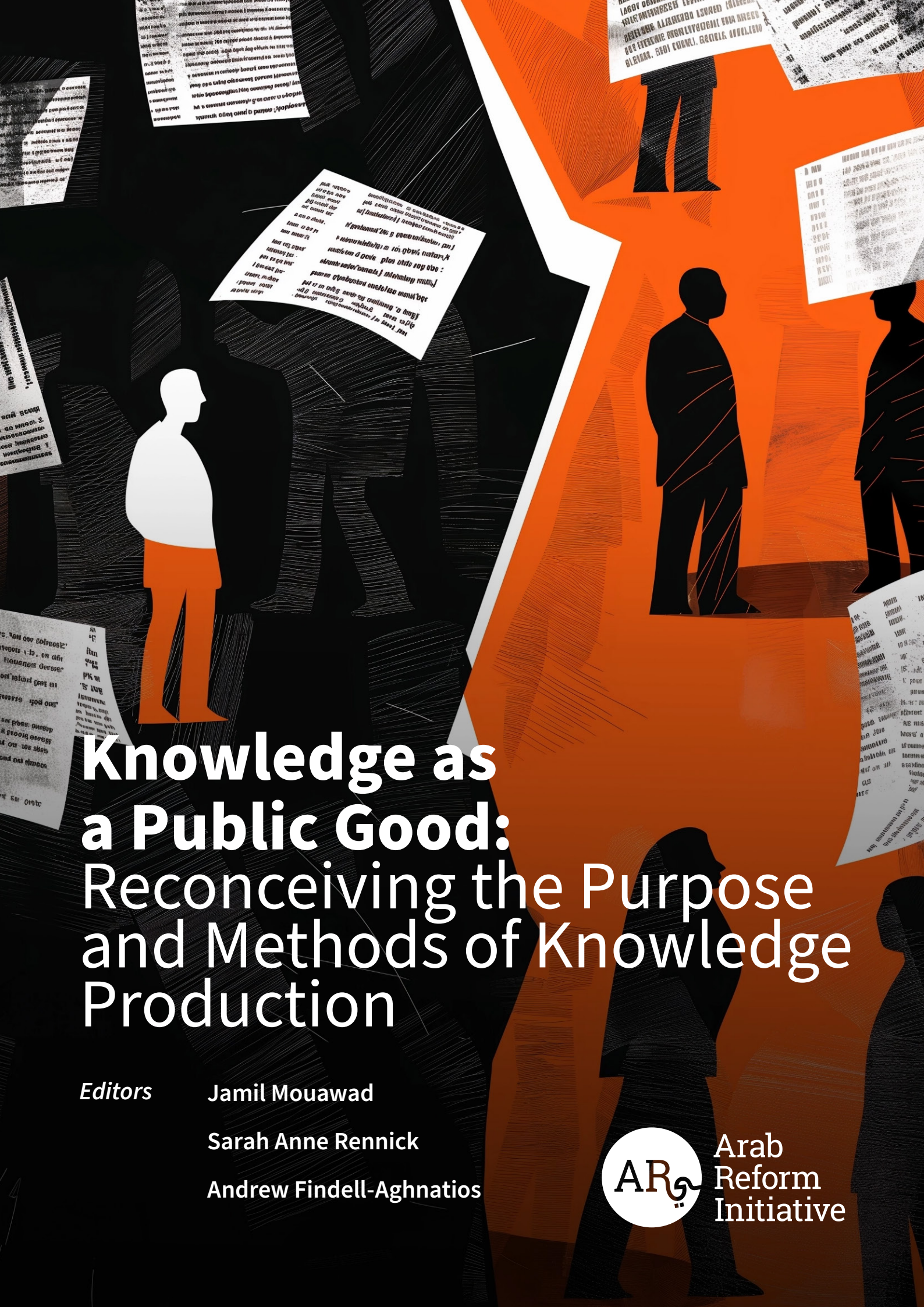

Knowledge as a Public Good: Reconceiving the Purpose and Methods of Knowledge Production

Editors **Jamil Mouawad**

Sarah Anne Rennick

Andrew Findell-Aghnatios

Arab Reform Initiative

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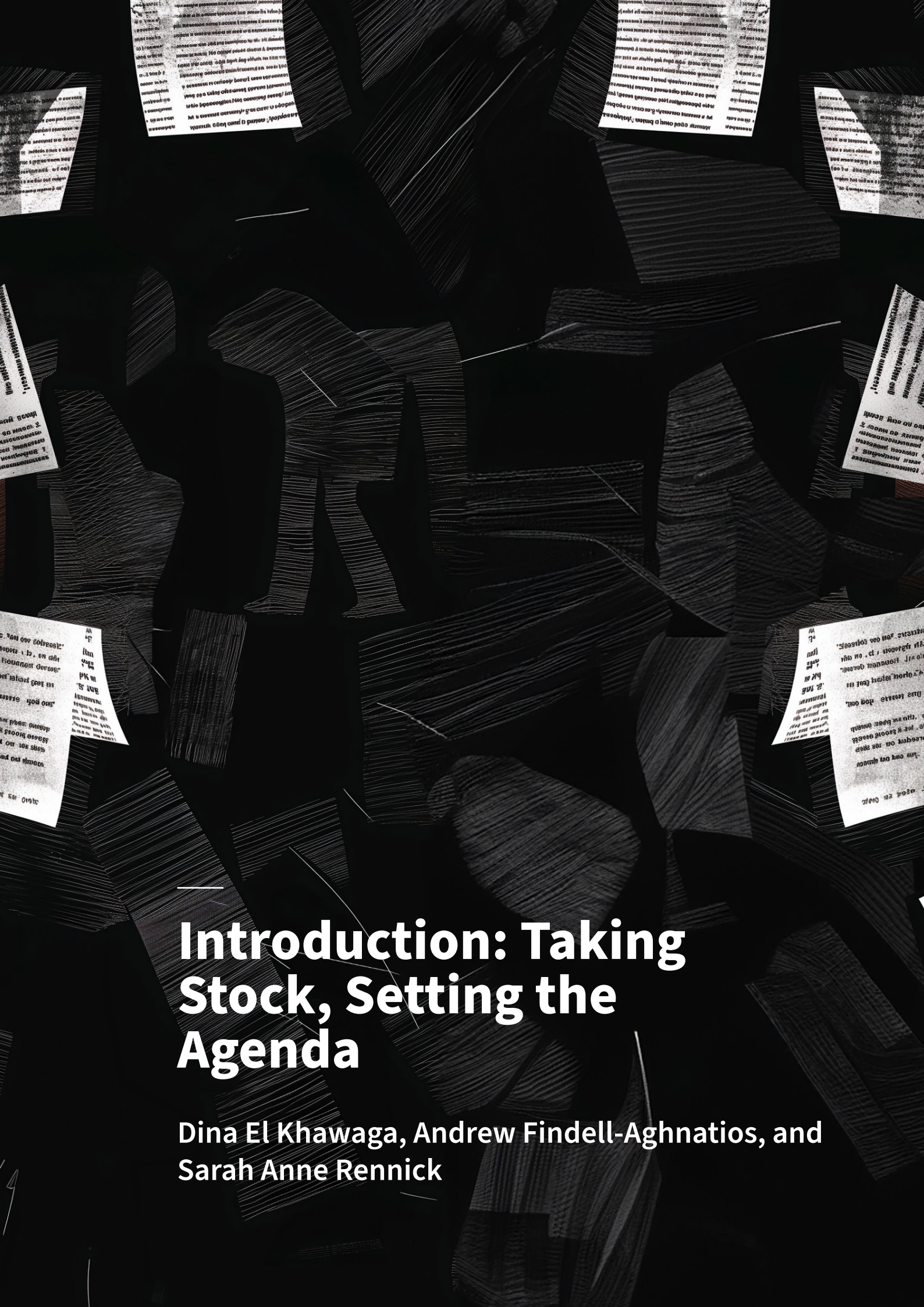

