



MERC Newsletter

January 2007, N°1

Annual Conference : Developing Research and Rethinking Development



**Working Groups identify their goals :
Formation of MERC Network and development of
peer-reviewed publications**



مركز الأبحاث
للشرق الأوسط
للدراسات
والتعاون
البحري



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FOREWORD

FOR THE EMPOWERMENT OF KNOWLEDGE AND DEVELOPMENT OF ABILITIES

With the advent of the New Year, the Middle East Research Program (MERC) begins a new phase of operation and a new decade from its new home in Tunis twenty years following its establishment by Ford foundation in Egypt in 1986. After a number of stops in different Arab capitals, that influenced the development of research in the region, moving from Cairo to Beirut then going back to Cairo, the program ended up last year in Tunis, a sign of the keenness of its founders to renew its work mechanisms and enhance its goals.

Truly MERC has only recently moved to its new headquarters within the Center of Economic Social Research and Studies (CERES), which may make any assessment of its activities over the last six months a premature undertaking, however, we would still like to underline the importance of the future collective thinking required for the program by the individuals who work in it and those associated with it towards

- Enabling as many researchers as possible to develop their research instruments and projects which they choose in full freedom.
- Striking - as much as possible - a balance between the rigor of the program and the required high quality on one hand, and equal opportunities for granting support to researchers who need it, on the other.
- Supporting creative research projects both on the level of new paradigms and links between research and public policies and interest.

Within the context of what we call a "healthy indicator" of the interactive dialogue between individuals working in the program and those associated with it, two questions still remain that need an answer.

The first question is recurrent and relates to whether MERC has a separate research agenda that responds to the priorities of the region and the interests of its citizens and legitimate development ambitions, away from externally- imposed research agendas. We have always reiterated that the mere fact that MERC encourages the young generation and women to formulate their ideas and proposals independently is clear evidence that the program is not driven by any research agendas. What inspires it instead is the agenda to develop and empower individual research abilities.

The second question is fresh and relates to the slogan of the program- *Knowledge for Public Interest*. A good number of researchers have inquired about the meaning and significance of the slogan. We believe that this question is a partial answer to the first. Associating research with public interest implies, above all, the interest of the people in our region. It implies in addition the endeavour to ensure that knowledge and scientific research in the name of the public is independent of the "indoctrination" of knowledge on one hand, and experts' reports and media rhetoric and inducement on the other hand.

MERC's endeavour to establish a link between its research goals on one hand and public interest on the other is an attempt to relate scientific knowledge to public development policies in the region, and to the aspirations of civil societies to improve all aspects of public life and contextualize knowledge especially at a time characterized by the decline of level of public services. The concept of *public interest* refers to areas of research in development and is adopted to synthesize different strategies representing psychological, social, economic and political perspectives without creating a Pandora's box. Because the challenge today and particularly in the Arab world is one of "abundance" and "scarcity" i.e. the abundance of social, educational, political, cultural and spiritual demands on the one hand and the scarcity of supply on the other, public interest can be defined as a fundamental issue or a paradigm that resembles algorithms in mathematics - a central idea or a linear progression from which infinite intellectual tributaries emanate. In brief, it is a way to free social sciences from the grip of ideology so it would be put into use by the people, now and here and an attempt to continue to address reality rather than abstract visions.

Abdelwahab Ben Hafaiedh

The Annual Conference report : Searching for new ways to develop social sciences

MERC's annual workshop on 'Developing Research and Rethinking Development' took place in Tunis on 15-17 December and was attended by 36 participants from 11 Arab countries and Turkey.

Seven sessions were organized followed by two working group sessions: the first to discuss the development of information in academic institutions, and the second on the potentials of producing a refereed journal dealing with MERC's areas of priorities.

Arab human development reports and their impact on developing mechanisms for collecting data in the region.

The inaugural speech by MERC coordinator Abdelwahab Benhafaiedh explained the rationale behind the meeting as well as the critical international stops and comparative context that paved the way for its convening: from Dakar to Paris and Buenos Aires. He asserted the importance of building bridges between science and development knowledge on one hand, and reports of experts in the area of social sciences and public opinion on the other, all within the context of re-thinking development.



Hassan Al Annabi
-Tunisia-



Abdelwahab Ben Hafaiedh
-Tunisia-



Gouda Abd Alkhalak
-Egypt-



Haidar Ibrahim
-Sudan-

Five papers were presented in each session covering the following areas:

- ❖ Epistemology of social sciences and definition of concepts
- ❖ New paradigms in social sciences
- ❖ Role of information in developing social science research
- ❖ Development from a new perspective: Geography of development
- ❖ Regional cooperation in the area of development of social sciences

Hassan Ennabi, CERES director inaugurated the meeting and presented the problematic relationship between scientific research and development by referring to the

Session 1

Haidar Ibrahim (Sudan) chaired the session. The first presentation by AbdelKader Zghal (Tunisia) addressed the challenges facing social sciences within the context of the search for a model or a post developmental paradigm. This was the same theme addressed by Omar Al Tir (Libya) and Mustafa Babiker (Sudan) albeit from a different perspective. Abdelwahab Benhafaiedh spoke about the situation of social sciences from the perspective of scientific indicators. He noted that the general situation points to poor publication outputs (books, journals, etc) and their modest quality. He contended that some factors help explain the weak level of social research, including the rise of regional tension

in countries that were traditionally known for their strong social sciences such as Lebanon, Palestine and Sudan. Other countries, meanwhile have shown noticeable improvement, such as Algeria and Morocco. Nazli Okten spoke about the difficulties facing international research cooperation in Turkey despite the political openness that precedes Turkey's attempts to join the European Union.

