

Background Paper: Regional Social Science Research in the Arab World¹

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Introduction

Social science research in the Arab world has generally been characterized as weak, both in its ability to address regional problems, and in its contribution to international social science research.² UNDP/RBAS's examination of the knowledge deficit in the Arab world in its 2002 *Arab Human Development Report (AHDR): Creating Opportunities for Future Generations*, and in the subsequent *AHDRs*, drew attention to the subject-matter, elevating it to a regional problem that required immediate attention.³ A review of regional social science infrastructure in the Arab world indicates that the most salient problem is not necessarily a shortage of institutions, either of higher education or research institutes which engage in social science research, but rather a more fundamental problem related to the caliber of the institutions, the training and reproduction of researchers, dissemination of research and outputs, and the quality of outputs. Some researchers have attributed this stagnation to varying degrees of political repression, lack of resources, cultural norms which do not encourage the pursuit of social science studies, and

¹ This report is a revised version of a paper submitted to Dr. Necla Tschirgi on 2 September, 2006.

² A number of studies have addressed the weakness of social science research in the region. Among these are: the United Nations Human Development Program, Regional Bureau for Arab States, *Arab Human Development Report 2002: Creating Opportunities for Future Generations*; *Arab Human Development Report 2003: Building a Knowledge Society*; *Arab Human Development Report 2004: Towards Freedom in the Arab World*; Eglal Rached and Dina Craissati eds., *Research for Development in the Middle East and North Africa* (Ottawa: International Development Research Center, 2000), and "The Social Sciences in North Africa and the Middle East," *World Social Science Report: A Global Picture* (Paris: UNESCO, 1999).

³ This is not the only initiative that attempts to address the weakness of social science research in the region. In response to the "knowledge deficit in the Arab world" findings of UNDP/RBAS, the institution has initiated the 'Knowledge Acquisition, Generation and Utilization in the Arab Region (KAGUAR)' program, and the more social science-focused 'Center for Economic and Social Policies in Arab Countries' (CESPAC). Most recently, Dr. Ali Khalifeh Al-Kawari has initiated the 'Arab School for Research and Studies' which focuses/will focus more specifically on 'traditional' social science research in the region.

bounded incentive structures which limit and condition free social science inquiry. Despite these limitations, important variations exist between different countries in the Arab world.

Objectives and Delimitations of the Study

The objective of this report is to provide an overview of the state of social science research in the Arab world, and to map out the types of institutions that are involved in REGIONAL social science research.⁴ In the first section of the report, I provide a general discussion of the state of social science research in the Arab world, situating its evolution and the establishment of its supporting institutions in broader historical perspective. I also focus on how the social sciences in the region have generally been conceptualized, and briefly discuss some of the ongoing debates regarding their conceptualization. Accompanying this section of report, I provide an appendix of a list/map of institutions engaged in regional social science research.

This report suffers from a number of weaknesses, many of which are a result of relying almost primarily on library and internet research, and not conducting the necessary fieldwork in the region. Moreover, the report was completed in approximately two and a half months, which naturally limited the scope of the research.⁵ Throughout the report, I shied away from evaluating institutions and their capacity to conduct research, since such an exercise would have required either in-depth knowledge of the institutions, the availability of impartial evaluations, or the necessary fieldwork to assess these institutions. The discussion pertaining to the study of the social sciences in universities of the *Maghreb*, as well as the significant role that Baghdad once

⁴ For the purpose of this report, Dr. Necla Tschirgi defines REGIONAL research as "...research that is not focused exclusively on local or national issues. Thus all cross-country, cross-regional, comparative and international research fits roughly under this definition provided that it is also linked in some way to the realities of the Middle East."

⁵ The 'Israel-Lebanon war' further exacerbated these limitations since I was not even able to correspond with a number of researchers in Lebanon.

played in the regional social sciences is thin and would benefit from greater detail. The discussion of professional academic associations in the Arab world also requires a more detailed historical evaluation leading to the contemporary period. Similarly, I was not able to access a number of articles written in Arabic which evaluate the state of social science research in the Arab world.⁶⁷ Moreover, the report does not adequately evaluate emergent trends in regional social science research in the Arab world. Although scholars make inferences about dominant research themes in the region, this discussion is not based on systematic examination of research outputs or publications in each country. An exercise of this nature is beyond the modest and limited scope of this report, especially since there are no established publications indices that list publications in the Arab world. Many of these shortcomings, however, can be easily addressed by more in-depth field research in the region, especially in those countries that are more involved in regional social science research production.

Methodology

Findings in this report are primarily based on internet and library research, as well as some email correspondence. The first section of the report dealing with the evolution of the social sciences in the region draws predominately from secondary sources. I also evaluated the outputs of important institutions in the region such as *Al-Mustaqbal Al-Arabi* which is published by the Center for Arab Unity Studies (CAUS), and the listings provided by the GDN regional window.⁸ Similarly, the findings in the section of the report which evaluate the state of the

⁶ I provide a list of these articles in the bibliography of this report.

⁸ I made several attempts to access publication indices of articles and books published in the Arab world, including correspondence with the Library of Congress and a number of publications index hosts. Unfortunately, the individuals and institutions I corresponded with indicated that no such indices exist.

social sciences in the Arab world were drawn from secondary sources, including key texts such as the different versions of the AHDR and different publications of UNESCO.

