

Human / Social Sciences and Research Ethics

On December 7-8, 2007, The Center for Economic and Social Studies and Research (CERES) organized in collaboration with the Middle East Research Competition (MERC) an international conference on Human and Social Sciences and Research Ethics. Twenty six researchers from universities and research centres in Tunisia, Algeria, Libya, Morocco, Turkey, Switzerland and France participated in the conference.

A large number of researchers from universities and research centers in Tunisia, Algeria, Libya, Morocco,

(Centre des Etudes et des Recherches Economiques et Sociales CERES) opened the meeting emphasizing the importance of research ethics in the social sciences. Following Dr. Ennabi, Dr. Abdelwahab Ben Hafaiedh, MERC coordinator, spoke about the general context underlying that selecting research ethics to be the topic of MERC annual conference was not easy as researchers often refrain from discussing it. Dr. Benhafaideh asserted the need to draw a distinction between general morality and research ethics, explaining that what we need is not to pass judgements but to understand the importance of



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Turkey, Switzerland and France participated in the above-mentioned conference presenting more than 26 papers. Dr. Hassan Al-Annabi, director-general of the Centre for Economic and Social Studies and Research

adherence to codes of ethics in research.

Dr. Benhafaiedh then gave the floor to the representatives of the Arab Sociological Association and the Association of Francophone Sociologists.

Head of the Arab Sociological Association, Mustapha Attir spoke about his experience with the development of research ethics and the series of meetings that were organized in collaboration with the Arab League Science, Culture and Education Organization (ALECSO).

Mrs. Ipek Merçil (Turkey), from the Association of Francophone sociologists linked the issue of research ethics in this conference to the growing interest in the topic in international research centers. Some centers, she commented, believe they are above research ethics.

These standards, the participants emphasized, have positive repercussions on the development of competent researchers. On the other hand, the ambiguity of standards or the interference of favouritism, nepotism, personal considerations and power relations can have negative effects that augment the mediocrity of research and researchers.

The conference brought together researchers from various disciplines in humanities and social sciences as well as different generations of researchers who



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Different Axes

Presentations were made over four sessions. The first session was dedicated to the discussion of research ethics in social sciences; the second session addressed the supervision of dissertations in

humanities and social sciences; the third session dealt with the unethical practices of piracy and plagiarism. Finally, the fourth session focused on the evaluation of research and the development of quality standards.

have been grappling through practice and experience with the contradictory meanings of research ethics, which may torment both individuals and institutions and create distance between the researcher and his field.

Professor Ridha Boukra stressed the context of the sociological research in Tunisia at the dawn of the creation of the national independent state. At that time, researchers experienced an inchoate moment and tension between developmental trends adopted

by the political elites which aimed at building an impervious economy and a decent life for citizens on one hand, and the requirements for undertaking field work which proved that these trends were not always correct or appropriate to the specificities of the Tunisian social structure, on the other. At that time, he reiterated, researchers faced a dilemma of research ethics: was it necessary to help the political elites in what they perceived as a political struggle against political, economic and cultural retardation, by conducting research that did not fulfil the conditions of a scientific and objective discourse that necessitated the diversification of fact-finding tools and refraining from the official data collection methods and analysis? Or, alternatively, get into debates and arguments with the

This oscillation lasted even after the failure of the cooperative choices and the triumph of economic liberalism which led, in the absence of an integrated societal project, to the collapse of Marxist sociology and the emergence of a positivist empirical trend enriched by the Anglo-Saxon traditions. In the 1980's, Tunisian sociologists' interest shifted away from the economic to the cultural sphere. Having abandoned the study of economic inequalities, more and more sociologists were now interested in the rise of Islamist movements and popular and religious phenomena. While these fluctuations have persisted, means of expressing them have changed. The argument between proponents of the



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political elite based on the findings of research studies? The speaker said that at that time, the use of the concept “sociological militancy” did not cause - in comparison with today- any embarrassment or ill feelings. Everybody was engaged in one way or the other in supporting the state's developmental efforts and there was no mention of research ethics, or of the researcher's assumed impartiality or neutrality.

quantitative and the qualitative approach were taken to the higher epistemological level.

For his part, Professor Khelil Zomitti, spoke about the contradictions he personally experienced in a sociological consultancy he undertook, between the ethics of academic research and the requirements of the work he was asked to do. That type of action

research implied 'helping' a certain donor or development expert to implement programs without consideration to the historic or social specificities of the society or the collective interest of the respondents.