The first discussant, Gouda Abdel-Khalek started off by saying that the papers represented a variety of perspectives even though they carried the same title. He raised a number of points for discussion :

1. The crisis of development witnessed by region and the inability of social sciences to contribute to its solution, which raises the problem of the relationship between the scientific and the political community (Nazli) i.e. the relationship between the scientists and the authority in our dictatorial societies.

There is also the rise of economic thought that epitomizes all developments in the economic dimension.

What we need is some degree of seriousness in dealing with the Islamic surge.

He commented on Al Tir's paper that the separating line between the local and the global is fading away adding that there is a need to establish a new dynamic relationship between the two particularly in view of the domination of multi-national corporations.

Abdel-Khaled added that Ben Hafaiiedh's paper addressed two main gaps: one is ever expanding within countries and is represented by the domination of international organizations and multi-national corporations and the focus on certain countries in particular, and the other a generational gap that takes form not only in our region, but also in other parts of the world.

Dwindling scientific production, he noted, is not only a result of wars, but also a result of the political and



James Miller
-USA-



Zeineb Samandi
-Tunisia-



Delal Al Bezri
-Lebanon-



Mustapha ettir
-libya-

2. With the lack of funding, the foreign agenda takes precedence and so the question is the extent to which scientific products in fact respond to objective local needs.

3. Social and cultural change in our societies represented in the rise of both Salafi and progressive trends as well as many other groups between the two. The Salafis are predominant and they challenge the basic assumptions of scientific logic and for them, some topics are simply not open for discussion like Darwin's theory of evolutionism.

economic situation, the decline in financial resources, and the low status accorded to researchers.

Commenting on Babiker's paper, he raised the following question: Can anthropological studies be commissioned and undertaken within the short periods of time Babiker talked about?

On use of language he said that language is one of the main components of identity and we cannot separate language as a medium of understanding and scientific production from the attempt to rethink development. The problem is not to express oneself in a particular

language, but the real issue is that the sheer publication of a research study in the English language makes it better without any consideration for content.

Nukhet Sirman, the second discussant, spoke about the dilemma of social sciences in the 21st century particularly that of countries on the margins of the world order. What does this dilemma mean in terms of forms of knowledge for us in the region? Commenting on Babiker's point about anthropologists as translators between the international agencies and the local communities and the accusation that they go local, she said that all social scientists become local informants. To the question of what we do with knowledge, she said that we either become part of the elite or are simply caught up between the local and global. Local knowledge pushes us towards Islamism, but we also don't want to be global and function only as informants. She contended that the rise of Islamism is a symptom of the problem and that we have to find a way to deal with this predicament.

social scientists, re-think development rigorously when development models are imposed by governments and donors. How can we respect the local culture and political and social realities of our countries? The sociologists of the 60s and 70s did not develop theories. They were prisoners of the paradigms of development . We are now more theoretical but at the same time have marginalized the field. We are far away from the field because the costs of the field are extremely high.

Commenting on local knowledge and global standards Solava Ibrahim (Egypt) asked: why can't we go global in tools and local in contents and why is it that anthropologists cannot present their information straight to the policy makers?

Boutheina Chereit (Algeria) said that in order to address the problem of development, we have to think in historical terms. Within the history of our region, two phenomena stand out and need to be addressed. These



Murat Cemrek
-Turkey-



Laroussi Amri
-Tunisia-



Ipek Merçil
-Turkey-



Abdelkader Zghal
-Tunisia-

The floor was open for discussion. Mohamed Bachouch (Tunisia) commented on the extent to which social scientists free themselves of theory and pay more attention to local realities as an extension to political realities. In Tunisia, for example, the problem is not with the development paradigm as such, but with the concern and the interest in building the Tunisian citizenship. He said there was a tendency to overlook the depth of the civic culture - the search for a rupture and building a new identity that cross cuts with the Islamic trend.

Another participant raised the question of how to find funds to support research work and how we, as national

are feminism and Islamism. We need to visit our own societies in terms of these two phenomena.

Dalal Al Bizri (Lebanon/Egypt) talked about the predominance of religion in our societies today. She said that religious slogans are far more important than political slogans to mobilize the masses in our societies. There is a general tendency towards Islamization regardless of the political orientation. On the other hand, development, as a topic is bland and unappealing. It does not conform to reality. There is a large gap between reality and what is being written. There are no indicators on identity in all the UN human development reports

nothing on spiritual needs, on happiness and peace of mind. There is a complete lack of a sense of individual or collective achievement.

