The Social Sciences Research in the Arab East Dilemmas of the Research Centres outside of the University[1]

Sari Hanafi[2]

Abstract

The donor community encourages the creation and the development of such centres. According to the new policy agenda and post-Washington consensus, there should be simultaneously empowerment of the civil society institutions and disempowerment of the state. The university was seen and treated as a public institution as if it were part of the State. Though they have recognized the institutional pitfalls in moving research outside the domain of universities, they highlight the benefits of doing research within small scale units that are not hampered by university bureaucracy and are flexible and efficient. In this process the university becomes a very marginal actor in term of research.

The growth of research groups outside the university has led to three contradictory consequences for the production of research. First, it has discouraged faculty members in universities from conducting research, although some have engaged in collaboration with off-campus centres. Second, the centres have well endowed libraries and are better stocked with recent titles than those within the universities. They are off-limit to University students and scholars. The third relates to the quality and form of the production of research. Research promoted by these centres is policy oriented, such as the research on population studies. A majority of these studies remain unpublished or, if published, they do not undergo a proper peer review process. Additionally, this form of funding has encouraged consultancies. Such research is based on low-level generalizations and extrapolates from tables derived from small samples. This research draws upon the fieldwork conducted in the framework of the project "Evaluation of Scientific and Technological capabilities in Mediterranean countries (ESTIME)"

> La tâche essentielle de la sociologie du monde arabe consiste à mener un double travail critique a) une déconstruction des concepts issus du savoir et des discours sociologiques qui ont parlé à la place du monde arabe, et qui sont marqués par une prédominance occidentale et une idéologie ethnocentriste, b) et en même temps une critique du savoir et des discours élaborés par les différentes sociétés du monde arabe pour elles-mêmes (Khatibi, 1975 p. 1).

---

[2] American University of Beirut. E-mail: sh41@aub.edu.lb

Ce qui est en jeu dans la pratique des experts, ce n'est pas tant l'accumulation d'un savoir sur la société 'indigène' dans sa "spécificité" que la mise au point de technologies pour sa transformation (Roussillon, 2002).

I. Introduction: the History of Social sciences as a Nexus between the Global and the Local

These two quotes with which I start my study suggest a problematic relationship between the heritage of the Western social sciences and the local society in the Arab region. I join Alain Roussillon (2002) who argues that sociology in the Arab World was part of the colonial project. Orientalist texts such as the five volume *Description de l'Egypte* (Description of Egypt) map out this intent. During the latter part of the colonial period, and especially after independence of the Arab states, an indigenous sociology or *sociologie musulmane* (Muslim Sociology) emerged. It attempted to decipher the specific nature of the segmented Arab society and yet retained an Orientalist position by investigating its 'exotic' culture. It was only in the 1970s and 1980s that a social sciences community emerged in the Arab region to examine its own society. This social sciences community occupied a complex and contradictory relationship with Western social sciences and scientists. It is structured by an unequal partnership as its analysis remained dependent on the academic perspectives developed in the West and yet it shared a relationship of collegiality with the West. As a result social sciences are often taken as a Western discipline raising the question of their legitimacy.

This relationship to the West is not only historical but also recent. Since the Washington Conesus in 1995 (Hanafi and Tabar, 2005) and its recommendation to direct aid not only to government but also to civil society, the international community has contributed to the creation and subsidizing of research activities in research centres located outside of national universities. Understanding the research production of sociology cannot be fully comprehended without referring both to the genesis of the social sciences in this region since the colonial era, and to the political economy of the aid system. This paper will focus on the impact of the latter factor on both the structure and production of research in the Arab East (Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestinian territory and Syria). The growth in the number of research centres in the Arab East is related to the proliferation of the phenomenon of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). There are almost 122 centres involved in research activities within this area, which emerged in the context of the political transition in the Palestinian territory and Lebanon as well as the economic transition in Egypt and Jordan. This abundance is not only specific to this particular region but, more generally, it refers to the context of any developing country to which the international community conceived aid as a way to promote the recipient country's civil society.

In this paper, I analyze how the intersection between structures of power within the society and state, the international community and the market of research production, influence the themes of research and the relationship between the donors and the NGOs. Thus, this study will question the research centres which hold the status of NGOs unaffiliated with academic institutions and the consequences these centres have on research production. This study will be based on two research programs. In the first program, ESTIME, which concerned donors' funding towards research activities[3], 52 interviews were undertaken with several donors, international

---

[3] The fieldwork was conducted under the framework of the research project ESTIME. The ESTIME project (Evaluation of Scientific and Technological capabilities in Mediterranean countries) aims at describing the scientific and technological capabilities of eight research partners' countries of the Mediterranean. The project

organizations involved in research funding in the Arab East, as well as their recipients from the research centres and universities. The second research program that I coordinated focuses on the relationship between donors, international organizations and Palestinian NGOs, and specifically on agenda-setting and networking between the global and the local[4].

This study will also shed light on the role of local NGO leaders, including researchers, as a new elite – hereby qualified as the 'globalized elite' – who have access to the international arena (such as sector-related UN conferences and international networks), but participate very weakly in their research agenda setting. While raising the dominant paradigms (research topics and objects, research methodology, research questions), this study will place more emphasis on actors and the structure of the research field.

