which provided a bedrock for the field (Green, 1986: 612). Despite high hopes that (once more) mainstream scholarship had 'come of age', however, the division of labour between universalist/scientific Disciplines and

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data-gathering Area Studies remained unchallenged (McCaughey, 1984), as did respective epistemic stances, thus also (re)producing the hierarchical relationship between fields.

For the fifth time in as many decades, in his 1994 MESA Presidential address Rashid Khalidi (1994) asked: 'Is there a future for Middle East Studies?' Khalidi accepted that MES was 'theoretically underdeveloped', calling for greater 'interdisciplinary awareness' by drawing on the Disciplines. James Bill agreed, arguing that the field had learned 'disturbingly little' since its inception. To counter MES' perceived weak methodological standards, Khalidi argued for the disappearance of MES altogether:

> … our future lies in being part of the departments of comparative literature, political science, history … not in remaining in a Middle Eastern ghetto… these disciplines… have more powerful institutional support, and most of them can claim to be more universal. (1994: 5)

The diagnosis for this patient, puzzlingly reluctant to heal, was thus yet another repeat prescription of social science. Richards and Waterbury unabashedly defended the application of modernization theory,[21] while, echoing Herring, Laitin (1993: 3) suggested that Area Studies should provide 'tantalizing' data for theorists. The fundamental limitation of these arguments is that, aside from once again relegating MES to taxonomical second fiddle, it predicates an interdisciplinary 'encounter' on that very idea of universal knowledge which by its nature undermines the foundation of Area Studies.

Observers agree that opportunities for cross-fertilization abound again today as they did in past decades. For Gause (1998) the region affords the opportunity to study frequently shifting alliances, regional multipolarity, and intense security conflicts under diverse ideological and material pressures. Korany echoes that the region is 'an intellectual laboratory … for both area specialists concerned with micro-level description [and for social science] generalists interested in empirically based model-building' (1999: 57).

Indeed, there is a steady rivulet of scholarship at this boundary. Hinnebusch and Ehteshami (2002) attempt to generalize Korany and Dessouki's (1991) work, accounting for such factors as 'identity' and the particular features of internal and external security environments. Ayubi (1994) develops a Gramscian approach to domestic politics. Bromley (1994) approaches regional political economy in order to infer generalizable hypotheses. Luciani (1987) develops the idea of the 'rentier state', while Guazzone (1995), Salamé (1994) and others made strong contributions to democratization studies. Perhaps with greater academic and public profile than any other, Fred Halliday (1995) has also worked on several aspects of the regional and international relations

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of the Middle East, not least the Orientalist tropes which have shaped both Western policy towards and scholarship on the region. These literatures attempt to overcome 'particularistic claims or approaches' which emphasize the idiosyncratic character of regional identities and their effect on socio-political processes.

However, although both post-Orientalist and mainstream scholarship reject the 'presumption that political regularities are area-bound', deep tensions remain between interpretive and social scientific approaches: 'the goal of the social scientist is not to achieve … *verstehen*; it is to identify lawful regularities which … must not be context-bound' (Bates, 1997a: 123). The foundations of interpretivist approaches, however, undermine universalist claims since they imply that 'knowledge' is neither spatio-temporally neutral nor observer-independent. These epistemic differences continue to provide the greatest obstacles to interdisciplinary convergence.

A second response to the 'crisis' of Area Studies has been to assert the end of the usefulness of such fields *in toto* (Heginbotham, 1994: 33–40). The Mellon and Ford Foundations decided that with the end of the Cold War 'area approaches' were obsolete.[22] The joint international programme of the SSRC–ACLS underwent reorganization, and both ACLS and SSRC dissolved their Joint Area Studies Committees (Bilgin, 2004: 424). SSRC President Kenneth Prewitt legitimized the changes arguing the need to 'internationalize' Area Studies, accommodating a new focus on cross-regional and thematic inquiry (*Items*, Social Science Research Council, March 1996, June 1996; Abraham and Kassimir, 1997) capable of speaking the language of newly fashionable Rational Choice Theory with the renewed goal of finding universal, 'globalizable' analytical frameworks (Heilbrun, 1996; Cumings, 1997). However, the shift away from local language and other sources towards quantitative methods often entails a decontextualization of knowledge inimical to Area Studies. As with previous incarnations of calls for interdisciplinarity to 'bridge the gap' between social science and humanistic approaches, today the implicit epistemological hierarchy between fields remains unchanged. As such, it is unsurprising that the terms of debate and the balance of disciplinary power also remain unchanged, relegating Area Studies to being a 'junior partner' in the 'disciplinary mapping of the world' (Rafael, 1994).