Introduction: Taking Stock, Setting the Agenda

Dina El Khawaga, Andrew Findell-Aghnatios, and Sarah Anne Rennick

This volume originally started as a conversation between academics from across the Arab world, all of whom have bridged their academic careers or professional development expertise to the public sphere in order to use their knowledge more actively to push for progressive, democratic change in their respective countries. Over the course of the conversation, Arab engaged scholars and activists shared a decade's worth of experiences and the lessons learned about how knowledge dissemination can help civil society organisations, community leaders, and average citizens to become informed and seasoned about the links between their grievances and demands and the public policies produced by their political systems. The conversation quickly shifted to how knowledge production can reinstate the 'public good' as a cornerstone of any social contract between governing groups and governed populations. Indeed, over the last decade, the Arab region has seen the emergence of this new generation of social scientists, activist-researchers, and experts (individuals, networks, or organizations), who are seeking to use their research and the knowledge they produce for the purpose of informing the public sphere and contributing to or questioning the public policy agenda in their respective countries. Like the authors collected in this volume, they became more focused on "policy change" as a main drive for their knowledge production. Evidently, other variables fostered this shift as think tanks, INGOs, and funding agencies were keener to measure impact in terms of tangible policy change, even in hard transitional contexts like the ones which followed the collapse of the Arab Spring mobilizations and the consolidation of authoritarianism in countries such as Syria, Egypt, Sudan, Tunisia, and Lebanon. Throughout this conversation, that lasted the better part of two years as expressed in public conferences and webinars as well as private roundtables and exchanges, these knowledge producers presented how they aim to play a pivotal role in feeding and shaping the public debate and driving the momentum of social movements. For most of them, the production and dissemination of knowledge serves not only as a catalyst for awareness or advocacy, but also equally as important reference for contentious politics against the new rise of authoritarianism across the region.

These individuals, networks, organizations, collectives, academics, and researchers' efforts are neither merely a reaction to the paralysis of traditional policymaking tracks and processes, nor just a response to large social movements rocking the region in the last decade and a half. Rather, they have emerged in part to counter the neoliberal reforms in university systems that have weakened the role of academic institutions in "framing" social demands as inputs to public agenda setting, and dragged professors into highly competitive races over tenure-ship and long publication technical records. Likewise, they have tried to serve as an "abeyance structure" (Taylor, 1989) that allows resistance and voice within the new restrictive conditions that followed the disengagement of thousands of social and political activists across the region.

These emerging "activist-researchers" (organizations and individuals) have since produced knowledge and contributed to a rethinking of public policy outside state-centered or state-led platforms and processes. After a short bracket where their expertise was solicited at the peak of the Arab Spring mobilization, they often ended up stigmatized, marginalized, silenced, or forced to exile. Our collaborative and iterative conversation ended up by focusing on the aftermath of these experiences, with participants rethinking the purpose and role of knowledge production, both within and outside campus walls and think tanks' programs, in this high-cost environment of activism and censured policy debates. Our discussions highlighted the growing difficulties of fostering change via incremental and alliance-building approaches. In essence, this community of emerging activist-scholars has shown a multiplicity of forms that aim to impact policymaking and public debates in a more contentious way and from a community or network-based position. This has come hand in hand with an advancement in the purpose of knowledge as a "public good", a concept we believe could counterbalance the growing commodification of knowledge in policy circles and bring it back as a pre-requisite for all forms of inclusive social change.

Rethinking Knowledge On/For Public Policy

It is in this context that the Arab Reform Initiative (ARI) has sought to document and take stock of these experiences and lessons learnt through publication of this collective volume, in order to push for a deeper and more inclusive understanding of knowledge and its place in progressive public policy production.

The discussions leading to this final volume raised multiple questions, some of which have been tackled in the following pieces and others which were not addressed, though all of which require more thought and research in order to fine tune the field of knowledge production and its constant interaction with public policy studies in the region. The paucity of rigorous reflection on knowledge production in the Arab world from the region, and specifically its impact on public policy, is well documented, with Hanafi and Aravantis (2015) being one of few central works referenced on the topic.[1] While other regions in the Global South have developed and utilized indigenous or homegrown epistemologies and methodologies to address local problems as they relate to research policy decisions,[2] our region bears witness to a heavy reliance on foreign state of the arts, frequently with strong technical knowledge but lacking in a solid grasp of the local context (El-Mikawy and El Baradei, 2024).

Furthermore, this importation of foreign expertise, particularly North American, has served to simultaneously crowd out and delegitimize most local and organic knowledge producers and to marginalize their inputs in formal policy debates (ibid.). It has also allowed the State to cement its power with the veneer of 'objective' expertise that may 'coincidentally' align with its own agenda (Gagnon, 1989), a tactic typical of authoritarian regimes that can be seen in other regions in the world (Li and He, 2016). Indeed, policymaking in the Arab world has largely occurred through the closed-door discussions of those in power – mostly men – with vested interests, both economically and politically. Consultations with the larger population on matters of policy were most often tokenistic, serving either to secure foreign aid or assuage foreign concerns about a lack of democratic standards. The impact of foreign interests in local policymaking is hard to fully grasp, with both geopolitical and economic factors that influence the decisions made, changed, revoked, and implemented by those in power. By way of introduction, two papers presented in this book (Toukan; Sidani) examine the role that western institutions have played in specific sectors of the Arab policy arena.

Be it through teaching and transmitting western knowledge production on the region, or through the application of western-based solutions to local problems, or the preference for outside rather than local experts to consult and provide policy recommendations to those in power, local knowledge production in and from the MENA region on topics such as public policy or knowledge itself has suffered from a lack of support and recognition and has therefore been lacking in both quality and breadth.

However, in recent years, interest in the topic has grown due to the multiple crises that the region is facing, which serve as an entry point to understanding the nature and typology of knowledge produced. The Arab Spring in 2011 and the subsequent social protests in the Arab world presented a unique moment for the region

1 A Google Scholar search for "knowledge production" AND "Arab World" in English shows only two publications cited more than 40 times (Hanafi and Aravantis, 2015 (cited 117 times); Sadiki, 2018 (cited 42 times)), with none in Arabic or in French.