After mapping the research structures, I will also delve into the ways through which external actors influence research production in the region. These actors are donor agencies (such as the French Cooperation, German Stuftungs, the Population Council, and UN agencies) and international organizations (such as the Ford Foundation of the Canadian agency IDRC). I will make reference to paradigms revealed from general trends, without any pretension of doing an inventory of funding and research centres activities, since many exceptions can be found within these trends.

II. Research Structure in the Arab East

Many scholars from Maghreb involved in the ESTIME project clearly indicated that the phenomenon of research centres taking the form of NGOs is not very widespread. However, the case of the Arab East is quite different. Research centres, either private or as NGOs, are flourishing, launching several surveys in applied social research for two particular reasons: the first being the peace processes of both Lebanon (after the Taef Agreement of 1989) and the Palestinian territory (after Oslo 1993), and the second concerning economic liberalization in Jordan and Egypt. The keyword for the donors was "the reinforcement" of civil society. These centres produce either research or pure consultancy (in other words, very short research where the output is often an unpublished report)[5].

The survey I have carried out concerning research centres in the region shows that research activities have mainly been conducted by two different types of organizations: first, by specialized research organizations such as research centres that have emerged either within or without university settings, and second, by NGOs specialized in development, advocacy and cooperative efforts (like The Lebanese Centre for Policy Studies). For instance, in the Palestinian territory, table 1 demonstrates that research production is very much marginalized when it comes to university affiliated institutions (only four centres constituting 10%)[6], while the predominant

---

portrays the close links between both the European and Mediterranean research spaces by providing precise indications on research, technological development, and innovation in the Mediterranean region, supported by empirical investigations and a thorough revision of sources of information. ESTIME is a project of the Institut de Recherche pour le Développement – IRD.

[4] The research on this program was conducted with Linda Taber and led to the publication of a book. (Hanafi & Tabar, 2005).

[5] IFPO and ESTIME established in 2005 a database for research centres and researchers. Among the 54 research centres, there are 27 centres which published publication labelled as grey literature: "En général les ONG éditent soit des guides, pour celles qui sont très proches du terrain et font de la formation, des rapports et enquêtes, les universités des actes de colloque». (IFPO, 2007)

[6] Three are connected to the University of Birzeit (Public Health institution, Law Center and Birzeit Centre for Development Studies) and one is connected to Al-Qds University (Jerusalem Studies Centre).

number of organizations are NGOs. Some 41% of the organizations producing research are specialized bodies while the rest are NGOs specializing in advocacy and development.

Table 1: Organisms producing research in the Palestinian Territory

Type of Centre	Number	%
NGOs: Research Centres	13	31
NGOs: Development and Advocacy Centres	16	38
NGOs: Development, Advocacy & Research Ceter	9	21
University Research Centre	4	10
Total	42	100

In Jordan we find diversity in the status of the research organization, but what is important is that the vast majority of the organizations are outside the premises of universities. See table 2.

Table 2: Organisms producing research in Jordan

Type of Centre	Number	%
Private research centres and offices of consultancy	23	31
NGOs	20	27
Governmental Institutions	16	21
International institutions	13	17
Library or Documentation centres	3	4
Total	75	100

Source: (IFPO, 2007) based on the (CERMOC, 1995). This number is reduced now to only 61 active organizations.

However we have two specific cases in the region: from one side, Syria and Lebanon, and from the other side, Egypt. In Lebanon the university is still the bastion of research: according to the ESTIME survey, 85% (60 out of 71) of the researchers studied are affiliated with the Lebanese universities (IFPO, 2007). Syria has the same situation but for different reasons: the government still controls what is produced in the social sciences and humanities. These are strongly apologetic, restricted in their research approaches, controlled by single-party authorities, and used for ideological propaganda and political manipulation. In contrast to other countries, Egypt constitutes a specific case where the importance of public research centres in social sciences is a phenomenon that dates back to the 1950s. Egypt holds the National Centre for Sociological and Criminological Research (NCSCR) based in Cairo, as well as the semi-public institution Al-Ahram Centre for Strategic Studies. Other centres are university affiliated like The American Research Centre in Egypt (ARCE), which is also based in Cairo.

The source of funding for these institutions does not only come from Western donors, but also from the Gulf monarchies. These absolute monarchies often finance non-critical social sciences and the Islamization of these sciences, as well as technical research centres. However, the picture has recently become more complex, especially with regards to Qatar's contribution to the promotion of research topics, like democracy. Other than Western, Gulf and national

funding, there is also funding from some pan Arab centres like the Arab Unity Studies Centre and the Institute of Palestine Studies. Both institutions survive thanks to endowments from Arab business people.

The growth of research groups outside the university has led to three contradictory consequences for the production of research. First, it has discouraged faculty members in universities from conducting research, although some have engaged in collaboration with off-campus centres. These centres are well-endowed and their libraries are better stocked with recent titles compared to those within the universities. However, these libraries remain private, usually not open to the public and when they are, they have regulated opening hours. Second, since they are off-campus and scattered, these research centres have not encouraged graduate and undergraduate students to be involved in research[7]. The ESTIME project reported that such centres do not often advertise their library in their website or brochures (IFPO, 2007). More generally, these research centres make little effort to cooperate with universities by opening their resources to university students and faculty. The third consequence relates to the quality and form of the production of research. Research promoted by these centres is policy oriented, such as the research on population studies (2004). A majority of these studies remain unpublished or if published, they do not undergo a proper peer review process. Additionally, this form of funding has encouraged consultancies and fast research (like fast food) where research is designed, implemented and analyzed within half a year. Such research is based on low-level generalizations and extrapolations from tables derived from small samples. Some funding organizations do not promote research, but rather fund only workshops and networking activities within research projects.