In a sense, the 'imperialist' tendencies built into the fabric of the Disciplines/Areas dichotomy in the form of the former's universalist aspirations translated into an increasingly vibrant attempt to 'colonize' Area Studies in general, and Middle East Studies in particular. The attacks on the field after the Cold War and especially after '9/11' add a further dimension to this standoff: Daniel Pipes and Martin Kramer accused MES of failing to provide a sufficient quantity and quality of policy-relevant studies, and of failing to predict the '9/11' attacks. For them, MES scholarship should be

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politically controlled through the reigns of 'Title VI' funding, and so serious
has been the field's failure in their eyes, so biased against US interests are
its scholars, that they have encouraged their blacklisting via websites like
campuswatch.org.[23] These attacks are part of an ongoing political and
academic debate which saw Federal funding come under severe political
pressure in Congressional debates during 2003,[24] but which are ultimately
made possible by the very structure of the Disciplines/Areas organization of
knowledge.

9.   *Constructivism: A New Hope?*

Given these precedents, one would be forgiven for meeting optimism about
new avenues of cross-fertilization with a sceptical sense of *déja-vu*. There has
been considerable exertion on the question of how to reconcile IR with MES,
and Disciplines with Area Studies more generally. Most of it has involved sub-
suming Areas into Disciplines, or, equivalently, holding them up to social
scientific methodological standards, thus encountering considerable resist-
ance from Area Studies. The two most interesting candidates for stimulating
the terrain of convergence for truly interdisciplinary scholarship are Mitchell's
idea of 'provincializing the Disciplines' and the promise of Constructivism.

Mitchell notes that while debate over interdisciplinary convergence has been
dominated by the idea that Area Studies should live up to Disciplines'
standards, Disciplines themselves are just as 'geographically' bound as Area
Studies, in two key senses. First, the 'laws' Disciplines seek and their analytical
toolkit rest on the highly problematic assumption that the European/Western
experience is somehow archetypal (Mitchell, 2003a). Second, Disciplines are
geographically bound insofar as they are simply predicated on a thematic rather
than geographical cartography, focusing merely on one aspect of society. It
may therefore be equally plausible to 'provincialize' the Disciplines, defining
convergence on shared post-positivist grounds and admitting that the 'know-
ledge' produced by Disciplines is itself 'area'-bound. This, however, is likely to
encounter the same kinds of 'epistemic resistance' within the Disciplines that
attempting to universalize Area Studies has.

Proponents of Constructivism, on the other hand, argue that the current
interdisciplinary predicament is new because *both* MES and IR are experiencing
'turns', both of which enable rather than foreclose interdisciplinary dialogue.
For these authors, Constructivism, as a post-positivist framework, may offer the
best analytical framework, research agenda and — crucially — epistemic stand-
point upon which convergence can occur with each field retaining their
distinctiveness (Valbjørn, 2004).

Certainly, the preconditions for such convergence appear to exist. In the
past there has been a small but steady trickle of scholarship drawing explicitly

on both literatures, and this continues to be the case (e.g. Binder, 1958; Korany and Dessouki, 1991; Korany et al., 1993; Halliday, 1995; Hinnebusch and Ehteshami, 2002). There have also been instances of cross-fertilization: IR has drawn on the idea of the 'rentier state' first developed in MES, while MES has often deployed 'power politics' (Brown, 1984; Hansen, 2001; Walt, 1987) and 'dependency' (Bromley, 1994) approaches in analysing regional politics. Moreover, there is within MES a body of work — e.g. Seale's 'implicit Realism' or Halliday's work on Islam in IR — which is already close to but still untapped by Constructivists. Conversely, the 'cultural turn' in IR has brought scholars like Lynch and Barnett closer to MES sensitivities. Thus, while in the past IR-MES interdisciplinary scholarship ran like 'seasonal rivulets' between isolated oases, IR's recent focus on culture and MES' on theory may indicate that a river might soon link these oases, finally allowing a 'fertile academic Mesopotamia' to flourish.

