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Awwak Al awwat - 1

Developing Research and Rethinking Development

- *Power and the production of knowledge in the social sciences: Text, context and texture*
- *Global social thought and spatial authenticity: Theory and Theorizing Across Borders*
- *Strengthening Social Science Research in the Region: The Case for Establishing an Arab Social Science Research Council*



Anrak Al Awsat

(Serie: Analyses et Prospective)

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Summary

Awrak Al Awsat

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Preface	10
Foreword	11
ARTICLES	
<i>Laurence Michalak.</i> Power and the production of knowledge in the social sciences: Text, context, and texture	14
<i>Solava Ibrahim.</i> “Localizing” the Conceptualization and Practice of Development	27
<i>Necla Tchirgi.</i> Strengthening Social Science Research in the Region : The Case for Establishing an Arab Social Science Research Council	34
<i>Abdelwahab Ben Hafaiedh.</i> Women and the public sphere in the Arab World: Empowerment and Participation in Social Sciences	46
<i>Moushira El Geziri - Aida Saidani.</i> MERC Annual Conference: Human and Social Sciences and Research Ethics.	54

Preface

Since its establishment in 1962 the Center for Economic and Social Studies and Research (CERES) has been keen to keep abreast of progress made in the sciences that fall within its scope of work, and expand its circle of interest to open up to new disciplines. Towards this goal, CERES has published several publications in economics, geography, linguistics, literature, Islamic studies, history, psychology and education and now, it is pleased to present to its audience a new series containing material with prospective character. It is worth noting that CERES completed in 2004 a number of studies for Tunisian ministries, which will be published shortly.

We are pleased that the new series “Analyses and Prospective Studies” includes research studies accomplished by grantees of the Middle East Research Competition (MERC), which has been operating since 2006 within CERES towards the development of field work in social sciences and analyzing the present to prospect the future.

Hassen El Ennabi

Foreword

The proverb goes to say that ‘small drops may form a stream’. Using the logic of the drops and stream we may consider the increase in number of journals and specialized work in social sciences in the Arab world, despite its modesty, is an indicator of good health and revival. However, the numbers are still below what is aspired for and much below international standards, relative to the number of social science graduates.

This optimistic quantitative estimation, relative to objective facts and low levels of research outputs, allow us to say with caution this time that social sciences have safely passed through the bottle-neck into a somewhat safer area. Today there are several research centers in the Arab world and many university departments and institutes in addition to thousands of graduates and a multitude of electronic websites that carry out research and library functions. This takes place as some Arab countries have been made the choice to give due regard and consideration to social sciences and knowledge, despite disparities from the far Maghreb to the Gulf.

This is the first half of the truth. The second half is less glamorous and has to be described from a purely clinical perspective. This is that a number of institutions in the region – without generalization – are still hesitant or refuse to play the role expected of them as mature and long-standing institutions. Some Arab universities and sociology departments are more than half a century old but they still live through childhood, or an extended period of frivolous adolescence. This

has reflected on social sciences and made them outsiders to the concerns, pre-occupations, interests and future paths of their societies as they preferred

to stay at square one of mental obliviousness and rejection of social responsibility. In other words, even if social sciences have made some improvements, they have not been entirely rescued from what is known in psychology as the “Peter Pan syndrome” a pathological state in which the old man (let us say the researcher) refuses to live through his old age for fear of the consequences and insists on returning to a previous stage of life. We may wish to say that social sciences in the Arab world suffer from these symptoms, that maturity is near to impossible and that return to childhood or to the past (depending on intellectual sensitivities) has become the only substitute for thinking about the future and the responsibilities of researchers towards their societies.

For the above reasons, as we prepared to issue *Awrak al Awsat* as a series for prospective studies to be published by CERES, our main concern was to develop the social responsibility of research within two main rubrics: First: encouraging writing and dissemination of research findings on the present and the future. The notion here is that if the local researcher does not have a prospective view of the present of his/her society, these societies with all their sciences, expertise and capacities will never be anything but the last square in the “future” of others.

Second: Disseminating research findings using the research studies funded by MERC. This was one of the main recommendations passed by MERC annual meeting held in Tunis in 2006. Participants in the meeting recommended that MERC issues a specialized publication to make known the results of research undertaken by its grantees.

The accumulation of diverse projects funded by MERC is one of the factors that encouraged the secretariat to venture into this experiment. It is an open invitation for everyone to work and write, and an acknowledgment that products are louder than words.

Abdelwahab Ben Hafaiedh



Articles

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social sciences: Text, context and texture*

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Power and the production of knowledge in the social sciences: Text, context, and texture

*Laurence Michalak**

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This paper looks at relations of power in the conduct and presentation of cross-societal research, with special attention to the Middle East and North Africa. It begins with Laura Nader's classic observation that most social scientists study down—that is, the relatively powerful—study the relatively powerless and it would be better if there was more studying up, including at the international level. We call attention to the terms text, context, and texture, which are suggestive of a useful hermeneutic approach to the study of society. Applying this approach to the study of a 1964 speech by then-President of Tunisia Habib Bouguiba, we argue that power resides most of all in the texture of Bouguiba's speeches such as the pauses and eye contact which are difficult to capture as text or context. We conclude that, although the countries of the Maghrib are suspicious toward the discipline of anthropology and have sometimes associated it with colonialism, anthropology nevertheless represents a positive tradition of scholarship that approaches other cultures with respect and offers useful insights.

تتطرق هذه الورقة إلى مشكلة السلطة كقادرة معنوية لها تأثير في مستوى إدارة وتسيير البحث بين المجتمعات مع تركيز أكبر على منطقة الشرق الأوسط وشمال إفريقيا. تستهل بملاحظة كلاسيكية للورا نادر ومفادها أن معظم علماء الاجتماع يدرسون "الأسفل" ويعني أن الأقوياء يدرسون الضعفاء غالبا. وسيكون الوضع أفضل لو أن هناك دراسة "للأعلى" على المستوى العالمي. نلفت النظر هنا إلى النص والسياق والحياسة الخاصة بالنص والتي تقترض مقارنة تفسيرية جديدة. لتأكيد ذلك يقوم الباحث بتوظيف هذه المقاربة في دراسة لخطاب خاص بالرئيس التونسي الأسبق الحبيب بورقيبة كان ألقاه سنة 1964. يبرهن الباحث على أن القوة تكمن في حياسة خطابات بورقيبة مثل لحظات الصمت و نظرات العين التي يصعب تحديد ما لو كانت نصا أم سياقاً. إن فهم النص مستقبلا سيضل مرتبطا بفهم سياقاته النفسية المركبة. وتخلص الورقة في النهاية إلى أنه على الرغم من شك بلدان المغرب في علم الأنثروبولوجيا وربطها غالبا بالاستعمار فإنها مع ذلك تمثل تقليدا إيجابيا لمنهج أو لمقاربة توصي باحترام ثقافات أخرى من خلال رؤية نافذة.

Until recently, anthropology was not taught in Algeria or Tunisia. Algerian higher education authorities at one time explicitly rejected anthropology as a colonialist discipline, and in Tunisia at least one minister of education once described anthropology as a “luxury”. Algeria and Tunisia have only recently introduced anthropology to their university curriculums, and Tunisia only at the Masters Degree level.

Thus anthropology has been a contested discipline in the Maghrib, for historical reasons that are easy to understand. To me and to many of my colleagues, however, anthropology is a positive tradition, the broadest and most fundamentally philosophical of the social sciences. The tradition of anthropology is multiple and diverse: it has had different routes of intellectual development and varies considerably from France, to Britain to Germany to the United States and elsewhere. However, these different modern manifestations of anthropology have in common the basic idea that we should approach other cultures with an attitude of respect, and from a perspective of equality. We need not necessarily accept the values of the societies we study, but our starting point is the attempt to understand them.

I refer to anthropology as a “fundamentally philosophical” discipline because to me it represents the attempt to understand the world from more than one perspective. Instead of looking at the social world with one eye, from only the perspective of one’s society of origin, the anthropologist attempts to understand the full spectrum of human diversity from more than one cultural perspective. Anthropology is a kind of triangulation on reality. If reality is a line, then the person who knows only his own society, however well, knows only one point on that line.

The anthropologist, however, seeks to integrate the perspectives of multiple cultures. This entails attempting to learn well at least one other language and spending a substantial period of time in at least one other culture, and these have become standard practice in cultural anthropology today. Anthropologists may argue about positivism, modernism, post-modernism, grounded research, hermeneutics, componential analysis, and belly-button anthropology, but we take seriously other cultures and civilizations, such as those of the Maghrib and the Middle East, and we approach them with respect

1- Power

Against this background, the key word in the title of my presentation and the main topic which I wish to address here is “power.” I argue that all social science, including anthropology, is about interrogation, and that interrogation is about power. I intentionally choose the word “interrogate,”

rather than “interview”. Both words mean “to ask questions,” but “interview” has connotations that are benign, while “interrogate” sounds more hostile and controlling. I prefer “interrogate” because it makes explicit the unequal relations between the studier and the studied, between the active and the passive, between the more powerful and the less powerful.

Some social scientists interrogate archives, city plans, and works of art and architecture. In the hermeneutic approach, as developed by late Clifford Geertz, all social phenomena are texts to be interpreted although, of course, archives, city plans, and works of art and architecture cannot actively reply. Real people can reply to our questions, and this is a big advantage. Thus social science becomes a process of interrogating people and interpreting their answers.

The person who asks the questions is relatively powerful, and the person who answers is relatively less powerful. An interrogation, or an interview, is not a normal human interaction. In a normal human interaction people ask and answer equally. “How are you?” “I’m fine.” “And how are you?” “I’m fine too” is a minimal conversation with one question and one answer from each of two interlocutors--a normal, balanced interaction. In the social sciences, however, the social scientist does, most of the asking and the native, or the informant does most of the answering, resembling in this way a police interrogation, in that the information flows in one direction only.

As social scientists, we may not like being compared to policemen. And yet sometimes the social scientist acts very much like a police interrogator. Radcliffe-Brown had Andaman Islanders brought to his office, where he asked them questions--that is, he interrogated them--and I doubt that the natives got to ask *him* many questions. In Tunisia, I was once with a social scientist in a government vehicle in a rural setting. He called people over with a gesture and asked them questions, and when he was finished he dismissed them with another gesture. They stood while he sat in the car and took notes. He did not tell them who he was or why he was asking questions. He did not greet them, or offer them a seat or thank them or bid them good-bye. This is interrogation.

I hasten to add that this example is atypical of scholars of any nationality. But the very position of being able to do research is itself a position of power. At one time, all of those who did social research of any kind were rich and powerful. They had to be in order to have the leisure to do research. Charles Darwin’s family was rich, and his wife’s family, the Wedgewoods, was even richer. Karl Marx was able to do social science thanks in part to the money of Friedrich Engels. Lewis Henry Morgan was able to study Native American kinship because he was a wealthy and

influential railroad lawyer who traveled for free. Margaret Mead was able to choose her research topic because she came from a wealthy family, her father having founded the Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania. However, most people have to work in mundane ways for a living. They do not have the luxury and leisure to analyze their sociopolitical and cultural environments. Even less do ordinary people (with the notable exception of labor migrants) have the opportunity to travel to other parts of the world, and study other peoples and cultures.

The result is that it is the more powerful who study the less powerful. The American anthropologist Laura Nader pointed this out in a seminal article 1972. She observed that social scientists tend to study relatively powerless people--such as native Americans, colonial peoples, tribal groups, and the poor. Nader called this "studying down." She argued that anthropologists and other social scientists should study not just the less powerful, but also the *more* powerful such as big corporations and government agencies. She called this "studying up."¹

More than three decades after Nader wrote this, there is still very little studying up, because the powerful do not want to be studied. An example of this came in 2001. Early in the first term of his presidency, George W. Bush formed a task force chaired by Vice President Dick Cheney, to devise a national energy policy. Both Bush and Cheney come from the energy industry. Their energy advisory committee consisted exclusively of lobbyists and executives linked to the gas, coal and oil industries, and they met in secret. In May 2001 the energy task force made its recommendations. They advocated more subsidies to polluters, more reliance on oil and non-nuclear power, no significant alternative energy endeavors, and they exhibited no concern for the environment.

When there were requests that Bush and Cheney give the names of participants in the task force, which met secretly over the course of several months, they refused to do so. Nor would they provide information about what had been discussed. A Freedom of Information lawsuit in April 2001 led to less than half the documents being turned over. In response to a series of lawsuits, full disclosure was ordered, but the Bush Administration has appealed at each step on grounds of Executive Privilege. The appeals are still pending and, after more than five years, the American people are still not fully informed about an important committee for which public money was

¹ Nader (Laura). "Up the Anthropologist: Perspectives Gained from Studying Up." In Dell Hymes, ed. *Reinventing Anthropology*. New York: Pantheon Press, 1972, pp. 284-311.

spent, and which made policies with important consequences. The powerful do not want to be studied and they make it difficult to study them.



Anthropologist Laura Nader wrote that social scientists tend to study powerless people

Laura Nader is right that we as social scientists have studied down too much. Despite the difficulties, studying up should be part of the social science agenda. And, whether we study up, down or across, we should strive for egalitarian modes of research interaction so that we interview rather than interrogate.

How does this relate to the Middle East? I would like to take Nader's analysis from the level of the study of the U.S. to the global level. Generally speaking, it is social scientists from the First

World who do research in Third World settings. If I may state the obvious, lots of Americans and Europeans study the Middle East but not so many scholars from the Middle East study America and Europe. I am an example of this--an American who studies the Maghrib. In Laura Nader's terms, but at the international level, I am studying down. If we look at the institutional framework of international research, we find that there are numerous organizations which facilitate the study of the Middle East and North Africa by Americans and Europeans. I am the Director of the Center for Maghrib Studies in Tunis (CEMAT), an organization whose task is to facilitate the study of Tunisia. CEMAT is part of a larger organization, the American Institute for Maghribi Studies (AIMS) which facilitates the study of the whole Maghrib.

There is nothing inherently wrong with studying the Third World, but my point is that there should also be Third World researchers who study the First World, and Third World organizations that facilitate the study of the First World. That is, there should be "studying up" at the international level.

Yet, I don't know of any Middle Eastern organizations that facilitate the study of America by Middle Easterners.

Besides CEMAT and AIMS, there are many other organizations that facilitate American research abroad. In the Middle East and North Africa alone, there is TALM for studying Morocco, CEMA for studying Algeria, CASA for studying Egypt, AIYS for studying Yemen, and ARIT for Studying Turkey. Throughout the world, there are 20 overseas research centers centrally organized under an American Council of Overseas Research Centers (CAORC). If we look at France, we find the same situation. The French have IRMC in Tunisia, IJB in Morocco, CEDEJ in Egypt, CERMOC in the Levant, IFEA in Turkey, etc. But where are the Middle Eastern organizations that have centers for Middle Easterners to study America and Europe?

I hasten to add that CEMAT, IRMC, and the other organizations I cite here are not bad organizations. The scholars, including myself, who run them and who do research through them are not necessarily colonialist or neo-colonialist. On the contrary, we operate in a post-colonial setting with post-colonial sensitivities. For example, as part of its activities CEMAT facilitates scholarship by Maghribis about the Maghrib. CEMAT's parent organization, AIMS, gives grants for Tunisians, Algerians and Moroccans to study each other's countries, and CEMAT gives grants for Tunisians to study the United States.

The CEMAT Library is a good example. It is a positive institution that promotes transparency of research about the Maghrib. In the CEMAT Library we have nearly all the major social science theses--approximately 1000 of them--that have been written by Americans about the Maghrib. We also have in our library most of the important books that have been written in English about the Maghrib. If you want to read American research about the Maghrib, it is there in the CEMAT Library. If you are a Maghribi or scholar from the Third World, you can use the CEMAT Library for free.