III. The Research "Field" and the Research Community

While one may find large research communities in Lebanon and Egypt (and to a lesser extent, in Jordan) scattered between universities and research centres, this is not the case in the Palestinian territory, where there are very few senior researchers who succeed in attaining a professional trajectory based mainly on teaching and conducting research. Very few scholars labelled by Vincent Romani (2001) as *intellectual entrepreneurs* have shared in the research contracts in the Palestinian territory. One prominent researcher cynically disclosed to me that he is currently involved in eight research projects. The research field is thus threatened by a model of market-based centres - the production and consumption of this research is for specific clients and not for the public. Contrary to both Lebanon and Egypt, Jordan suffers from a lack of proper research centres. IFPO/Amman (Ex-CERMOC) was a pioneer in producing the bulk of research concerning social history, migration and refugee camps in Jordan. For example, the Centre of Strategic Studies established at Jordan University produces political literature, while the Centre of Urdon al-Jadid (the New Jordan), founded in the 1990s, produced good research about social history, but ended up often producing rather journalistic studies on the Jordanian economy, political system, and the process of democratization.

This has implications in terms of investment. There is an overwhelming bias towards physical infrastructure rather than human resources within these research centres. For example, most centres have excellent communication systems, such as the Internet, websites, brochures,

---

[7] One Masters student in Ramallah reported sadly that "they are forced to run around the West Bank from one city to another city to find one book here and another there. While there is no centralized public library (of course the municipality library usually is very poor), the acquisition in university libraries depends entirely on book donation."

publications and newsletters. The discourse of institution and capacity building of both donors and local NGOs often concerns equipment more than human resources. It is very rare to find training programs for researchers working in these centres. However their research staff is recruited on contract for the term of the projects (generally eighteen months) while administrative staff is permanent. As a result, researchers shift from one centre to another depending on project availability. This mobility is salient and prevents researchers from accumulating experience. This situation compels many competent graduates to seek employment in international NGOs, developmental fields, or even as employees in government administration. Reflexive research thereby looses out. Individual researchers do not play a role in setting-up research programs inside these research centres. The majority of these research centres do not hold weekly or monthly meetings, and thus they do not share decisions with the contracted researchers. It is no wonder that these centres remain associated with single individuals and, at best, the decision making is shared between the director of the centre and the board. This explains why so many of these research centres have a diverse range of research projects with no program federating them.

The absence of the participation of young and junior researchers in the decision-making process has reinforced their marginalization and has kept them in the shadows. The majority of seminars are closed to the public and the invitation process is often personal, composed almost entirely of clientele who are close to the NGO spheres and research centres. This concerns not only the attendants but also the participants who belong to the older generation of researchers.

In describing the closed nature of the research field, one researcher from Ramallah stated, "Tell me the title of a conference and I will guess the chosen speaker." It is striking that until now it is very rare to find a call for papers for the workshops or conferences that have been held. In the process of organizing the Middle East Research Awards (MEAwards) research group on return migration - a type of brainstorming group - some of those who received the call for papers found it quite insulting to be required to provide abstracts and CVs; they thought that their names should have been sufficient for their selection. I will later discuss the case of the MEAwards.

Pierre Bourdieu's concept of the field (*champ*) helps illuminate the nature of intellectual production[8]. The field is a result of interaction between the specific rules of the field, the agent's habitus and the agent's capital (social, economic, cultural and symbolic) (Bourdieu, 1990). In the case of Palestine, the rules of the research-field are complex and established not only by local actors but also by the donor agencies. The latter not only allocate the research contracts to the research centres but also influence staff recruitment.

The field is a social arena of struggle over the appropriation of certain types of capital. While scholars often focus on diverging ideas and ideologies to explain conflict within a field, they tend to overlook the power structure shaping it. There are many fault lines inside this structure: between the well established senior scholars versus junior newcomers and between English speakers versus Arabic and French speakers. The senior researchers and English speakers impede the latter in establishing themselves[9]. Ironically, after contributing to the marginalization of the new researchers and the graduate students, this research elite has complained about the lack of competent researchers. Most senior researchers are located in the capitals (Amman[10], Cairo,

---

[8] A field is a system of social positions (for instance, a research field) structured internally in terms of power relationships (the power differential between universities, research centres, senior and junior researchers).

[9] Roussillon (2002) was not convinced by the notion of a field, because he considered the research community in Egypt to be extremely fragmented, thus rendering the concept of field inappropriate.

[10] 58 out of 61 centres are located in Amman (IFPO 2007).