In assembling the map/list of institutions engaged in regional social science institutions in the Arab world, I relied on different sources on the web, as well as a number of secondary sources which refer to or discuss these institutions.⁹ I first evaluated the Arab Social Science Research (ASSR) website, and compiled a tentative list of institutions engaged in regional social science research.¹⁰ I then conducted individual searches for each of these institutions, relying on Arabic sources or write-ups when they were available. I also conducted web searches for each country, focusing on research centers, non-governmental organizations, and institutions of higher education. Throughout the study, I compiled and maintained a list of all institutions mentioned in the various reports and secondary sources. I used this information to validate my initial lists, and to fill in any glaring omissions.

Background

The Historical Context

It is important to recognize that there have been important ‘ebbs’ and ‘flows’ in knowledge production’ in the region. Dating back to the beginning of the Abassid state in the 13th AD, and during the Ibn Khaldoun era of the 14th century AD, a scholarly renaissance began which had far-reaching implications that continued after the disintegration of the caliphate and

⁹ Please note that this map/list is not necessarily exhaustive, and will be updated based on input from colleagues.

¹⁰ Other websites I evaluated in depth are: <http://www.al-bab.com/>, <http://alawaba.com>, www.sosig.ac.uk, http://portal.unesco.org/shs/en/ev.php-URL_ID=1396&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

the division of the Islamic world into states.¹¹ In more recent years, developments in the social sciences of the region, including the founding of different types of research institutions, have evidently been shaped by the broader historical, socio-economic and political context. In particular, there have been stark increases in higher education and research institutions in the region in the immediate post-colonial era, and the subsequent state-building phase, in the post-1973 oil boom period, and in the post-Cold War globalization era.

Under colonial auspices, the first Western-style universities were established in the 19th and 20th century, especially in Egypt, Lebanon, and North Africa.¹² The post-independence phase witnessed a surge in the rise of ‘national universities,’ and the rise of the contemporary Arabic public systems of education, making universal education more accessible to the masses. A number of national research centers were also established during this period.

Following the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, but most notably after the 1973 oil boom, a number of social science research institutions were established that were more pan-Arabist in outlook, in hopes of more effectively addressing emergent challenges which plagued the region. Among these institutions were the Arab Planning Institute (API), which was established in 1972, and the Center for Arab Unity Studies (CAUS), which was founded in 1975. Increased interest in social science research persisted throughout the 1970s and beyond. According to Sabagh and Ghazalla, the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, and the subsequent dramatic increase in oil prices led to far-reaching

¹¹ *Arab Human Development Report 2003: Building a Knowledge Society*, p. 42.

¹² Seteney Shami, “Socio-cultural Anthropology in Arab Universities,” *Current Anthropology*, vol. 30, no. 5 (December 1989): 649. The partial ‘modernization’ of the education systems experienced the dual colonialism of the Turkish and Europeans; Western universities were established alongside *waqf* institutions. As Zakia Belhachmi explains, awareness of the colonial hierarchy is critical, “...because it reveals the internal and external dynamics that continue to shape the course of social change and epistemological foundations of education in the region.” For more on this discussion, refer to: Zakia Belhachmi, “Power and Authority in Higher Education of Southern Mediterranean Countries: Epistemological and Socio-Political Implications in the Era of Globalization,” *International Journal of Contemporary Sociology* vol. 40, no. 1 (April 2003): 111-135.

social, economic and demographic changes in the region which demanded greater research and understanding.¹³ During this period, and extending to the early 1980s, individuals and organizations in the region established a number of regional coordination and funding institutions.¹⁴ The mid-1980s witnessed another growth period in regional social science research; most notably the Center for Arab Unity Studies (CAUS) established a number of regional professional associations.¹⁵

Since the end of the Cold War, or what some might refer to as the globalization phase, Western foreign donors have played a pivotal role in the founding of various research centers and regional networks, especially in fields related to socio-economic development. In particular, the World Bank has played a key role in establishing a number of regional networks which are ‘neo-liberal in their orientation;’ these institutions include the ERF, GDN, and MDF. This phase of institution-building and social science development also coincided with the initiation of the various bilateral tracks of Arab-Israeli negotiations; an era many believed would herald far-reaching transformations in the region.

Since the 1970s, but most dramatically since the 1980s, there has been a substantial increase in institutions that promote social science research. These institutions include social science departments in universities, a number of which also offer MA and PhD degrees, university-based research centers, private research institutions, regional funding agencies,

¹³ For more on this discussion, refer to Sabagh and Ghazalla, *Arab Sociology Today: A View from Within*, *Annual Review of Sociology*, vol. 12 (1986), pp. 373-399.

¹⁴ These regional coordination and funding organizations include the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) which was established in 1969, the Arab League Educational, Cultural, and Scientific Organization (ALESCO) which was established in 1970, and the Islamic Research and Training Institute (IRTI) which was established in 1981.

¹⁵ Nader Fergany, “Science and Research for Development in the Arab Region,” *Research and Development in the Middle East and North Africa* (Cairo: International Development and Research Center, 2000), p. 76.

regional research networks, and foreign funded regional grant competitions. Despite the regional variations which exist, scholars generally concur that the quality of production is “questionable,” and that the increase in the quantity of institutions has not translated into an improvement in quality of social science research in the region.¹⁶ Some of even push the point further, and argue that there has been an overall deterioration in the quality of social science production in the region.¹⁷

Problematics of Social Science Research in the Region

Social science research in the Arab world is plagued by a number of problems, including but not limited to, the lack of resources incentive structure which do not encourage social science research, restrictive political environments, cultural norms which place little value on social science research, the absence of a tradition of peer review, the ‘elitism’ of social science research, and its lack of accessibility to the general public, and language constraints especially since a declining number of students are trained in non-Arabic languages. Many of these problems also apply more broadly to scientific research in the region.