2 See for example: Phaahla (2006) and Canagarajah (2006).

to highlight the demands of social movements, and possibly channel and transform them into public policies, through more democratic processes and platforms. These protests managed to broadcast an increased awareness and inclination for, as the famous slogan goes, "freedom, equality and social justice." These demands, widespread across the region, pushed for policy to become more accessible, inclusive, and more relevant. They also called for feasible changes and participatory platforms to induce change.

Soon after, these hopes were proven to be fleeting. In fact, the traditional field of policy-making– under the strict control of governments and often based on personal interest as opposed to evidence and social gain –has become more and more irresponsive to the calls of civil society, social movements, and experts, due to both the shrinking of the public space and reconsolidation of authoritarian rules in the Arab world. This knowledge, hence, should be understood as operating in a crisis—the crisis of both the academy and the civil society as fully fledged partners in the public sphere.

Accompanying this continuously shifting space for discussion – though perhaps it would be more relevant to say in explicit reaction to it – has been a growing interest in the critic of public policies through reports, op-ed or investigative journalism. This was mainly produced by human rights NGOs, independent unions and syndicates, independent media, and analysis outlets, or engaged consultancy groups. All of these are trying to challenge public policy decisions and suggest alternatives, either inspired from analogous movements in the Global South, or other civil society social movements in the North.

Building the Epistemic Community

This volume brings together a diverse range of scholars and knowledge producing organizations that sprung up after 2011, with contributions from FTDES (Talbi, Tunisia), 10Tooba (Shawkat & Zaazaa, Egypt), CeSSRA (AbiYaghi & Yammine, Lebanon). It is a combination of solicited papers and those accepted through an open call launched in 2021 under the topic of "Unpacking 'Knowledge' as 'Public Good'." This call solicited proposals on topics such as teaching public policy in the Arab world; the role of "experts" and intellectuals; portraits of organizations that are producing knowledge and have an impact on policy making and public debates (their history, methodologies, purposes, etc.); and the process of building collaborative and bottom-up approaches to policy priorities in the Arab region. In doing so, we have attempted to bring together scholars, activists/researchers, and experts in order for them to address and reflect, critically and autobiographically, on the impact of the knowledge they produce on policy and/or public debates in their respective countries. After a competitive selection process, authors were invited to writing workshops and closed discussions in order to refine their ideas and hone the critical lens of their papers. The public webinars are available in a compiled playlist on the ARI YouTube channel, in addition to several explanatory videos about public policy in the region. This process allowed for both peer feedback and insights from other engaged experts in the field and a closed peer review process, facilitated by external discussants.

Key to these discussions was the nature of knowledge as a "public good." At the beginning of these discussions, we had taken "public good" to be understood as laid out by Stiglitz (1999), with two key criteria: (1) nonrivalrous consumption where "the consumption of one individual does not detract from that of another" and (2) nonexcludability where it is difficult, if not impossible, to exclude an individual from enjoying the

good.[3] However, it quickly became clear that the intersection of knowledge production as a public good and public policy is thorny at the best of times. Building on Habermas (1974),recent research has sought to show the often less than ideal nature of the public sphere in authoritarian contexts and the challenges this poses both to regimes and to mobilisation around issues of public policy.[4] Indeed, in a sharp critique of Stiglitz, Fine and van Waeyenberge (2006) reveal neocolonial and neoliberal lenses that reduce the "objective" credence that the utility of knowledge can be returned back to society at large, reminiscent of decolonialism, that would argue "the construction of the universal-western world … is always thought to establish, or defend, not the Law [as an objective and universally true set of rules], but rather its own laws presented as the Law" (Leca, 1991, author's translation).

Furthermore, the multiplicity of national, regional, and international stakeholders present in this ecosystem in the Arab world necessitates careful examination if a truly inclusive view of knowledge production and public policy(making) is to be taken. This ecosystem being far from homogenous, its discourse, debates, and decisions have tangible effects on all those residing in the local environment. Indeed, it is this heterogeneity, especially since the Arab Spring and the spaces that subsequently opened up for critical discussion, that has turned public policy into an arena for contentious politics[5], where local progressive researchers, academics, activists, and policymakers, as well as international or regional organizations and agendas, clash with their conservative counterparts over the status quo in an attempt to increase freedoms and democracy.

In such a contentious context, the questions explored by theorists such as Habermas (1974), Gagnon (1989), and Stiglitz (1999), and developed more concretely by Li and He (2016), become critical: when discussing the "public," what or who are we discussing? Public policy in the Arab world is easily equitable with State policy, which tends towards oppression of freedoms. Does knowledge as a "public good" therefore mean that, as Gagnon suggests, knowledge becomes a source of legitimacy for State power and serves only to reinforce authoritarian structures rather than pushing for progressive societal changes? Would it not be more pertinent to speak of public policy not as a vector for knowledge as a public good but rather as a space for contentious politics? Indeed, this is the direction reflection in the region has developed towards, fueled by El Khawaga (1997)'s push for relocalisation of western frames of reference as a final part of a three-step process that centers local references and continues Leca (1990)'s critique of the "universal-western world." Adly (2020) continues this discussion and recenters local knowledge and its resultant discussions, showing public policy to be a space of contentious politics. These questions are yet to find concrete answers, or even a fully developed debate in the tradition of other contexts, and yet are central to suggesting alternative paths to more inclusive politics in the Arab world and pave the ground for a multiplicity of policy-related platforms in academia, civil society, social movements, and local advocates.

The key inquiry which this publication seeks to address is the emergence of activists-researchers as an "epistemic community" that dynamically shapes the process of knowledge creation in a localized context. It also sheds light on how this community enables knowledge to transit from asocial injustice frame to a public cause, and how this knowledge has an impact on so called public-policies and public debates.

Twelve years after the Arab Spring, the bulk of research on knowledge production in the Arab world and the

3 Stiglitz, Joseph. 'Knowledge as a Global Public Good'. Global Public Goods: International Cooperation in the 21st Century, Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 308–25, short link.

4 For discussions on the intersection between authoritarianism and the public sphere, see: Dukalsis (2017) and Lei (2018)

5 For a discussion on contentious politics in Egypt around the issue of human rights, see: Adly 2018; 2020

impact it has on policies revolves around few poles: universities, human rights related think tanks, electronic journalism, and community organizing groups.[6] This volume aims to expand this literature and contribute to capture the knowledge that is produced outside the university. The book carves out a space for researchers/activists within the emerging topic of knowledge production in the Arab world.

Calling for a Paradigm Shift

The papers presented herein show a diverse array of methodologies, with the majority taking an autobiographic and reflexive approach, involving an analysis of their own pathways as activist-scholars and how they have sought to challenge orthodoxies in knowledge production and dissemination in order to create knowledge that matters and that responds to the needs and realities of the communities they represent or seek to work with. The papers reflect on the logics of knowledge production itself, involving an analysis of the political economies of research and publication; the positionality and social capital of different knowledge producers; and the hierarchies within researcher communities and the negative impacts these can have in terms of what type of knowledge ends up being produced and valued, and what this does to researchers in terms of their commodification and creation of new subalternity. The pieces also provide a vital lens to understanding what role knowledge currently plays, and what role it could play, in policy making, in informing the public sphere, and within communities that seek to advocate on their own behalf.