The same positive elements which I have cited for CEMAT are true for French organizations. Even more than the Americans, the French facilitate the study of the Maghrib by Maghribis. Go to the IRMC Library and you will see mostly North Africans, not French. Look at the list of IRMC researchers, and you will find that many (perhaps even most) of them are North Africans.

An example of postcolonial scholarship empowering native Middle Eastern social scientists is MERC, the sponsor of the conference in which this communication is being presented. The purpose of MERC is to empower

young social scientists in the Arab World and Turkey. MERC is funded by an American organization, the Ford Foundation, which has been helping young Third World social scientists since at least 1986. During the ten years that MERC was headquartered in Cairo, MERC helped over 153 Middle Eastern researchers. MERC was headquartered in Lebanon for four years, from 1997 to 2001, and then again in Cairo, from 2002 to 2005. And MERC is run not only *for* scholars from Middle East, but also *by* scholars from the Middle East. MERC is a positive, progressive, postcolonial institution.

Despite the good things I have just said about CEMAT, IRMC, MERC, and its enlightened postcolonial cousins, however, the point remains that there are many First World institutions for the study of the Third World, but very few institutions in the Third World for studying America and Europe. The West studies the East, and the West helps the East study the East, but the East does not study the West very much, and there are few resources to help the East study the West. The West studies down, and the East studies across, but neither the East nor the West studies up. This is a statement of power relations, and, again, power is inherent in process of social science research.

2- TEXT, CONTEXT AND TEXTURE

Now let me move to the second topic in the title of my presentation: “text, context, and texture.” These are three important aspects of social science field research which have been explicated primarily by folklorists, such as the late Alan Dundes². I will look at these three terms, examine an example drawn from a Maghribi setting, and then, in conclusion, connect these terms back to the central theme of power.

The first term, *text*, obviously refers to words. Historians especially rely on texts. Leon Carl Brown read Ottoman texts from Tunisian archives of the late 19th century and then wrote a text about Ahmed Bey.³ Other social scientists also use texts. I studied weekly markets in part through texts in the Tunisian National Archives⁴. As I mentioned earlier, I approve of Clifford

² Dundes(Alan). “Text, Texture and Context. “ *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 28:251-65 (1964).

³ Brown (Leon Carl.) *The Tunisia of Ahmed Bey, 1837-1855*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984

⁴ Michalak (Laurence) *The Changing Weekly Markets of Tunisia*. Ph.D Dissertation. University of California. Berkeley (1983).

Geertz's hermeneutic approach, using a broader definition of "text" to include other social phenomena such as city plans, art and architecture, etc.

The second term, *context*, refers to "the physical and social environment within which a text is performed" such as the physical setting in which I am speaking to you today and the institutional context of MERC and CEMAT. I would also include under *context* the historical setting. The third term, *texture*, refers to "the special linguistic and paralinguistic features of a performed narrative" e.g., pauses, intonation, imitation of speech, gesture, etc. These are three important aspects of the data which anthropologists (and, indeed, all social scientists) collect.

An example of text, context, and texture from Tunisia is the speeches of the late Tunisian President Habib Bourguiba. The *text* of a speech by Bourguiba can be written down, where it is available for all of us to read. We can analyze the texts of the speeches of Bourguiba, and indeed many historians and political scientists have done so in many books and articles. Second, we have the *context* of each speech, the characteristics of the place and the time in Tunisian history when the speech was given. And third, we have the *texture*, which I will discuss in a minute.

A memorable example of a Bourguiba speech came in 1964, when I had just arrived in Tunisia as an English teacher. Tunisia was in the midst of the cooperative movement under Ahmed Ben Salah. Ben Salah led an explicitly socialist government, and the name of Tunisia's single party had recently been changed to the Destour *Socialist* Party to reflect this. As part of its agricultural program, the Ben Salah government wanted to replace the old olive trees of the Sahel with new olive trees, in the name of increasing Tunisia's olive production. They proposed to uproot old trees and plant young trees, paying the owners of the trees for their lost income while the new olive trees were maturing. However, for a number of reasons, the farmers of the Sahel did not like this plan. Some farmers, especially in Ouardanine, fired shots from their old muskets at the bulldozers which came to uproot their trees and to remove the fences of cactus that divided the fields.

The bulldozer drivers ran away, and then the authorities came and shot and killed some of the farmers. In another town in the Sahel, in Msaken, where I lived and taught in Fall 1964, there was a protest by farmers in front of the city hall. The names of the protesters were noted, and they were later hunted down and arrested. I was sitting in a café in Msaken when one of the men who had protested was beaten up by the police and dragged away. President Bourguiba reacted to the protests by giving a speech. In his speech,

Bourguiba said, essentially, “You people of the Sahel are ungrateful for the wonderful agricultural program I am giving you ; I am a Saheli too; how could you, my fellow Sahelis, be so ungrateful and act so badly; you have offended me! Shame on you!” Clearly, the political and historical *context* here is important for understanding the speech.

Now I come to the third term, which I have saved for the last--the *texture* of Bourguiba’s speeches. As older Tunisians remember, Bourguiba had a distinctive style of speech, mainly because of its *texture*. There was much more to Bourguiba’s speeches than text or context. In fact, Bourguiba spoke most often without a written text. His speeches were performances, but his texts were not like lines of a play that an actor learns. Rather, the texts of Bourguiba’s speeches that remain for us today are transcripts, after-the-fact records of performances that were largely extemporaneous. Bourguiba usually began slowly. His speeches were like malouf or flamenco music, which are Arab in spirit. Like this music, a Bourguiba speech would begin with a slow tempo, pick up speed, become rapid, and then end abruptly. Bourguiba would start almost indifferently. Then he would warm to his theme, gather momentum, and get excited. His voice would rise in pitch and sometimes he would sound like a woman. Sometimes he would even weep. And then the speech was suddenly over.

There is much that one could say about Bourguiba’s speeches, but the most important things would come under *texture*. One textural aspect was the pauses. Bourguiba had long pauses in his speeches, especially in the openings, as if he were deciding what he would talk about and how he would talk about it. He would also pause in the middle of his speeches and look around at his audience with his piercing blue eyes. If one were trying to record such a speech, one might write in the text, “pause,” or “pause of ten seconds.” One could note pauses and other textural phenomena the way a playwright does, or the way a composer does in the musical score of an opera, with brief instructions such as *lento*, or *andante*, or *con brio*. Similarly, one could write, “weeps.” But the texture of Bourguiba’s speeches was complex. Unlike opera notation which is meant to apply to many performers, Bourguiba’s speech texture cannot be captured in just a word or two.

Now, to bring the two parts of my presentation together, where is the locus of power in Bourguiba’s speech ? Power can be found in the text and the context in obvious ways, but power is, I would argue, to be found most of all in the texture--for example, in the pauses just mentioned. What does the pause mean? I would argue that the pause means, at least in part, “I am

the President, and you are not; I am speaking, and you will listen; and if I pause to collect my thoughts, or to wait while my words sink in, you will sit quietly and wait until I am ready to continue.” This is power.

But there are different kinds of power. The power of Bourguiba was not the power of a policeman. His power was, or at least he intended it to be, the power of a father. His were very much the speeches of a father. The father does not need a written text, because the father speaks from the heart. In 1964, after the incidents in the Sahel, Bourguiba’s speech was the speech of a father to children who have behaved badly and need correction. And if the father sometimes weeps when he speaks with his children, it is because he loves them. Indeed, Bourguiba explicitly presented himself as a father to Tunisia.

It is important to note that not all Tunisians accepted Bourguiba’s father role. Not all Tunisians necessarily accepted Bourguiba’s paternally styled authority. Or perhaps many accepted it at first, but fewer did as time went by. There was a paternalistic logic to Bourguiba making himself President for Life. After all, you do not elect your father, or reelect him, and most especially you do not have the option of voting your father out of office. Your father is imposed on you from your birth. A father is unique and for all your life. Historians of Tunisia are now free to say that it is not necessarily good to have a father for a President, especially if he clings to his authority, even as his family matures.

3- CONCLUSION

At the beginning of my presentation I argued that, in process of social science research, the powerless do most of the talking, answering the questions of the powerful. When it comes to publication, however, the informant falls silent and the social scientist takes over and speaks for him or her. To use Edward Said’s term, the social scientist *represents* the informants. At the beginning of his book *Orientalism*, Said cites the famous quotation from Karl Marx : “They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented”.⁵ Actually, Marx used “representation” in the political sense of *vorstellen*, to represent a constituency in a parliament, but Said redefined “representation” and made it the key term in a powerful and persuasive new argument. Paul Rabinow in *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco* wrote about the construction of ethnographic representations from the interaction

⁵ Said (Edward) *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978.

between the anthropologist and the informant⁶, and Kevin Dwyer in *Moroccan Dialogues* wrote about the difficulty of representing, or speaking for the informant⁷, a topic that other scholars have since explored further.

Bourguiba's speeches exist in a realm of privileged discourse. Here it is the powerful one, the President, who does all the talking. Bourguiba was not answering questions from his citizens, but answering his own questions. He set his own discursive agenda. Bourguiba's speeches were like a social scientist publishing an article or a book. The informants fall silent, and the social scientist represents them. This is inevitable in social science. The important thing is that the social scientist be faithful to the voice of the informant. The anthropologist engages in the difficult attempt to capture, interpret and convey text, context and texture.

Earlier I asserted that social scientists are powerful because they have the leisure to do research, and because they ask questions of the relatively less powerful. Some of you may be thinking to yourselves: "But I am a social scientist and I am not powerful; I had to struggle to get my job I receive only a modest salary; I have to teach large classes and grade lots of examinations; I have only limited time to read and do research and write; I can't afford the books I would like to buy; and I am able to travel very little. How am I powerful?"



*The late Palestinian-American scholar
Edward Said redefined the term
"representation"*

I therefore add the important qualification that social scientists in themselves are not necessarily powerful. They are more often the agents--usually, I think, the unwitting agents--of the powerful, contributing to ideologies that justify the policies of the powerful.

⁶Rabinow (Paul) *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1977.

⁷Dwyer(Kevin) *Moroccan Dialogues: Anthropology in Question*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982.

Even if social scientists have good intentions, and certainly most of us do, the information they collect may be used in ways that justify the policies of the powerful. As social scientists, and especially as anthropologists, we occupy conflicted positions in our societies.

The power of the written word also varies. Abdelwahab Ben Hafaiedh has noted that scholars who publish in Arabic and Turkish are often marginalized.⁸ Their work tends not to appear in refereed journals, and therefore much of their work does not count for promotion or for tenure. At the same time, scholars who study the Maghrib and publish in English are marginalized, because most of the social science work published about the Maghrib is in French or Arabic. Even after it is published, the work of an Anglophone scholar of the Maghrib is not likely to be read by French and Arab scholars. Examine the references in works in French about the Maghrib and you will find few works in English cited. When they cite works in English at all, they are limited to the most famous scholars, such as Clifford Geertz and Edward Said, known mainly through translations. Excellent works about Tunisia by Mira Zussman and Sabra Webber remain little known and rarely cited by French or Arab scholars, because of language barriers.

Local scholars in the Maghrib have power that arises from their native linguistic and social knowledge that no outsider can ever fully attain. Scholars from outside the Maghrib may have greater resources, but they face the formidable tasks, both linguistic and philosophical, of attaining understanding of the complex societies of the Middle East and North Africa, to which they come as strangers. One might add that power relations are prone to periodic reversals, as we are reminded, at the collective level, by the case of the French in North Africa, and at the individual level, by the case of Bourguiba. Thus relations of power and powerlessness are complex.

I have argued here that, in the conduct and presentation of cross-societal research, it is important to be aware of power, and that within this context, the triumvirate of “text, context, and texture” is a useful analytical construct for understanding society, be it our own or another. In any case, all of us can learn from perspectives that come from scholars from outside, who look with different eyes, analyze through different cognitive lenses, and achieve different insights. We can learn from each other not only about other

⁸ Ben Hafaiedh (Abdelwahab) “The Body of a Dinosaur and the Steps of a Tortoise: Narrowing the Gap of Social Sciences in the Middle East and North Africa,” *The Journal of North African Studies*, June 2007 (Vol 12, N°2).

societies, but about our own, as the fish tends not to notice that it swims in water, and as it is hard for the camel to see its own hump.

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“Localizing” the Conceptualization and Practice of Development

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The literature on well-being is diverse, however, many of the development paradigms neither correspond to the *actual* perceptions of the poor nor do they account for the cultural diversity in their well-being perceptions. In addition, most national and international development projects also depart from a paternalistic view that fails to capture the actual *achievements* of the poor. This paper argues that the conceptualization and practice of development need to be “localized” to achieve a culturally sensitive definition of well-being and create bottom-up development projects building on the existing assets and initiatives of the poor. The paper first defines well-being and presents some of the “Northern” attempts to articulate the meanings of well-being through the “Voices of the Poor”. To “localize” the practice of development, the paper emphasizes the role of self-help initiatives. The paper suggests that building upon these existing initiatives can create a new bottom-up model of development whereby the “ideas of the poor come first” and assistance is provided accordingly. Thus, by “localizing” development paradigms and policies, more effective poverty reduction strategies can be designed that “find out what the poor want and help them do it”.

إن الأدبيات المتعلقة بالرفاهية متعددة. ورغم ذلك، فإن العديد من الأمثلة المبتكرة لا تتفق مع الإدراكات الحسية الحالية للفقراء ولا تعكس التنوع الثقافي لإدراكهم للرفاهية. إضافة إلى ذلك، فإن معظم مشاريع التنمية الوطنية والعالمية تصدر غالباً عن نظرة أبوية. من هذا المنطلق، ترى الباحثة بأنها قد فشلت في رصد الإنجازات الحالية للفقراء. كما تبرهن الورقة على أن فهم وممارسة التنمية تحتاج إلى "تمركز ذاتي" لتحقيق مفهوم ثقافي محسوس للرفاهية وخلق مشاريع تنمية من الأسفل إلى الأعلى مبنية على قدرات ومبادرات الفقراء. تعرف الورقة أولاً الرفاهية وتقدم بعض المساعي النظرية في دول "الشمال" لتبين معانيها من خلال أصوات الفقراء. وبشكل ما، تتبنى الورقة مقاربة "القدرة" كبنية تعريفية نظراً لتركيزها على حرية كل فرد لمتابعة الحياة التي يمتنها والتي تمثل لديه الدافع للممارسة التنموية. كما تشدد الورقة على دور مساعي المساعدة الذاتية وترى بأن هذه المساعي المتوفرة يمكن أن تخلق (من أسفل/أعلى) نموذجاً جديداً تبرز من خلاله أفكار الفقراء أولاً.

وبشكل استخلاصي، ترى الباحثة بأنه ومن خلال تمحور الأمثلة والسياسات على مثل هذه المقاربة يمكن خلق استراتيجيات ناجحة "لنصل إلى ما يريده الفقراء ونساعدهم بالتالي على تحقيق ذلك".

Do we know what the poor want? Do we know what they are doing ? The literature on well-being is diverse, however, many of the developed paradigms neither correspond to the *actual* perceptions of the poor nor do they account for the cultural diversity in their well-being perceptions.

In addition, most national and international development projects stem from a paternalistic view that fails to capture the actual *achievements* of the poor. This is why the starting point of any development strategy should be a comprehensive understanding of people's perceptions of well-being to help them constructively achieve this aspired well-being. This paper therefore argues that the conceptualization and practice of development need to be "localized" to achieve a culturally sensitive definition of well-being and create bottom-up development projects building on the existing assets and initiatives of the poor. The paper first defines well-being and presents some of the "Northern" attempts to articulate the meanings of well-being through the "Voices of the Poor". The paper then adopts the capability approach as its conceptual framework due to its emphasis on the freedom of each individual to pursue the life that s/he *values and has reason to value*.