Beirut[11], Jerusalem and "Ramallah"), where they are in proximity of the donor community. Teaching may occur in any city but the research structure tends to be in the capital near the donor community[12]. These conflicts allow for groups to develop within the sociological community. Following Jacques Kabanji's (2005 pp. 75 - 77) ideal-types, one can distinguish between three types of sociologist. The first is the committed (or activist) sociologist who is engaged ideologically, politically and nationally in societal problems. The second group does not believe in the leading role of state in the modernization project of Arab society and is in search of new actors in civil society to fulfil this project. The final group consists of experts interested in sociological research as a tool for development in order to manage the social crisis but who do not engage in reflexive and critical theoretical research. For Roussillon (2002), in the specific context of Egypt, the tradition is rather of an apolitical sociology and what he called "structural a-politicism." There is unequal competition in the society, because with the intervention of the donor agencies, there is a tendency to favour expert-sociologists at the expense of other figures. Competition between these three groups for resources allows for research to be dictated by an obsessive commitment to the paradigm of identity at the expense of social criticism. Contemporary sociological analysis has overstated externalities as well as the negative role of colonialism upon the local society and understated the internal factors and the contradictions inside this society. Additionally, the themes of study - such as democratization or public satisfaction - borrowed from the West and promoted by the donors, do not reflect the internal processes as organic to contemporary society. Simultaneously, the study of new local themes is not encouraged. Because of this contradiction, researchers are caught in a trap: a criticism of the lack of democracy implies a criticism of existing power structures and, by implication, means an acceptance of the positions represented by international donor communities. This is why many debates in the region often end up being parochial and reflect old debates. These debates were often marked by a discourse of exceptionalism, specificity and particularism of the society in question as compared to perceived 'others,' therefore necessitating special social science agendas and methods governed by national considerations (Hanafi, 1999), to the point of mythologizing their uniqueness as in the case of the research on Palestinian and Lebanese issues[13]. In the case of Lebanon, many research projects and publications start with the statement that the Lebanese political system cannot be analyzed in the light of the political science categories of secularism versus sectarianism and that the Lebanese society is unique in the Arab region. The outcome then is often practical knowledge (Romani, 2007), lacking deep conceptualization, a comparative perspective and criticism.

Having said that, I am in favour of the public intellectual who takes interest in the hot issues of society, especially when they are not part of one's specialty. (Burawoy, 2007) In the last four years, after suicide bombing became the main mode of military action among Palestinians, we see a new trend among some Palestinian sociologists to criticize such nationalism and to be committed to the transformation of the Palestinian community. Many Palestinian scholars have condemned such acts through petitions and articles in the Palestinian newspapers labelling it as a war crime.

IV. Aid System and the Emerging NGO Status's Research centers

These processes have become starkly clear due to the changes in funding after the 1990s as a

---

[11] Out of 54 centres, 46, or approximately 85%, are located in Beirut (IFPO 2007).

[12] See the Romani study about sociologists in the West Bank (2007).

[13] See, for instance, the critical review of the research trends on the Palestinian refugee problem in Hanafi (2006) and Zureik (2003).

result of an increase in the number of research centres promoted by donors in collaboration with the local elite. Before 1990, sociological research was produced mainly in universities.

The Palestinian case is very revealing. For instance, the book *The Sociology of the Palestinians* was written to create an "attached, committed and action-oriented" (Nakhleh and Zureik, 1980 pp. 11-12) sociology of Palestine that is sensitive to dependency, social classes and colonial exploitation (Tamari, 1980). This perceived orientation of sociology changed in the nineties. One of the major reasons for this shift is due to the institutional setting of the research. The increase in the number of foreign donor-driven research centres is part of the neoliberal agenda. The latter believes in the need to promote local civil society organizations to facilitate the shift from a conflict-ridden society to a post-conflict one, with the aim of reconfiguring the ways by which subordinate classes are incorporated into emerging state-society relations. This is particularly true today in the case of Palestine, which has a long history of internal and external conflicts. This agenda has direct implications on the structure of social science knowledge. Krishna et al. (1998: 269) argues that instead of creating national institutions that organize its knowledge in coherent structures, this type of agenda creates hierarchies in the research field. In the context of Palestine, this agenda has serious implications, given its weak institutional educational structure, the occupation of its territory and the enormous influence of international communities in its internal politics.

If we project this process onto the research agenda in the Arab East, we see that the transformations in the donor agenda are intrinsically linked to three complex processes:

Firstly, from the early 1990s there was a fundamental shift in the political economy of aid in NGOs. Internationally, this moment coincided with a change in the sources of aid: solidarity-based support between Northern and Southern NGOs withered away and was replaced by bilateral and multilateral relations between Southern NGOs and governmental and development agencies. Regionally and locally, this period coincided with the 1991 Gulf War and the onset of the Madrid peace talks, through which Palestine's geopolitical status was reconfigured and the West Bank and Gaza Strip were recast as sites of 'peace-making'.

Secondly, the shift in the political economy of aid in NGOs in the region created new internal forms of social and political capital. As a result, the establishment of research centres was encouraged at the expense of giving aid to universities; this was part of the new policy agenda for the empowerment of civil society institutions.

Thirdly, the entry of local NGOs into aid channels has led to new subject formation and changes in the conceptual and institutional foundation of NGOs. NGOs represent *fragmentary sites.* That is, they are positioned locally, within development channels and network globally. A new globalized elite has emerged. This elite refers to a type of transnational subject formation, in which the actions of local actors are fore-grounded by debates, development paradigms and international standards, that are not bound to their local context.