Laroussi Lamri (Tunisia) commented that the researchers in our region are like their governments. They work with schemes, concepts, indicators and model of development but there are no theories for development in our region today. After Samir Amin, who do we know has produced a theory of globalization today? Who theorized on civil society? We need anthropologists but anthropology in our region is banished because it raises questions about hunger and poverty; it is threatened. In such a case where people don't have a conception of the future, how do we expect them not to want to save their souls by going to mosques and becoming religious? If we do not raise important questions, we'll always be behind.

- ❖ Authority and sociological knowledge
- ❖ Specificity and globalization
- ❖ Local actors and the evaluation of public policies

The discussions dealt with the problem of the relationship between authority and power on one hand and the researched on the other. Dalal Bizri and Solava Ibrahim pointed out that the contents of the power relationships are not always in favour of the researcher. Solava said that sometimes the opposite is true especially in view of the researcher's need for information and data. Researchers often find themselves in a weak situation.

Mustafa Al Tir (Libya) raised the issue of the ideology of sociology and its link to the researchers who work for the political authorities and their opponents. He also pointed to the lack of communications in the field of knowledge



Salah Al Hathloul
-Saudi Arabia-



Mustapha Babiker
-Sudan-



Lina Khamis
-Jordan-



Lawrence Michalek
CEMAT - Tunisia -

Abdel-Fatah Al Zein (Morocco) said that there is a general understanding in our societies that some topics are not open for discussion like politics and drugs. Our society exercises some kind of mental exclusion on us. The political rise of Islamism is related to that and to the crisis of political legitimacy. Commenting on Bizri, he said that in our societies the notion of 'happiness' is related to deviance, the sacred and to leisure time.

Session 2

Saleh al Hathloul (Saudi Arabia) chaired Session 2 which included presentations by Lawrence Michalek (CEMAT, Tunis), Haydar Ibrahim (Sudan), Nukhet Sirman (Turkey) and Nadia El Khouly (Egypt). The papers covered a number of topics as follows:

production in the Arab world to the extent that we do not know what is being produced in different countries and do not make use of it. The same work may be duplicated in more than one country without our knowledge.

The second issue is identity. Some participants mentioned that in the case where certain approaches or perspectives are not allowed to come out to the public, other underground or opposition perspectives come to life. The fact remains, however, that dialogue with the other could generate objective solutions or at least limit the escalation of conflicts. Here the question is how the researcher can reconcile his/her complex identity with the objective social conditions. Lina Khamis (Jordan) said that many researchers pay attention to these phenomena after they take place without analyzing or predicting the events in a way that would help decision makers.

Thirdly is the issue of specificities and globalization from an economic perspective. Gouda Abdel-Khalek (Egypt) asserted that social sciences should not follow the argument on local specificities, adding that science and knowledge have no boundaries. Any specificities for religious considerations is baseless. For example, Islamic economics is not based on any true science. He distinguished between the specificity of the value systems in societies on one hand, and the universalism of scientific tools on the other. Participants distinguished between rigid and immutable specificities.

The former change and develop and are in a constant process of construction and confrontation. Change is a difficult process and is often met by fear or opposition or both.

The fourth issue had to do with the importance of quantitative research and tools. Some participants said, however, that qualitative research remains the most

-Criticism for the use of quantitative indicators to measure schooling
-The call for more qualitative indicators to evaluate pedagogical systems
-Suggestion for a pedagogical quality indicator to serve policy makers.

The paper discussed the role of indicators in evaluating pedagogical system and stated that current indicators have been used for over a two decades are now obsolete. She called for establishing new qualitative indicators that take into account the specificities of pedagogical systems and open up to other pedagogical approaches. She made a suggestion to enhance regional cooperation within the Arab Education Laboratory, which she considered an appropriate forum for dialogue and consultations in the area of pedagogy.

The second paper was presented by Shukkri al Fidha (Tunisia) – a comparative study of information technology in the area of social sciences in Arab countries. The paper



Abdeltif Hermassi
-Tunisia-



Buthaina Cheraiet
-Algeria-



Amina Aouchar
-Morocco-



Scott Shaffer
-USA-

capable of penetrating facts and dealing with them. And yet, both are important and one cannot be done at the expense of the other.

Session 3

Lawrence Michalek (CEMAT Tunis) chaired the session. The first paper presented by Najoua Ghriss (Tunisia) was entitled “Education information: importance and problems: The case of pedagogical indicators”. Her paper addressed the following:

-Concept of quality of education
-Indicators to evaluate and follow up the development of pedagogical systems

reported on the findings of a study conducted in three Arab countries: Tunisia, Syria and the United Arab Emirates on the use of information technology as a pedagogical tool in teaching social sciences. He pointed out that Arab academic institutes are slowly but surely adopting these new pedagogical methods.

The paper dealt with information technology currently used to undertake research such as the internet and distance learning. He added that a number of his study participants reported their preference to use these new

- ❖ technologies for the following reasons:
- ❖ easy accessibility and outreach
- ❖ new technique of teaching
- ❖ mentoring at the hands of specialists

- ❖ Accessibility of information
- ❖ Flexibility of work schedules

The presenter rejected the hypothesis that cultural and social specificity impedes the use of information technology in pedagogy, based on the responses of his study participants. However, the main problem remains how to enhance infra-structure to deal with new technologies in universities and research centers and how to secure the exchanged information.