The capability approach also accounts for the importance of culture in the valuation and achievement of diverse human capabilities. To "localize" the *conceptualization* of development, the paper suggests a new methodological tool. This new tool is based on a qualitative questionnaire that articulates the poor's perceptions of their achieved and valued capabilities. To "localize" the *practice* of development, the paper emphasizes the role of self-help initiatives, i.e. the informal economic and social activities undertaken by the poor to improve their well-beings. The paper suggests that building upon these existing initiatives can create a new bottom-up model of development whereby the "ideas of the poor comes first" and assistance is provided accordingly. Thus, by "localizing" development paradigms and policies, more effective poverty reduction strategies can be designed that "find out what the poor want and help them do it".

What is Well-being ?

The ultimate aim of development is the promotion of human well-being. However, the definition of "well-being" and the means of achieving it differ in various economic, cultural, social and political contexts. This is why there is an urgent need to develop "localized" tools to understand the people's perceptions of well-being in diverse socio-economic settings.

Although some scholars deny the possibility of defining well-being due to the multi-dimensionality of human life (Sudgen,1993), different approaches have been developed to define well-being starting from growth oriented views, to the basic needs approach, the capability approach and the human development paradigm. Fifty years ago **economic growth** was perceived as the ultimate solution for all underdevelopment problems. Achieving well-being was synonymous to the increase in GDP and many scholars argued for the trickle down effect of accelerated economic growth (Anand and Ravallion, 1993). Lewis (1954) stressed the instrumental role of economic growth and capital accumulation as engines of development. In the 1970s, it became evident that growth "does not always trickle down" nor does it necessarily enhance the provision of social services. Notions such as "growth with redistribution" were promoted and social services were regarded as a means to raise the poor's incomes and enhance their well-beings. With the growing inequalities within and between nations, the "growth-oriented" approach to development was scrutinized, thus giving rise to the basic needs approach. The **basic needs approach** is based on "the idea that the basic needs of all should be satisfied before the less essential needs of a few are met"⁹. It views well-being as the fulfillment of acceptable standards of nutrition, shelter, health, education, employment and participation. Accordingly, any development strategy should aim at the provision of these minimum living requirements for the poor. However, the approach still defines wellbeing strictly in *pure material sense*, i.e. resources rather than capabilities.

Due this materialistic emphasis of the basic needs approach, it came under attack. It was later replaced by the Capability Approach, as "a wider, philosophically more rigorous way of conceiving the role of poverty reduction in relation to the full life"¹⁰The Capability Approach overcomes the problems of intercultural and interpersonal variations of needs and does not restrict these needs to commodities¹¹.

The Capability Approach as Conceptual Framework for Well-being Assessment

The Capability Approach (CA) acknowledges the importance of economic growth and the provision of basic needs and social services;

⁹ Streeten, Paul et.al. (1981). *First Things First: Meeting Basic Human Needs in Developing Countries*. Oxford: Oxford University Press .p8

¹⁰ Alkire, S. (2002). *Valuing Freedoms: Sen's Capability Approach and Poverty Reduction*. Oxford : Oxford UP, 2002. p167.

¹¹ Op.cit. p167-168.

however, it refuses to reduce the definition of well-being merely to the command over commodities. It focuses on people's achievements - their beings and doings and their capability to function. By acknowledging the multiplicity of valuables and the heterogeneity of factors involved in the valuation exercise of human wellbeing, the capability approach broadens the informational space needed for an adequate definition of a complex concept such as human well-being. Accounting for interpersonal variations, human diversity and multicultural differences, the approach does not impose a specific set of elements of the "good life", but rather emphasizes three basic concepts necessary for human well-being: functioning and capabilities.

The relationship between functionings and capabilities forms the bulk of the capability approach. Functionings are the actual achievements of the individual, i.e. "what the person is succeeding in doing or being"¹². They can be either potential or achieved¹³, elementary, such as nutrition, health, life expectancy, or more complex such as "taking part in the life of the community and having self-respect"¹⁴. Functionings are "only instrumentally valued [...] to the extent that [they] help the achievement of the things that we do value (viz. capabilities)"¹⁵. Human capabilities are "the various alternative functioning bundles he or she can achieve through choice". Each person has a *capability set* which is the range of functionings s/he has the *freedom* to choose from. The capability set affects well-being not only as it determines the functionings one *can* achieve, but also because certain capabilities are *intrinsically* valuable. Therefore, functionings *lead* to well-being, while capabilities represent the person's *freedoms and choices* to achieve this well-being. The distinction between functionings and capabilities is mainly that between the "realized and the effectively possible [...] achievements [...] and freedoms or valuable options"¹⁶. Thus, instead of imposing a "set definition of human well-being", the CA rather leaves it to each individual

¹² Sen, A. K. (1987). *Commodities and Capabilities*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi. p 19

¹³ Robeyns, I. (2005). 'The Capability Approach: A Theoretical Survey'. *The Journal of Human Development*, 6, 1 p 100.

¹⁴ Sen, A. K. (1999). *Development as Freedom*. Oxford University Press, Oxford. p75

¹⁵ Sen, A. K. (1992). *Inequality Reexamined* U,U Russell Sage Foundation, New York. pp 40-45

¹⁶ Robeyns, I. (2005). 'The Capability Approach: A Theoretical Survey'. *The Journal of Human Development*, 6, 1p 95.

to choose his/her valuable beings and doings and focuses on his/her ability to shape their own destiny.¹⁷

Why is the capability approach unique in its approach to human well-being? This paper argues that the capability approach can be a suitable framework for wellbeing assessment in the “South” due to various reasons. First, it emphasizes the *freedom* of each individual to pursue the life that s/he values and has reason to value thus accounting for the *importance of culture* in the valuation and achievement of diverse human capabilities. Culture is extremely crucial for the valuation of human well-being as “individuals [are] driven by a culturally influenced set of motives, incentives, beliefs, and identities that interact with economic incentives to affect outcomes”¹⁸. On the one hand, culture is a constitutive element of development that affects human values and perceptions of well-being. On the other hand, it is also instrumental in achieving this well-being through its **impact** on economic behaviour, political participation and social solidarity¹⁹. In addition to its cultural sensitivity, the CA is a suitable framework for the valuation of human well-being in the “South” as it accounts for the different human *abilities* to convert resources into valuable functionings.

Thirdly, it puts the concept of social justice and equality at the center of development discourse²⁰. It is this emphasis on social equality that gives the capability approach its moral and normative strength and renders it particularly relevant in developing countries’ contexts. Fourthly, as the focus of the CA is on the expansion of human capabilities, the approach leaves the determination of the valuable capabilities and their weights to the process of democratic public discussion thus demonstrating the importance of practical reason and social debates in defining well-being according to each cultural, social and economic context²¹ Finally, the capability approach adopts a ***freedom-centered perspective of well-being***. Sen argues that "freedom is the issue; not commodities, nor utility as such" Freedom is viewed in a positive sense, i.e. *to be free to do something and have the capability to live well*²².

¹⁷ Sen, A. K. (1999). *Development as Freedom*. Oxford University Press, Oxford . pp 53-56

¹⁸ Rao and Walton, 2004, 9)

¹⁹ Sen, A. K. (2004). “How Does Culture Matter?” in (eds) Rao, V. and M. Walton. *Culture and Public Action*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press. p39-42

²⁰ Nussbaum, M. (2003). 'Capabilities as Fundamental Entitlements: Sen and Social Justice'. *Feminist Economics* U.U July-November 2003, 9, 2-4

²¹ Alkire.Op.cit p125.

The CA also had a major impact on the rise of the “human development paradigm” thus putting people back at the center of development and emphasizing the importance of enlarging human choices as the means and ends of development.



***Amartya Sen:** Nobel Prize for Economics in 1998, for his contributions to welfare economics, for his work on famine, human development theory, welfare economics, the underlying mechanisms of poverty and political liberalism.*

This freedom-centered approach is the most adequate for well-being assessment in the South as it presents a comprehensive framework for the valuation of human wellbeing accounting for the importance of goods, utilities, functionings, capabilities and freedoms.

Northern vs. Southern Attempts for Well-being Assessment

The definition of well-being is culturally sensitive and context specific. Therefore, any methodology developed to articulate people's perceptions of well-being also needs to account for these diverse social and cultural settings. A number of methodologies have been already adopted to articulate the poor's perceptions of well-being (Narayan, 2000). This section reviews some of these methodologies and compares their findings. It also explores a number of "Southern" attempts of well-being assessment using the CA as their conceptual framework (Clark, 2002; Semerci, 2004; Anand, Hunter and Smith 2005). Among the most prominent international "Northern" attempts to articulate people's perceptions of well-being in the South are the two "Voices of the Poor" volumes published by the World Bank (Narayan et.al, 2000a; 2000b). Covering more than 50 countries and using openended questions and PPA (Participatory Poverty Assessment) techniques, these two volumes focused on the valuation of the poor's well-being, the impact of institutions on their lives as well as the nature of gender roles in developing countries²³. The main question of these studies was: "How do you define well-being or a good quality of life, and ill-being or a bad quality of life?"²⁴ In addition to confirming the multidimensionality of poverty and its link to material well-being, one of the main findings of these reports is their emphasis on "psychological" well-being and the importance of voice and participation²⁵

The report recommended a strategy of change that starts with people's realities, invests in their organizational capacities in addition to supporting and changing their social norms²⁶. Using a methodology similar to that of the "Voices of the Poor", a number of studies were conducted either to support these volumes or to deepen the understanding of people's wellbeing from a "Southern perspective". In Egypt, for example, two such studies were conducted. The first was "Voices of the Poor in Egypt" (CDS, 1999) and the second study is a UNDP report entitled "Social Capital and Subjective Poverty in Egypt". Similarly, the former explores the poor's perception of well-being, identifies their priorities and problems. The research methodology comprises mainly qualitative methods such as semi-structured interviews, focus groups, discussions and meetings with key informants, such as community leaders and poor communities (CDS, *Voices of the Poor*, 1999, 6-9). The second study, "Subjective Poverty and Social Capital in Egypt" (UNDP, 2003), aims at

²³ Narayan, Deepa, Robert Chambers, Meera Shah and Patti Petesch. (2000b). *Voices of the Poor: Crying Out for Change*. Washington, D.C. World Bank. P 15

²⁴ Op .cit p 21.

²⁵ Op.cit p 27-31.

²⁶ Op.cit p 280.

"shedding light on the different mechanisms involved in establishing networks, the structure of these networks, when identified, and their interaction between and among the different socio-economic strata" (43). It uses a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods such as interview questionnaires, in-depth studies as well as a study of three NGOs. These "Southern" studies are conceptually and methodologically useful as they provide a useful insight into the poor's perceptions of well-being "from an Egyptian perspective".

Localizing the Conceptualization of Development : Developing a New Methodological Tool for Well-being Assessment in the South

In addition to these international attempts to explore people's well-being in the South, a number of scholars sought to articulate people's perceptions of well-being using the CA as their conceptual framework. This section briefly reviews some of these methodologies and demonstrates their supremacy over "traditional" methodologies. Various studies tried to operationalize the CA in two main ways.

The first operationalization method is through *the distant assessment of human capabilities* (Anand, Hunter and Smith, 2005; Comim and Kuklys 2002) by using secondary data to identify the corresponding capabilities or by developing indices of human well-being. However, this method is rather inadequate for the context in "Southern" countries as it limits the analysis of human well-being to a specific list of pre-determined capabilities by "Northern" scholars (such as the Nussbaum list of capabilities), rather than deriving them from the poor themselves. In addition, the limited availability of data on human well-being in the South renders the adoption of this methodology rather difficult. To overcome these defects, some researchers, Clark (2002a) in South Africa and Semerci (2004) in Turkey and Ibrahim (2006) in Egypt, adopted a second operationalization method to identify the poor's well-being perceptions through a *Grassroots Exploration of the Poor's Capabilities*. Through questionnaires and in-depth interviews, these studies adopted a "people driven" methodology to identify the poor's perceptions of well-being thus forming a list of basic capabilities from a purely "Southern" perspective.

This paper argues that this "grassroots exploration of the poor's capabilities" can be a new methodological tool to "localize" the *conceptualization* of development. This new tool is based on a qualitative questionnaire and/or in-depth interviews that articulate the poor's perceptions of *their achieved and valued* capabilities. In a systemized attempt to articulate the subjective well-beings of people in the "South",

Clark (2002; 2003), for example, conducted two surveys in a rural village and an urban township in South Africa to identify the poor's perceptions of well-being. He designed his "methodological tool", i.e. the questionnaire, to contrast the poor's perceptions of well-being (i.e. the Southern perspective), with the common vision of development as presented by "Northern" scholars. Clark's methodology has a number of strengths.

First, he does not confine himself to Sen and Nussbaum's lists of capabilities, but rather complements them with further capabilities which these "Northern" lists usually ignore, such as physical security, economic resources and employment. Secondly, his questionnaire includes open and closed-ended questions to compare the "grassroots" generated data from the poor with the "predefined" perceptions of well-being as identified by "Northern" scholars. Comparing these two perspectives, Clark (2003) explains that "most people appear to share a common vision of development, which is not fundamentally at odds with most of the capabilities advocated by scholars like Nussbaum and Sen"²⁷. Nevertheless, he points out that "Southern" analysis of human well-being need to focus more on the survival mechanisms in poor countries, the "psychological" well-being of the poor and their aspirations for a "better" life. Clark's methodology constitutes one of the "Southern" attempts to develop culturally sensitive methodologies for well-being assessment. It abandons the paternalistic methodologies where scholars *assume* they know what the poor think and what they want. Instead, it allows the poor to identify the lives that *they* value and thus resorts to "public reasoning" and democratic processes as necessary means for the determination and valuation of human capabilities. Semerci (2004) also sought of articulating the people's perception of well-being from a "Southern" perspective. She focused on the perceptions of migrant poor women in Turkey. Without manipulating the "voices of the poor", she collected data mainly through in-depth interviews, participant observation and two published diaries by women in these squatter areas. Rejecting the patronizing and disempowering "Northern" methodologies, Semerci (2004) "listened" to the voices of the "subaltern" women to understand their perceptions of well-being and their achieved capabilities (1-5).

Listening to the voices of women in a Turkish squatter area, Semerci discovered that the language of the poor women is similar to that of the capability approach. She explains that:

²⁷ Sen ,A. Op.cit p .173

The explanatory power of the theories should be challenged by the voices of the subaltern groups. This requires an ongoing research and interaction among the researchers for developing better tools of inquiry [...] Though subaltern groups are usually the subjects of inquiry, the conceptual discussions are done mostly by the intellectuals and academicians, excluding their views. Nevertheless, in order to develop theories and policies which would solve the urgent problems of the subaltern groups to engage multiple dialogues with the subaltern is necessary²⁸. Building on these promising attempts of articulating the perceptions of well-being from a Southern perspective, this paper suggests a new methodological tool to “localize” the conceptualization of development. The aim of this methodological tool is to (1) understand the poor’s perceptions of their *own* well-being in various socio-economic contexts and (2) generate a “list” of human capabilities derived *from the voices of the poor* through cross-cultural dialogue and “public discussion”. Instead of going to the “Southern field” to test “Northern” theories, the aim of this tool is to help each country/community in the “South” to generate its own list of human capabilities that corresponds to its cultural, economic, social and political setting. This tool will *take the ideas of the poor seriously*. It is therefore important to depart from the traditional methods of well-being assessments in welfare economics to a more “grounded” approach in capability analysis. This “localized” tool is particularly crucial for understanding what the poor themselves consider as a “good life” and which capabilities they value according to their location, context and time. This is how we can test and challenge the traditional welfare assessment of the “North” with the actual voices of the poor in the “South”. This new methodological tool aims at articulating the poor’s well-beings and identifying their human capabilities. Its starting point is the ‘simple’ definition of a “capability”. Capabilities are defined as the various functioning bundles, freedoms or “choices” that a person values and has reason to value. To articulate the well-being perceptions of the poor, it is therefore necessary to identify (1) what a person “values and has reason to value”, i.e. capability, (2) what a person is/isn’t able to achieve, i.e. functionings, as well as (3) the structural impediments/conversion factors that hinder/help the person to achieve what s/he values and has reason to value.