In this context, and in the framework of a three-dimensional crisis of national science (financially, institutionally and in terms of self-confidence) (Waast, 1996), one needs to study the emergence of research centres in the form of NGOs. I will develop three points: the *institutional aspect*, the *emergence of knowledge society,* and finally the *impact in terms of elite formation*.

1. Institutional Aspects: Empowering NGOs and Disempowering the State

During the 1980s and 1990s, there was a process of professionalization and institutionalization of NGOs in their capacity for advocacy and research actions, and especially in their increased entry into development cooperation. NGOs have taken on new practices in the form of research, civic education training programs and awareness raising activities (Hammami, 1996).

International donors have encouraged the creation and the development of such centres. According to the new policy agenda, empowerment of civil society institutions is accompanied by a disempowerment of the state. In the Palestinian territory, the ties between the Ministry of Higher Education and the High Commission of Higher Education, on which Palestinian universities depend, have made the donors perceive universities less as civil society and more as public institutions. As a result, the university becomes a locus for producing graduate students who are disconnected from the research field. Moreover, the centre's leaders have preferred to decline university affiliations in the fear that the university will take a percentage of the allocated funds. In fact, the University of Birzeit, like other universities in the world, receives a percentage that varies from thirty to eighty percent of the project budget for running costs, administrative management and the facilities offered to the project. Occasionally these leaders have been direct in their replies, claiming individualistic reasons such as keeping research centres outside the control of some university faculty members and administrators. Consequently, Palestinian universities are unable to generate adequate resources for instruction and research.

While there are serious pitfalls in moving research outside the domain of universities, one should also acknowledge the benefits: these small scale units are not hampered by university bureaucracy and are flexible and efficient when closures and curfews become the general behaviour of the Israeli occupation forces in the Palestinian territory. Some donors and external agencies are well aware of this situation.

So the dilemma of empowering NGOs and disempowering the state does not take into account the fact that the number of the private universities is mushrooming: six universities in Lebanon, five in Egypt, four in Syria, four in Jordan and one in the Palestinian territory. These universities (with the relative exception of those in Lebanon) have few resources for research. In the Gulf monarchies, a different phenomenon is taking place. Instead of developing the national state universities, international branches of leading universities (including, for example, Carnegie Mellon, Texas A&M, Weill Cornell, Sorbonne and others) have grown. The parachuting (Bashour, 2006) of these structures does not encourage research production and the social sciences in these institutions are very marginal.

2. The Impact on Elite Formation

As a result of this logic of competition between different NGOs introduced by new sources of funding, new cleavages have emerged. These new actors represent an emerging elite, intertwining research, advocacy and development, and have overturned the old elite of the voluntary charitable societies which mainly work on relief. Moreover, internal divisions such as urban/rural, Islamist/secular, English/Arabic speakers and professional technocrat/militant activist have become more pronounced. These divisions represent markers, fissures, which reflect the process out of which this new elite is emerging.

The fact that the majority of research is done under the framework of NGO structures and not in specialized university research centres - or at least university affiliated research centres - has important consequences. They impact on the quality of the research and the type of approach and methodology used, as well as fostering the emergence of a new 'globalized' elite in local societies (Hanafi and Tabar, 2005). A central premise of this study, therefore, is that there is a re-structuring of knowledge and practices and a new process of elite formation underway in the Arab East research and NGO sector today. They are called the "globalized elite" because they have access to the global (e.g. UN events, international workshops, scientific congress) but do not participate in the decision-making of these global events.

The configuration of this field cannot be understood without looking at the general environment of the region and the impact of donor policies on the empowerment of an elite category of researchers. However, responsibility cannot be placed on the donors alone but is shared by the globalized elite, whose actions/research are disconnected from social demand. In fact, local actors have their own responsibility and role in promoting certain groups at the expense of others. The donors sometimes propose an idea without taking into consideration the conflicts, the internal divisions within the society, or the actors' own predilection. For example, the Network of Policy Research Centres (Rabita), a network proposed by the Ford Foundation in 1995 for five Palestinian research centres, ignored the fact that some of these organizations do not want to engage in networking. As a result, the networking initiative ended up as a small club. Although ideas and knowledge circulate within aid channels and are embraced by donors and NGOs alike, concepts are interpreted and re-articulated by local actors. Therefore, although the Ford Foundation conceived the idea for the network as an open space, this idea was de-coded and re-encoded by local actors as a clique.

The fact that many of the practitioners and leaders of NGOs are producing reports and/or publications in the field of research makes it hard to understand the relationship between knowledge and society without referring to the internal transformation of the NGO sector. Much has been written on the way salaried positions in the NGO sector attract skilled and educated individuals, often to the detriment of the public sector. The notion of elite used here is much broader and includes the way in which the rise of a new social formation disrupts the embeddedness of local organizations within local social networks, concomitant with the rise of the neoliberal paradigm which transforms the relationship between the individual and social institutions.