In a different subject, professor Maher Trimech spoke about the crisis of sociology in the Arab World which he attributed to modernity which mirrored on Arab sociological action and giving sociologists the power to reform rather than to theorize and provide treatment rather than analyze. He quotes Abdelkader Zghal who said in one of his articles: "we are all geared up for social problems and are unprepared to transform them into sociological problematics that are open for probing and the formulation of hypotheses that are amenable to be examined and validated"

Professor Trimech went on in his analysis of the crisis of sociology in the Arab world by saying that sociology

was tantamount to adopting the political vision with all its methodological choices.

History professor Habib Kozdogli pointed in his presentation on "research in humanities and social science: the importance of respecting research topic" to the un-objective conditions that accompanied the organization of a seminar in Mannouba University. He explained that a number of students spurred by some university professors boycotted the conference and issued slogans and fliers against it, while instead they could have used the public space of their university to write articles to convey their point of view. They could have challenged the organizers' theoretical, political and ideological underpinnings. The absence of dialogue, said the speaker, leads to violence and paves the road to dogma and gradually kills the critical social



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has tended to support the nation-state in its efforts at nation building and the protection of the social status quo. This, according to Algerian sociologist Ali al Kenz,

intellect that is capable of advancing scientific discourse.

Addressing the sociological and political use of scientific research, Professor Nazli Oktem from Turkey focused on the public sponsorship of research. She explained that the choice of research topics is subjugated to the social and political context and that quite often researchers do not take part in the choice but rather the topics are imposed on them to fit the state's general approach. At the same time, some topics are still taboo subjects. The researcher does not enjoy

localism which sometimes prevents the birth of free and critical thought in humanities.

Along the same lines, Ahmed Khouaja and Zeinab Samandi from Tunis focused on the question of bibliography and the problematic of reading and writing in social sciences. They raised a theoretical and methodological problem that faces researchers everywhere regardless of their theoretical and epistemological background. The conscious or un



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freedom which in turn may result in the decline of research ethics, as the researcher does not have the chance to practise reflexivity on the objective and non-objective topics that may generate scientific knowledge. The choice of research topics is not free from political and ideological inclinations, she concluded. Researchers should be made aware of these practices so they would be able to find a solution for the tension they experience between the academic research requirements and research ethics in their consultancy work. In her presentation, the speaker put emphasis on the importance of cooperation and networking between researchers all over the world to break the fetters of

conscious choice of bibliography is not a haphazard process, they emphasized. Khouaja said that it is the reader who creates the impact of the work and in this context he raised the issue of neutrality of reading. The reader has control over the impact and subjugates it to his/her tendencies and intellectual and ideological proclivities. This explains why some books have not been read or others have been wrongly read. There are narcissist readers who enjoy particular parts of the text. In the same vein, Samandi asserted that bibliography is a domain to examine political and social stakes outside the scientific discourse and that the task of the

researcher is to uncover mechanisms of hegemony and attempt to reduce their effect on the topic.

Along the same line of the theoretical and methodological framework that preoccupy researchers in humanities and social sciences regardless of their identities and affiliations, Abdel Kader Latreche from Algeria focused on the ethics of collecting personal data from some of the ethnic migrant groups that find difficulty in assimilation in the destination countries. He questioned how we can produce scientific knowledge without infringing upon the privacy of people. He also questioned the ability of national and public statistics to reflect the conditions of the public and their demands and present their orientations and

Accusations, justifications and interpretations
Several papers (Hermassi, Belkahla, ...) addressed the issue of research supervision and piracy.

Training in Tunisian and Moroccan universities was addressed and speakers discussed the teaching staff and students' breach of the ethics of respect, credibility,

trust and perseverance. Others indicated that the relation of tension between teachers and students is a result of the deterioration in the condition of universities and the large number of students and



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public opinions. Is statistics as a discipline required to only inquire into the credibility of data regardless of their sources which respect the well recognized norms and controls applied in soliciting information from respondents, in return for respect of privacy and confidentiality and use of data only for scientific purposes?

the clear keenness of students to pursue graduate studies, not out of interest in the promotion of knowledge and science but in order to run away from the bogey of unemployment which now threatens many social science graduates. Adil Belkahla, Tunisia, was critical of the conditions of universities indicating that they now comprise

individuals that have very little to do with knowledge, intellect and scientific research.

Some speakers addressed the absence of a clear vision or policy for academic research despite the message from the ministries of higher education and scientific research in Morocco and Tunisia that promote returns of teaching and research and increase appropriations in these areas. He pointed to the problems encountered by research units and laboratories in training students as a result of lack of funding, administrative problems in making financial allocations and lack of motivation on the part of teaching staff. Other speakers addressed the poor level of training of social science students.