The lack of resources is an important constraint on knowledge production which merits special attention. Salim Tamari elaborates:

“Among the grievances frequently mentioned are: the excessive teaching loads (12 hour weeks on average); absence of research grant which allows faculty to be released from teaching; weak research support facilities (congested working space, limited or absent

¹⁶ In addition to the reports cited in footnote 1, a number of scholars also make this point, among which are: Saad Eddin Ibrahim “Arab Social Science Research in the 1990s and Beyond: Issues, Trends, and Priorities,” *Research and Development in the Middle East and North Africa* (Cairo: International Development and Research Center, 2000), Salim Nasr, based on Lisa Hajjar, “A View from the Region: Middle East Studies in the Arab World: Interview with Salim Nasr,” *Middle East Report*, No. 205 (October-December, 1997): 16-18, Seteney Shami, “Socio-Cultural Anthropology in Arab Universities.”

¹⁷ See for example, Saad Eddin Ibrahim, “Cross-Eyed Sociology in Egypt and the Arab World,” *Contemporary Sociology*, vol. 26, no. 5 (September 1997): 549, and Lisa Hajjar, “A View from the Region,” p. 18.

secretarial staff, limited or absent computing facilities); and library budgets which do not allow for necessary subscriptions to international journals and recent social science literature published abroad.”¹⁸

Moreover, because of the low salaries in Arab universities, professors often need to subsidize their income by undertaking contract research work. This pervasive phenomena negatively impacts knowledge creation in two fundamental ways. First, because of heavy teaching loads and the nature of contract research work, professors are left with little time to conduct academic research. Second, because of the nature of incentive structures, donors and multilateral organizations often play a pivotal role in shaping research agendas, limiting the role of local scholars in defining these agendas. These dynamics have become even more prevalent in the past fifteen years, as external funding has played an important role in shifting research capacity to NGOs and policy-related institutes, instead of universities. Although this development has provided researchers in the region with greater opportunities, the impact is more precarious pointing to less of autonomy in shaping research agendas.

The Conceptualization of Social Science Research in the Arab World

In general, social science research in the region is conceived in ‘utilitarian terms,’ often requiring that knowledge production serve the broader interests of society. This approach to knowledge production is facilitated by perceptions of ‘Middle East exceptionalism’ and the consequent perceived inability of Middle East studies to contribute to the broader social sciences. A number of scholars, however, argue that the utilitarian terms in which the social sciences are conceived in the region, seriously constrain the knowledge production process.

¹⁸ Salim Tamari, “Problems of Social Science Research in Palestine: An Overview,” *Current Sociology* vol. 42 (June 1994): 70. Although Tamari discusses these problems as they apply to the Palestinian context, they can easily describe the social science research environment in other Arab countries.

Many scholars have argued that the idiosyncratic character of Islam, its effects on social and political processes, and the extent to which it renders the Middle East as an exceptional case study has precluded using the Middle East to develop generalizable and testable social science theory.¹⁹ This discussion assumes even greater relevance to research produced in the Middle East in recent years, since much of it is not necessarily theoretically-informed. In response to this debate, many third world scholars have argued that the ultimate goal of knowledge creation should be to serve the societies in which it is produced. For example, as Tessa Marcus explains, social science research in developing countries must address a number of issues including "...the socio-economic problems and 'worries' that developing countries face; their political priorities nationally, regionally, and internationally; the space they assign knowledge production and knowledge producers; the capacity of their knowledge systems and producers to respond in dynamic, autochthonous ways; and the legacies of the unequal power play that dominates relations between 'advanced' and 'developing' countries."²⁰ This view that social science research must serve society is quite prevalent in the Arab world.

In particular, sociology as a discipline has been elevated above others as the most capable of addressing pressing social issues. As Ibrahim explains, By the 1870s, "Coinciding with independence and the formation of the new Arab states, the third generation [of Arab sociologists] exaggerated the value of sociology in the state-building process. Sociology was marketed as more 'scientific' than other human and social disciplines, more capable of treating

¹⁹ For more detailed discussion of this debate, refer to: Lisa Anderson, "Politics in the Middle East: Opportunities and Limits in the Quest for Theory," In *Area Studies and Social Science: Strategies for Understanding Middle East Politics*, ed. Mark Tessler. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), and Michael Hudson, *The Middle East, PS: Political Science and Politics*, vol. 34, no. 4 (December, 2001), pp. 801-804.

²⁰ Quoted from a presentation of Dr. Tessa Marcus at a Workshop on the Social Sciences in Developing Countries, 5 July, 2006.

social problems left over from colonialism, and more able to bring about ‘integrated development’ as opposed to ‘crass economic growth.’²¹ Sociology therefore became to be understood in utilitarian terms as the discipline which could solve social problems. Hence, greater emphasis has been placed on sociological research in the Arab world; this was especially true during the 1980s.²² Moreover, according to Sabagh and Ghazal, between 1983 and 1986, at least six conferences were held in the Arab world in order to evaluate the state of Arab sociology.²³

In line with the ‘utilitarian conception’ of knowledge production, foreign donors have elevated economic and development research in the region in recent years. Accordingly, other disciplines, such as anthropology or geography for example, have been perceived as less important. The balance between knowledge creation and utilitarian social research which serves

²¹ Ibrahim, “Cross-Eyed Sociology in Egypt and the Arab World,” p. 549.