A closer look at Constructivism's intellectual toolkit reinforces such optimism. While Constructivism houses diverse research projects, Constructivists would agree on certain pivotal stances (Hopf, 1998: 172). These core features present clear opportunities of linkage with MES scholarship.

First, identities are intersubjective, and therefore continually constructed through interaction. Interests therefore derive from particular identities, making them endogenous variables. Mainstream IR theory, however, only superficially incorporates ideas/identity. Even most neo-liberals assume that states are 'unitary rational actors' with fixed preferences (Keohane, 1990: 183). The intersubjectivity of norms and identity allows Constructivism to grasp the ideational dimension of Arabism or indeed Islamism as cause of and constraint upon leadership's decision-making which can contradict a purely materialist cost–benefit analysis. Hopf's work on Russia (e.g. 2002) is probably the best example of a systematic attempt to explore the connection between identity and policy practice.

Second, both agency and structure, and ideational and material levels, are mutually constitutive. Agents are constrained by material frameworks setting 'parameters of the possible' and by a normative landscape: both of these define the costs and benefits of any given course of action, but both remain open to (a degree of) re-articulation by agents themselves. Mutual constitution of agency/structure and ideal/material allows Constructivism to address the 'blindness' to change of structuralist approaches, and Neorealism in particular. Because this is true within as well as between states, Constructivism affords a framework within which to think systematically about how 'the ideational' shapes a society's 'internal' politics, its boundaries, about its 'external' relations, and about the organic connection between 'inside' and 'outside'.[25] Such characteristics place it in an ideal position to contribute sophisticated anti-essentialist analyses of

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transnational identity politics such as Arabism (as Barnett's work shows) and Islamism.

Third, Constructivism thus conceived provides a flexible framework for explaining, *inter alia*, a change in nature and/or configuration of the global system. This allows it to explain, for example, shifts in behavioural patterns even when power distributions remain constant. Here Barnett's demonstration of the central importance of Arabism in alliance formation until the 1980s again provides a case in point. Most Middle Eastern states have undergone (and are undergoing) significant changes in 'identity', at least in terms of the dominant discursive canon of politics, and Constructivism is ideally placed to capture the complex interaction of domestic and international, ideational and material factors at play.

Thus, by addressing the problem of cultural thinness and of the relationship between individual agency and structural constraints in particular, Constructivism may provide a bridge between both IR's mainstream and its critics, and between Disciplines and Area Studies. This allows the elaboration of flexible analytical frameworks capable of dealing with identity as much as with traditional understandings of power. Constructivists have applied this framework to a series of topics, from anarchy (Wendt) to security (Wæver and Adler) to norms (Onuf, Kratochwil, Finnemore and Sikkink). Moreover, its successful reception in both the study of Russian foreign policy (e.g. Hopf, 2002) and of the European Union (e.g. Christiansen et al., 2001) suggests that there may indeed be scope for successful reception within area studies. In MES, the best examples of such a fledgling literature are Barnett (1998) and Lynch (1999). Drawing on secondary IR and social theoretical literature, but also on primary sources and fieldwork, both works use Constructivist frameworks to consciously move away from traditional IR theory and towards culturally sensitive explanations.