In this context, Fatima Roumate “Morocco”, spoke about the qualitative evaluation of scientific research in Morocco and the role of the Ph.D schools in raising the standard of training and supervision and the quality of Ph.D. theses. She also discussed the report that is published in Morocco every two years and seeks to evaluate the performance of scientific research. The report presents an objective diagnosis of the performance of scientific research as well as solutions and alternatives. In 1998 the report suggested that the government allocates at least 1% of the gross domestic product to scientific research and the development of documentation policies and technological changes as well as the dissemination of research findings.

Abdellatif Hermassi from Tunisia focused on the issues of supervision and evaluation in light of the fuzziness

of the legal texts in Tunisia which have several loopholes particularly when it comes to the examination of the files of candidates for promotion to the rank of lecturer (after eliminating the degree of doctorat d’etat). The supervision and Ph.D. committees became domains of tension and nepotism which undermined the credibility of the degrees. Ph.D. supervision organized by law 1829 of 1993 which was amended in 1997 requires scientific distinction, creativity and seriousness which the supervision committees have found hard to evaluate. In some cases the committee stipulates

not less than 200 pages of published peer reviewed articles in addition to a pedagogic report which highlight the level of supervision obtained by the candidate up till the Masters degree. Ministerial decree no. 23 issued in 1998 drew distinction between acceptability and final acceptance of the file. The latter required the formation of a five member committee of teaching staff representing the university to which the candidate is affiliated as well as outsiders. Ministerial decree no. 38 of 2006 helped the eligibility committees perform their task by providing eight criteria of evaluation including continuous production and creativity, control over research techniques and good writing and mastering foreign languages. Dr. Hermassi said that research ethics are necessary and are the bases upon which supervision and evaluation are grounded but they are at the same time linked to other elements that

fall beyond the limited university environment and have historical and social roots that cannot be epitomized by enacting laws or refining legislation. These, he said need to have an appropriate atmosphere to develop scientific research inside and outside the universities and nurture scientific capacities in accordance to best university practices applied in top universities around the world that respect research ethics.

Combating piracy

A number of speakers emphasized the proliferation of research piracy and violation of ethics as a result of the poor conditions of scientific research in the developing world and the over-crowdedness of universities particularly their social science departments. They also underlined another factor, namely the progress achieved in means of communication and the revolution of the internet that resulted in the opulent flow of information and text. Presenters, particularly Mrs. Michelle Bergada from Switzerland, who manages a site on the web that combats piracy and stealth, and Idriss Lakrini from Morocco, stressed the need to speak about these issues in public and on university campuses in order to limit the proliferation of the phenomenon among staff and students. Lakrini emphasized that in order to combat piracy in Morocco, legislation was issued to protect intellectual copyrights but has unfortunately remained ineffective and unable to either protect victims of piracy or punish those who commit the acts, due to the inefficient system of litigation and implementation of

law. Public slandering, he added, remains the most effective way of combating this phenomenon.

Research ethics: An extended phenomenon and societal problem

At the end of the seminar, participants asserted the importance of research ethics in developing social science research and improving the performance of universities but they insisted on the need to organize the social science profession and issue basic laws that control criteria of affiliation to the profession and the ethics of dealing between its members on one hand or between researchers and respondents on the other, and finally, between researchers and the organizations in which they work

They also emphasized the importance of audio visual media to promote the returns of social science research and disseminate its findings. Some speakers said that research ethics are related to the condition of public freedoms and human welfare as well as the general effectiveness of laws, the immanence of democracy in public governance as well as the economic and moral conditions of staff and researchers.

MERC Research Awards (Cycle 4)

December 2007

Aslihan Aykac

(Turkey)

The impact of social security reform on women's labor force participation in Turkey

Lena Meari

(Palestine)

Interrogating "painful" encounters: The interrogation-encounter between Palestinian political activists and Shabak

May Farah

(Lebanon)

Identity in exile: The case of Palestinian youth refugees

Feika Bagbag, Tarek Belhadj & Mohammad Bechir Hlayem

(Tunisia)

Quality of life and welfare: Study of young Tunisians

Sonia el Amdouni

(Tunisia)

The feminization of employment in Tunisia: Family, social and professional trajectories of working women

Yasmine Berriane

(Morocco)

Strategies and Modalities of access into the public sphere of associative women leaders on Morocco: Case study

MERC Research Awards (Cycle5)

July 2008

Rawia Tawfik

(Egypt)

State – Society relations and regional role:
Comparing Egypt and South Africa

Besma Loukil

(Tunisia)

For a better variability of Tunisian urban Public
parks: A geography of incivility and other
offences in public parks in towns of northern
Tunisia

Meriem Yafout

(Morocco)

Women within islamists movements: A
modernization factor ?