Session 4

Nukhet Sirman chaired the session which included three presentations by Ipek Mercil (Turkey) entitled "Sociological tradition in Turkey between memory and oblivion" wherein she focused on the history of sociology in Turkey and its current status within the context of development of research institutions and centers. The second presentation was by Zainab Samandi (Tunisia) on "Development and durability: A global

for indicators to understand the development of the family. Hassane El Mouri (Tunisia) focused on the status of the social researcher in development work and asserted the ambivalence of his/her role in the area of the sociology of development.

Commenting on the presentations, Lilia Bensalem (Tunisia) focused on the role of researchers in pushing forward development. She drew distinction between the substance and content of development and modernity and asserting that the three papers directly address modernity. Focusing on Zainab Samandi's paper, she asserted that it is important for the researcher to evaluate skills and patterns of participation while taking into account the sociological ambience. She concluded by stating the need to distinguish between two roles in development: the manager who acts in accordance to a political approach and the researcher who is guided by a meditative and intellectual perspective.



Nukhet Sirman
-Turkey-



Najoua Ghriss
-Tunisia-



Ahmad Achour
-Egypt-



Aicha Taieb Korchid
-Tunisia-

social approach"; she focused on the duality of social sciences and development, explaining that social knowledge is always related to 'space' and geography. The third paper by Solava Ibrahim (Egypt) dealt with local sociological knowledge focusing on the concept of well-being and the need for an approach that is centered on the poor to deal with poverty. Her presentation was entitled "Localizing the conceptualization and practice of development"

Ahmed El Khawaga (Tunisia) addressed the transformation witnessed by the Tunisian family within the context of the recent modernization. He stressed the need.

Abdel-Latif Hermassi (Tunisia) focused on Samandi's paper criticizing the fact that it adopts the official definition of the concept of development and urging that sociologists adopt independent stances and be able to use reality to confront official discourse.

The session chairman asserted the need to re-consider terminologies and adopt critical stances towards them. She also emphasized that sociologists should have the freedom to choose their research topic of interest so they can perform their roles, explaining that this may not always be possible in contexts that do not enjoy political freedoms and political pluralism.

Session 5

Murat Cemrek (Turkey) spoke about the prevailing negative understanding of the globalization of information, explaining that globalization can be used to develop social sciences from the perspectives and interests of the South . He also said that globalization is not a new phenomenon and has been taking place in the sense of transfer of information from one geographical region to the other.

He affirmed that there is a distinction between Social change and transfer in the psychological and biological sense on one hand, and the transfer and transmittal of information and transition on the other.

Mohamed Jouili (Tunisia) spoke about the relationship between Arabization and translation emphasizing the need for more translations in order to localize social knowledge. Mohamed Ashhour (Egypt) presented a similar point of view based on the survey of Ph.D. dissertations in African studies in an Egyptian university.

Session 6

Necla Tschirgi (Turkey) chaired the session which included four papers as follows: Scott Shaffer “Theory and theorizing across borders: Global social thought and geographic organic intellectualism” Aroussi Lamri (Tunisia) on “The three decisive questions that trapped development”

Dalal Bizri (Lebanon/Egypt) on Gender and Islamic feminism

Faika Bakkak (Tunisia) on Developing Happiness

The first paper contrasted social sciences in the south to the international production of social sciences and raised questions about sociological production in the context of post-colonialism within the conflict between the local and the global, and the challenges of geography and spatial specificity.

Lamri delineated with the obstacles that impede the proper discussion of development as follows:



Adel Al Ali
-Jordan-



Abdelfattah Ezzine
-Morocco-



Solava Ibrahim
-Egypt-



Chokri Al fidha
-Tunisia-

Lina Khamis (Jordan) presented a paper on “Social approaches to development: The case of Jordan”. She commenced by asserting the limited scope of perceptions of development and their non-efficacy in the Arab context, which is steadily moving towards the adoption of ready made recipes. Azza Baidoun from Lebanon explored how some statistical agencies collect data without any coordination among them.

Gouda Abdel-Khalek, Mustafa El Tir and Haydar Ibrahim emphasized that Lina Khamis’s presentation includes very serious generalizations and do not take into account achievements in the Arab world in the area of social sciences.

- ❖ Dynamism which renders society autonomous through informal pathways
- ❖ Internalism: which address the role of values and norms internalized by society
- ❖ Independence: which refers to the independence and governance of social actors.

Dalal Bizri focused on “Gender is Jihad” and the role of the concept within Islamic feminism, asserting that there is more demand on spirituality in Arab societies than what feminist Islamism is able to offer.

The “importance of happiness” was the last paper presented at this session. Faeka Bakbak affirmed the need to distinguish between “having” and “being” explaining that the prevailing understanding of development is faulty because it is based on material objects such as income, while neglecting spiritualities, emotions, sentiments and lived reality.