V. New Forms of Knowledge

Since the nineties, we can discern new forms of knowledge emerging that assess contemporary societies in the region[14]. As in the rest of the world, gender has become an important lens through which changes in contemporary society are assessed. Themes such as gender and democratization in the Arab world, gender and school curriculum and the oral history of women's experiences examine patriarchal and semi-patriarchal domination. However this research has not developed through the 'mainstream gender analysis' approach and it remains somewhat superficial unlike such research in the North and some parts of the South.

As we mentioned before, the donor community has, with only a few exceptions, channelled its funds to research centres holding NGO status. NGOs, as a fragmented site, were seen as an easy target that would accept the transfer of new research activity and methodology.

As a new research activity, the NGOs linked their research to a new notion of the 'public' that emphasises that citizens need to be satisfied of the actions exercised in social and political spheres. These NGOs' research centres claim that these models are being accepted by the new citizens thereby indicating the superiority of their analysis over the traditional in-depth comparative analysis advocated by the universities. To this end, developmental NGOs have created a new repertoire of concepts, which anthropologist Riccardo Bocco (2006) calls *knowledge society*. This term, he argues, together with other concepts such as *knowledge management* and *knowledge*

---

[14] As Rosen noted, some international organizations have been leading agents for the development of certain fields. For him, the "Ford Foundation... played a constitutive role in the post-World War 2 establishment of area studies as well as development discourses and theories" (Rosen 1985).

sharing is actively promoted by the World Bank *(*1998) and has created a preconceived theory with its own specific methodology. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has come up with its own repertoire of concepts such as *knowledge-based aid* to add to those of the World Bank, creating a new perspective to assess and examine social processes in the Palestine territory. These concepts legitimize the interventions of donor driven aid through scientific tools, measurement and monitoring systems on the basis of preconceived past experiences (Bocco, 2006). Knowledge about the political system and social actors in the recipient societies become all important for orienting Western government and international organizations policy.

However, my analysis of the paradigmatical intervention of the donor community should not, in any way, suggest that there is homogeneity in the donors' agendas or in the reception of this agenda by the region's research centres. While donors exercise influence over local research centres in order to advance their own political agenda, this does not mean that it isn't met by resistance from their partners. In the research domain, when funding agencies support a specific research topic, they do so at the *expense of others*. Thus, research topics are indirectly "manipulated," but donors rarely wield any control over the actual research process. Moreover, although there may be a tendency for research projects to reflect the official political position of either the donor or its government, one should not exaggerate the occurrence of such episodes. For example, a German foundation supported a conference organized by the Economic and Social Commission for West Asia (ESCWA) entitled, "The Impact of the Peace Process on Industrial Sectors in the Middle East." Although the foundation sought to emphasize the positive impact of the peace process on the industrial economies of the concerned countries, most of the studies presented at the conference concluded the opposite, at least in the transitional period, due to the intermittent progress of the peace process.

Not only are there new research activities and topics, but also a new methodology. Much research on the Palestinian territory and on Jordan is based on polls as they are the only available empirical data. Lebanon, Syria and Egypt seem to be different from the two former areas. In the Palestinian territory there are eight research centres whose activities are mainly concerned with producing public opinion polls on political issues. Presently, NGO research centres promoting advocacy and policy oriented research do so mainly through the organization of surveys, the majority of which are based on polls. These inevitably use quantitative techniques to study living conditions. One reason for this is the orientation of funding organizations which prefer research projects with unambiguous quantitative indicators. This "fetishism of the quantitative" (Tamari, 1997, pp. 33) is devoid of critical interpretation. Currently, eight research centres conduct public opinion polls on political issues. It is a donor-driven methodology which fits the model of a "standardized" project. In the proposal, poll centres determine the sample size, the questionnaire and the budget. For instance, one German foundation's major program was to support opinion polls on Palestinian society. Unfortunately, the methodology used was obtrusive. Instead of assessing opinion, it *generated* and manufactured opinion, legitimizing political discourses and actions of certain political actors, who are the contemporary elite. Social scientists became a part of the political game (Champagne, 1990). Research conducted on poverty will illustrate the forms of knowledge generated in this form of research.

1. Research on Poverty: Who and Where Are the Rich?

Poverty studies conducted in the Palestinian territory make a diagnostic survey of 'poverty mapping' and 'poverty alleviation,' by presuming that certain neighbourhoods are occupied by the poor, without examining why they live in these neighbourhoods and assessing the root

causes of the poverty, such as the distribution of resources and the role of the state and its structural adjustment policies. The study of poverty is part of catastrophe-centred research that has been carried out, sponsored and sometimes published by UN agencies and later outsourced to NGOs. Indeed, the abundance of data on poverty - declining standards of living, unemployment, labour market contraction, and other crises in the public and private sectors - found in the periodicals and annual reports by the aforementioned organizations is probably sufficient to sustain hundreds of research projects in the social sciences. These organizations have often used quantitative indicators and have emphasized demographic characteristics. These surveys are thus descriptive in nature, based on an evaluation of consumption and income, together with life expectancy, child mortality and literacy. The incorporation of this raw data and its partially processed findings into broader sociological, anthropological, and historical studies lags far behind. It is also interesting to note that these studies identify the poor but not the rich and have postulated policy interventions to reduce the size of the poor population, while neglecting to assess the wealthy community. A qualitative approach based on in-depth interviews and an assessment of poverty in specific groups such as youth, are seldom taken into consideration. In these circumstances, it is impossible to understand the nature of inequality and the stratification system. This trend is confirmed in a global study of Else Oyen et al. (1996) which reveals different analyses of the datasets available in their country/region, but does not take into account ethnographic research.