²² For example, among the publications dealing with the study of sociology in the Arab world during the late 1970s and 1980s are: A. Al-Qazzaz, “Impressions of Sociology in Iraq,” *International Social Science Journal*, vol. 27 (1975): 781-786; H. Barakat, *Contemporary Arab Society: An Exploratory Sociological Study* (in Arabic) (Beirut: Center for Arab Unity Studies, 1984); S. Bassiouni, *The Present State of Sociology in Egypt* (in Arabic) (Cairo: Ain Shams University, 1979); T. Ben Jelloun, “Decolonizing Sociology in the Maghreb,” in *Arab Society in Transition*, eds. S.E. Ibrahim and N.S. Hopkins (Cairo: American University of Cairo Press, 1977), pp. 685-712; L. Ben Salem, “Interet des analyses en termes de segmentaire pour l’etude des societes du Maghreb,” *Revue L’Occident Musulman Mediterranee*, vol. 33 (1982): 113-135; S.E. Ibrahim, “Contemplating the Future of Arab Sociology: From Proving Existence to Realizing Promises,” (in Arabic) *Al-Mustaqbal Al-Arabi*, vol. 77 (1985): 129-139; J.S. Al-Issa and S. Husseini, “Sociology and Arab Reality: A Study in the Views of Arab Sociologists,” *Al-Mustaqbal Al-Arabi*, vol. 41 (1982): 28-51; A. Khatibi, “Double Criticism: The Decolonization of Arab Sociology,” in *Contemporary North Africa: Issues of Development*, ed., H. Barakat (Washington DC: Georgetown University, 1985), pp. 9-19; El Kordy, “Underdevelopment and Development in Sociology: A Critical Analysis,” (in Arabic) *Al Kitab Al-Sanawi Li-Ilm Al-Ijtima*, vol. 1(1980): 19-45; S. Nasr, “A Conference: Toward an Arab Sociology” (in Arabic), *Al-Mustaqbal Al-Arabi*, vol. 41, pp. 28-51; G. Sabbagh, “Sociology,” in *The Study of the Middle East*, ed., L. Binder (New York: John Wiley Press, 1976), pp. 511-564; S. Sari, “Sociology and Arab Sociological Problems: Concerns and Interests,” (in Arabic), *Al-Mustaqbal Al-Arabi* vol. 58 (1983): 52-69; and S. Sari, “Arab Sociologists and the Study of Arab Social Issues: A Critical Appraisal” (in Arabic), *Al-Mustaqbal Al-Arabi* vol. 85 (1985): 85-95. These references were cited in Sabagh and Ghazalla, “Arab Sociology Today: A View from Within.”

²³ These conferences are: *The Problem of Methodology in Social Science Research* (Cairo, January 1983); *The Problematic of Social Science in the Arab World* (Cairo, February 1983); *Toward an Arab Sociology* (Abu-Dhabi, April 1983); *The Policy of Social Sciences in the Arab World* (Kuwait, January 1985); and *The Status of Sociology in the Arab World* (Tunis, January 1985). For more on this discussion, refer to: George Sabagh and Iman Ghazalla, “Arab Sociology Today: A View from Within,” p. 375.

the societies in which it is created, however, is a delicate one. The implication of this limited conception is that social science has come to be seen as a ‘human technology,’²⁴ seriously limiting the knowledge production process.

Indigenization of Social Science Research in the Region

Recognizing the weakness of social science research in the region, some scholars have proposed the ‘indigenization of the social sciences.’ During the 1980s, there was a vast literature concerning an ‘Arab social science.’ In the 1990s, this was followed with the idea of an “Islamic social science.”²⁵ Within these two currents, there have been two different approaches to the ‘indigenization of the social sciences in the Arab world’: the radical and neo-traditionalist.²⁶ The radical approach has stressed the socio-economic roots and inherent dependency relationships in the ‘crisis of social science’ in the region, espousing to overcome these dependency relations. According to Hijazi:

“The present state of sociology in the Arab world is the result of a number of objective social, economic and political conditions... This is to say that the relationship between the crisis of social science and that of society is dialectical and should be analyzed, diagnosed and tackled on this basis.”²⁷

²⁴ Shami, “Socio-Cultural Anthropology in Arab Universities,” p. 650.

²⁵ According to Morsy et. al., among the scholars who called for the Islamization response are: Ismail al-Faruqi, “Meta-Religion: Towards a Critical World Theology,” *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* vol. 3, no. 1(1986): 13-58; Syeed Sayyid, “Islamization and Linguistics,” *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* vol. 3, no. 1 (1986): 77-78; Muhammed Ma’ruf, “Towards an Islamic Critique of Anthropological Evolutionism,” *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* vol. 3, no. 1 (1986): 89-108. Other scholars, cited by Bassam Tibi, who call for the Islamization of knowledge include Adel Husain, *Nahwa Fikr ‘Arabi Jadid* (Cairo: Dar al-Mustaqbal al-‘Arabi/ Internatoinal Institute for Islamic Thought, 1985), and Adel Husain, *Islamiyyat al-Ma’rifah* (Cairo: al-Ahram li al-Tawzi, 1986). For more on this, refer to Soheir Morsy, Cynthia Nelson, Reem Saad, and Hania Sholkamy, “Anthropology and the Call for Indigenization of Social Sciences in the Arab World,” in *The Contemporary Study of the Arab World* eds., Earl Sullivan and Jacqueline S. Ismael (Edmonton: the University of Alberta Press, 1991).