The papers of this volume have been brought together under four main subheadings, each dealing with a central pillar of the questions mentioned above:

1. **Theorizing the Limits of Knowledge as a Public Good**
   Written by Dina El Khawaga, this section describes three traditions of public policy research and their different positionality to the state, the international order and the established expertise and the Balkanization of knowledge in authoritarian contexts.

2. **Meso-scale Initiatives to Emancipatory Knowledge**
   In this section, Dina Wahba, Mario Mikhail, and Mai Amer examine the role of knowledge production in affecting/challenging general discourse, particularly in the context of Egypt. Through looking at knowledge production in exile, the type of knowledge produced during the events at Tahrir Square in 2011, and alternative pathways to knowledge, these papers address the role that non-traditional actors have in creating knowledge.

3. **International Actors in Local Policymaking: Mechanisms, Modalities, and Obstacles**
   Dima Toukam and Ola Sidani look at the role played by international organizations as pivotal actors, an immovable stakeholder in the policy ecosystem of the region. Through an examination of evaluation practices in development programs and an in-depth look at a Lebanese case study, the relationship between international, governmental, and civil agendas is clear, as is the impact of trust and transparency on the successful implementation of recommended policy changes.

6 Hanafi, Sari, and Arvanitis, Rigas. Knowledge Production in The Arab World: The Impossible Promise. Routledge, 2019.; سعيداني, منير ‘عدنان الأمين، (2021). إنتاج الفراغ. التقاليد البحثية العربية’. Insaniyat / إنسانيات, no. 92, June 2021, pp. 49–54. DOI.org (Cross-ref),https://doi.org/10.4000/insaniyat.25156.

4. **Reclaiming Knowledge as a Non-Commodified Public Good**
   In the most extensive section of this volume, Marie-Noelle AbiYaghi, Lea Yammine, Alaa Talbi, Yehia Shawkat, and Ahmed Zaazaa take a critically reflective look at their trajectories as academic practitioners of public policy change. The confluence of social science, architecture, and political science here allows for interesting deep dives into a lay-of-the-land perspective of actors calling for progressive change in the region. They look in particular at the evolution of their trajectories and organizations over time, and how most of them have tried to make their knowledge a tool for activists to undertake concrete actions to challenge or reform the policy agenda adopted by sector or within a local context, and to redefine the stakeholders and the policy solutions in a more inclusive and socially responsible ways.

Ultimately, this collective volume calls for the need for a paradigm shift in how knowledge is produced, communicated, valued, and utilized across the region. Though current discourse would suggest otherwise, knowledge cannot be considered a "public" good in contexts where the public itself is contested, through current discourse in the region. Such discourse, often framed as part of the "knowledge economy" and linked to fiscal reform and neoliberalism or confiscated in the name of national security by authoritarian regimes, erases the less-than-idyllic nature of the political systems in the region and can therefore not address the demands of a citizenry that increasingly calls for open and inclusive policymaking. This shift needs to happen both at the level of knowledge producers but also policymakers. Our hope is that this collective volume, in both its content as well as its process of production and communication, is contributing precisely to this paradigm shift. We invite our readers to also reflect on their research trajectories and directions, joining us in this conversation on how to better understand our roles as knowledge producers for progress.

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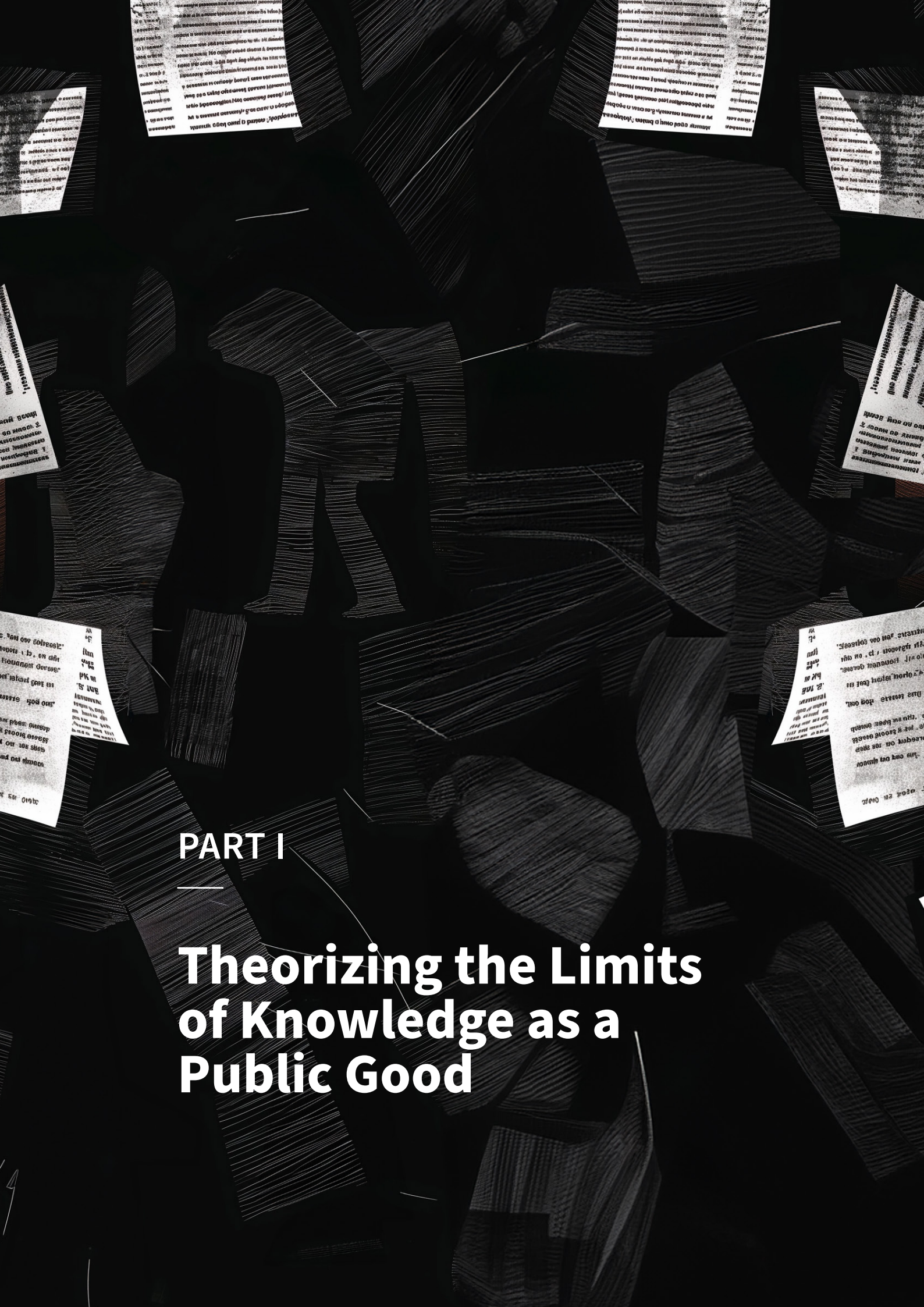