Saleh Al Hathloul (Saudi Arabia), discussant, focused on two main points. The first concerns the importance of the place in dealing with social issues explaining that the difference between Western social scientists and Arab social scientists is that the first live through the event and absorb it while the latter do not, which creates a situation of dualism. An example is the Islamic feminists who sought to adjust with a situation they chose but dealt with it with a great deal of dualism in terms of criteria.

Lawrence Michalek’s comments addressed the following points:

- ❖ Development cannot be imported from outside
- ❖ The difficulty of taking decisions lies in the inability to predict reactions
- ❖ It is necessary to listen to people, and learn from their points of view and expectations
- ❖ Happiness is essential at a time when material aspirations have prevailed.

The discussants also encouraged Lamri to revise his paper to render it more balanced.

Commenting on Lamri, Mustafa Al Tir said that the model presented cannot succeed in Arab societies and that tribal allegiance is quite a serious matter because it prevents individuals from becoming citizens. He asked Bizri why she did not address the official reactions towards Islamic gender movements like that of al Azhar.



Feika Bakbak
-Tunisia-



Nazli Okten
-Turkey-



Neçla Tschirgi
-Turkey-



Abderazzak Hammami
-Tunisia-

The second point is on the need to take into account culture and history in dealing with Quranic verses explaining that the mistake committed by feminist Islamists is that they focused on two verses and ignored 1400 others and also dealt with them in the literally sense of the term. He addressed the issue of the ability of Arab students in foreign universities to come up with new theories explaining that the problem is in the fact that despite their education, they still have a superficial view of western thought and cannot grasp it. Thus they are unable to adjust it to their own ideas.

Abdel Fatah Al Zein (Morocco) pointed to the importance of emotions in accepting ideas asserting the need for a sociology that can study emotions and measure them systematically. Aicha El Taieb (Tunisia) pointed to the importance of the project suggested by Scott Shaffer which includes the potential of local and regional communications and outreach. In response to Bizri’s presentation, El Taieb said that she preferred the Arabic word “Al Nou” to “gender” explaining that the concept has been over-loaded in the Arab countries and has been put into incorrect usage.

Murat Cemrek (Turkey) explained that Islamic feminism is a vulnerable movement because it is exported from outside, asserting that we have to build

our own theories and our own measurements. Sirman (Turkey) expressed concern over the use of some concepts such as 'authenticity', 'tribe' and 'ideology' because it risks superficial understanding and use. She said that feminism in Turkey falls within the discourse on human rights.

Abdel-Khalek (Egypt) focused on two ideas. The first is the relationship between the development of social sciences and public interest, wherein power occupies a critical position. The second is the need to maintain the unit of analysis. He also said that it was important that social sciences do not follow economics as a discipline in its attempt to micro-manage its research topics.

Haidar Ibrahim (Sudan) explained that Birzi's presentation could have become more solid if she had focused on the original references of Islamic feminism expressing his difference with her in the statement that feminists stick to the narrow sense of the text. Differing with her, he expressed his belief that these women have moved from reality to the text.

In his response to comments, Shaffar said it was hard to penetrate the publishers' review system. Lamri asserted that there are different approaches to address development: the advanced, the local and the scientific.

Session 7

Gouda Abdel-Khalek (Egypt) chaired the session which included papers by Mukhtar al Harras (Morocco) on "the integration between expertise and academic research", Abdel Fatah El Zein (Morocco) on "the relationship between research in humanities and social sciences in development and the development of these studies"

and finally Necla Tschirgi's (Turkey) on "Prospects for regional collaboration in the social science in the Middle East"

Commenting on Harras's paper, James Miller (USA) observed that social sciences are often understood through orientations or particular disciplines such as political science. He explained that this is a poor area because of the lack of funding. He agreed with Al Zein

on the importance of cooperation between Arab research centers and suggested the unification of expressions and terminology to ensure the success of this endeavour. Al Tir focused on Harass's presentation and said his own paper complements al Harass's in that they both address the issue of consultancy work. He pointed to the need for both consultancies and academic work, but given the lack of funds, consultancies remain the only way to interact with institutions and open a door for dialogue with other disciplines since consultancies are usually based on team work. Tschirgi made the following comments:

- ❖ there is a strong need to understand how funding takes place in research institutions.
- ❖ The Middle East North Africa region does not lack research institutions. We only need to know who does what and be able to define our priorities.

In response to Tschirgi's paper, Bizri asked whether in the context of establishing an Arab Council for Social Sciences Tshirgi has made sure to learn from previous experiences in order to avoid failure, and whether there is an Arab presence in the planned Council.

Bachouch commented on consultancy work by saying that what is important is to maintain the integrity and quality of work. He contrasted Arab countries that allocate only 1% of their budgets to research to other countries that have clear policies in this area. He admitted that consultancies indeed represent opportunities for financial gains for researchers.

Hassane Mouri (Tunisia) said that the balance between consultancies and academic research is indeed hard to resolve. Aicha El Taieb said that the paradox is that at the time when consultancy work is witnessing development, its legal aspects are still ambivalent.