Mohammad Jeggllaly

(Lebanon)

Regulation mode of a competitive religious
field: Dar El Fatwa and Sunni Ulemas in
Lebanon

Saniye Dedealglu

(Turkey)

Dynamics of social exlusion of migrant women
in Turkey: The case of Azerbaijani women

Suha Bolukbasi

(Turkey)

Political Islam in Turkey: Are outsiders
becoming the established ?

Randa Nasser

(Palestine)

Feminist consciousness and praxis among
Palestinian women activists

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

December 2008

Research awards competition

The Middle East Research Competition (MERC) is pleased to announce the sixth round of research awards and invites proposals from qualified researchers. Deadline for receiving proposals in their final format is **October 31, 2008**.

While open to all research ideas and topics, the program encourages rigorous applications that apply social science methodologies and theories particularly in the following areas:

- Public life: public interest and the public sphere, including the development of public life in societies under study and enhancement of opportunities of public participation for all social groups with emphasis on women and youth
- Development: Research on various aspects of development, both local and national, i.e., sustainable development, social change and governance
- Knowledge and educational capacities: Research on educational capacities and socialization, including citizenship, educational policy, use of IT, academic curricula, and the role of various actors in field of education.
- Social issues, including research on gender, the family, old age, and childhood, socialisation, social reproduction and social mobility
- Regional and international relations: This includes research on economic and diplomatic relations, post-conflict situations, the psychological and political impact of conflicts and the rehabilitation of victims of conflict.

Scientific Committee

MERC is guided by a multi-disciplinary scientific selection committee composed of five scholars from the region with established research and publication records as well as experience in regional research and teaching.

All selections for research awards are made by the Scientific Committee, which also makes recommendations concerning the topical orientation and activities of the program.

Members of the Scientific Committee serve on a rotating basis and previous committee members play a vital role in extending the MERC network and facilitating communication **and feedback**.

Eligibility

Residents of Arab countries and Turkey are eligible to apply for the awards and to participate in the activities of the program. Residents are persons of any nationality whose current and planned future place of professional practice is in the region. Temporary residence outside the region for purposes of advanced study does not preclude eligibility. Research proposals may include non-residents as co-investigators. Old awardees of MERC are not eligible

Research Awards

Research Awards are intended for scholars with previous successful research experience in any social science field. Ph.D. holders in the early stages of their professional careers are especially encouraged to apply. For exceptionally strong cases, research awards may also be made for Ph.D. dissertation research in the region by students from the region. In the case of projects involving team research, the principal investigator must have a Ph.D. degree.

Final Proposal

Proposals can be submitted in Arabic, French, or English. Only fully developed proposals are forwarded to the Scientific Committee. Final proposals should include all information and details necessary for the Scientific Committee to understand the research ideas and plans. Every proposal should be self contained and not dependent on supporting documents unless they are enclosed (e.g., papers or articles of the principal investigator). A final proposal should not exceed 20 typed double-spaced pages in length. Additional pages are needed for an abstract, time-line, budget, and curriculum vitae of all proposed project members.

No special forms are used to submit proposals. The following checklist is suggested in order to help the applicant prepare a complete proposal. Proposals must be submitted in Times New Roman, 12-point font. Electronic (email) submissions are strongly encouraged.

I. The body of the proposal should discuss fully the following issues:

a. The main objectives of the proposed research.

b. The theoretical framework of the proposed research, with sufficient reference to the state of the art, and the possible contributions of the proposed research to the discipline.

c. A literature review, including an evaluation of previous research on the subject and current gaps. The review of the literature should demonstrate the applicant's knowledge of international as well as regional research on the subject.

It is particularly important to identify the contribution of the proposed research to the current state of scholarship on the region. Quotations and bibliographic references should be fully documented.

d. The methodology that will be used to investigate the objectives of the research, including methods for data collection and analysis. For field data collection, the researcher's prospects for obtaining necessary permits should be addressed. For secondary analysis, sources of information or data and their accessibility to the investigators should also be identified in the proposal.

II. In addition to the above, the proposal must address the following issues:

e. Significance of the expected results and its public policy implications.

f. Plans for the write-up and dissemination of research results.

g. Provisions made for the protection of human subjects, obtaining informed consent and the protection of confidentiality as well as an assessment of the impact of probable findings. These should be discussed in conformity with the ethical guidelines of each discipline.

h. Utilization of existing research facilities at the researcher's institution or other institutions.

III. The proposal must contain the following appendices:

1. Time-Line: A time-line for the research project, outlining the unfolding of the proposed research in reasonable detail. The research duration usually ranges between 12 to 18 months.