PART I

Theorizing the Limits of Knowledge as a Public Good

Sites and Channels of Public Policy Knowledge in the Arab Region: The Forest, the Trees, and the Poison Ivy

Dina El Khawaga

Introduction

This paper aims to achieve two things: First, it aims to provide an initial survey of the diverse sites of knowledge production related to public policy in the Arab region. This covers a wide range of contributors, including Arab universities that produce academic theses and courses; think tanks; and private and specialized research centers that publish papers, policy briefs, and recommendations or draft legislation aimed at offering alternatives to current policies. Additionally, it covers knowledge generated by human rights organizations or independent online journalism that seeks to engage communities and apply local and international pressure to address concerns and mitigate the negative impacts of certain public policies across various countries in the region. The second concern of this paper is to monitor the channels used to publish the knowledge produced, whether in the form of books; doctoral dissertations and master's theses; within the framework of seminars and lectures; annual or periodic reports; papers and policy summaries about consultations and partnerships with national or international official bodies; journalistic investigative pieces; or even judicial prosecutions against a state agency, the contents and pleadings of which are published on websites with the aim of denouncement, condemnation, mobilization, or building a legal precedent through strategic litigation.

This paper diverges from the common narrative among Arab scholars that criticizes the dominance of Western-centric approaches in public policy studies. These approaches are often viewed as "imported" or "hegemonic", serving as technical tools to bolster decision-makers' interests or to reinforce and legitimize political power structures. Instead, this paper interprets the prevalence of "Western centralism" as the gradual formation of a "political opportunity". This perspective has enabled knowledge producers in various contexts to define their unique positions and contribute to public policy knowledge. This evolution traces back from the emergence of post-independence states, through the development of regulatory states, to the current era of scrutinizing public actions within the framework of the social contract, significantly broadening the scope of public policy knowledge.

The paper aims to explore the interactions – or lack thereof – among the identified sites and channels of knowledge production. It seeks to understand how these structures of political opportunity have facilitated the emergence of diverse methods for disseminating or communicating knowledge, how these methods cater to different target audiences, and how they have led to the development of various analytical languages within the presented frameworks. Therefore, the

focus is on capturing the capacity for interaction and agency in producing knowledge – tracing the evolution of sites and channels of knowledge in the Arab context, as well as forms of interaction and production (i.e., agency) – starting from the era of independence, through the implementation of structural adjustment programs and governance concepts, all the way to the Arab revolutions. The paper aims to do so without succumbing to the notion of Western or neoliberal conspiracies against the region or perpetuating cultural narratives that suggest Arab societies are inherently incapable of adopting public policies in the sense understood in the institutional democratic West.

While acknowledging the challenges of comparing the institutional democratic nature of Western societies with the Arab context, which only formally adheres to these standards, the paper remains committed to examining the mechanisms of knowledge production under these conditions. It considers the positioning between authoritarian political systems and international institutions that support government policy reforms or producers of critical and potentially contentious knowledge. The analysis also extends to the general public, which, despite being the theoretical target audience, faces increasing marginalization and barriers to engage, express and influence the course of actions in the public domain.

Presented at the Sixth Conference of the Arab Council for the Social Sciences, this paper organizes its analysis into three sections, utilizing a participatory observation method. This approach reflects the researcher's varied professional experiences across government universities, academic research centers, independent think tanks, and donor organizations with differing stances on the Arab region's political systems. The research incorporates insights from seven in-depth interviews with Arab academics, researchers, and investigative journalists, alongside a review of publications from three university research centers and three independent research centers in Egypt. This wide selection, exclusively limited to the egyptian caseaims to establish a national model for future comparative studies.

The paper deliberately narrows its focus to literature on the social construction of public policies rather than engaging extensively with the policy cycle, functional or institutional analyses, or mapping the institutional landscape of policy research.

This choice underscores a preference for theoretical frameworks that emphasize the social dynamics of policy formation over more mechanistic or structural approaches. Employing qualitative analysis, the paper categorizes the types of knowledge produced in the field. This includes research that utilizes quantitative and statistical data to draft policy papers, suggest alternatives, and summarize policies, as well as more conventional formats found in doctoral dissertations and policy reports from think tanks. Innovative methodologies, such as ethnographic studies or field policy papers, are highlighted for their ability to capture citizen responses and narratives as direct evidence of policy impacts. Examples include investigative journalism on the Maspero Triangle residents by Omnia Khalil (2020) and strategic litigation efforts by the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (2008) challenging the mandatory religious classification of Baha'is on official documents. The paper also explores initiatives to contest the constitutionality of specific public policies before supreme courts (Salma Hussein, 2019).

Public Policy and the Fluidity of Its Definition

In his book Beyond Public Policy, Peter Spink poses a critical question regarding the expansive significance of what we mean by public policies within academic discourse. He debates whether the term public policies has transcended its academic confines to become a social language rather than a field with clearly defined research methods, units of analysis, and agreed-upon scientific domains. This expansion, especially notable in the context of Western democracies and particularly in North America, follows the emergence of governance concepts, globalization, and the broad application of the term to any public procedural activity or so-called "public action studies". This broadening, according to Spink, challenges our ability to clearly identify and map the interactions and practices within this field due to the growing fluidity and diversification of terminologies.

Spink's inquiry extends to the difficulty of tracking the myriad actors engaging with this language of public policies, and the resulting blurring of traditional academic boundaries. The phenomenon of conceptual fluidity, is not unique to public policy studies but also affects other domains such as budget and planning studies, human rights, and protest strategies. These areas, now perceived as social languages, drive various stakeholders in the public sphere toward change, employing new approaches, platforms, and sometimes conflicting strategies for public affairs reform.

In navigating these questions within the Arab context, specifically through a case study in Egypt aiming to create a

prototype of different policy research production sites, this paper considers knowledge produced for purely academic purposes by experts aiming to assist governmental or official decision-makers, and by entities focused on informing the public about political system practices through activist endeavors such as documentation, exposure, and legal actions against executive authorities. Through exploration of the dissemination methods these parties use to spread their knowledge, I posit a hypothesis contrasting Spink's notion of fluidity: the concept of balkanization of knowledge production. My hypothesis suggests a fragmentation among knowledge producers, influenced by different historical contexts and diverse authoritarian constraints, that limit public debate and knowledge exchange. Furthermore, the paper examines the role of donor agencies in shaping specific knowledge production sites and the strategies they adopt, whether in supporting policy reform through government collaboration or enhancing critical and denunciatory capacities toward political systems via human rights organizations and other civil society platforms.