²⁶ Soheir Morsy et. al. “Anthropology and the Call for Indigenization of Social Sciences in the Arab World,” pp. 81-111.

²⁷ Quoted from Morsy et. al. “Anthropology and the Call for Indigenization of Social Sciences in the Arab World,” p. 85.

Hence, for radicals, the main objective of indigenization is to create a “relevant social science.”²⁸

According to what is referred to as the neo-traditionalist approach to indigenization, the social sciences must/should reflect distinct conceptual frameworks and methodologies that reflect their own world views. ‘Indigenization’ therefore espouses “...constructing a specific theory built on the essence of Arab civilization and rejecting the essence of Western civilization.”²⁹

A number of scholars, however, argue that ‘indigenization’ is in and of itself a problematic response to the crisis of social science research in the region. The ‘indigenization’ response not only makes a faulty prescription, but also misreads the nature of the problem. Morsy et. al. cogently explain, “...the indigenization trend again commits an epistemological blunder by trying to create a local ‘theory,’ which is derived from and can only deal with Arab reality. It also has the serious defect of classifying social science according to nationality of the scholar thereby obscuring political and ideological differentiation among social scientists in the Arab world as well as the West.”³⁰ Although the discussion of more relevant social science research in the Arab demands further investigation, I have attempted to problematize the subject-matter, shedding light on the different facets of the debate.

The State of Contemporary Social Science Research in the Arab World Today

In general, although the Arab region has lagged behind other societies in terms of knowledge production, there have been important advances that are worthy of mention. Since

²⁸ Morsy et. al., p. 86.

²⁹ Morsy et. al., p. 87.

³⁰ Morsy et. al., p. 84.

the 1980s, there have been dramatic increases in the number of universities, graduate programs, female enrollments, and research institutes and centers. As the following review of indicators illustrates, however, there are important variations between the different countries of the region.

Key Indicators

of Institutions and Social Scientists

Exact figures of the number of institutions engaged in social science research, or more specifically regional social science research, are difficult to come by. A 1998 UNESCO study estimated that there were approximately 127 social science research institutions in the region³¹ of which only a fraction were/are engaged in regional social science research.

of Social Scientists

In a study commissioned by the International Development Research Center (IDRC), one scholar estimated that there were approximately 50,000 social scientists in the region, of which 20,000 are senior scholars, and 30,000 are junior scholars.³²

of universities and enrollments

The number of universities in the Arab world has increased from 10 in 1950, to over 175 in 1996.³³ Each of the region's countries has at least one institution of higher education.

³¹ Cited from Nader Fergany, "Science and Research for Development in the Arab Region," *Research and Development in the Middle East and North Africa*, p. 10. Fergany however disputes this figure claiming that it is quite high, and that some institutions included in the study do not actually engage in 'social science research.'

³² Saad Eddin Ibrahim, "Arab Social Science Research in the 1990s and Beyond: Issues, Trends, and Priorities," *Research and Development in the Middle East and North Africa*, p. 129. Ibrahim further explains that this figure includes 20,000 senior researchers and 30,000 junior researchers. Ibrahim, however, provides no references, but did explain to Dr. Necla Tschirgi that this figure represents university graduates from social science disciplines rather than actual social science researchers.

According to one study, more than half of these universities were founded between 1981 and 1996.³⁴ This rapid increase in the number of universities has been generated by the increasing demand for education in the region. In the period between 1999 and 2000, there were five million students enrolled in higher education in the Arab world, of which two million, or 40 percent were women.³⁵

Important variations exist among the different countries of the region. Libya, for example, had gross enrollments of 51 percent, compared to 0.4 percent in Djibouti, and 9 percent in Morocco.³⁶ Moreover, there were variations in terms of female enrollments. In Iraq, Djibouti, Morocco, and the PA, female enrollments were lower than male enrollments, compared to Jordan, Lebanon and Libya in which female enrollments in tertiary education tended to be higher.³⁷

Tertiary Enrollments in the Social Sciences

In general, the social sciences disciplines (which include Business and Law according to this UNESCO categorization) represent some of the highest enrollments in Arab universities. For example, in Morocco, which has the highest enrollments in social science disciplines, 46 percent of all university enrollments are in social science disciplines, compared to 40 percent in Lebanon, 32 percent in Jordan, 32 percent in the Palestinian territories, 13 percent in Oman, and

³³ Fahima Charafeddine, *Guni Series on the Social Commitments of Universities: the Financing of Universities* (New York: Palgrave/Macmillan, 2006), p. 168.

³⁴ Figures are from *Higher Education System in the Arab World* (New York: ESCWA and Washington DC: World Bank, 2002), referenced in Fahima Charafeddine, *Guni Series on the Social Commitments of Universities*.

³⁵ Fahima Charafeddine, *Guni Series on the Social Commitments of Universities: the Financing of Universities*, p. 168.

³⁶ UNESCO Institute of Statistics, *Education Statistics 2002: Arab States Regional Report* (Montreal: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2002).