This methodological tool thus succeeds in capturing the “counterfactual” by identifying the difference between the “aspired” capabilities of the poor and “their actual functionings/achievements” in

²⁸ Semerci, Pinar Uyan. (2004). ‘Reconsidering the Capability Approach: Poverty, Tradition and Capabilities’. Paper presented at the *Fourth Conference on the Capability Approach: Enhancing Human Security*, the University of Pavia, Italy, September 28.

developing countries. The suggested questionnaire design follows this pattern:

Capability

1. Do you value ?
2. Why do you value ?

Functioning

3. Have you succeed in achieving ?

Conversion

Factors

- 4 . Why have/haven't you
Succeeded in achieving?

In addition, the questionnaire will start with a standard life satisfaction question, such as “Are you generally satisfied or dissatisfied with your life?” to allow the person to reflect on his/her life and give a clear yes/no answer to this question.

This question will allow the respondent to “weigh” the positive and negative aspects in his/her life and come up with a “general evaluation” of his/her level of well-being instead of resorting to complex econometric models and weighting systems that might not necessarily correspond to the valuation of the respondents. However, which “aspects” or “domains” of well-being need to be assessed? To identify the categories of well-being that need to be covered in the questionnaire the following approach can be adopted. First, various operationalization attempts of the capability approach and previous well-being questionnaires should be reviewed : Alkire (2002) ; Anand, Hunter and Smith (2005) ; Clark (2002) ; (2003), Semerci (2004) ; Ranis, Stewart and Samman (2005); Jha, Rao and Woolcock (2004). Secondly, different questionnaires conducted in the specific country, e.g. Egypt, need to be reviewed and their findings analyzed. Thirdly, a “pool” of capabilities is drawn from these previous studies and divided into a number of “categories” with corresponding indicators. Finally, “preliminary” categories are then identified from among the most frequently cited capabilities in the literature. The identification of the different “domains” is thus based on the existing consensus on the importance of these capability “domains” as well as their suitability to the cultural setting in each developing country. To help “rank” these domains, each respondent to the questionnaire will be asked at the end to choose to improve only one aspect of his/her life which s/he considers particularly important. This is how one can draw a “hierarchy” of capabilities that are regarded by the poor *themselves* as crucial for their well-being.

Although we believe that each capability is of central importance, it is also important to recognize that each person has “his or her own hierarchy of capabilities” according to his priorities and needs. This question would therefore reveal the domain which the

- Capability
- Functioning
- Conversion

-Factors, respondent regards as most crucial and urgent for improving his/her well-being. Furthermore, as the generated “list” of domains/capabilities is not exclusive, an open question is also included at the end of the questionnaire to ask the respondent whether s/he wishes to add something that s/he regards as important and that was not included in the questionnaire. This question allows one to “complement the capabilities list” through “democratic processes” and “public discussion” as Sen recommended.

The well-being questionnaire needs to cover four main categories of human well-being: general well-being, material well-being, social well-being and mental well-being. The general well-being of the poor examines their perceptions of a good life, their problems, and their “unfulfilled capabilities”. The material well-being covers the extent to which they value and achieve certain capabilities, such as income generation, education, employment, health and food, housing, transportation and safety. The “social” well-being of the poor examines the degree of social respect and fair treatment in their communities, their relationships with family and friends, the level of communal trust and mutual support, as well as their relationship with local institutions and their degree of political freedom. Finally, the “mental well-being” of the poor will be assessed by identifying their fears and worries and their means of spending their leisure time.

This new methodological tool contributes to the localization of development concepts in various ways. First, the open-ended qualitative questions allow researchers in the South to articulate the poor’s perceptions of their achieved and valued capabilities without imposing any set of previously determined capabilities (by “Northern scholars”). Secondly, it allows for the operationalization of the capability approach within a non-Christian and non-Westernized country context. Thirdly, it allows the poor themselves to rank and weigh the capabilities according to their own perceptions of well-being. Finally, it helps construct a democratically generated and culturally sensitive list of capabilities identified by the poor themselves in each socio economic setting.

Localizing the Practice of Development : Developing a New Model of Development Building on Self-help Initiatives

In addition to localizing the conceptualization of development, there is a need to develop a “localized” development practice that stresses the roles of local communities in shaping their destinies and improving their well-beings. This paper therefore argues that one of the best ways to “localize development practice” is by supporting the self-help initiatives of the poor.

Why is Self-help Important?

Self-help is extremely important for the poor’s well-being not only as it helps them increase their capability space, but also as it allows the poor to challenge unequal power relations in their communities. One way of addressing this problem is through the "power of the collectivity". One poor individual alone might be vulnerable; however, the poor –as a group - have a better chance to voice their demands. The poor are therefore usually engaged in a strategy of "quiet encroachment" as an open-ended silent struggle to survive. Through this struggle the poor not only seek to surmount the hierarchal paternalistic relations with local leaders, but they also want to challenge restrictive state measures against communal collective action²⁹.

Contrary to the conventional belief that the poor are disorganized and individualistic, Bayat (1996) confirms that "the poor do get involved in visible collective struggle" (3). Collective self-help initiatives can therefore play crucial economic, social and political roles in promoting the capabilities of the poor, especially in the South. They fulfil four main functions: the generation, aggregation and utilization of collective capabilities; the enhancement of local development ; the promotion of grassroots participation, and the strengthening of social cohesion. Economically, they allow poor communities to create and seize new opportunities that respond to their urgent local needs. They also enhance the poor's ownership of development projects and allow them to collectively invest in their financial, human and social capitals. Politically, self-help initiatives promote grassroots participation and improve local governance. They help the poor overcome their helplessness by changing their perceptions of their own capabilities. These initiatives are also a means of overcoming government failures and complementing the role of local NGOs. Socially, self-help initiatives help the poor overcome the 'dilemmas of collective action', nurture their social capital and enhance their local bargaining powers vis-à-vis other more powerful social groups. By acting collectively the poor are therefore able to widen the range of choices/capabilities available to them.

²⁹ Bayat, A. (1996). ‘Cairo’s Poor: Dilemmas of Survival and Solidarity’. *Middle East Report*, no. 202, Cairo: Power, Poverty and Urban Survival Winter, 1996-3-6.

The process of self-help can thus be regarded as a means of generating new 'collective capabilities' that promote sustainable poverty reduction. Therefore, through self-help the poor in the South can be not only the ends of development, but also among its principal means. By encouraging and supporting self-help initiatives, the practice of development can be localized thus promoting a new state-society synergy that builds upon the existing initiatives of the poor instead of imposing predetermined top-down development projects and later encouraging the poor to participate in them! A word of caution, by pointing out the importance of self-help as a means of "localizing the practice of development", this paper does not seek to undermine the role of the state in providing for the poor, nor does it "blame the victim" or ask the poor to deal with their own poverty. Instead, the paper emphasizes the "power of the poor" to improve their own lives and views them as the starting point of any successful development policy. It aims at altering the conventional paternalistic view of the poor as passive aid recipients to recognizing their inherent abilities to help themselves and thus successfully becoming active agents of change. Various scholars (De Soto, 2000; Bebbington, 1999) pointed out the value of the poor's assets for development processes. These assets do not only help the poor to survive, but also render them agents able to "act and to reproduce, challenge or change the rules that govern the control, use and transformation of resources" (Bebbington, 1999, 2002). Acts of self-help therefore can have an instrumental, hermeneutic and emancipatory importance for the poor's lives. They allow the poor to make a living, render this living meaningful in addition to urging them to challenge the structures under which the poor make this living (ibid, 2022). De Soto explains that even in the poorest countries, the poor are able to save and own a large sum of assets, such as informal businesses and dwellings.

However, due to the informal nature of this "dead capital", the poor can neither use them for market transactions nor as collateral to access credit (De Soto, 1997,2000). Thus, this large size and magnitude of the poor's assets affirms the possibility of self-help being a catalyst for a localized development strategy that builds upon the *actual achievements* of the poor and suits their cultural, social, economic and political needs. It is important to note that self-help is not only a feature of developing countries. Samuel Smiles (1866/1996) asserted that the spirit of self-help existed in England and constituted one of the nation's main powers (3). He adds that "so far from poverty being a misfortune, it may, by *vigorous self-help*, be converted even into a blessing; rousing a man to that struggle with the world in which, though some may purchase ease by degradation, the right-minded and truehearted find strength, confidence, and triumph" (ibid, 12 [emphasis added]). Self-help is also crucial as it nurtures the "capacity to aspire"

(Appadurai, 2004), that is "how a group [...] succeed(s) in reducing the costs of developing a culture of aspirations by collectively envisioning their future, and their capacity to shape this future, through influencing other groups, the government and other factors in their physical and social environment"³⁰. Thus, by building upon the self-help initiatives of the poor, a new "localized" development practice can emerge where states support the poor to collectively build and unfold their own capabilities. Self-help is particularly important also as it allows the poor to voice their needs. The relationship between "voice and the capacity to aspire" is mutually reinforcing as the one nurtures the other³¹.

Various studies emphasized the need to "help people help themselves"³² and emphasizes the importance of informal organizations for the survival of the poor (Narayan et.al, 2000). These community-based organizations help in the provision of social services and enhance social cohesion among the poor. Thus, the true strength of the poor lies in their ability to organize themselves to let their voices be heard, negotiate with powerful social groups and participate effectively in local governance³³

This is why any development practice should start with an identification of "what the poor are already doing", i.e. their self-help initiatives thus rendering development practice more effective, relevant and sustainable. Examining a number of successful case studies of group formation and local institutions among the poor, Krishna, Uphoff and Esman (1997) affirm the willingness and ability of the poor to improve their living conditions in a collectivity. They explain that people with few resources other than their labor, intelligence, creativity and social networks, would be able through increasing self-reliance to achieve improvements in their lives across a range of sectors and areas... despite the distressing economic, environmental, political and social crises that the people of this world face³⁴.

22- Rao,V.and M. Walton. *Culture and Public Action*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2004 p 25.

23- Op.cit p 25

24- Narayan, Deepa, Robert Chambers, Meera Shah and Patti Petesch. (2000b). *Voices of the Poor: Crying Out for Change*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank. p 271- 276.

25- Op.cit p 271

26- Krishna,A.,N. Uphoff, M. Esman. (1997). (Eds). *Reasons for Hope: Instructive Experiences in Rural Development*. Kumarian Press, Connecticut. p 298

While collective action among the poor is not an easy task, it is not an impossible one nor inherently destructive to the poor's capabilities. The potential benefits of collective action for the individual and collective capabilities are therefore undeniable. This is why, policymakers need to "create an enabling environment to provide the poor with the tools, and the voice, to navigate their way out of poverty"³⁵. Such a supportive environment would facilitate the "localization of development practice" by helping the poor build their own capabilities to pursue the lives that they "value and have reason to value". This model thus allows policymakers to localize their development policies, especially in the South, by "finding out what the people are doing and helping them do it" (Schumacher, 1973).

Conclusion

This paper argued for the "localization" of development concepts and practice. At the methodological level, it proposed a new tool that identifies "what the poor think", i.e. their perceptions of well-being and compares their achieved and valued human capabilities. The conceptualization of development in the South can thus be localized by exploring the subjective well-being of the poor and operationalizing the capability approach within developing country contexts. At the practical level, the paper urged policymakers to explore "what the poor are actually doing". By emphasizing the importance of self-help initiatives, the paper explained how - by identifying recurring patterns of self-help- policymakers can formulate policies that would "help the poor help themselves". Supporting the self-help initiatives of the poor can also help reinvent the social contract between the poor and their governments thus building a new state society synergy that promotes sustainable poverty reduction. By articulating the poor's perceptions of well-being and building upon their self-help initiatives, development agencies can enhance the effectiveness, ownership and relevance of their projects. Building on the previous analysis, this paper presents a "localization framework" for development conceptualization and practice. Figure 1 presents this framework for policymakers in the South to come up with localized notions of well-being and development practice that helps them develop more "culturally" sensitive policies. The framework is based on two main pillars: development concepts and development practice. The paper recognizes that the perceptions of well-being as presented by Northern scholars do not account for the cultural and social settings in the

³⁵ Rao and Walton, op.cit. 361.

South. It also views that most top-down development projects especially those implemented by donor agencies and international organizations do not correspond to the actual needs and achievements of the poor in the South. To “localize” the notion of well-being, the paper proposed a new methodological tool that articulates the poor’s perceptions of well-being in each cultural, social, economic and political context.

It thus allows policymakers to actually understand “what the poor really want” through a “grassroots exploration of the poor’s capabilities”. The proposed well-being assessment tool explores four main domains: the general, material, social and mental well-beings of the poor to come up with a comprehensive understanding of their conditions and potentials. This “localized” notion of well-being would thus correspond to each cultural setting and would also – through a virtuous feedback mechanism- help refine and redefine the conceptualization of development. It can thus generate more context-specific notions of wellbeing in the South rather than remaining confined to those prescribed by “Northern” scholars. To “localize” the practice of development, the second pillar of the “localization framework”, the paper stressed the importance of self-help initiatives as a means of collective capability building among the poor. Identifying the self-help initiatives and building upon them allow policymakers to know “what the poor are actually doing” and help them do it. This “localized” development practice therefore creates a new bottom-up model of development where the “ideas of the poor come first” and assistance is provided accordingly. This is how development concepts and practice in the South can become more effective and relevant.

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Strengthening Social Science Research in the Region : The Case for Establishing an Arab Social Science Research Council

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This paper is based on a feasibility study which was undertaken from March to October 2006 to examine ways of strengthening REGIONAL social science research in the Middle East with support from the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) of Canada. However, the paper goes beyond the regional feasibility study to describe an evolving initiative to set up an Arab Social Science Research Council as agreed at a regional meeting held at the Dubai School of Government on 26-27 November 2006. Thus, the paper has two purposes: a) to share the findings from the original feasibility study; and b) to draw attention to the beginnings of a collaborative initiative that is designed to redress some of the key weaknesses of the social sciences in the Arab world. It is hoped that the paper will contribute to the larger discussion on the links between social science research and the public interest.

بنيبت هذه الورقة على دراسة الجدوى التي تم انجازها في الفترة الفاصلة بين مارس و أكتوبر 2006 وذلك للبحث في طرق دعم البحث في العلوم الاجتماعية في منطقة الشرق الأوسط وشمال افريقيا، وذلك بمساهمة المركز الدولي لتطوير البحث العلمي بكندا ومؤسسة فورد .

تتعدى الورقة دراسة الجدوى الإقليمية لتقوم بتوصيف مسعى متطور لوضع مجلس عربي لتطوير العلوم الاجتماعية وفق ما اتفق عليه خلال ملتقى اقليمي انعقد بدبي (الإمارات العربية المتحدة)، من 26 إلى 27 نوفمبر 2006. و تهدف الورقة إلى تقاسم نتائج دراسة الجدوى المنجزة مع الباحثين و لفت الأنظار إلى بدايات المساعي التعاونية والتي بعثت لإصلاح بعض نقاط الضعف الأساسية في العلوم الاجتماعية في العالم العربي. كما تسعى الورقة إلى التعريف ببعض المبادرات التجديدية في مجال تطوير العمل المؤسسي من خلال الجمع بين البحث في العلوم الاجتماعية والاهتمام بالشأن العام.