While Peter Spink links the widespread use of the term policies in the Western context to the growing expectations from knowledge producers to exert influence on policy as a new benchmark for their work's value, he advocates for starting any inquiry with the theories of change at use as a means to measure the potential impact. This paper seeks to explore the dynamics of policy research within the Arab region, whether in the sphere of pure academic research, expertise provided to support political systems and decision-makers, and efforts aimed at enlarging the social base engaged in public discourse. These efforts include publishing, advocacy, and litigation intended to modify specific aspects of public policies through mechanisms of pressure, mobilization, and critique, both locally and internationally. The paper tracks the evolution of these sites of policy knowledge production over several decades and assess the diversity of knowledge dissemination strategies they employ, with the goal of assessing the partition between these entities and analyzing their cognitive references, publication formats, targeted audiences, and strategies for enhancing the utility of public policy knowledge. Such strategies have a range of objectives from rationalizing policymaking and bolstering government stability to adhering to governance principles, exposing the adverse social impact of certain policies or documenting citizens' complaints. Thus, the paper elucidates the interaction mechanisms within an interstitial field of knowledge production, bringing together academia, think tanks, human rights organizations, and investigative journalism. It highlights the variety of methods proposed for knowledge dissemination – even within the same entity – to widen the impact scope, reaching and enlightening the target audience, fostering awareness of the collated references, and stimulating public discourse on the presented knowledge.

Sites of Public Policy Knowledge Production: A Changing Context

In this section, we aim to develop a chronological typology of the various sites of public policy knowledge production and the contexts that have influenced their creation, as well as their distinct roles in the production process. It is important to note that, despite the chronological order in which these sites appeared, the principle of parallelism persists to the present day. This means that each site, regardless of the specifics of its initial formation, continues to operate concurrently with others, a concept that aligns with Pierre Bourdieu's notion of structured structures (Bourdieu, 1980).

Arab Academia

Public policy education emerged as a specialized field within Arab universities during the 1960s and 1970s, primarily within political science or public administration departments. This development was supported by academics from political science, economics, and law backgrounds, but it did not extend to the establishment of independent departments dedicated solely to public policy. We delve into two pivotal moments in the development of this academic field as the first site.

The first phase occurred in the post-independence era, marked by a focus on developmental planning, industrialization, and import substitution driven by a developmental and protectionist economic rationale. This period saw the state expanding its institutional control and oversight capabilities, framing these activities under the banner of "planned" public policies. The foundational assumption during the 1960s and 70s was that the state was responsible for all resource allocation to fulfill its social functions, including providing employment, housing, transportation, education, and health coverage, without relying on the private sector or foreign financial support. This phase also emphasized the theoretical push toward the institutional development of a modern, efficient postindependence state. Academics contributed to this effort by sharing lessons from comparative experiences, developing state affiliated oversight structures, preparing students for public sector employment, and legitimizing the significance and positive impact of planned public policies.

The second significant development in the field of public policy education occurred in the late 1980s and early 90s. This period saw the redefinition of public policy in both public (governmental) and private universities, the latter often providing approaches in foreign languages and based on Western academic traditions. The focus shifted toward addressing the challenge of allocating scarce resources amidst competing needs and interests. This new approach emphasized stakeholder engagement, transforming the state's role to that of an arbiter from that of a direct participant in the allocation of resources and public spending priorities within a more pluralistic political system.

This transformation in defining public policy as both an academic and a professional field is intricately linked with the gradual shift toward political and partisan pluralism observed across Arab political systems in the 1980s. This shift, alongside the crystallization of governance principles as a prerequisite for bolstering international recognition and cooperation, marked a pivotal change after the decline of the bipolar international system. Such developments necessitated a significant overhaul of public policy curricula and the orientation of graduate theses within universities. Emerging conceptual frameworks, predominantly originating from the US, emphasized a functional and technical approach.

These frameworks advocated for viewing public policies through a lifecycle lens and stressed the importance of recognizing the diversity of actors involved – including governmental and non-governmental entities – through concepts like policy networks, issue coalitions, interest groups, and street-level bureaucracy, with the aim of to enhancing skills in monitoring, documenting, and evaluating the policy process.

This American-derived conceptual dominance continues to pervade Arab academia, often adopted verbatim without critical examination of its applicability to the unique sociopolitical realities of Arab or national contexts. Such an uncritical adoption overlooks the urgent need for theoretical development, especially considering the region's exposure to significant political upheavals such as state failures, the Arab Spring movements, and the entrenchment of authoritarian regimes aligning closely with Western interests in countries like Egypt, Tunisia, and Morocco.

The 1990s stands out as a decade that cemented public policy as a distinct and significant academic field of postgraduate education, attracting individuals from diverse backgrounds like political science, economics, project management, accounting, architecture, and tourism. The era also witnessed the rise of the "policy analyst" as a key professional focusing more on practical application than theoretical discourse. Departments and institutes have since concentrated on equipping students with skills for monitoring and evaluating public policy processes, implementation mechanisms, evaluation skills and the development of alternatives.

The competition between public and private universities to secure partnerships with state agencies and ministries for policy implementation projects, as well as to attract research funding from international donors, highlights a common goal: to influence and improve policy formulation and implementation. Despite these efforts, the participation of national universities in international forums for policy documentation and evaluation remains limited compared to their international private counterparts, which engage more deeply in cooperation agreements with government entities and transnational policy analysis networks, and thus establishing themselves as more solid sources of policy knowledge.

Think Tanks, Private Research Centers, and Policy as the Dispersed Practices of Executive Government

The expansion of civil society's role, the increasing prominence of NGOs, and the proliferation of think tanks and research centers outside of academic institutions has significantly influenced the formulation of policy proposals. Independent policy research centers and think tanks – often established with specific funding visions and missions – focus on rationalizing, evaluating, and presenting policy alternatives within various sectors such as social, economic, security, urban or gender policies. Their contributions to policy discourse are marked by two distinct characteristics from traditional academic research.

First, these entities tend to narrow their focus to specific policy sectors, treating each as a separate domain (e.g., education policy, housing, energy policy). This approach stems from the understanding that policymaking processes within state agencies are multifaceted and complex,

making it impractical to study the state as a unified actor. Instead, they view the state as a public arena for interaction and competition among diverse policy sets produced by governmental and social elites, national and international pressure groups, and international funding bodies. This fragmentation and the partitioning of the political landscape have unveiled new insights into actors previously marginally explored in academic literature. For instance, they shed light on interest groups that collaborate financially with the state to reshape urban planning policies, as well as those implicated in corrupt practices affecting the distribution of government support at the local level in conjunction with private sector traders. Additionally, it allowed to explore the resistance of some bureaucratic wings to policy reform (such as public school teachers blocking curriculum updates, often to benefit private book traders compagnies or private educational centers, highlighting their significant influence within the education sector (Hania Sobhi, 2023), and the emergence of new business elites from a military background who collaborate with international institutions regarding strategic industry sectors such as energy (Mohamad Gad, 2022).