One case of subcontracting is the work of the Jordan Centre for Social Research (JCSR). This centre's project is to promote the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). This research is very descriptive and its objective is to identify the geographical location of poverty and to propose solutions. This is very obvious even from the declared objectives of the research:

> [they] were to carry out the first phase of the overall development of a strategy for the MDG implementation and monitoring in Zarqa/ Jordan. The overall development strategy had the following components or phases: (Phase One) Conducting a preliminary field study to assess the socio-economic situation in the Governorate of Zarqa and identifying potential local partners. (Phase two) Drafting of an in-depth local MDG Report to be used as a future blueprint for policy and to monitor progress towards achieving the MDG and development goals in the Governorate. This phase involves extensive research into the status of MDG implementation to be conducted with the participation of local organizations, NGOs, CBOs, the municipal authority, etc... (Phase Three) Implementing short-term projects to address the most urgent issues and set the foundations of a strong partnership for development with local authorities and civil society organizations.

Through cooperation with international organizations, the local research centres also produce knowledge on poverty but the researchers are often experts who have built their careers in international organizations. Another example of this tendency to geographically localize poverty is a project entitled "The Figures: Measurement Methodologies and Development Research Needs for Data in Jordan. (The Problem of Poverty)[15]

However, there are some exceptions. The urban approach adopted by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) in 2006, in response to the Millennium Development Goals of UNDP, has dealt with fundamental issues related to the causes of poverty, such as the lack of redistribution of wealth.

---

[15] This project was implemented in 1999 in Jordan by the Centre for Strategic Studies.

VI. Conclusion

This paper has attempted to qualify our claim about the problematic development of research in the social sciences in the region. It has accounted for the emergence of the intellectual entrepreneurs (Romani, 2001), expert-sociologists (Kabanji, 2005), and consultants (al-Kinz, 2005) who have become part of the networks of the donor agencies and thus use the cognitive code of the donor agencies in the research field. All of them have in turn become part of the network of the donor agencies, each using their respective discourse in the research field. Although sociological research has flourished in the Arab East recently (compared to its earlier dearth), due to academics' attempts to present plural and diverse approaches, their studies have lacked a critical emphasis because of the donor-driven orientation discussed earlier. Thus, this research field is not structured by interests of social classes or ideologies but rather is an arena wherein researchers compete to manoeuvre for material resources and/or contracts. The donor agencies play an important role in setting the rules of the field. This partially explains why current research is policy oriented, commissioned and packaged to assess the "pulse of the Arab street," rather than being driven by academic research programs and social demands. The end result is an empiricist-oriented research, often lacking theorization. Although some authors have tried to transcend these constraints by conducting qualitative, in-depth research based on theoretical frameworks, publishers have not encouraged the publication of these texts, indicating the close relationship between donors, knowledge and academic culture.

The most salient issue is the form of funding. Funding disparate projects, instead of coherent research programs, raises a major problem concerning the accumulation of knowledge, methodology, topics, and specialization which are necessary to ensure good research. The scarcity of public funding for research, the lack of fundraising from the wealthy local community, and the exclusive appeal to and for foreign funding hinders the ability of the research centres to make long-term plans and hire suitable personnel.

For instance, endowments that generate minimal revenue for research centres, often found in North America and some European countries, are very rare. As Mustapha Barghouthi explains, endowments have been proposed by NGOs, but the donors often refuse them since there is no guarantee that the character of the organization will not change over time (1995). In June 2000, at an International Development and Research Centre meeting for Palestinian partner organizations, many Palestinian NGOs suggested that international NGOs should help local NGOs set up endowment funds. Yet, as the present discussion revealed, this form of support is very difficult for donors to justify financially. It is apparent that donor support for Palestinian research centres remains confined to a short-term emphasis on obtaining 'results' in donor-relevant thematic areas of concern. This comes at the expense of long-term institution building. While research centre sustainability is ultimately the responsibility of the local organization, donors have hindered them in this matter by prioritizing short-term gains over long-term mechanisms to support these institutions.

With research done outside the university, sociological practices have become prone to many pressures. Even the *Universitat* in Italy in the Middle Ages was autonomous vis-à-vis the city. This was a necessary condition for creating a community critical of its society. The fragmentation of research sites makes research centres vulnerable to attacks from political and security authorities and also from religious, leftist or conservative groups. Thus the researchers fail to be critical of their own society. In this globalized order, in which donors are not interested in empowering state institutions to conduct research so as to play a role in social change, the

marginalization of the university need not be inevitable. Ali Al-Kinz noted that the university tradition in Brazil, Argentina, India and South Africa is so strong, that universities take a leading role in the production of research (2005, p. 35).

Finally, if the current situation continues and research centres remain disconnected from universities in the Arab East, one can eventually expect a research field without professional researchers, mirroring Ghassan Salameh's (1994) characterization of a democracy without democrats. This would be a dark future for the research field itself.