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

15 percent in Saudi Arabia.³⁸ The high enrollments in social science disciplines, however, should not be read as a sign of their popularity, but rather as an indicator of their underappreciation as fields of study. In much of the Arab world, students' matriculation exam scores determine which fields of study they are allowed to pursue; accordingly, only those students with the highest matriculation exam scores are allowed entry into the hard sciences, and the less qualified students are allowed entry into social science faculties.

Female Enrollments in the Social Sciences

Female enrollments in social science disciplines vary across the region. In Bahrain, Lebanon, and Qatar, female enrollments account for the majority of in the social sciences, representing 69 percent, 53 percent, and 62 percent of enrolments respectively.³⁹ This compares to 35 percent in Iraq, 46 percent in Jordan, 42 percent in Morocco, 37 percent in Oman, 47 percent in PA areas, 39 percent in Saudi Arabia.⁴⁰

Brain Drain

Brain drain is a salient problem in the region. According to the Arab Human Development Report, approximately 25 percent of 300,000 first-degree graduates from Arab universities in 1995/96 emigrated. Between 1998 and 2000, more than 15,000 Arab doctors migrated.

³⁸ *Global Education Digest 2006: Comparing Education Statistics Across the World* (Montreal: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2006), p. 139.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

Social Science Outputs

The dearth of scholarly production in the Arab world is not limited to the social sciences, but is symptomatic of the scholarly research more generally. Despite the increase in research production in the region, it still lags behind most other regions. The average social science research output of the Arab world per million inhabitants is roughly 2 percent of that of any industrialized country.⁴¹ Although Arab scientific output doubled from 11 papers per million in 1985 to 26 papers per million in 1995, China's output during the same period increased 11-fold, and the Republic of Korea increased its production 24-fold, from 6 papers to 144 during the same time period.⁴²

Although there has been an increase in scientific publications in recent years, from 465 papers in 1967 to approximately 7000 in 1995, most of these papers have been in applied fields such as medicine, health, and agriculture. Similarly, the study estimates that only 26 scientific institutions published more than 50 research papers in 1995, while only five institutions published more than 200 papers.⁴³ The dearth of production also applies to the number of books that are translated in the region. According to the AHDR, approximately 4.4 books per one million of the population were translated during the first five years of the 1980s, compared to 510 books per million in Hungary, and 920 books per one million in Spain during the same time period.⁴⁴

⁴¹ *Arab Human Development Report 2002: Creating Opportunities for Future Generations*. This figure, however, is problematic for a number of reasons. First, there are no established publication indices in the Arab world. Moreover, ISBN numbers are not always used in the reproduction of books. Therefore, it is difficult to ascertain the exact number of publications in the Arab world.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 68.

⁴³ For more on scientific research and outputs, refer to the *Arab Human Development Report, 2003: Producing a Knowledge Society*, p. 70. The AHDR, however, does not provide references or explanations regarding how it arrived at these findings.

Funding to Higher Education and Research and Development (R&D)

Significant variation exists in education expenditure among Arab countries. As a percentage of GDP, Kuwait allocates 8.2%, Lebanon 2.6%, Morocco 6.3%, Tunisia 6.4%, and Yemen 1.6%.⁴⁵ The lack of funding to R&D is more pronounced; the Arab states allocate 0.2 percent of their GNP to Research and Development (R&D), compared to 3.1 percent in the United State, Japan, and Sweden, 2.4 percent in Germany, France, UK, Italy, Australia, and Canada, and 0.4 percent in Turkey and Mexico.⁴⁶

Connectivity and Cross-Fertilization Among Scholars

According to the 2002 Arab Human Development Report, connectivity among scholars is low at the national, regional, and international levels. Even in countries with higher rates of social science outputs/publications, such as Egypt, Lebanon, and Morocco, the vast majority of publications are produced and consumed locally, with minimal opportunities for cross-fertilization.⁴⁷ Research is further constrained by the limited flow of English/European language materials into libraries of the Arab world. The dearth of institutions which study ‘other societies’ merely exacerbates the problem.

The connectivity of regionally-based scientists with scientists from outside the region, however, is much better, representing greater cooperation opportunities. In contrast, a number of developing countries, such as Brazil, China, and the Republic of Korea have established

⁴⁴ *Arab Human Development Report: Building a Knowledge Society*, pp. 3-4.

⁴⁵ UNESCO Institute of Statistics, *Education Statistics 2002: Arab States Regional Report*, p. 154.

⁴⁶ Based on Table 3.2 in the *Arab Human Development Report 2003: Building a Knowledge Society*, p. 73.

⁴⁷ “The Social Sciences in North Africa and the Middle East,” *World Social Science Report: A Global Picture*, p. 141.

developed systems of national and international linkages among scholars and practitioners which better enable them to benefit from their respective national knowledge bases.

Infrastructure of Regional Social Science Research⁴⁸

In the following section, I provide a descriptive overview of the types of institutions that are engaged in, or support regional social science research.⁴⁹ These institutions comprise local initiatives as well as foreign promoted bodies, and consist of nationally-based institutions, including university-based research centers and think-tanks, regional networks, working groups, regional grant programs, and regional funding institutions. I also briefly review institutions that are engaged in survey research; although these institutions may not necessarily be involved in regional social research, they may contribute to shaping the regional research agendas and preferred methodologies.