2. Budget Request: The budget should be reflective of the extent of fieldwork and number of researchers.



3. Investigators and personnel should be listed by position or task, giving for each person the time commitment (percentage of time allocated to the project) and time-rates of compensation (how financial compensation is calculated for tasks performed). Budget items may include purchase of specifically identified research equipment, travel and transportation costs, stipends, technical assistance, stationery and other supplies. Awards are usually made in the range of US\$ 5,000 to US \$ 15,000. In the case of awards for team research or to institutions, there is an allowable maximum of US \$ 35,000. The budget should clearly indicate whether other sources of funding are already available or have been applied for and which items would be fully or partially covered by other sources.
4. A curriculum vita with a list of publications for every investigator is required. For a proposal from a graduate student for support of Ph.D. dissertation research in the region, at least one letter of evaluation and support of the student and the project by a dissertation supervisor is required.

Deadlines

Final and complete research proposals are due on **October 31, 2008**.

A response from the MERC Secretariat can be expected four weeks after the meeting of the Scientific Committee. Inquiries can be submitted at any time and MERC will be pleased to examine and comment on draft research proposals received not later than six weeks before the final deadline.

Applications and/or inquiries about the competition should be addressed to:

The Middle East Research Competition

Center for Economic and Social Studies and researches

23 Rue D'Espagne-Tunis

Tel: (00216)98321172/ Fax: (00216)71326770

Email : contact@mercprogram.org

Social welfare in the Arab world: the future of public services and social policies in studies and research

MERC - CERES
December 2008



Human and social sciences are witnessing ongoing knowledge expansion, both in terms of the steady increase in the number of researchers as well as the increasing volume of information transmission and piracy through a variety of electronic resources. This poses several new challenges including those pertaining to quality standards and code of professional ethics in social science research.

It is worth noting that rarely is the relationship between the researcher and research management or the issue of evaluation of research or competition and the right to disagree on objective scientific grounds open for discussion. These are important topics that arise on a daily basis and result in tension and sometimes bewilderment given the difficulty that traditional referents encounter in adapting to the rapid social and academic developments.

However, in this regard, the most critical issue that needs to be examined is the one relating to the extent of freedom in devising research agenda and selection of priority topics. In fact, the selection of research topic is the first determinant of researcher's professional career. Is this choice the responsibility of the research management only or does the researcher has a say in it? On what basis does this occur: personal interests, availability of resources, the requirements of work within a research team, or considerations of the job market? ... And then what are the conditions governing supervision and research management ? Do the ethics of professional conduct require tracking all steps undertaken by the researcher in order enable her/him to achieve progress or are there different objectives? Finally, how possible is it to monitor piracy operations that have become rampant nowadays?.



Academic legislation and traditions require peer-review to verify quality of scientific output in all its forms (dissertations, theses, books and articles...). Does scientific assessment play an effective role as a safety valve to ensure that scientific research rise to a higher level?

All these questions and others are open for examination and scrutiny. The conference carrying the above-mentioned title will open for discussion the following main topics:

- Building research projects and development of agenda.
- Piracy and the ethics of dealing with resources.
- Evaluation and objective review of scientific output and assessments of peer-reviewers.
- Ethical rules for competition and for scientific differences

The deadline for submission of proposals is **October 31, 2008**

Address

The Middle East Research Competition

Center for Economic and Social Studies and Research

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Diversity and uniformity: What Role for Education, socialization and culture?

Upon the invitation of UNESCO Regional Office in Rabat and in collaboration with the Center for Economic and Social Studies and Research (CERES) in Tunis, the regional conference on “*diversity and cultural similarities: what role for education, socialization and culture?*” was held on April 26-28-2006

This meeting organized by CERES hosted many scholars and researchers representing a variety of disciplinary backgrounds and North African countries: Tunisia, Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria, and Egypt. Papers were presented in four pivotal sessions that were also rich with commentaries and discussions.

Content

Abdelwahab Benhafaiedh: Educating on choice: the hypothesis of the spider’s eyes and the elephant’s large body.

Mohamed Jouili: Cultural diversity and ethnic boundaries: the case of the black minority in the south of Tunisia.

Chokri El Mamni: Observations on the development of Arab cultural projects in the light of globalization.

Faten Adli: Cultural diversity and uniformity in the Egyptian society.

Aicha Ettaib Korchid: Border regions of the Maghreb; trajectories of building identity and production of privacy and communication.

Adel Belkahla: Amazigh self between uniformity and diversity.

Monia Reguig: Cultural identity in educational programs diversity and uniformity.