Given the serious challenges that confront the Middle East in the early years of the 21st century, there is an acute recognition of the need for regional social science research institutions that focus on socio-economic-political and environmental issues that are regional in nature and that require policy responses beyond the individual country level. In the last few years, a series of conferences and reports have served to draw attention to serious gaps in academic as well as policy research underscoring the importance of concerted efforts to overcome the existing weaknesses in the infrastructure of social science research in the Middle East in general and the Arab countries more specifically.³⁶

Recently several institutions and individuals independently undertook initiatives to examine and address the need to create or strengthen social science research in the Middle East region. These include UNDP Regional Bureau of Arab States' (UNDP/RBAS) project on *Knowledge Acquisition, Generation and Utilization in the Arab Region (KAGUAR)* ; IDRC's research support activity titled *The Middle East Under Pressure : What Role for the Social Sciences ?* and consultations for a joint initiative between the Middle East Program of the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) in New York and the Regional Office of the Population Council in Cairo. Each of these initiatives has a different entry point and geographic focus. Nonetheless, at the core, they all address the same issue : *the need to generate more effective social science research with a regional scope in order to enhance understanding of cross-cutting problems in the Arab and/or the broader Middle East region and to influence public debate and public policies through research and policy analysis.*

Since early 2006, a small group of individuals involved in these initiatives have been working together to exchange ideas and to engage a broader community of scholars, academics and researchers in the region.³⁷ Jointly, they organized a meeting in Beirut in April 2006 which was co-hosted by UNDP and IDRC. The Beirut meeting endorsed the value of undertaking a more rigorous diagnosis of the state of regional social sciences in the Middle East and recommended a follow up meeting to discuss the results of the IDRC feasibility study.³⁸ The IDRC-supported feasibility study

³⁶- See, for example, the 1999 Lebanese Center for Policy Studies-World Bank EDI meeting on "Think Tanks as Civil Society Catalysts in the MENA region: Fulfilling their Potential" and the 2002 LCPS and UNESCO meeting "A Social Science Strategy for the Arab States." Also see the 2003 Arab Human Development Report, and the meeting held by UNDP in Beirut in advance of KAGUAR.

³⁷- The core group included Azza Karam and Nada al-Nashif from UNDP/RBAS, Seteney Shami from SSRC (NY), Ragui Assaad (PopCouncil) and Necla Tschirgi (IDRC consultant.)

³⁸ - The minutes of the Beirut report as well as an analytic synopsis are available for review.

was conducted by Necla Tschirgi in collaboration with Dr. Kian Tajbakhsh in Tehran and Dr. Manal Jamal in New York. The research team respectively reviewed the state of REGIONAL social sciences in Turkey, Iran and the Arab world. In addition, Necla Tschirgi undertook two visits to the Middle East in April and August 2006 to consult with a wide range of researchers and research institutes in Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt and Turkey.³⁹ The research team submitted a consolidated study to IDRC in October 2006. The study argued that the social science communities in the Arab world, Iran and Turkey have followed divergent trajectories over the last few decades. Their institutional infra-structure is distinct; they work within different intellectual and political environments; and their needs and aspirations vary considerably. Although there are numerous benefits to be derived from more active engagement among Arab, Iranian and Turkish social scientists, the current climate is not particularly conducive to promoting deeper interaction and joint work among their social science communities.

Meanwhile, there is a widely-perceived need for a mechanism that would build upon and enhance the existing regional research collaboration in the Arab world. Such a mechanism would not only serve the Arab social science community to play a more effective role in contributing to public debates and public policies in the Arab world. It would also facilitate closer links with other regional and international social science research communities, specifically in Iran and Turkey. Accordingly, the study proposed the creation of a new institution tentatively called the Arab Social Science Research Council (ASSRC) and offered a plan of action that would help move that proposal forward. Based on the original IDRC feasibility study, a second paper was prepared by Necla Tschirgi for a regional experts' workshop which was held in Dubai on 26-27 November 2006. It was accompanied by a paper by Manal Jamal on the state of the social sciences in the Arab World as well as a map of institutions engaged in regional social science research in the Arab countries.⁴⁰ Those documents were reviewed by the participants at the Dubai meeting ; their overall diagnosis about the weaknesses of the social sciences in the Arab world was formally endorsed. As a result, the participants at the Dubai meeting decided to support the idea of creating an Arab Social Science Research Council (ASSRC) and they set

³⁹ - See Appendix 1

⁴⁰ - For a fuller discussion of these issues please see "Strengthening Social Science Research in the Middle East/Arab Region: Exploring the Feasibility of an Arab Social Science Research Council" by Necla Tschirgi (unpublished paper prepared the Dubai meeting, 26-27 November 2006). Also see "Background Paper: Regional Social Science Research in the Arab World" and "Mapping of Institutions and Networks Engaged in Social Science Research in the Arab Region" by Manal Jamal (unpublished papers prepared for the Dubai meeting, 26-27 November 2006). These paper, will be available at www.assr.org

up a Steering Committee to oversee the next phases of the initiative. This paper is extracted from the larger IDRC feasibility study as well as the papers submitted at the Dubai meeting. It consists of four parts:

- a- a summary of findings from the original IDRC research project,
- b- a short review of the state of regional social sciences in the Arab world,
- c- the rationale for establishing an Arab Social Science Research Council ,
- d- the outcome of the Dubai meeting.

I- Summary of Findings from the Original Feasibility Study on the Middle East : Differentiated Needs and Opportunities

The original research project that was supported by IDRC started with a pressing question : Given the range of common internal and external challenges confronting states and societies in the Middle East region in the early years of the 21st century, why is there not a robust body of social science research and analysis that is regionally based and regionally informed ? That question led to other related queries : In the absence of regionally-grounded research and analysis, can the region's problems be understood (and addressed) through country-specific or externally-driven international perspectives ?

If not, how can the social sciences be strengthened in the Middle East to generate cross-country, comparative or collaborative research and analysis that can help influence public debates as well as public policies ? The project was clear in its key concern : the current status, promises, challenges and opportunities of REGIONAL social science research in the Arab countries, Iran and Turkey. "Regional" was defined broadly as research that is not focused exclusively on local or national issues. Thus, all cross-country, cross-regional, comparative and international research would fit roughly under this definition provided that it was also linked in some way to the realities of the Middle East. The findings of the original feasibility study did not endorse the presumed need for a regional social science mechanism that would bring Arab, Iranian and Turkish scholars under a common umbrella. Instead, the consolidated project report offered a differentiated analysis of the social science research communities in the Arab world, Iran and Turkey. Its key conclusions were as follows:

- There is very little research on the common challenges confronting the Arab countries, Turkey and Iran from a regional or comparative perspective.
- With the exception of the Economic Research Forum in Cairo (ERF) and the Middle East Research Competition (MERC) which are regional in nature, there are no mechanisms for sustained interaction or collaboration among social scientists in the Arab countries, Iran and Turkey.

However, networks like the Global Development Network (GDN), the Mediterranean Development Forum (MDF) and EuroMeSCo include both Turkey and the Arab countries as part of larger groupings--thereby providing an indirect opportunity for interaction.

- Meanwhile, there many research institutions which focus on the Arab region. However, these institutions operate in a highly fragmented and privatized research environment. Their collective work falls short of articulating a “regional” perspective that can serve as the basis for public debate and public policy in the Arab world.

- Social science communities in the Arab countries, Iran and Turkey have followed divergent trajectories in the last few decades. Their institutional infra-structure is quite distinct and they are working within different political and intellectual environments. As a result, their needs and aspirations at this time are very different.

- Scholars in the Arab world, Iran and Turkey acknowledge the “objective” benefits of collaboration and the need for regionally-informed research, but they also recognize that there are serious obstacles to regional collaboration.

- The absence of regional research is attributed mainly to the shortcomings of the social science communities in the region--each of which has a different handicap. In the case of Iran, the main limitation is the intellectual insularity that has been imposed by the political regime since 1979. In the case of Turkey, it is the consequences of a narrow, almost exclusively Western-oriented social science enterprise. In the Arab world, the critical challenge is the overall weakness of the social sciences.

- In addition, there are formidable language, institutional, political and financial barriers that militate against collaborative initiatives between Arab, Iranian and Turkish researchers. Existing political and professional incentive structures decidedly work against regionally-based and regionally-initiated efforts. Moreover, there is some evidence that the current generation of social scientists is too heavily invested in existing national and/or international networks to change course. Thus, innovative strategies are needed to strengthen existing links and to invest in the future.

- Among researchers who have been involved in regional initiatives under such mechanisms as MEAwards, MERC and ERF, there is support for substantive collaboration on selected issue areas (such as reproductive health, urbanization, women’s issues, education, migration, refugees, water-related conflicts) as well as regional mechanisms that can indirectly expand the autonomy and space for social research in the region as a whole. In fact,

one of the strongest arguments provided for regional research was not the production of “new” knowledge but the need to create “new public spaces” that can broaden the geographic, political and intellectual scope of social and political discourses in the Middle East region. Given the severe political limitations at the national level, a regionally-based approach was seen to offer a safer ground for testing new ideas.

- Despite the current state of affairs, there is considerable support for investing in a new generation of scholars with greater opportunities for interaction and exchange among them within the region as well as internationally. It is argued that only a new generation of researchers can overcome each community’s shortcomings and initiate a process of mutual learning across the Arab countries, Iran and Turkey and to offer a “regional” dimension to current international analyses of the Middle East.

- Given the existence of large diaspora communities especially of Arab and Iranian scholars, there is strong support for mechanisms of collaboration with diaspora social scientists especially since many of them work at the intersection of regional/international issues.

- While recognizing the merits of fostering closer relations among Arab, Iranian and Turkish social scientists, thoughtful observers of the current state of affairs also acknowledge the lack of a general demand for regional social and researchers in each country. On the other hand, there seems to be considerable support for strengthening “regional” social science research in the Arab world-both in its own right and as a potential base for broader cooperation with other social science communities.

Based on the above analysis, the original feasibility study refrained from proposing a formal mechanism to promote closer engagement among social scientists in the Arab countries, Iran and Turkey at this time. Instead, the report proposed a strategy that is firmly grounded in today’s realities but propelled by the many ideas and proposals that were put forth by researchers in the region during the course of the project. In a nutshell, it proposed a phased response to redressing the weaknesses of the social sciences in the Middle East region by building upon the existing groundwork in the Arab world while exploring concrete opportunities for collaboration with Iran and Turkey. Several factors supported a concentrated focus on the Arab world:

- a- the long tradition of networking among Arab social scientists;
- b- the natural linguistic/cultural links among Arab scholars that facilitate intra-Arab communication and collaboration;

- c- the serious gaps in the infra-structure of the social sciences in the Arab region despite the existence of a plethora of institutions, activities and initiatives;
- d- the absence of any national or pan-Arab institution with the mandate to support and strengthen the social sciences;
- e- the keen interest of the UNDP's Regional Bureau of Arab States to mobilize its considerable resources to support a regional initiative in the Arab world.

II- The State of the Social Sciences in the Arab World

This section consists of four parts. The first outlines the political context within which Arab social scientists operate; the second highlights key features of the social sciences in the Arab region; the third analyses the regional infrastructure of social science research; and the final section summarizes the implications of the new institutional landscape.⁴¹

The Political Context

In the early years of the 21st century, the Arab world is characterized more by its discontinuities and disarray than its unity. However, at the risk of overgeneralization, certain common features of the Arab world have direct relevance for this study. These include the unifying role of language and religion ; the autocratic nature of most Arab states ; the mixed consequences of the region's rich oil resources ; high incidence of war, violent conflict and political crises ; high level of penetration by external actors ; and the widespread public appeal of pan-Islamist and pan-Arab ideologies. The Arab world is faced with simultaneous centrifugal and centripetal factors which often lead to contradictory outcomes. The rise of satellite networks that reach every corner of the Arab world, the heightened role of Islam as a potent political force, the large-scale labor movements within the region, the rise of new social actors that work regionally, the long-standing sense of grievance generated by the Arab-Israeli conflict, the passionate opposition to the wars in Palestine, Iraq, Lebanon and the militaristic policies of the Western powers in the region these and other factors shape the Arab world as a regional (as well as an aspirational) unit. On the other hand, the existence of 20 plus states, and the narrow interests of their ruling regimes, militate against a pan-Arab project. The post-Ottoman history of the Arab world is littered with failed attempts at Arab unification.

The Arab League, one of the earliest regional organizations in the world, is the epitome of Arab disunity. Various sub-regions in the Arab

⁴¹ - For a fuller discussion of these issues, please see the three papers cited above.

world are in fact better integrated than the region as a whole. There is a big chasm between the Gulf States, the Maghreb and the Mashrek ; between the oil rich and oil poor states ; and between the front-line states and others who are spared the direct impacts of the Israeli conflict. This is naturally reflected in the changing status and performance of their social science communities- which is discussed below.

Nonetheless, there is little question that the political context in most of the Arab countries is basically inhospitable to social science research. Without exception, analysts attribute the current state of the social sciences in the Arab world primarily to the adverse political conditions within which they have to work.⁴² The list of impediments to independent research is long: repressive authoritarian regimes which tolerate little dissent; the lack of robust mechanisms to protect basic human rights and freedoms; the hold of religious establishments on many governments; the growing appeal of religious movements and the existence educational systems based on religion; the cultural tendency towards conformism and the absence of a tradition of critical thinking in the education system; the lack of demand for evidence-based policy research; the corrosive impact of wars, violent conflict and political instability.⁴³

⁴²- As Suad Joseph rightly noted: conditions for social science research have not always been bleak in the Arab world. In fact, during the nation and state building phases of Arab political development, the social scientists played an important role.

⁴³- For a thoughtful review of this issue, see Lisa Anderson's Presidential address at MESA in 2003 entitled "*Scholarship, Policy, Debate and Conflict: Why We Study the Middle East and Why it Matters?*"

The Social Sciences in the Arab World

The 2003 UNDP Arab Human Development Report (AHDR) notes :

The human sciences have historical traditions dating back to the time before the independence of the Arab countries, as is the case with studies of history and civilization, for instance. Social sciences as full-fledged disciplines, however, did not emerge and take hold in these countries until after independence when universities and research centres were established to teach and research these sciences.



Al Yamama University (KSA): Due to high demand for education, the number of new universities has increased to over 233

In other words, social sciences did not exist in the Arab world before the 1960s, with a few exceptions, mainly Egypt. In some countries, such as the Arabian Gulf countries, they did not emerge until a decade later. The status of human and social sciences differs from one Arab country to the next in the level of their development, scholarship and social and political returns. There is not enough accurate data to draw an Arab map of their distribution. There are, however, general trends which can be monitored on the basis of partial indicators. While Iraqis and Syrians, for instance, made excellent contributions to the study of history and civilization, Egyptians made advanced contributions in the field of economic and political sciences, compared to other Arabs. Research traditions in sociology and anthropology seem stronger in the Arab Maghreb in terms of theory and methodology.⁴⁴

The AHDR rightly includes the social sciences as part of the overall knowledge deficit problem in the Arab region. Reliable research on the state of the social sciences in the Arab world is quite rare even though there are numerous studies on particular disciplines, especially sociology and anthropology. Unlike other countries or regions, there are no national or regional institutions with the mandate to monitor and document the state of the social sciences in the Arab world.⁴⁵ Instead, any historical memory resides with individual scholars or in individual archives. As a result, it is difficult to compile a comprehensive or accurate portrait of the state of the art.⁴⁶

Nonetheless, individual researchers and social scientists hold strong and almost universally negative opinions about the state of the social sciences in the Arab region.⁴⁷ With some exceptions, analyses of the social

⁴⁴ - UNDP, Arab Human Development Report, p. 74 citing Al-Taher Labib's background paper.

⁴⁵ - In Turkey, for example, the social sciences fall under the mandate of the Turkish Academy of Sciences. In some regions like West Africa and Latin America, regional institutions like CODESRIA and CLACSO play an important role in the development of the social science in the region.

⁴⁶ - Our research was greatly hampered by the lack of a professional tradition of information sharing and collaboration among social scientists in the region. Knowledge is still treated as a rare commodity to be hoarded and shared only sparingly. Thus, in numerous cases, it proved impossible to gain access to documents, papers and reports held by certain colleagues and institutions. Without a commitment to sharing information and analysis and exposing them to the critical eyes of other researchers, social sciences are bound to remain at the "cottage industry" level of knowledge production. With the advent of new information technologies, there are no longer any excuses for not making public knowledge publicly available.