Second, these centers and think tanks have contributed to blurring the boundaries between national experts working in official government departments and those engaged with international institutions through legal partnerships (e.g., UN agencies, the EU, international financial institutions). This phenomenon, absent in the traditional, national, state-building narrative, facilitated a seamless transition between national government sectors and advisory or executive roles in international organizations. This overlap marked a shift in the public policy knowledge landscape, blending national policymaking with international evaluation and reform agendas. It illustrated how national experts can evolve into transnational policy analysts or research supervisors within think tanks or international institutions, aiming to rationalize and reform policies they once helped to create.

This blending of roles indicates a trend toward aligning knowledge production with international standards and Western frameworks, particularly those from American literature, which may not always align with the structural realities of Arab political systems. Moreover, it emphasizes a focus on program and project life cycles as fundamental units in public policy work, driven by donor priorities that shape programmatic agendas and incorporate national talents to facilitate documentation, cooperation, and training.

Further, this second approach primarily emphasizes the generation of applied knowledge, employing extensive fieldwork, statistical surveys, and the analysis of macrolevel variables to assess the efficiency of resource allocation within various sectoral policies. This method often involves comparing these evaluations on an international scale and using these comparisons as a basis for policy recommendations. These recommendations aim to make technical amendments to policies, typically without addressing the underlying social power dynamics that originally shaped these policies or considering the challenges in gaining approval and support for proposed changes.

A notable instance of this applied-knowledge production includes the work of independent policy research centers on compulsory education policy challenges, such as those studied by the Economic Research Forum. Similarly, reports addressing the issues faced by immigrants and displaced individuals in the aftermath of the Arab Spring focus on crafting recommendations for housing, employment, and mobility rights management. In all previous examples, recommendations were made regardless of the existence of national and international political forces that may obstruct the modification, reform, or more efficient resource allocation within these policy areas (Baseera Center, “On Development Goals”, 2018).

The Human Rights Approach

Since the beginning of the 2000s, the human rights movement has emerged as a significant counterpoint to dominant nationalist, leftist, and liberal narratives, fueled by political activists’ frustration with superficially multi- party systems that merely repackage old power structures. The co-optation or neutralization of the political influence of professional and labor unions by political systems has aggravated the vacuum, paving the way for alternative frameworks calling for collective action from outside political parties or professional unions. Demographic trends, such as the increasing youth population and urbanization in the Arab region, have further encouraged the adoption of legal lens as an alternative approach to public affairs. Moreover, political systems’ expanded use of repression and stigmatization against opposition has positioned the human rights approach as an effective means to address citizens’ daily grievances and the injustice practices imposed to many informal groups.

The spread of international human rights instruments

and discourse, and the growth of transnational solidarity networks focusing on economic or social rights and civil or political rights, have been supported by progressive donors. These donors have highlighted human rights organizations as key actors in international cooperation, emphasizing their role in providing comparative knowledge and fostering advocacy networks. The first decade of the new millennium witnessed the establishment of specialized human rights organizations and alliances aimed at advocating for rights in various sectors, such as employment, housing, education and freedom of expression, marking a significant shift toward addressing public grievances through the rights lens.

The knowledge produced by these nascent human rights organizations is characterized by several distinctive features. They target the legality or constitutionality of specific public policies and create public discourse around executive practices that infringe upon rights, such as discriminatory actions against women who wear the niqab that bar them from entering public libraries and universities, or against religious minorities such as the members of the Bahai faith who were prevented from registering as such in personal status documents. It also includes budget cuts in compulsory education, and the neglect of laws protecting strategic sectors. Emphasis is also placed on documenting violations and presenting findings through press releases and media statements to garner regional and international support and advocacy.

Field documentation became a crucial element for human rights organizations, as extensive fieldwork can help to include and represent a broad range of social groups, providing a solid foundation for the organizations' research and policy proposals. Legal documentation and litigation have also become hallmarks of this approach, with the use of cause lawyering as a particularly significant contentious repertoire since 2010. Lawsuits aimed at policy changes, such as adjusting the minimum wage in the public sector, have not only facilitated the airing of grievances but have also enabled legal victories through court decisions, pioneering a method of legal advocacy and policy change previously unseen in the Arab region. Strategic litigation and the establishment of legal clinics in peripheral areas have become key methods of engaging ordinary citizens with public policies (Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights, 2010-2013).

From Sites to Channels: Options for Disseminating Public Policy Knowledge in Non-Democratic Contexts

A complete overview of public policy knowledge requires more than mapping the production process; it is also crucial to examine the "channels" through which this knowledge is disseminated. This involves assessing the impact of each site of policy knowledge production on the dissemination methods employed and evaluating the flexibility of actors within each site to either adapt to existing channels and patterns for sharing their knowledge or to innovate new methods to stimulate public debate and engage wider constituencies against decision-makers.

Through in-depth interviews and an a review of all private university research institutes publications, legal and research centers, think tanks focused on policy and reform websites, and even online journalism platforms, it has been possible to compile an inventory of the knowledge dissemination patterns utilized in the public policy arena in Egypt. This analysis helps to differentiate among three fundamental dissemination patterns observed across various contexts, especially in the current landscape: written, oral, and (unpublished) consulting.

The diverse list of channels used for disseminating knowledge highlights the breadth of approaches adopted, regardless of the specific audience targeted in each case. What is crucial here is to use this list as a starting point to distinguish between conventional and innovative publishing methods – whether they cater to national audiences, international decision-makers, or regional and international solidarity networks. The innovative approaches are designed to spark debate and critique of policies that are either currently in effect or will soon be implemented, aiming to engage activist circles in broadening the scope of their opposition and resistance. This strategy often involves transforming social issues into public problems (Erik Neveu, 1998).

Written Channels

- Scientific dissertations and published papers in academic journals
- Policy reports published[1]
- Policy papers and position papers[2]
- Policy weekly digest[3]
- Press releases and statements[4]
- The call for international solidarity with a rising mobilisation
- Ethnographic articles from stakeholders' perspectives[5]
- Publishing testimonials of affected people in investigative reports Oral

Channels

- Seminars (open or closed) by Cairo University and the American University in Cairo
- The publication of comparative experiences
- The invitation of academic expert to present counter policy solutions
- The initiation of semi governmental platforms for collaborative agenda setting with scholars[6]
- The launch of research hub working as free consultants for ministries before piloting new policies[7]

Unpublished Consulting Channels

On the other hand, the increased control of the public sphere was unable to totally stop other forms of unwritten knowledge dissemination. Many esteemed rights and research organizations used the tight marge of manœuvre to undertake other forms to reach and inform wider constituencies, through:

- Stakeholder session simulations for draft laws[8]
- Pilot phase management before implementing laws[9]

Channels of State-Produced Policy Knowledge: The Forest

The metaphor of the forest, trees, and poison ivy serves as a useful framework to differentiate the perspectives adopted by various knowledge dissemination channels.