However, owing to many Constructivists' generalist background, most research has so far focused on themes rather than individual countries, and despite Barnett and a few others, much work remains to be done on the Middle East. This creates a space within which MES scholarship could make significant and active contributions. Nor would MES' role be mere data-provision: post-Orientalist scholarship such as Halliday's is increasingly theoretically sophisticated, rejects notions of regional exceptionalism (which would be incompatible with Constructivist positions), develops analytical frameworks grounded in local experience, and is sensitive to the power/knowledge nexus and its political implications — all essential to Constructivism's need to move beyond mainstream IR's Western-centric biases.[26]

Moreover, unlike other post-positivist approaches, Constructivism is far from marginal in IR: since the late 1980s it has enjoyed a meteoric rise to

disciplinary prominence, becoming the principal counterpart to the Neoliberal–Neorealist consensus (Onuf, 1989; Wendt, 1987, 1992; Ruggie, 1998). Perhaps such optimism, therefore, is justified after all: Constructivism offers a space within which critical IR and MES — and therefore Disciplines and Area Studies — scholarship can converge, sharing perspectives of ontological and epistemological positions (the fluidity of reality), methodological sensitivities (the importance of the symbolic/discursive), and intellectual categories (e.g. power, identity).

There are, however, several qualifications to be made. First, the notable feature of the *practice* of contemporary interdisciplinary relations is, unfortunately, the continued paucity of cross-fertilization. Second, there is little corresponding movement towards IR theory by mainstream or post-Orientalist MES.[27] Finally, and most importantly, there is an emerging (American) Constructivist mainstream which distances itself from post-positivist positions. Checkel, for example, argues that Constructivism promises to 'rescue identity from postmodernists', by providing mainstream IR with 'the identity variable' (1998: 325).[28] This is intellectually problematic because Constructivism's stance that properties of social kinds are not fixed is incompatible with 'social *science*' understood as a quest for *universal* 'laws' *independent* of time, place and of 'observer effects'. Moreover, such an objectivist project would necessarily reaffirm existing epistemic and ontological hierarchies between Disciplines and Areas. Indeed, to the extent that the critical potential in Constructivism constitutes a possible territory of convergence, the blunting of that critical edge impedes reconciliation within and between fields. Finally, as Wæver (1998) argues, the increasing emphasis on (social scientific) methodology in North American IR, against the more 'critical' connotations of European scholarship, underlies an infra-disciplinary polarization which is likely to continue, with further problematic consequences for interdisciplinarity in terms of epistemic underpinnings.

That said, first, Constructivism remains a contested framework. In both North American and European contexts, what exactly counts as Constructivism and what its relation should be with both positivist mainstream and critical alternatives is far from set in stone. Second, Constructivism *does* provide intellectual conditions amenable to interdisciplinary convergence; and third, internal IR debates could benefit from MES contributions and vice versa. As with previous attempts at interdisciplinary dialogue, however, Constructivism's amenability to act as a bridge is in itself necessary but not sufficient for convergence, and must be supplemented with an examination of the mechanisms through which knowledge is organized and produced. To understand the processes which bring about shifts in disciplinary mainstreams, a history of ideas analysing the (meta)theoretical conditions for convergence must be combined with

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an analysis of how knowledge is organized and produced in order to establish both the necessary intellectual and the sufficient material conditions for convergence to occur. In this political economy of the production of knowledge, obstacles to disciplinary convergence are located at a range of sites from ontological and epistemological grounds to material frameworks and political commitments.

10. Conclusion

The particularly intellectually and politically fraught trajectory of relations between IR and MES throws the foundational tensions at the heart of relations between academic fields into particularly sharp relief, providing a telling case of relations between Disciplines and Area Studies. First, both IR/Disciplines and MES/Area Studies are historically grounded in a positivist quest for universal knowledge. Second, the process of self-definition which other Disciplines like sociology, economics and anthropology went through, as in politics' case, also involved the appropriation of objectivist ideas of science.[29] Third, like MES, other Area Studies — e.g. African Studies — display analogous recent concerns with their viability (Bates, 1997b; Haugerud, 1997; Lowe, 1997). Indeed, European Studies was similarly accused of being theoretically isolated until a recent injection of Constructivism (e.g. Christiansen et al., 2001).[30] Investigating the attempts to 'bridge the IR/MES gap' therefore provides indications concerning relations between Disciplines and Area Studies more generally.