⁴⁷ - See for example the feasibility study undertaken by the Gulf Research Center for UNDP/RBAS on CESPAC, the proposed Center for Economic and Social Policies in the Arab Countries. The interviews conducted for this study also consistently revealed a deep dissatisfaction with the state of the social sciences in individual Arab countries as well as the region as a whole.

sciences in the region reflect the broader problems of the field in general: they are highly subjective, largely undocumented, patchy and inconclusive. Nonetheless, several broad features of the social sciences in the Arab region merit attention :⁴⁸

- Universities and enrollments: Due to high demand for education, the number of universities in the Arab world has increased from 10 in 1950 to over 233 as of 2003. Between 1993 and 2003, 93 new universities were established including 51 private universities.⁴⁹

In the last decade, there has been a mushrooming of private universities in the Arab countries. Of the region's countries, each has at least one institution for tertiary education. In the period between 1999 and 2000, there were five million students enrolled in higher education in the Arab world, of which two million or 40 percent were women.

- Quality of Teaching & Curricula: With the exception of few elite universities, there is widespread dissatisfaction with current curricula and teaching standards in the social sciences-both at the graduate and undergraduate levels. It is consistently argued that the curricula and textbooks are outdated, and the teaching methods are inappropriate to foster analytical and critical thinking. However, much of the criticism is based on personal experiences and anecdotal evidence rather than comparative research.⁵⁰

- Tertiary Enrollments in the Social Sciences: Social sciences disciplines have some of the highest enrollments in the public Arab universities. This is more a function of their under-appreciation rather than their popularity since in much of the Arab world; matriculation exam scores determine students' fields of study. Students with the highest scores enroll in the physical sciences while those with lower scores enroll in social science faculties. Focusing primarily on the professions, many of the private universities do not offer degree programs in the social sciences.

- Feminization of the Social Sciences: The gender break-down of students enrolled in social science disciplines varies across the region. In Bahrain, Lebanon, and Qatar, female enrolments account for the majority of enrolments in the social sciences, representing 69 percent, 53 percent, and 62

⁴⁸- Unless otherwise indicated, these are drawn directly from the aforementioned paper by Manal Jamal.

⁴⁹- UNESCO, 2003. Higher Education in the Arab Region, 1998-2003. Paris: UNESCO.

⁵⁰- This issue was discussed at length in the April 11-12, 2006 Beirut meeting. There are various current initiatives to address this problem, including a proposal to set up a new Arab Social Science School as well as a comparative study of social science curricula in the Arab region.

percent of enrolments respectively. This compares to 35 percent in Iraq, 46 percent in Jordan, 42 percent in Morocco, 37 percent in Oman, 47 percent in PA areas, and 39 percent in Saudi Arabia.

- **Integration of Social Scientists:** The number of trained social scientists actively engaged in social science teaching or research is difficult to determine beyond a crude estimate of overall enrollments, faculty members and researchers working at research institutions. The estimates range from 20,000 senior scholars and 30,000 junior scholars, to only a few thousand.⁵¹

- **Social Science Outputs:** While hard data are missing, the Arab Human Development Report estimates that the average social science research output of the Arab world per million inhabitants is roughly 2 percent of that of any industrialized country.⁵² If the pattern from the hard sciences applies to the social sciences, it can be assumed that much of this research is undertaken in a few institutions by a small number of researchers. According to the AHDR, only 26 scientific institutions published more than 50 research papers in 1995, while only five institutions published more than 200 papers. In terms of the quality of research outputs, there are no established mechanisms or standards to assess quality. Peer review seems to be employed only sporadically.

- **Outlets for Social Science Research :** There are limited outlets for serious research across the various disciplines. Even in countries where social science publications are more plentiful, such as Egypt, Lebanon, and Morocco, the vast majority of publications are produced and consumed locally, with minimal opportunities for cross-fertilization.

- **Brain drain:** According to the AHDR, there is a large brain drain of educated Arabs to Western countries. For example, approximately 25 percent of 300,000 first degree graduates from Arab universities in 1995/96 emigrated. Between 1998 and 2000, more than 15,000 Arab doctors

⁵¹- Saad Eddin Ibrahim, "Arab Social Science Research in the 1990s and Beyond: Issues, Trends, and Priorities," *Research and Development in the Middle East and North Africa* (Cairo: International Development and Research Center, 2000), p. 129. Ibrahim recently clarified that this figure actually represents university graduates from social science disciplines rather than the number of social scientists with appropriate professional, research-oriented training in the social sciences.

⁵²- *Arab Human Development Report 2002: Creating Opportunities for Future Generations* (NY: UNDP: Regional Bureau for Arab States and Arab Fund for Social and Economic Development, 2002). This figure, however, is problematic for a number of reasons. First, there are no established publication indexes in the Arab world. Moreover, ISBN numbers are not always preserved or used in the reproduction of books. Therefore, it is difficult to ascertain the exact number of publications in the Arab world.

migrated. Although their numbers are not known, there is a strong community of Arab social scientists working abroad. The above trends paint a fairly bleak picture which is largely confirmed in interviews with social scientists in the region. There is high demand for university education in the Arab region, although the social sciences are not the preferred field of study. On the supply side: teaching and curricula in the social sciences are considered quite weak and outdated. Moreover, there does not seem to be a strong link between teaching and research. There is low level of research production and limited outlets for research. All of this suggests that the social sciences are basically caught in a negative web of inhospitable political climate, low demand, poor training, and weak output. The presumed high brain drain seems to cap a rather grim picture. Curiously, however, there is a fairly extensive infrastructure of regional social science research institutions in the Arab region.

*The institutional infrastructure of regional research in the Arab World*⁵³

Since the 1970s, but most dramatically since the 1980s, there has been a substantial increase in institutions involved in regional social science research in the Arab world. These include social science departments in universities (a number of which also offer MA and PhD degrees), university-based research centers, private research institutions and think tanks, regional research networks and small grants programs, professional associations, advocacy networks, foreign research institutes, and regional as well as international organizations. While commentators and social scientists in the region bemoan the state of the social sciences in the Arab world, there has been a proliferation of projects, networks and institutions that are engaged in a plethora of research activities at the national, regional and global levels. Some of the region's most prominent institutions and scholars are involved in these initiatives.

However, these initiatives seem to be largely divorced from the academic realm and operate in an increasing privatized and fragmented research environment. A quick analysis of the institutional map reveals the diversity and the range of institutions engaged in social science research in the region.⁵⁴ Although the distinction is somewhat artificial, these institutions can be grouped into two broad categories: a) regional and cross-regional institutions, networks and award programs; b) nationally-based institutions.

⁵³- The institutional map and the analysis that follows are far from conclusive. They have been distributed widely for input throughout the region. Incoming additions, corrections and comments have been incorporated. It is hoped that the map will serve as a useful baseline that can be built upon.

⁵⁴- Unless otherwise indicated, the following sections are drawn upon but go beyond the review of the institutional map by Manal Jamal. The analysis has been deepened through my own knowledge of the field as well as interviews and conversations with a large number of Arab colleagues who were directly involved in these initiatives.

a) *Regional and Cross-Regional Institutions, Networks and Award Programs*

Networking and collaboration among Arab intellectuals preceded the establishment of the social sciences as professional disciplines. Unfortunately, there is no formal record of those links beyond the history of the intellectual currents of the 20th century. In any case, these links were probably more personal rather than institutional. Multi-country and multi-institutional networks in the Arab world are recent creations, dating mostly to the 1990s. Pre-dating the current generation of regional networks, there were pan-Arab institutions which brought individuals from across the region together around a common project. Indeed, two of the continuing pan-Arab institutions are the Arab Planning Institute (API) and the Arab Urban Development Institute (AUDI). In the 1980s, there were also competing professional social science associations which were the scene of many ideological and political debates in the region. However, these institutions are now largely extinct.

Most of the 1990s generation of regional institutes and networks were created with major support from foreign donors. Since many of them have become well-established and are able to attract multiple sources of funding. The most prolific of these institutions are engaged in research on economic development or gender-related issues. The **Economic Research Forum** (ERF) is the most notable regional network engaged in policy-oriented economic research. Significantly, EFR includes the Arab region, Turkey and Iran. While API's membership is composed of Arab countries and its research focuses on development, economic management, and planning, ERF's membership is composed of individual scholars whose research is diverse and multi-dimensional. There are three networks in the region that promote gender research: the *Center for Arab Women Training and Research* (CAWTAR), the *Gender Economic Research Policy and Analysis* (GERPA) initiative, and *Mashriq/Maghrib Gender Linking Information Project* (Mac/Mag GLIP). Whereas CAWTAR has been involved in research on women in the Arab world since 1993, GERPA was created very recently to incorporate a gender dimension in a select number of high profile policy research activities. Mac/Mag GLIP, on the other hand, serves as a forum for communication on gender issues.

Unlike ERF or CAWTAR, there are several multi-institutional networks that were created since the mid 1990s. The most prominent of these are the *Global Development Network* (GDN), the *Mediterranean Development Forum* (MDF), and the *EuroMeSCo-European Mediterranean Partnership* (EMP). Initiated and funded by international organizations and donor agencies, these networks have generated considerable activity and research as well as competition for limited human resources in the Middle East. The GDN and the MDF both focus predominately on socio-economic

development issues. EuroMeSCo focuses on policy and security related issues. The MDF partnership is comprised of Middle East and North Africa (MENA) think tanks, the United Nations Development Program, and the World Bank Institute. A critical component of the MDF partnership is a Forum which is held every two to three years. The GDN, on the other hand, operates as a network of regional partners from around the world. MENA is represented by ERF which also manages the regional window of GDN. The EuroMeSCo brings together institutes of five southern EU members and a number of institutes from Southern Mediterranean countries. None of these networks are specific to the Arab region, and in fact they all include Turkey. Of these networks, GDN represents an interesting model because it was originally founded by and managed by the World Bank; however, it became independent in 2001 and has its institutional home in India. Some argue that these international networks are created to promote particular policy agendas rather than to support regionally-relevant research; thus, their research outputs are seen as incidental. However, many of the conferences and meetings organized by these networks are substantive in nature and clearly foster the production, dissemination and discussion of new knowledge on issues of direct concern to the Middle East. Moreover, their close links to national as well as international policy networks attest to their policy influence. In the case of GDN, its internet based research platform (GDN) is a major repository of electronic research in the region. The GDN (along with ASSR which is discussed below) is a significant resource for the social science community.

Two recent networks with international connections are the *Arab Reform Initiative (ARI)* and the *Consortium of Research Institutes to Promote Regional Security and Cooperation in the Middle East and North Africa*. While there is not sufficient information on the Consortium, the Arab Reform Initiative (ARI) is already well-entrenched. Devoted to the study of political reform in the Arab World in order to advance knowledge and develop a program of home-grown democratic change, ARI's membership consists of 10 local institutions and five Western partners. Its founding members include some of the better known and more active research centers in the Arab world, such as the Al-Ahram Center, Biblioteca Alexandria, Center for Strategic Studies at Jordan University, Lebanese Center for Policy Studies and the Gulf Research Center.

It should be noted that several of these same institutions are also members of GDN, MDF and EuroMeSCo. The implications of the density of the relationships between several Arab institutions and their international/global partners certainly deserves further examination especially since there is a widespread view that the region's pre-eminent think tanks and research institutes constitute a club of "usual suspects" whose major work is increasingly defined in light of their participation in global networks.

Actually, many of the “usual suspects” were instrumental in creating a sui generis pan Arab institution in the late 1990s called the *Arab Institute for Studies and Communication* (AISC) to support research organizations in the region and to assist researchers, particularly in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Palestine. AISC, in turn, established the Arab Social Science Research (ASSR) as its net-based resource and research platform (www.assr.org). Although AISC is now moribund, ASSR remains one of the most important research tools in the Arab world alongside the UNDP’s Program on Governance in the Arab region (POGAR) gateway (www.pogar.org). Surprisingly, ASSR has for some time been running on a long-distance, part-time basis from Texas.⁵⁵ Meanwhile, although founded by some of the region’s best connected institutions and individuals, AISC discontinued its operations due to lack of adequate and sustained funding, and the changes in the personal trajectories of several of the key individuals who had been instrumental in its creation.⁵⁶ Regional grant programs funded by foreign donors have historically played an important role in the promotion of social science research in the region. Among the best known of these programs are the *Middle East Awards Program in Population and Development* (ME Awards) and the *Middle East Research Competition* (MERC). ME Awards was established by the Population Council in 1978 and continued its grant making activities for over two decades. It also served as the model for MERC which was established by the Ford Foundation in 1986. Whereas MERC supported social science research in all disciplines in the Arab world and Turkey, the now-defunct ME Awards grants program supported social science research primarily linked to demography and health-related issues in the Arab world, Iran and Turkey. During its 26 years of operations, ME Awards played an important role in knowledge generation, capacity building and networking. In addition to its research competition, ME Awards initiated and supported study groups, workshops and research working groups. Its Reproductive Health Working Group is an ongoing network with an evolving research agenda. It is considered to be one of the most successful and sustained collaborative research initiatives in the Middle East involving researchers from the Arab countries and Turkey. MERC’s trajectory is instructive in terms of the challenges of institutional development in the region. During its first ten years, MERC was administered directly by the Ford Foundation’s Cairo office.

The program grew over the years, expanding its disciplinary and geographic scope. As part of its strategy to give autonomy to MERC, the

⁵⁵- Telephone interviews and e-mail correspondence with Dr. Elizabeth Bouri, who started ASSR while she was associated with the Cairo office of the Ford Foundation.

⁵⁶- While accurate information is not available, the anecdotal evidence is that with the departure of Salim Nasr from the Ford Foundation and Saad Eddin Ibrahim’s legal problems, AISC could not survive.

Ford Foundation facilitated the program's move to a regional institution. From 1997-2001, MERC was administered by the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies in Beirut. From 2002-2005, it moved back to Cairo and was administered by the Center for the Study of Developing Countries at the Faculty of Economics and Political Science in Cairo University. In 2006, MERC relocated to its new institutional home, the Centre d'études et de recherches économiques et sociales (CERES) in Tunisia. Both MERC and MEAwards have been externally evaluated. In both cases, the evaluations have pointed to their positive contributions to individual research support and capacity building.

b) Nationally-Based Institutions

Nationally-based institutions play an important role in regional social science research, and indeed provide the institutional membership for many of the regional and international networks described above. Although universities are expected to be the primary producers of knowledge, it is widely claimed that little research takes place as part of the core mandate of most universities in the Arab world. This is largely attributed to various factors: the poor qualifications of academic staff and their unfamiliarity with research methodologies; the political risks of doing social science research; the heavy teaching load of academic staff in national universities; the brain drain from the region's "research" universities to the new "teaching" universities in the Gulf; the absence of financial or professional incentives in doing research; the lack of research facilities, and especially research libraries; the absence of a vibrant and competitive intellectual environment that encourages research; the shortage of venues for dissemination of research; the negative role of the "old guard" who serve as the gatekeepers for research opportunities and research funds; and the poor language skills of many academics. Any mix of these factors would certainly explain the claimed paucity of research produced in universities.⁵⁷

While academic research is in short-supply, there are numerous university-based research centers-mainly in the elite, capital city-based universities. For example, Cairo University (established in 1908), especially its Faculty of Economics and Political Sciences, stands out as a hub of research centers. The Faculty hosts over half a dozen research centers which respectively cover Asian Studies, Developing Countries Studies, American

⁵⁷- There is no easy way to document the volume and quality of research produced in national universities. The absence of basic tools such as well-stocked university libraries with reliable catalogues, bibliographic data bases, citation indices, etc. makes it virtually impossible to undertake quantitative research. However, if individual research is taking place in universities, it is certainly not accessible in the public domain.

Studies, European Studies as well as Centers for Public Administration Research and Consulting, Center for Surveys and Statistical Applications.

