INSTRUCTIONS TO CANDIDATES

Please read these instructions carefully, but do not open the question paper until you are told that you may do so. This paper is Section 2 of 2.

This question paper requires you to read a single passage and answer three related questions.

You should write your answer in the space provided in this question paper. Please complete this section in black pen.

You can use the blank inside front and back covers for rough working or notes, but no extra paper is allowed. Only answers in the space indicated in the paper will be marked.

Dictionaries may NOT be used.

Please wait to be told you may begin before turning this page.
Read the following passage carefully and answer the questions that follow.

Write your answers in the space provided in this booklet. Your answers must be in English.

The Indian Ocean and Other Middle Easts

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rise of the European Union, many of the categories of scholarly inquiry that once seemed entirely self-evident have entered an era of protracted critique, if not outright crisis. Old assumptions about the inexorable march from a world of empires to a world of sovereign nation-states suddenly appeared less certain. The nation-state’s crisis of confidence was mirrored, perhaps even magnified, in the area studies system. As the metageography of the Cold War crumbled, the regional boundaries of the area studies system that it had produced were instantly outmoded. Concomitantly, the growing recognition of globalization called into question the wisdom of imposing such boundaries in the first place.

In response to these concerns, academia has been inundated by a torrent of scholarship claiming to transcend both national and regional frames. Prominent among these has been the surging popularity of oceanic arenas and seascapes. Indian Ocean works have been an especially vibrant part of this trend. As Isabel Hofmeyr enthused, the Indian Ocean “makes visible a range of lateral networks that fall within the Third World or Global South. It is hence of particular relevance to those pursuing post-area studies scholarship.” And yet, despite such lofty pronouncements, area studies regions live on and continue to exert an enormous power over our scholarly imaginations. On the whole, scholars of the Middle East have been somewhat more reticent than their Africanist and South Asianist counterparts in embracing this “oceanic turn.” For many Middle East specialists Indian Ocean studies may still appear to be a South Asian subfield or, less charitably, a soup of synthetic imperial histories spiced with world-systems theory.

While Middle East specialists have repeatedly agonized over where to draw the external geographical boundaries of the region, one could make an equally persuasive claim that they have also failed to address the internal spatial divisions created by the region’s core historiographical narratives and preoccupations. When we view the modern Middle East through conventional area studies lenses, more often than not, we refer primarily to Egypt, Greater Syria, and the Turkish core of the Ottoman state. For the pre–World War I era, the Ottoman frame is understandably privileged, but, again, the balance of this scholarship is not distributed very evenly across the entire region. For the nineteenth century, the core narratives of modern Middle Eastern history tend to lavish attention on the region’s relationship with Europe and the modernizing projects of the Ottoman center or Mehmed Ali’s Egypt. Another way of thinking about the modern Middle East is as a space defined by questions related to the Ottoman Empire’s struggle to defend its sovereignty against European intervention and nationalist successions, essentially an expanded version of the Eastern Question. Carrying this narrative forward, the region’s post–World War I history is predominantly structured around the managed transition from Ottoman and European mandatory rule to the emergence of Arab nationalism and the creation of independent states in Egypt, Greater Syria, and Iraq.

As a result of this prioritization, a host of Other Middle Easts in the Arabian Peninsula, the Red Sea, and the Gulf (including parts of Iraq and Iran) remain marginalized. In contrast to the more thoroughly centralized Ottoman core of the conventional Middle East, the Red Sea and Gulf featured a varied landscape of tenuously integrated frontier provinces, semi-autonomous and indirect rule, and wide swaths of territory entirely beyond even the most nominal claims of Ottoman sovereignty. Of equal importance, most of the peninsular Middle East’s states owe their origins to the system of frontier residencies, treaty shaykhdoms, and protectorates created by and tied to British India.

Source: Michael Christopher Low, 2014. Published in Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East, Volume 34(3).
QUESTIONS

1. In no more than 100 words, summarise the discussion in the text.

2. What do you understand by the term ‘area studies scholarship’? Why has there been a call for ‘post-area studies scholarship’?

3. Geographical boundaries are sometimes thought of as simply physical lines on a map. Is this view satisfactory? Why? Why not?
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