References

Barghouthi, Mustapha (1995). North-South Dynamics and the Question of Aid. *The Concept of Health Under National Democratic Struggle, International People's Health Council.* Jerusalem: Union of Palestinian Medical Relief Committees.

Bocco, Ricardo, Matthias Brunner, Jalal al-Husseini, Frédéric Lapeyre et Luigi **De Martino** (2006). Mesurer la fièvre palestinienne. Notes sur une expérience de monitoring des conditions de vie de la population civile palestinienne pendant la deuxième Intifada, 2000 - 2006. *Annuaire Suisse des Politiques de Développement* 25, no. 2,79 - 94.

Bourdieu, Pierre (1990). *Homo Academicus*. London: Polity.

Burawoy, Michael (2007). For public sociology. Dan Clawson [et al.] (Eds.) *Public sociology: fifteen eminent sociologists debate politics and the profession in the twenty-first century.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

CERMOC (1995) . Guide des centres de recherche en sciences sociales au Liban: 1975 - 1992. Collection Cahiers du Cermoc no. 11

Champagne, Patrick (1990). *Faire l'opinion. Le nouveau jeu politique*. Paris: Éditions de Minuit.

Fisher, William F. (1997). Doing Good? The Politics and Antipolitics of NGO Practices. *Annual Review of Anthropology,* 26 : 439-464.

Hanafi, Sari (2006). Vivre dans le camp, vivre ailleurs : Les Palestiniens réfugiés en Egypte et dans les Territoires palestiniens. *Geographies. Bulletin de l'Association des Géographes Français.* Paris: Association de Géographes Français.

Hanafi, Sari (2005). Report on the survey and database of research on population issues in Palestine. *Population Council*, Cairo.

Hanafi, Sari (1999). The Image of Others, between Arabic and French Agendas. In *Social Science in Egypt: Emerging Voices*, edited by Seteney Shamy and Linda Herrera, pp: 34 - 56. Cairo: AUC.

Hanafi, Sari and Linda Tabar (2005). *Donors, International organizations, local NGOs. Emergence of the Palestinian Globalized Elite*. Ramallah: Muwatin and Institute of Jerusalem Studies.

IFPO (2007). Répertoire des chercheurs et Répertoire des centres de recherche Liban/Syrie/Jordanie. Retrieved Nov.12, 2008. http://www.estime.ird.fr/IMG/pdf/rapport_IFPO_2007.pdf).

Khatibi, Abdel Kebir (1975). Sociologie du monde arabe. Positions, *BESM no* 126, pp 13-26.

Krishna, V.V.; Waast, Roland; Gaillard, Jacques (1998). Globalization and scientific communities in developing countries. *World science report*. UNESCO, pp. 273 - 288.

Oyen, Else, and Seyed Abdus Samad (1996). *Poverty: A Global Review*. Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.

Romani, Vincent (2001). Universités et universitaires palestiniens d'une Intifada à l'autre. In *D'une Intifada l'autre. La Palestine au quotidien* edited by Bernard Botiveau and Aude Signoles, pp. 5580-. Egypte/Monde Arabe, no. 6. Cairo: CEDEJ and Bruxelles : Complexe.

-----. "Sociologues et Sociologies en Cisjordanie occupée : Engagements et hétéronomies." Etude de cas, 2007.

Rosen, George (1985). *Western Economists and Eastern Societies: Agents of Change in South Asia 1950 - 70*.

Roussillon, Alain (2002). Sociologie et identité en Égypte et au Maroc: le travail de deuil de la colonisation. *Revue d'Histoire des Sciences de l'Homme*, 7, 125-173.

Salameh, Ghassan (1994). Introduction. In *Democracy Without Democrats? The Renewal of Politics in the Muslim World* edited by Ghassam Salameh, pp. 1- 22. London: I. B. Tauris.

Tamari, Salim (1997). Social Science Research in Palestine: a Review of Trends and Issues. In *Palestine, Palestiniens. Territoire national, espaces communautaires* edited by Riccardo Bocco, Blandine Destrmeau and JeanHannoyer, pp. 17 - 40. No .17. Beirut: Cahiers du CERMOC.

UNDP (2002). *Capacity for Development: New Solutions to Old Problems*. New York: UNDP.

UNDP (2003). *Ownership, Leadership and Transformation: Can We Do Better for Capacity Development?* New York: UNDP.

Waast, Roland (1996). *Les Sciences hors d'Occident au XXe siècle*. Paris: ORSTOM.

World Bank (1998). *World Development Report 199899-: Knowledge for Development*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Zureik, Elia (2003). Theoretical and Methodological Considerations for the Study of Palestinian Society. *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 23, no.1- 2, 152 - 162.

حنفي، ساري؛ طبر، ليندا (2005). **بروز النخبة الفلسطينية المعولمة**. المانحون والمنظمات الدولية، والمنظمات غير الحكومية المحلية. رام الله: مركز مواطن.

قبانجي، جاك (2005). كيف تقرأ الإنتاج السوسيولوجي العربي. إضافات: **المجلة العربية لعلم الاجتماع**. العدد 2. ص.ص. 88–59

الكنز، علي (2005). العلوم الاجتماعية في العالم العربي. إضافات: **المجلة العربية لعلم الاجتماع**. العدد 2. ص. ص. 48–17