Egypt, Lebanon, and Palestine have the highest number of university-based research centers. Birzeit University in Palestine is particularly noteworthy in having established and maintained several innovative research centers under harsh political conditions. Its Institute of Women's Studies and Institute of Law have remained connected to regional and international networks despite continuing travel restrictions.

In Jordan, the Center for Strategic Studies (CSS) stands out as a university-based center that has become an active node of research and regional collaboration with a range of other actors. CSS has particularly been singled out as a success story based on its ability to train and reproduce its own research staff. The University of Yemen hosts one of the few Women's Studies Centers in the Arab World alongside similar centers in Palestine, Lebanon and Egypt. Meanwhile, there are several active research centers in the Gulf, including the Center for Gulf Studies at Qatar University; the Center for Strategic and Future Studies, and the Euro-Gulf Research Unit in the Department of Political Science at Kuwait University; the Economic Policy and Research Center at Zayed University in UAE. In addition, there are new public policy schools such as the Dubai School of Government which represents a hybrid institutional model in the region.

The two American universities rooted in the region, AUB and AUC, have historically played, and continue to play, significant roles in the development of the social sciences in the region in terms of their curricula, research focus and extensive research facilities including the most advanced libraries in Lebanon and Egypt respectively. They have also been in the forefront of establishing new fields of study as well as undertaking multi-disciplinary and collaborative research through in-house research centers. The Center for Behavioral Research (CBR) and the Center for Research on Population and Health (CRPH) at AUB and the Social Research Center at AUC are involved in cross-disciplinary projects. More recently, the newly established Issam Faris Institute of Public Policy and International Affairs at AUB as well as the Center for Arab Philanthropy are poised to open up new areas of research based on the two universities' extensive financial and human resources. Turning to non-university based research centers, many of the older institutions are based in Egypt, Lebanon and Jordan which have traditionally been the most hospitable venues for social science research. These institutions, founded primarily in the period between the late 1960 and late 1980s, include the Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies, the Arab Thought Forum, the Center for Arab Unity Studies, the Institute for Palestine Studies and

the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies.⁵⁸ These institutions represent sustained research efforts with prolific publication records which are available in Arabic and English. There seem to be no evaluation studies on any of these institutions. As a result, it is difficult to assess their performance, productivity and effectiveness beyond a mechanical bean-counting. Since the late 1980s and early 1990s, there have also been numerous new institutions in the Gulf which focus primarily on the Gulf region. These institutions include the Bahrain Center for Studies and Research, the government-supported Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, and the private Gulf Research Center. With considerable financial resources and good research facilities, these institutes already constitute a critical mass of knowledge and expertise in the Gulf region; they also serve as a magnet for researchers from around the Arab world and internationally. Some have twinning arrangements with similar research centers in the US and are poised to become the local counterpart of foreign universities and think tanks such as the Rand/Qatar project. Their growing role is reminiscent of the early years of the new universities in the Gulf region. Many academics and social scientists left their home institutions in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine to take up teaching positions in the Gulf. Some argue that this brain drain to the Gulf for teaching is partially responsible for the low productivity of many promising scholars and academics.⁵⁹ In addition, there has been a proliferation of a new breed of research centers which are variably described as “boutique” research centers, “research shops” or “dukkan research”. Many of these centers are engaged in “soft” research that is mainly client-driven. As a result, their output is generally not in the public sphere and ends up in the drawers and bookcases of their various clients. The relative role of these institutions vis-à-vis other producers of research is currently difficult to assess although their rapid expansion has been a growing area of concern to the academic research community.⁶⁰

From the “dukkan” research to the multi-institutional networks, there is clearly a diverse range of institutions involved in social science research in the Arab world. Nonetheless, there is a strong perception that individually and collectively these institutions are largely driven by their donors. Since there is very limited public money for research in the Arab world, research is primarily funded through other channels including government agencies, the private sector, regional and international organizations and various

⁵⁸ - The Institute for Palestine Studies is a unique institution in terms of its specific focus on Palestine and its offices in several countries. Its work, although not regional in nature, clearly incorporates regional perspectives.

⁵⁹ - Conversations with Profs. Saad Eddin Ibrahim and Suad Joseph.

⁶⁰ - Without further research, we have decided not to include and/or explicitly identify these institutions in our institutional map.

foundations and funding agencies. Thus, donors play a pivotal role in shaping research agendas. Nonetheless, this is not to suggest a one-way influence. In fact, there is often a symbiotic relationship between donors and the research institutes with a close correspondence of their respective interests. Such correspondence might affect research priorities but it need not affect the quality of research. In an environment where “private” and “foreign” funding is increasingly the norm, the main criteria for assessing the autonomy and public utility of the research enterprise have to be the quality and the relevance of the research itself rather than the source of its funding or the priorities of the funder.⁶¹ Thus, the perennial problem with privately-funded “soft” research is its short-termism and transience. Indeed, in the absence of public funds, sustainable (non-project) funding for research institutes to undertake long-term research remains a major problem throughout the Arab region.⁶² Some institutions (such as the API and GDN) have been quite successful in diversifying their funding base to reduce their dependence on a single donor and to ensure sustainability. Others are increasingly turning to doing consultancy work to remain in business.

The Implications of the Changing Landscape of Social Science Research in the Arab world

As the above review demonstrates, there is considerable research activity and a fast changing map of institutional arrangements for research and policy analysis in the Arab region.

The research landscape has gradually been shifting on three fronts : from the traditional countries in the Magreb and the Mashreq to the Gulf; from public universities to private institutions ; from single institutions to collaborative networks and institutional arrangements. One of the key findings to emerge from this project is that much social research is undertaken outside the universities by a diverse range of private institutions. As a result, such research is often driven by transient institutional or policy impulses rather longer-term basic research agendas that serve the public good. Although there are a growing number of university-based research centers, they also operate in the same research market place as private think tanks. Another important finding is the emergence of a set of interlocking partnerships among several elite institutions with strong external links. These so-called

⁶¹- The role of funding agencies is a highly sensitive topic in the Arab world. It has been studied at great length in many other regions. That it has not been the topic of extensive research project in the Arab region is indicative of the research climate.

⁶²- In this context, the model of Policy Research Consortia supported by DFID deserves closer examination since it provides a mix of project and institutional funding.

“usual suspects” have close connections with the policy and donor community and as a result attract both envy and criticism. While they are highly regarded internationally their domestic constituencies seem to be fairly limited because they are in high demand and have finite capacities.

Finally, entrepreneurship has entered the research marketplace as research institutes seek to generate funding by undertaking operations research and doing consultancies for the private sector, governments and international organizations. With the proliferation of new institutions, the research community is quite fragmented and the collective body of knowledge is almost universally characterized as patchy, uneven and ephemeral. Besides the university-based research centers, there are very few institutes that have a track record in a particular issue area. Instead, despite their small size, many regionally active centers tend to be multi-thematic in their coverage and highly responsive to changing opportunity structures. The implications of these changes in the institutional landscape of social science research are difficult to ascertain at the moment. However, there is a strong perception that Arab social scientists have basically become contract researchers rather than public intellectuals that are primarily concerned with the public interest. Whether this is a fair assessment is hard to judge. Nonetheless, it needs to be considered in light of the following observations offered by Arab social scientists who were interviewed for this project:

a- Despite the proliferation of new institutions, there are only a limited number of academic social scientists in the region who conduct “social science” research - i.e. critical, theoretically-informed and empirically grounded research.

b- The first generation of foreign-trained professional Arab social scientists who helped build the social sciences in the Arab world is on its way out. The next generation of academics and researchers - many of whom are home-grown - lack the tools and skills that are essential for rigorous social science research. These include limited language skills, poor training and unfamiliarity with the global body of knowledge in the social sciences, lack of robust mechanisms of quality control, lack of access to research libraries and resources, limited links to regional or international researchers.

c- There is a large gap between academics in universities who are primarily engaged in teaching, and researchers in non-academic institutions who do social research. This bifurcation of teaching/training and research is ultimately untenable. From university-based research centers to private think tanks, there is strong demand for professional researchers. However, it is not clear where and how these researchers are being trained, whether they are

acquiring good research skills and if Arab universities are able to reproduce their own faculty.

d- Within universities, academic researchers are often involved in social research projects that deal with issues of critical importance such as health, environment, population, and development.⁶³ However, given heavy teaching loads and distorted incentive structures, this is often at the expense of contributing to the development of their own disciplines and fields of study.

e- Notwithstanding the growing flurry of research activities and projects funded by a multitude of research donors and undertaken by an increasing number of research institutes, there has been little accumulation of social science knowledge or significant contributions to the social sciences originating from the Arab world in the last 10-15 years.

f- Instead, the Arab world has a high number of “commentators”, “pundits”, “policy entrepreneurs” and “research impresarios” who have not produced any new research in the last 10-15 years but still serve as gatekeepers.

III- Reclaiming the public role of social science research: creating an Arab social science research council

Two key conclusions emerge from the above analysis :

a- Currently, there seems to be a pressing problem about the production and reproduction of social sciences in the Arab region.

b- Social science research in the region is increasingly privatized and fragmented and has basically retreated from playing a public role in informing public policy or stimulating public debate. When combined with the range of socio-economic, political and security challenges that confront the Arab region in the early years of the 21st century, the prognosis seems bleak indeed. The energies of Arab social scientists seem to be taken up by a flurry of short-term projects, programs, networks and operations research that are often defined and conducted on behalf of a host of government agencies, the private sector, regional or international organizations or donors.

⁶³- One university president noted that there is little basic “social science research” even in the best universities. However, he also indicated that many social scientists are involved in social research on critical areas such as demography, education, and health-bringing valuable social science perspectives to these issues. He likened the research in the social sciences to a dough-nut, with “basic research” as the missing hole in the dough-nut.

However, there seems to be little demand for and limited supply of social science research that is independent, critical, cumulative, not tied to short term policy or institutional agendas, and is in the public interest. Moreover, there are no institutions at the national or the regional level to support or monitor the performance of the Arab social science community, to provide services to address collective needs, and to facilitate a process of collective agenda and priority setting. There is no counterpart in the Arab world to the Turkish Academy of Sciences or to the regional social science research councils like CLACSO in Latin America, CODESRIA in West Africa or OSSREA in East Africa. From addressing the question of curriculum review to the brain drain, from establishing mechanisms of quality control and standards setting to ensuring access to new research tools and resources, each institution basically has to fend for itself and rely on their clients or a small pool of (primarily) foreign donors. Operating in highly restrictive political environments and enjoying very limited autonomy and freedom of action, Arab social scientists do not have an independent professional platform that can both serve and support them. As a result, their efforts fall short of the region's acute need for research and analysis that can help inform public debates and public policies.

The idea of creating an Arab Social Science Research Council (or a more appropriate name) has been discussed repeatedly in the past, but it was never fully pursued.⁶⁴ For the reasons outlined in this paper, there is an evident need for an institution with the clear mandate to promote and support the production and reproduction of social science research in the Arab World

⁶⁴- Interestingly, one of the first attempts to create a regional network of social scientists goes back to the 1970s and involved researchers from the Arab countries, Turkey and Iran. The "Organization for the Promotion of Social Sciences in the Middle East" (OPSSME) brought together some of the prominent social scientists of the period (Laila Hamamsi, Serif Mardin, and Mubeccel Kiray) to create a regional institute. Its origins, short history and eventual demise are carefully stored in the memories of those involved in it. While various people made references to it, we were unable to find any documentation on OPSSME which apparently had its first meeting in Egypt and its second meeting in Kuwait before disappearing from the scene. More recently, in 1996, UNESCO was instrumental in the creation of the Conseil arabe des sciences sociales / Arab Council of Social Sciences (ARABSSCO). The Council was intended to be the Arab equivalent of CODESRIA in Africa and CLACSO in Latin America. The organization was created as an independent NGO and held its first conference with the participation of many Maghreb and Mashrek social scientists, and adopted a constitution and plan activities. With a legal status and structure, ARABSSCO became an associate member of the International Social Science Council (ISSC). However, there is no record of its activities since then and it is not clear if it still exists. (E-mail correspondence with Dr. Ali Kazancigil, Secretary-General, ISSC.)

and to serve as the professional link of the Arab research community to other researchers in the Middle East and globally. The main objectives of such a Council would be to :

a- enhance the contributions of Arab social sciences to public discourse and public policy, and to the betterment of Arab societies.

b- strengthen the capacity, quality, range, reach and influence of social sciences in the Arab region through programs and activities that serve the current and next generation of individuals and institutions engaged in social science research.

c- provide an autonomous professional platform for research agenda setting, resource mobilization and the enhancement of the role of the social sciences in the Arab region.

d- facilitate intellectual and professional exchanges between Arab social scientists with their counterparts in the Middle East region and internationally. Based on the experiences of other similar councils in both industrialized and developing countries, the most important functions of the proposed ASSRC would be :

1- Research and Publications

- Identifying unmet research needs and incubating new ideas
- Developing a long-term research agenda for the Arab region
- Promoting and disseminating high quality publications

2- Training and Capacity Building

• Promoting and/or conducting training and capacity building programs (methodology workshops, textbook translations projects, joint graduate programs among universities, language training programs, and Arabization of essential resources such as statistical packages)

• Serving as the originator or repository of resources of interest to the entire community

• Offering new programs and projects to enhance the effectiveness of the social sciences (research grants, exchange programs, fellowships, “scholars at risk” programs).

3- Professionalization of the Social Sciences

• Developing standards, codes of ethics, peer review and quality control mechanisms (on-line peer reviewed journals, Advisory Committees, review of PhD programs)

- Initiating or kick-starting new projects of service to the community (commissioning a review of social science curricula, compiling histories of the social sciences in the region; providing opportunities to attract diaspora social scientists)

- Providing a platform for interest aggregation and advocacy (interfacing with donor agencies, governments and other stakeholders, fundraising)

4- Networking and Connectivity

- Convening conferences, meetings and other activities to promote intellectual exchanges and to disseminate research findings

- Creating or supporting links with other research communities in the Middle East region as well as internationally (student/faculty exchanges, joint research projects, periodic visits).

- Supporting more effective linkages between the research, policy and practitioners, communities as well as the public and the media (effective communications and outreach programs).

V- OUTCOME OF THE DUBAI MEETING: LAYING THE GROUNDWORK FOR ASSRC

The rationale for the proposed ASSRC was accepted and endorsed at the Dubai meeting on 26-27 November 2006.

Attended by over 30 Arab scholars and researchers as well as several academics from Turkey and Iran, the Dubai meeting established a Steering Committee to help move the proposed ASSRC from an idea to reality. It was agreed that ASSRC should not be an inward-looking and insular professional association.

Instead, its goal should be to strengthen the social science community to serve the public interest. The challenges confronting the Arab social sciences are by no means sui generis.⁶⁵ There is, in fact, a burgeoning body of literature on the role of information and knowledge in an increasingly interconnected world where traditional models of education, knowledge production/ reproduction and information sharing are changing rapidly. There are global debates on the function of universities in knowledge societies ; the role of the developing countries in the global production of

⁶⁵- Numerous national, regional and international social research institutions are currently involved in assessing the role of the social science in a global world. For example, a two day meeting hosted by the International Social Science Council in Paris on 5-6 July 2006 focused specifically on the social sciences in the developing countries and in the global production of knowledge.

knowledge ; the scope and boundaries of the social sciences in addressing social issues; the evolving relationship between research funders, knowledge producers and knowledge users; and the emergence of new models of collaboration across disciplines, institutions and the new range of actors involved in social research.⁶⁶ It is increasingly recognized that the traditional dichotomous categories of research (universal vs. particularistic, domestic vs. foreign, physical vs. social, academic vs. policy-oriented; theoretical vs. empirical) are no longer valid. Research is produced and disseminated in multiple ways by various actors.