Ahmed Khawaga said that consultancies are not a matter of choice in the Arab Maghreb but rather a reality, adding that research centers are dying.

Zeinab Samandi said that research in our region is facing difficulties for the following reasons:

- ❖ the difficulty of securing information
- ❖ Lack of resources
- ❖ The presence of taboo subjects

She added that priority should be given to a type of knowledge that stems from specificities of the region and warned again the phenomenon of importing knowledge (On doit avoir notre prêt- a- porter)

Abdel-Latif Al Hermassi said that funding research is important but more essential is the freedom of the researcher vis a vis firstly, the state and secondly, society or the two together. He concluded by stressing the need for space that provide the requires freedom.

Group photo



Working groups: The need for realistic follow-up



The participants were divided into working groups to come up with practical suggestions and lay down mechanisms to deal with social science knowledge.

The main question for working group I was: How can we lay down mechanisms for the development of information in institutions of higher education and academic research in our region ?

The question to working group II was how to lay down mechanisms for a publication that will contribute to the dissemination of intellectual products of high quality?

From left to right: Abdelwahab Ben Hafaiedh (Tunisia), Neçla Tshirgi (Turkey), Delal Al Bezri (Lebanon), Laroussi Lamri (Tunisia)

First Working Group: Prepare for refereed academic publication

Following a review of the difficulties which local researchers encounter in publishing their products and the decline in standards, participants agreed that despite the importance of the proposed publication, it is not a realistic endeavour at the present time. Until this becomes possible, it is important to form a network of researchers that will include the present participants in the Tunis meeting to:

- ❖ form a virtual research network
- ❖ develop a data base of researchers and their orientations
- ❖ issue a newsletter for MERC
- ❖ prepare to issue a refereed journal



From left to right: Mohamed Jouili (Tunisia), Aicha Teieb Korchid (Tunisia), Solava Ibrahim (Egypt), Delal al Bezri (Lebanon), Mokhtar Harras (Morocco).

The Second Working Group : Establish of a database for Ph.d dissertation

The second working group on mechanisms of development of information agreed on the following:

- ❖ The need for a data base to be shared by all universities
- ❖ Laying down mechanisms to achieve the first goal by identifying institutions that will take charge
- ❖ Establishing a data base for regional Phd dissertation and finding an institution that will take responsibility for it.



From left to right : Abdelkader Zghal (Tunisia), Haider Ibrahim (Sudan), Adel Al Ali (Jordan), Abdelwahab Ben Hafaiedh(Tunisia), Abdeltif Hermassi (Tunisia).



From left to right : Najoua Ghriss (Tunisia), Mohammed Achour (Egypt), Chokri Al Fidha (Tunisia).



From left to right : Murat Cemrek (Turkey), Laroussi Amri (Tunisia), Mohamed Achour (Egypt), Abdelfattah Ezzine (Morocco), Lina Khamis (Jordan), Scott Shaffer (USA), Solava Ibrahim (Egypt).



From left to right : Hassane Mouri (Tunisia), Mohamed Jouili (Tunisia), Aicha Teib Korchid (Tunisia)

CALL FOR PROPOSALS

JULY 2007

Research awards competition

MERC is pleased to announce the third round of research awards and invites proposals from qualified researchers. Deadline for receiving proposals in their final form is **May 1, 2007**. While open to all research ideas and topics, the program encourages rigorous applications that apply social science methodologies and theories particularly in the following areas:

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

Scientific Committee

MERC is guided by a multi-disciplinary scientific selection committee composed of five scholars from the region with established research and publication records as well as experience in regional research and teaching. All selections for research awards are made by the Scientific Committee, which also makes recommendations concerning the topical orientation and activities of the program.

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

Eligibility

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

Research Awards

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

Final Proposal

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

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

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

- a. The main objectives of the proposed research.
- b. The theoretical framework of the proposed research, with sufficient reference to the state of the art, and the possible contributions of the proposed research to the discipline.
- c. A literature review, including an evaluation of previous research on the subject and current gaps. The review of the literature should demonstrate the applicant's knowledge of international as well as regional research on the subject.

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

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

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

- e. Significance of the expected results and its public policy implications.
- f. Plans for the write-up and dissemination of research results.
- g. Provisions made for the protection of human subjects, obtaining informed consent and the protection of confidentiality as well as an assessment of the impact of probable findings. These should be discussed in conformity with the ethical guidelines of each discipline.
- h. Utilization of existing research facilities at the researcher's institution or other institutions.

III. The proposal must contain the following appendices:

1. Appendix 1: An abstract for the proposal (not more than 250 words)
2. Appendix 2: Time-Line: A time-line for the research project, outlining the unfolding of the proposed

research in reasonable detail. The research duration usually ranges between 12 to 18 months.

3. Appendix 3. Budget Request: The budget should be reflective of the extent of fieldwork and number of researchers

Investigators and personnel should be listed by position or task, giving for each person the time commitment (percentage of time allocated to the project) and time-rates of compensation (how financial compensation is calculated for tasks performed). Budget items may include purchase of specifically identified research equipment, travel and transportation costs, stipends, technical assistance, stationery and other supplies.