Among these categories, many of the regional networks/institutions have played an important role in the promotion, coordination, and dissemination of research. These institutions include a multiplicity of forms, representing different levels of activity, different levels of reliance on foreign donors, and varying contributions to the generation of social science knowledge. For the exception of the Arab Planning Institute (API), most of these networks were founded after 1991. Many of these institutions are engaged in economic development, security, or gender-related research.

API, Economic Research Forum (ERF), the Global Development Network (GDN) and the Mediterranean Development Forum (MDF) are all engaged, or support socio-economic

⁴⁸ For a detailed evaluation of institutions engaged in regional social science research, please refer to Dr. Necla's Tschirgi's paper.

⁴⁹ Please refer to the attached map/list of institutions for more detail.

development research. API is specifically involved in research pertaining to development, economic management, and planning. Its membership is comprised of Arab countries. The MDF partnership is comprised of Middle East and North Africa (MENA) think tanks, the United Nations Development Program, and the World Bank Institute. A critical component of the MDF partnership is a Forum which is held every two to three years. The GDN, on the other hand, operates as a network of regional partners; MENA is represented by the ERF which also manages the regional window of GDNNet. The membership of ERF and GDN is comprised of individuals, and is by invitation only. Unlike the ERF, the GDN, and the MDF, API does not predominately rely on foreign donor funding, despite the initial role that UNDP played in its establishment. The GDN and ERF represent interesting models, because although they were founded by the World Bank, they both became independent, and now rely on funding from a number of other donors.

A number of networks exist in the region which promote regional gender research. These institutions include the better known Center for Arab Women Training and Research (CAWTAR), the newly established Gender Economic Research Policy and Analysis (GERPA) initiative, and the less known *Mashriq/Maghrib* Gender Linking Information Project (Mac/Mag GLIP). Whereas CAWTAR is involved in research on women in the Arab world, GERPA is specifically involved in incorporating a gender dimension in a select number of high profile policy research activities. Mac/Mag GLIP serves as a forum for communication on gender issues. These institutions are primarily funded by Western donors. There are a number of university-based women's studies centers in the region.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Please refer to the university research centers section of the map for a detailed listing of women's studies centers in the Arab world. It is important to note that the extent to which many of these institutions are involved in regional social science research is debatable.

Alongside the donor-promoted regional networks, there are a number of others which are local endeavors. These institutions include the Arab Institute for Studies and Communication (AISC), and its very useful network engine, Arab Social Science Research (ASSR), the less known Association for Arab Private Institutions for Higher Education, and the Arab Urban Development Institute (AUDI). Although AUDI was founded to enhance the quality of municipal services, in recent years it has become more involved in socio-economic issues. For example, in December 2006, it will be hosting an international conference on “Youth in the Middle and North Africa.”⁵¹ Of these institutions, AISC is specifically dedicated to the development of research organizations and to assisting researchers in the Arab world, or more exactly in Egypt and the *Mashriq* countries of Jordan, Lebanon, and Palestine. Although the institution was founded by prominent scholars in the region, its membership is predominately comprised of non-governmental research centers; few, if any, of these organizations are affiliated with institutions of higher education.

Since the early 1990s, a number of security-related partnerships and research centers have been established in the region. At a regional level, these institutions include the EuroMeSCo-European Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), and the Consortium of Research Institutes (CRI). The EuroMeSCo focuses on policy and security related issues, and brings together institutes of five southern EU members, and a number of institutes from Southern Mediterranean Arab countries. CRI was founded by a number of nationally-based institutions, with the participation of the governments of Canada and Denmark. In recent years, a number of

⁵¹ This conference will be in collaboration with the World Bank, the MedChild Institute, and the Child Protection Initiative.

nationally-based security-related research institutions have been established, especially in the Gulf.⁵²

Foreign regional grant programs have historically played an important role in the promotion of social science research in the region. Among the best known of these programs are the Middle East Research competition (MERC), and the now defunct Middle East Awards at the Population Council (ME Awards). MERC was established by the Ford Foundation in 1986, and ME Awards was established by the Population Council. Whereas MERC supports social science research in all disciplines in the Arab world and Turkey, ME Awards supported research on demographics and health-related issues in the Arab world, Iran and Turkey. ME Awards also played an important role in supporting research working groups, such as the Reproductive Health Working Group.

Regional organizations and funding institutions have also played a noteworthy role in supporting regional social science research. Perhaps, the most active⁵³ of these organizations are the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), the Arab League Educational, Cultural, and Scientific Organization (ALESCO), the Arab Fund for Social and Economic Development (AFSED), the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the Islamic Development Bank, specifically its affiliated Islamic Research and Training Institute (IRTI), Al-Hariri Foundation, and the Al-Shouman Foundation. These institutions have a longer history in the region and were founded in the period between 1968 and 1981. The focus of the OIC and the IRTI is beyond the Arab world, and extends to the Islamic world more broadly. Both these organizations are more concerned with supporting institutions and research endeavors that are more ‘Islamic’ in orientation. The

⁵² Please refer to the nationally-based institutions section of the list/map for a more detailed listing of institutions engaged in regional security research.

⁵³ I describe these institutions as ‘active’ because of the number of regional programs and initiatives they appear to support.