All of these issues have direct resonance in the Arab region. The main difference is that in other countries and regions there are institutions with the specific mandate to examine these issues and to generate ideas for broader public debate and appropriate policy responses. The absence of such an institution in the Arab world is a tremendous void. It is anticipated that the creation of an Arab Social Science Research Council would fill a major gap in the Arab region. It would also be an effective instrument through which Arab researchers can work with Iranian, Turkish and international colleagues on issues of common interest such as: student/faculty exchanges; dissertation and research grants; periodic conferences and workshops on a regional topic; parallel and/or joint Projects on specific topics such as urbanization, the welfare state, or the future of the region's mega cities; investment in a new generation of researchers to study each others' countries; Fellowships for language training; twinning programs between different universities; and joint publications and selective translation programs.⁶⁷

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⁶⁶- A detailed discussion of these issues is beyond the scope of this paper. However, the bibliography contains a list of key resources consulted for this project. These debates (such as new mechanisms of funding and collaboration, the role of ICTs in knowledge production, the various "social science foresight projects" undertaken in other countries, and current efforts to strengthen the social sciences globally) are incorporated into the discussion as appropriate.

⁶⁷- It should be noted here that such a program already exists and is funded by the Open Society Institute. The Next Page Foundation supports a South-South translation project which currently involves translation of selected books from Turkey, Iran and India into Arabic.

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Women and the public sphere in the Arab World Empowerment and Participation in Social Sciences

Abdelwahab Ben Hafaidh

In cooperation with the Arab Women Organization in Cairo and the Syrian Family Board in Damascus, MERC organized a round-table discussion on the “Women and the Public sphere in the Arab World: Empowerment and Participation in Social Sciences” in July 2007. The meeting took place in Bloudan near the Syrian Lebanese borders. The topic of the meeting falls within MERC interests that recognize the importance of the empowerment of Arab women and the development of research on public sphere.

The meeting’s main concept paper is based on the assumption that even though the Arab countries have made relative achievements on the level of the participation of women in public life, the region’s general attitude towards female participation in public life is passive. This passivity is reflected on the civil and social level of citizenship (obtaining full civil rights), as well as on the economic level (high rates of unemployment among females) in a context that is characterized by weak public participation for both men and women. Studies addressing these issues are still scanty despite the large efforts undertaken by the Arab Institute for Human Rights in Tunis and the Center for the Study of Arab Unity in Beirut through the organization of seminars on the topic.

Politically, assigning women political or parliamentary quota through the application of the quota system is still questioned in terms of its effectiveness and viability. It success has been proven in some countries, but not so much in others. Several case studies were discussed in the seminar to expound this point. It is important to assess the numerous papers presented in the seminar and other studies that have addressed the participation of women in the media, as a public sphere (See the list of studies initiated by CAWTER the Center for the Training of Arab Women). The relative recent developments in the area of media and the rise in number of satellites have resulted in some improvements although not to the level aspired for. In addition, only a few studies have been conducted in this area. Women journalists mostly work as press

correspondents or in entertainment programs and rarely do they engage in “Sahafet array”. This is also manifested in the limited number of women in the written press. The few cases where women made appearance on satellites and in electronic journals have been addressed in the papers presented during the seminar. The problematic of the seminar raised a number of issues pertaining to concepts and in particular the concept of public sphere. The importance of this concept in the context of local research strategies in the Arab World and Turkey goes back to the large program undertaken in 2000 by the Social Science Research Council under the title “Public Sphere in North Africa and the Middle East” which amassed a large number of studies on the subject from various countries of the region, that are now considered important references on the topic.

Between 2000 and 2007 several changes took place on the theoretical and practical levels, Until recent times, most of the studies used the theoretical underpinnings provided by Jurigen Habermas to discuss reality and actual life. An important number of studies has proved that it is more useful to move clockwise from reality towards theory building. This is what Islah Jad (Egypt – Palestine) suggested. She also affirmed the importance of going beyond Habermas’s theory to describe the local public sphere with all its specificities.

The Bloudan meeting was an invitation to undertake a critical reading of what has been written on women and the public sphere in the Arab world and identify the existing gaps and areas that have not received sufficient attention, taking the following questions as its point of departure:

- What is being produced now on women and the public sphere and to what extent does it cover all the issues on the subject?
- To what extent do writings and studies on women in the public sphere respond to scientific criteria and standards?
- To what extent does the research and scientific products on women in the Arab world reflect developments and relations between women and the public sphere?

Topics were divided as follows:

- Regional and international research methods on women in the Arab World
- Research on women and the public sphere
- Research on economic empowerment and participation
- Women and the general cultural sphere
- Feminist studies on political participation
- Women and politics through case studies.

A question of understanding, a question of inquiry and a question of apprehension:

MERC coordinator, Dr. Abdelwahab Benhafaiedh inaugurated the meeting by welcoming the participants and saying that they were invited to respond to queries of understanding, inquiry and apprehension. The first question of understanding pertains to topic of the hour particularly the importance of the relationship between women in the Arab world and public sphere in the agendas of research and social sciences. He added that participants were also responding to a question of inquiry because they needed to create a methodological distance that avoids passing judgments or endorsing pre-designed analytical tools and pre-conceptualized concepts. He said that we need to stop and take stock of the concepts that are exported to us or cloned by international consultancy offices and research laboratories.

A. Ben Hafaiedh said: Participation is a concept; empowerment is a concept and private and public spheres are concepts. Each concept in social sciences has a life and a story and difficult translations from one language to the other. Concepts are part of discourse formations and are part as well of language and scientific speech and perhaps also of the prevailing and dominant cultural patterns. This reminds us of the statement of Heidegger: Are we playing with concepts or are concepts playing with us?

Because we want to understand first before we interpret or make judgments, the title of the meeting has been changed several times. Initially, the question was: why do we organize a seminar on women and the public sphere while in fact different aspects of this topic have been discussed before in previous meetings and seminars. Are we about to repeat what has already been said?

This desire on the part of MERC to understand resulted in linking the topic of women and public sphere to the development of scientific research and improvement of research capabilities, one of MERC's principal goals, using the following indicators:

-The rise in number of women researchers in social sciences in MERC's two research rounds last year to equal the number of male applicants and award winners.

-The feminization of graduate study in social sciences in the Arab world and the increase in number of female students.

-The numerical increase in number of reports and university dissertations on the participation of women in the public sphere which we know little about.

Finally, Benhafaideh expressed his belief that women's participation in the public sphere is a question of apprehension because it is hard to subject it to a quantitative approach since researchers in the region need to view matters

from the inside: a regard that is close to the social scene and not subject to theoretical moulds.

- an academic image that is as independent and as liberated as possible from the usual paradigms. This is why, according to Ben Hafaiedh, it is important to view with apprehension the reports issued by governmental and non governmental organizations and international institutions including the UN Human Development Reports. In this connection, he also emphasized multi disciplinary and analytical approaches to research.

Criticizing what we wrote and will write:

Dr. Wadouda Badran, the secretary general of the Arab Women Organization said in her word that the Arab scene is witnessing increased interest in women issues. An increasing number of papers and studies are published on the topic and so is also the large interest shown by the UN and its different organization and NGOs, both regional and international, in women's issues.

Badran inquired about the increasing intellectual and research interest in women and its level of authenticity and to what degree it is scientific. She also emphasized the ability of these writings to develop into an appropriate base for a genuine social and cultural transformation in the Arab society. She considered the strong link between scientific research and society as a national need and priority in light of the urgent requirement for development on all levels. Scientific research is needed to offer a sincere reading of reality and to suggest the best ways to change. With regard to the topic of women, there is a strong need for serious trends of research that deal realistically with women's issues in a way that places women in the right place in society and reflect their needs and demands as human being, citizens and important members of the family and society.

She finally asserted that the Bloudan seminar is important in that it represents a critical pause towards reviewing research on women's issues in the Arab world in order to explore all its aspects – all its areas of strength and weakness, its share of authenticity and depth as well as sensitivity to cultural and social reality and identity. It will crucial to question how to rationalize research and guide it towards sound accumulation that could create a sophisticated scientific culture capable of spreading a social culture that carries new and constructive thought for the promotion of women.

Dr. Buchra Kanafani from Syria, considered this first meeting a proof of the soundness condition of scientific research on women, given the decision of the organizers not to repeat what earlier research has said. She added that it

is crucial that such a critical stock-taking process takes place time and again in order to review what has been said and done.

The logic of the academy and the logic of reports:

The first session under Dr. Wadouda Badran dealt with the methodologies of national and international reports on the empowerment of women. The first paper by Boutheina Cherait (University of Algiers) addressed how national reports are drafted. She explained that all the laws on family and women are derived in the Algerian case from different interpretations of the Islamic Sharia. She also said that despite the presence of a civil society in Algeria, no systematic study of the issue of women participation and empowerment has taken place. It is interesting, says Cherait, that in academia, the issue of women's participation in the public sphere is dealt with from a technical point of view i.e. the analytical perspective of Habermas. From that perspective, the talk about women and the public sphere becomes very close to the narration of Sheherzade to Shehrayar in the Baghdadi society i.e. a society where freedom did not exist. This explains the logical departure from the Habermas theory. To talk and to dialogue is not important. More important is what to say what kind of dialogue to conduct.

The second paper presented by Mohamed Gowaily, included an analytical review of the report issued by the Arab Institute for Human Rights based in Tunis, which included a detailed presentation of Arab women's political participation in the following Arab countries: Sudan, Algeria, Egypt, Bahrain, Jordan, Yemen, Kuwait and Lebanon.

The researcher explains how the report team presented a historical and legal account of women's participation in political life without describing the obstacles facing this participation and confining them to religious impediments. He also observed that most of the qualitative studies end with the statement that qualitative studies are absent and there is no description of participation sites. There are no studies on political behavior

Arous Zubeir from the Center of Applied Economic Studies in Algiers spoke about the UN Human Development Report on the empowerment of Arab women. He noted that the results of the report have been an accredited reference in scientific research in the region particularly MA students. This poses new challenges of research methodology. How can lesson be derived from consultancy work. Moreover, statistics deal only with urban women to the exclusion of rural women. Women in the Algerian rural areas, for example, have no social existence, not to mention political influence. The UN reports, he concluded, have been issued to confront society and not political institutions and have placed its writers in confrontation with society and its traditional institutions.

Commenting on the above papers, Amal Abidy from the University of Benghazi, Libya said in response to Cherait's presentation that the latter's experience as minister in the Algerian cabinet then her sudden resignation could become a research topic in itself and she would have liked to listen to this experience and to how a woman can voluntarily relinquish participation. She mentioned that the phenomenon of Arab women relinquishing political responsibilities is an individual phenomenon but worth studying.

Dr. Ahmed Zayed from Egypt pointed to a number of topics that could become future research areas particularly those related to women's participation in public sphere, which the three papers did not refer to.

Islah Jad said that the figures referred to in the seminar are not accurate and that the Arab countries are divided into two camps each of which presents conflicting and contradictory figures. This explains the lack of credibility of the reports.

Sawsan Zakzak from the university of Damascus said that the three papers have overlooked a very important methodological issue and that is the need for more in depth studies. She questioned whether this issue is posed in the context of an Islamic society or an Islamic state or another context all together. This, she said, is important in order to determine the meaning of the citizenship we aspire for. In other words: what are the referents of women's citizenship and what exactly is meant by empowerment?

Research contexts:

Lolwa al Awady from Bahrain and member of the executive council of the AWO chaired the session which included four papers as follows:

- Hayam Bashour from Syria who evaluated studies on violence in Syria.
- Hind Mustafa AWO, Cairo, presented a paper on violence against women between the public and the private spheres.
- Sawsan Zakzak, Syria, presented a paper on women's movement in the Syrian society.

The third session was headed by Boutheina Cherait, University of Algiers. The papers presented during the session were as follows:

- Aicha El Taib (Tunisia-Egypt) presented the case of research on women's black market activities.
- Saniya El Amdouny (CNRS, Paris) presented a paper on women and the public sphere through the department of general services.

Yasmin Ibrahim from the New Woman's Organization in Egypt presented a paper on women's participation in trade unions in the Egyptian society.

The first paper addressed two important elements. The first was the approach towards scientific and research products by women in their close relationship to the socio-historic and intellectual context generated from within. The idea, from this perspective, according to the researcher, is to raise questions and not to present answers about the status of women in social research in the Arab world.

The second element is how to monitor what is being said and written on the level of Arab universities. The researcher examined more than 1800 Ph.D. dissertations to determine their general orientations. Saniya Amdouni and Yasmin Ibrahim attempted to address the question of women's participation in the management of public services in the first case in Tunisia and in the second, trade unions in Egypt. Rima al Sabban from Lebanon questioned whose sphere is the public sphere? She emphasized the importance of studying the topic of domestic workers in the Gulf countries because of its importance in determining the structure of the Gulf society on one hand and the human and family relations i.e. the private sphere on the other hand.

Towards a regional research agenda:

The renewal of research agenda on women's empowerment was a dominant issue in the following session headed by Ahmed Zayed, Cairo University. The following papers were discussed:

- Ensaf Ahmed, Damascus University on women in the religious discourse
- Al Sadek Korchid, Zeytouna university, Women in Islamic electronic websites
- Arous Zubair, CREAD, Algiers, women's participation through Islamic revivalism.

Through a detailed examination of the impact of religious discourse on women, Dr. Ensaf Ahmed attempted to define the role that social sciences could play to resolve the conflict between religious and dogmatic thought. Dr. Korchid reviewed a sample of electronic websites that have religious and fundamentalist tendencies saying that women are a topic and not an actor or producer of these websites, which reduces their importance as public sphere. Arous Zubeir addressed women and political Islam explaining that the issue has to be addressed from its dynamic angles and not merely as a question of slogans. During the fifth session Ahmed Zayed talked about "women and civil society: case study of the production of scientific knowledge". He explained how most of the research studies were conducted in response to an international agenda like those produced by the World Bank, the UN and

international feminist organizations reflecting on the local study of the following topics: (Empowerment, Participation, Gender studies.).He called for a local agenda that responds to local needs and realities. The same comment was made by Raymond Maloul, University of Damascus, who presented a paper on the empowerment of women in Syria. Islah Jad spoke about women's right and the concept of citizenship in the Arab world. She concluded that active citizenship has been associated in our region with the encouragement of voluntary activities. This happened in Latin America as a result of the alliance between the left and the Catholic church. This context gave rise to the empowerment discourse. She mentioned, however, that the achievement of full citizenship in the Arab world requires an overall process of reform that includes the citizenship of both men and women, which again requires work with different social groups and forces.

Analysis from below:

Dr. Abdel Kader Abdulla (the United Arab Emirates University) chaired the session which included papers by Mustafa Al Tir (Libya) on the position of the Libyan women towards equality in light of the findings of a survey undertaken recently, and Dr. Yasmin Berryan on "women and political life in Morocco: towards the diversification of approaches". In the first stage, the researcher examined the scientific production of women the public sphere since the 1990s trying to understand who decided on the topics and analyses over that period of time. In the second stage, she undertook a critical bibliographic study and discovered two things: the exaggerated emphasis on the so-called liberated feminist organizations and secondly and the researchers' concern with the presence of women on the national level without paying attention to the local specificity of the issues under discussion. Given the absence of the local dimension and the approach from below, the researcher remarked that this absence runs in line with the focus on the limited dimensions of the feminist movement. She also noted the dominant trend of neglecting famous women in the mass media who contribute to the national sphere as well as liberated women. There is a noticeable absence of a comprehensive approach that see things from below.

MERC Annual Conference: Human and Social Sciences and Research Ethics.

*Moushira El Geziri
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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, 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 (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. Annabi, 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. Ben Hafaideh 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 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.

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. 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 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 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.

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

For his part, Professor Khalil Zamitti, 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 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, 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 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 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 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 unconscious 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 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?

Accusations, justifications and interpretations:

Several papers (Pr; Abdellaif Hermassi, Adel 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 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. Adel 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 Roumat (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. Abdellatif 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.