Awards are usually made in the range of US\$ 5,000 to US \$ 15,000. In the case of awards for team research or to institutions, there is an allowable maximum of US \$ 35,000.

The budget should clearly indicate whether other sources of funding are already available or have been applied for and which items would be fully or partially covered by other sources.

4. A curriculum vitae with a list of publications for every investigator is required (See Attachment 2 for the CV format).

5. For a proposal from a graduate student for support of Ph.D. dissertation research in the region, at least one letter of evaluation and support of the student and the project by a dissertation supervisor is required.

Deadlines

Final and complete research proposals are due on **May 1, 2007**. Dates for the next round of awards, which will take place before the end of 2007, will be announced in due course.

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

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

MERC PROGRAM

CENTRE D' ETUDES ET DE RECHERCHES ECONOMIQUES ET SOCIALES

23 Rue d'Espagne

Tunis- Tunisie

Tel : +216 23 545 052 Fax :+216 71 326 770

Secretariat : Mrs Elham Barboura

E-mail: contact@mercprogram.com

Please visit Merc Website

www.mercprogram.com

for about expected proposals

Workshop on “Information Technology (IT) and the Development of Social Sciences in the Arab World”

Tunis, 25-29 March 2007

The Middle East Research Competition (MERC) is pleased to announce a workshop on “Information Technology (IT) and the Development of Social Sciences in the Arab World” to be held in March 2007 in Tunis.

The workshop, scheduled to run for a week, will be divided into two main components. The first is an overview of the state of information technology in the Arab World as it relates to social sciences. The second are practical and training sessions to provide participants with hands on experience on how to use electronic resources for research purposes.

I. The state of social science and information technology in the Arab world

- Reality and potentials of information technology in the Arab world:

Comparisons will be drawn with other regions and countries of the world. Successful disciplinary experiences undertaken by educational and/or governmental institutions as well as individuals will also be reviewed.

- Social sciences and electronic publishing:

This will include electronic dissemination such as periodicals and social science journals, personal websites, and daily papers.

- IT and research in social science:

How to use internet resources to obtain information? This includes written, audio visual and image sources of information, as well as video films and statistics. It also presents other means of gathering information using various search engines as well as the use of messengers and chatting, both with individuals and with groups; how to use email to circulate questionnaires and how to post questionnaires on specialized sites, thus reducing time and costs of research.

- Social sciences and the importance of studying public and virtual spaces on the internet:

Virtual communities are a new phenomenon that represents different areas such as sports, arts, women and politics.

- Challenges to the use of information technology by social scientists:

This includes economic, political and social impediments.

II. Training component:

- Electronic tools in social sciences
- How to prepare your thesis using electronic resource
- Defining your research problem through 'key' words
- How to use Acrobat Reader
- How to prepare your research design
- Different social science software: SPSS – Statistica – Super Anova-Excel
- Internet Search
- Research from a distance: how to manage a research team on the internet
- Navigating the net
- Downloading electronic files
- Cellular phones as research tools
- Converting files
- How to prepare a data show
- Dissemination of research on line/off line
- How to find journals and periodicals
- How to publish in peer-reviewed journals

Eligibility criteria:

A minimum of Masters degree in any social science discipline is required

Required documents:

- Detailed curriculum vitae indicating evidence of previous research experience
- Endorsement letter from applicant's employer confirming the relevance of the proposed training to the institution's research interests and activities.
- Copies of degrees from an accredited university or equivalent institution

Workshop logistics:

MERC will cover travel, accommodation and subsistence expenses during the training period for a limited number of short-listed candidates. Preference will be given to applicants based in educational and research institutions. Other successful candidates will be strongly encouraged to approach other donor organizations or sponsors.

Workshop language:

Arabic is the main language used. Knowledge of English is an asset

Application deadline: Applications and supporting documents should reach MERC secretariat not later than **15 Fevrier 2007**. Electronic submissions will be accepted as long as supporting documents are sent by mail by the deadline indicated above. Applications should be sent to: contact@mercprogram.com

Research Grants

AIMS Research Grants for North African Scholars

The application deadline is January 31, 2007.