The analysis herein suggests first that, far from MES' 'crisis' being a novelty, the lack of 'interdisciplinarity' has regularly been identified as problematic since these fields' very inception. It also suggests that approaching the evolution of interdisciplinary relations as a purely intellectual history explains neither the persistence of such calls nor their continued failure despite repeated opportunities, emphasizing the need to integrate such conventional approaches with an analysis of the way knowledge is organized, produced and validated. Such an investigation, in turn, suggests that epistemic differences between mainstream Disciplines and Area Studies within a positivist organization of knowledge, compounded by more or less explicit political agendas, result in a tendency — embedded in the very fabric of these fields — to reproduce existing foundational divisions rather than transcend them. Thus, if interdisciplinary scholarship is to take root, convergence must occur on both intellectual and organizational levels.[31]

Such disciplinary synchronicity is unlikely so long as post-Orientalist scholarship remains marginal in MES and mainstream IR absorbs Constructivism's critical potential. Constructivism, however, remains a contested framework, and

the goal of re-equilibrating North American objectivism would benefit from interventions drawing on strong local knowledge to illustrate the spatio-temporal boundedness of political dynamics. This in turn would help emphasize the inadequacy of universalist epistemologies in favour of narrative explanatory frameworks (Ruggie, 1998). Moreover, any potential intellectual 'bridge' must be associated with an alternative organization and production of knowledge. Whether changes at the level of institutional design or of academic practices will facilitate this process remains debatable.[32]

Given this complex set of circumstances, what prospects are there for inter-disciplinary cross-fertilization? Although this review suggests scepticism, there is something specific about both the kind of organization under consideration, and the in-built 'emancipatory' goal it sets itself which may facilitate this convergence. The function of academia is to produce the highest possible quality of knowledge, and — with due provisos concerning the normativity of defining 'quality' — this entails a reflection on the foundations of that knowledge, which in turn embeds the possibility of subverting 'mainstreams' into the very nature of intellectual enterprise. Whether that potential is realized depends on numerous features of the institutional (and political) environment.

In sum, if Constructivism affords a possible environment for the convergence of IR and MES, of Disciplines and Area Studies, it is also clear that this is a necessary but not a sufficient condition, and that the epistemic shifts required in order to allow the flowering of such a 'fertile academic Mesopotamia' can be brought about only with shifts in the way knowledge is organized, produced and validated.

Notes

1. With Marxism this distinction is less clear-cut: various strands — e.g. Gramsci, the Frankfurt School — distance themselves from materialism.
2. E.g. Gibb, Hourani, Vatikiotis. The *International Journal of Middle East Studies* only publishes articles using unpublished primary documentation.
3. Although more frequently applying than re-evaluating (Western) models, MES political economists deserve separate mention for more systematically theoretically informed work.
4. This suggests a problematic 'co-habitation' of philosophically empiricist *and* realist stances.
5. This holds at both inter- and infra-disciplinary levels: margins and mainstreams can be simultaneously culture-blind in self-representation and culture-blinded in their practices.

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6. Oxford, where Gibb taught, is an example. This division dates to the early 20th century: before World War I North American MES and European counterparts were organized around Semitic Studies, with fields not distinguished methodologically, but by the kinds of questions asked. Economics only invented 'the economy' in the 1930s, Political Science 'the political system' in the 1940s–50s (Mitchell, 2003a: 3–6).

7. E.g. for Halpern '[o]nly a society that has already achieved a dynamic stability can afford to think of politics, economics, or culture as genuinely autonomous realms of existence' (1962: 121).

8. The Carnegie Corporation's Pendelton Herring in Wagley (1948: 6–7; emphasis added). The emancipatory reading of this position, relativizing Western experiences, did not come about until the 1960s, and even then remained marginalized.

9. ACLS, A program for Near East Studies in the United States, Washington, 1949, in Halpern (1962: 109).

10. Neither findings nor minutes were published. For assessments of fields and desirable direction of change, see D.A. Rustow (1956); Gibb (1956).

11. Hall, Clowse and Rafael in Mitchell (2003a: 3). In the USSR, attention to contemporary Middle East politics was not officially sanctioned until 1956 (Halpern, 1962: n. 2).

12. The political dimensions of the 1950s project for Disciplines and Area Studies transpire, first, from the Cold War-driven funding of Area Studies; and second, from the explicit political goals of 'New Orientologists'.