GCC focuses on the Gulf States and social affairs, and research related to this area. ALESCO and AFSED focus on the Arab world, and their memberships consist of all members of all states who are members of the League of Arab States. AFSED is an autonomous regional Pan-Arab development finance organization, which has also funded the construction of university physical infrastructure and has provided fellowships for research and teaching to Arab PhD holders. ALESCO, however, has focused more specifically on coordinating Arab efforts in the fields of education, culture and science, and has played an important role in spear-heading *Arabization* projects, as well as disseminating research and information related to these fields. Although Al-Shouman and Al-Hariri Foundations are better known for supporting business initiatives in the Arab world, both have also funded PhD students and researchers throughout the Arab world.

Nationally-based institutions, which include think-tanks and NGOs, university-based research centers, and scholarly professional associations have also played an important role in regional social science research.⁵⁴ Many of these institutions are based in Egypt and Lebanon, and were founded in the period between the late 1960 and early 1980s. These institutions include the Arab Thought Forum, the Center for Arab Unity Studies (CAUS), and the Institute for Palestine Studies. These institutions represent sustained research efforts with strong publication records, both in terms of periodicals and books, and in disseminating these materials throughout the region, in both the Arabic and English languages.

Similarly, Egypt, Lebanon and Palestine also represent the highest number of university-based research centers. In North Africa, Morocco stands out in this regard. Many of the institutions in Palestine are much more recent, compared to the research centers in Egypt, especially the majority that were established in the 1980s in Cairo University. A number of

⁵⁴ Again, for a more detailed listing of the various nationally-based research institutions, please refer to the institutional map.

professional scholarly associations were also founded in the 1980s, many of these by the Center for Arab Unity Studies.⁵⁵ The Dubai School of Government also is a recent initiative-- though it is too early to assess its influence in producing and influencing regional social science research.

Alongside these institutions are the newly established research centers in the Gulf, mostly founded since the late 1980s. These institutions include the Gulf Research Center, the Qatar Foundation, and the International Center for Strategic Analysis. These institutions focus more exclusively on the Gulf region.

Concluding Comments and Key Findings

A number of important issues/findings emerge from this report:

1) Important variations exist in the region, especially in terms of the quantity of institutions. Most notably, Egypt and *Mashriq* countries represent the highest number of social science research institutions engaged in regional social science research. Most notably, Egypt represents the highest number of social science research institutes in the region. In addition to the high number of social science graduate-degree granting institutions, the country has a plethora of university-based research centers and private research centers. Among the university-based research centers, those housed in the American University of Cairo appear to have the strongest record of outputs.

Lebanon similarly boasts a high number of institutions engaged in regional social science; a feat all the more significant since Lebanon's population is approximately twenty times less than that of Egypt. In addition, to the high number of social science graduate degree granting institutions, Lebanon has a number of active university-based research centers, especially in the

⁵⁵ Unfortunately, more information is needed on the current level of activity of existing professional scholarly associations.

American University of Beirut. Jordan and Palestine, along with Morocco, also have more institutions engaged in regional research relative to other countries in the region. These countries contrast with Comoros, Djibouti, Mauritania, and Somalia which have no institutions that are engaged in regional social science research. Similarly, Iraq, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Yemen appear to have few institutions engaged in regional social science research. In Syria, only public research centers are engaged in regional social science research, and in Libya these institutions tend to be university-based.

Interestingly, this cursory evaluation of regional differences points at times to an inverse relationship between GDP and the quantity and quality of social science research in the Arab region. For example, Morocco and Egypt have developed impressive research capacities compared to their less than favorable economic conditions. Moreover, according to the World Social Science Report, Lebanon has also fared better than many wealthier Arab countries in terms of its research environment.⁵⁶

2) A certain bifurcation of regional social science institutions appears to exist between local endeavors, and foreign founded and funded institutions. On the one hand, there are a number of regional organizations that were established between the late 1960's and early 1980's. Then, there are the more recently established regional and cross-regional networks, mostly initiated by Western donors. There appears to be little, if any, coordination between these two categories of institutions. Related to this, incestuous relations characterize the nature of partnerships between many of the institutions created in the late 1990s, especially those initiated by the World Bank. Most notably, ERF appears to be a key counterpart for major cross-regional institutions, such as

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 138.

the GDN, CAWTAR, and the MDF. This issue of ‘bifurcation,’ and the lack of connectivity between regional initiatives and foreign-funded initiatives deserves further investigation, especially in light of more recent initiatives like the founding of the Arab School for Social Science Research.

3) There appears to be a marginalization of the Arab university, and its affiliated research centers. Although university-based research centers have played and continue to play an important role in promoting regional research, there appears to be less interaction between these institutions and think-tanks, the regional and cross-regional networks, and private research centers in the region. Moreover, although university-based research centers house a number of issue-oriented regional networks, they often are not member organizations of broader regional networks. This is an important observation which deserves further investigation.

4) There appears to be an over-emphasis on certain research topics. For example, many of the regional social science institutions in *Mashriq* countries focus on economic development related issues, as opposed to many of the newly established research centers in the Gulf which focus on security issues. University-based research centers appear to address a more diverse array of research themes such as democratization and liberalization, migration trends, and the study of other contexts etc...

5) Although foreign donors have played a pivotal role in shaping the region’s research agendas, it is important to note that some institutions have not been beholden to the donors who initially

founded them. For example, although API was founded by the UNDP, it subsequently became an independent institution, reliant on other donors and funders.

6) The weakness of regional social science research is not a function of the lack of institutions, but more fundamentally related to the caliber of these institutions, and the networking and coordination, or lack thereof, between these institutions.

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