1. The competition is open to Maghribi citizens who are conducting research for a doctoral dissertation or are post doctoral or senior scholars. The CEMAT/TALM/CEMA Research Grants for Maghribi Scholars are open to citizens of Algeria Libya, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia. Grants are to be used for research in either Morocco, Tunisia or Algeria (where AIMS operates centers) and are open to scholars of business, humanities and the social sciences. Grantees must conduct their research in a country other than their own and explain why travel to another Maghribi country is necessary for their research.
2. Grants will typically be for 20-45 days, but support for longer stays will be considered. Priority will be given to Maghribi scholars living in North Africa.
3. Applications will be reviewed by a committee of the American Institute of Maghrebi Studies (AIMS)
4. The grant awards will range between \$1000 and \$2500.
5. The grantees will be affiliated with an AIMS Overseas Research Center: TALM in Tangier, Morocco, CEMAT in Tunis, Tunisia or CEMA in Oran, Algeria or a combination of these countries. Research will be conducted in one of these countries.
6. The grantees will make a presentation on their research at the center with which they are affiliated during the period of their grant.
7. Grantees should, whenever possible, interact with other affiliated scholars doing research in the host country.
8. At the end of their grant period, and within 30 days, all research fellows must submit to CEMAT, TALM or CEMA both a 2-5 page summary of their research work in the country and an accounting of the use of all grant funds. CEMAT/TALM will retain a portion of the funds until the report has been submitted and a lecture given at CEMAT/TALM/CMEA. AIMS may choose to publish grant reports in the AIMS newsletter.
9. Applicants should consult their institution about any release time that may be needed to carry out the proposed project. AIMS assumes that applicants have obtained any necessary approval from their home institution.
10. Applications must include the following:
 - o completed **applicant information sheet**
 - o one-page **description of the proposed research** in English. It should include a clearly stated reason as to why research in Maghrebi country other than the applicant's home country is essential to the research
 - o detailed 3-5 page **description of the research project** in French, English or Arabic
 - o **curriculum vitae** .
 - o detailed **recommendation letters** will be helpful, but are not mandatory.

The application deadline is January 31, 2007. Applications can be sent by mail, email or fax to the following address:

Kerry Adams
American Institute for Maghrib Studies
Center for Middle Eastern Studies
845 N. Park Ave.
Marshall Bldg., Room 477
PO Box 210158-B
Tucson, AZ 85721-0158 USA
Phone: (520) 626-6498
Fax: (520) 621-9257
aimscmes@u.arizona.edu

Grant funds need to be used by October 1, 2007.

Before departure, grantees must have medical and medical evacuation insurance to cover them in their country of research. This will be arranged through the AIMS center and the cost will be deducted from the amount of the grant award.

The Selected Book...

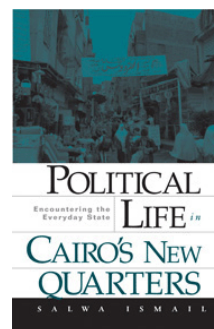
Political Life in Cairo's New Quarters

*Encountering the
Everyday State*

\$22.50 Paper
ISBN: 0-8166-4912-X
ISBN-13: 978-0-8166-4912-9

\$67.50 Cloth
ISBN: 0-8166-4911-1
ISBN-13: 978-0-8166-4911-2

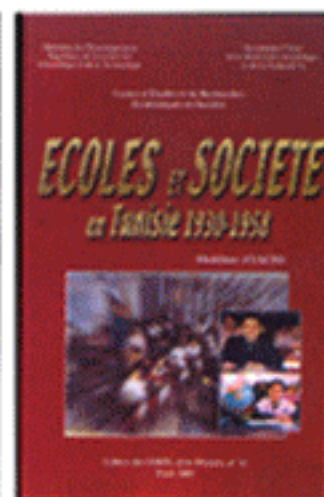
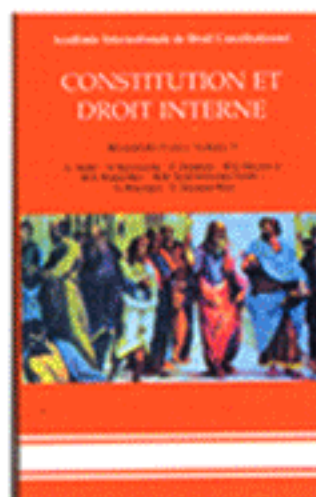
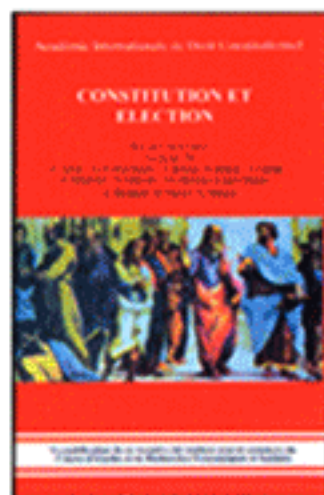
Salwa Ismail



Since the 1970s, Cairo has experienced tremendous growth and change. Nearly three million people now live in new urban communities characterized by unregulated housing, informal economic activity, and the presence of Islamist groups. Salwa Ismail examines the effects of these changes in *Political Life in Cairo's New Quarters*. Working in Cairo, Ismail interviewed new quarter residents, observed daily life in markets and alleyways, met with local leaders, and talked with young men about their encounters with the government. Rich in ethnographic detail, this work reveals the city's new urban quarters as sites not only of opposition and relative autonomy, but also under governmental surveillance and discipline. In doing so, it situates the everyday within the context of wider developments in Cairo: the decline of welfarism, the shift to neoliberal government, and the rise of the security state. Original and timely, *Political Life in Cairo's New Quarters* highlights the interplay of structural changes, state power, and daily governance, and presents a fascinating analysis of urban transformation and power struggles—as international forces meet local communities in a major city of the global south.

Salwa Ismail is a senior lecturer of politics at the University of Exeter.

264 pages | 3 halftones, 2 tables, 4 maps | 5 7/8 x 9 | 2006





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