13. AAMES survey by J.C. Hurewitz in Halpern (1962: 108). Institutions include Columbia, Harvard, Johns Hopkins, Princeton, UCLA and McGill. The appearance of interdisciplinary programmes suggests that a 'gap' was identified as problematic.

14. See references in Mitchell (2003a: n. 29).

15. See monographs listed in note 3.

16. This suggests a split within 'new Orientology' regarding which interdisciplinary gap was significant and how to bridge it. Europeans emphasized humanistic methods, North Americans preferred social science.

17. Vatikiotis was an Arabic-speaker, a trained political scientist, and participated in SSRC Meetings on Comparative Politics and the Middle East. Halpern accused him of being theoretically 'confused' (1962: 113).

18. Others responded that academics involved in advisory capacities to the US or Israel were also part of the (neo)colonial enterprise. Future MESA President Leonard Binder, for example, was an Israeli soldier during the 1948–49 war. Said's (1978) critique pointed at deeper biases embedded in the scholarship, both humanist and Disciplinary.

19. An SSRC Near and Middle East Committee initiative, with Ford Foundation funds. Mitchell (2003a: 9). The extent of connections with AAMES is unclear.

20. Mitchell (2003a) indicates Samir Amin's thesis on dependency patterns, completed in the 1950s, although political activities prevented publication until the 1970s.

21. Richards and Waterbury strenuously defended modernization theory, drawing on dichotomic Orientalist constructions of West-developed/non-West-underdeveloped: Europe 'shaped our understanding of [development] but has not provided

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a model that will *faithfully* be *replicated* in developing countries [which] may skip some stages by importing technology or telescope others' adding that 'the process of class formation in the Middle East and elsewhere has *varied considerably from* that of Europe' (1996: 37; emphasis added).

22. In 1991, the National Security Education Program supporting Area Studies centres was transferred to the US DoD. MESA and other professional associations protested NSEA's administrative location and requirements of service; a 1993 MESA resolution urged members to eschew NSEP funding. See *MESA Newsletter* (May 1994, February 1996).

23. This argument is not new: a 1981 RAND study of Title VI argues that Area Studies 'should make efforts to link their programs to more policy-oriented disciplines … [There] is a disjunction between center focus and national need, as defined by academic, governmental and business employers' (Hajjar and Niva, 1997).

24. Title VI was alleged to have been abused by funding scholarship which actively criticized US foreign policy. Cf. Kramer (2001) and H-MiddleEast-Politics discussions (2003).

25. Norms are 'intersubjective' because their existence rests neither entirely within the individual imagination, nor entirely independently of it. Consequently, norms and their politics are spatio-temporally bound. See Searle (1995) and Onuf in Jørgensen (2001).

26. E.g. Mitchell's 'study of the power to colonise' (1988: i). Kassem (1999) compares Middle Eastern and Latin American experiences; Fahmy (1997) analyses the ramifications of army modernisation; Ayubi (1996) adopts a Gramscian approach. See also Jankowski and Gershoni (1997), Beinin and Lockman (1997).

27. Some scholars, like Halliday or Barnett, are exceptions. Post-Orientalist scholars work primarily themes other than international politics, although a sustained effort is made in the 2004 *Journal of Mediterranean Studies.*

28. See also Hopf (1998) and *International Studies Review*'s 2004 special issue on 'Realist Constructivism'.

29. See articles on Sociology (Camic), Linguistics (Gal et al.) and Anthropology (Stocking) in the special issue of *Social Research* (1995) 62(4).

30. Latin American Studies' highly innovative theoretical profile is an exception (Drake and Hilbink, 2002).

31. Certainly, persistent criticism of the 'state of the art' may be partly attributed to young scholars attempting to further their careers. However, the continued involvement of senior academics, the recurring emphasis on 'interdisciplinarity' as social *science*, and not least the way in which such a notion is deployed to oversee and discipline both relations between fields and 'real-world' politics, suggest that a more general process of securitization of knowledge production is taking place.

32. Facilitating change requires funding bodies to emphasize interdisciplinary projects (cf. the ESRC's old Thematic Priorities vs. its upcoming 'responsive mode'). For debates over the impact of funding, see Rogers (2000) and Sidaway (2000).

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