The "forest" refers to policy reports crafted by experts, often on behalf of state actors, which either explicitly or implicitly provide broad indicators to support the policy objectives or legitimize governmental choices. These reports typically link the policies under review to the political system's national projects or international commitments, prompting the initiation of these policy projects. Examples include works by the Social Research Center in 2009, the Baseera Center in 2017, the Public Administration Research & Consultation Center at Cairo University in 2019, and the Information and Decision Support Center in 2020. They often detail the expected or realized phases of the policies under examination, list potential pitfalls, and offer recommendations to mitigate them or to bolster them with additional resources, whether material or symbolic.

Financial, transportation, and construction policy reports from universities or national think tanks, whether issued in partnership with government bodies like ministries or from research centers close to decision-making circles, exemplify this literature type. Despite their nominal independence, these reports adopt a totalistic lens that views the state as a unified actor with a cohesive, multilevel strategy, even if the policy in question originates from a specific executive body. This forest perspective is prevalent in reports funded by international programs from the US, the EU, and other governmental funding bodies as they vie for a portion of

1 For examples, see: the Economic Research Forum, a public policy research project at the American University of Cairo called Alternative Policy Solutions (APS), and the Baseera Center

2 For examples, see: John Gearhart Center and the APS

3 Currently these are published only by the APS

4 For examples, see: Mada Masr, the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR) pressure campaigns, the Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights litigation documentation, and Al-Manassa

5 For examples, see the work of the Social Research Center at AUC

6 For an example, see: the COP 27 conference in Egypt

7 For examples, see: The Public Policy HUB at AUC and the Public Admine istration Consulting Center at Cairo University

8 For examples, see: the EIPR, the Public Policy Hub

9 This included, for example: the organization of local and international expert consultation sessions; the mediatisation of new laws through national campaigns in collaboration with the national press or government donors to support new models of social protection; or targeted governmental projects

development funds by promoting prospective cooperation projects.

This comprehensive view aligns with national analytical reports from universities and their associated research centers, such as the Faculty of Economics at Cairo University's reports on civil service law, social protection programs, or political reforms in the small and microenterprise sector, often sponsored by the Ministry of Social Solidarity. Similarly, this approach was illustrated in SRC publications on the pilot phases of conditional cash support programs in Ain al-Sira and Sohag in 2009.

Channels of Sectoral Policy Research: The Trees

The second approach to producing and disseminating public policy knowledge is represented by sectoral policy papers that focus on the objectives, stakeholders, formulations, and implementation stages of specific laws and procedures. This includes analytical papers from training programs for bureaucrats like schoolteachers or public employees, initiatives for modernizing electronic educational tools during the COVID-19 pandemic, efforts to expedite public service delivery through e-government, or programs aimed at combating discrimination against women in the labor market. These policies, internationally supported by specialized UN agencies either directly to governments or through international evaluation units within the recipient country, labeled as international cooperation, exemplify this model.

Led by independent research centers, the "trees" model emphasizes the resources allocated to a specific sectoral policy while largely ignoring other concurrent projects and the degree of social support or resistance to these policy reforms. The literature is characterized by its technical and technocratic nature, relying on quantitative data from governmental or international sources to detail the policy's formulation, evaluation, implementation, and potential modifications..

Additionally, the tree model addresses its production to think tanks in other regions, such as Southeast Asia, Africa, or South America, aiming to produce universally applicable knowledge that facilitates comparisons beyond Euro-American centrism, adhering to globally recognized standards in policymaking within economic and social development sectors (Raji Asad, 2014). Amidst this institutionalized landscape, a few think tanks focus on engaging with international financial circles, offering subtly critical assessments within a scientific framework to maintain their status in international policy debates. Notably, some choose to operate outside of Egypt to evade the pressures faced by critical knowledge producers, such as the regional offices of Carnegie, the Middle East Council on Global Affairs (formerly part of the Brookings Institution), the International Crisis Group, the Arab Reform Initiative, and the Unity Institute for Public Policy.

The Confrontational Approach of Exposing Policy: The Poison Ivy

A third, more recent, and confrontational form of policy research, which we term "poison ivy" literature, demands recognition for its fully legitimate role in public policy knowledge production, despite its relative newness. This form utilizes a language focused on denouncing and exposing the policies under study. It manifests through op-Ed's, policy summaries, or quasi-academic books that delve into the socially prohibitive costs of certain policies, as highlighted by researchers like Yahya Shawkat and Ahmed Zaazaa in a meeting hosted by ARI in 2023. Poison ivy literature critiques the government's failure to integrate inclusivity and social cohesion into broad policies or points out the lack of a consultative foundation in the inception of policy projects, as observed by Omnia Khalil in 2020.

The emergence and proliferation of this type of literature have been particularly notable among human rights platforms and observatories around and during the Arab Spring revolutions. It emphasizes documenting comprehensive and qualitative indicators to underscore the severity of policies or the need for their amendment, rather than justifying or supporting policy creation and implementation processes. Additionally, there is a significant increase in the adoption of this confrontational stance among numerous research groups, human rights and urban observatories, and feminist organizations, particularly those based in the diaspora following the contraction of freedom in various countries across the region, especially Egypt. This trend reflects the growing phenomenon of

politically active policy researchers emigrating from their home countries to continue their work in free spaces from the constraints of burgeoning authoritarian regimes.

Moreover, the continuation of this contentious poison ivy model within human rights organizations, academic and professional groups, and networks of activists – including human rights advocates, engineers, urban planners, feminists, and those focused on digital or environmental activism – demonstrates a shift away from the traditional think tank model and its rigid organizational structures. This innovative approach to critiquing policies, revealing the injust consequences and condemning the obstructions that prevent their dissemination into the public sphere is exemplified by journalistic websites that emerged in the aftermath of the Arab Spring, such as Mada Masr, Daraj, Megaphone, al-Manassa, and Maaref.

Additionally, organizations like the Urban Observatory in Berlin and the Tahrir Research Group in DC have embraced investigative journalism techniques from their inception, focusing on training their staff in these documented approaches based on credible statistics and data and drawing from the principles of citizen and Western investigative journalism to support protest movements and community mobilization.

Inside Egypt, platforms like Mada Masr and al-Manassa conduct documented investigations into the impact of policies on citizens, going beyond mere quantitative analysis to convey the experiences of those directly affected by these policies. This method often involves modern research techniques, such as ethnographic or field research, distinguishing these efforts from the more publication-focused approach of traditional think tanks and research centers, which are more cautious about crossing the restrictive boundaries of field research in Egypt.

Some policy research produced under this third model finds its way to publishing circles, research centers, and even prestigious universities – albeit only occasionally; this is to broaden its audience reach, rather than working as equal partners in collaborative research endeavors. The publication of works through academic channels and conferences, or within renowned think tanks, by entities like 10 Tooba in Egypt and Public Works in Lebanon illustrates this nascent and occasional cooperation among diverse knowledge producers. This collaboration has the potential, even if it is still marginal, to overcome the fragmentation prevalent in public policy research in Egypt and most likely in the rest of the Arab region and to challenge conventional notions about sectoral policy paper methodologies, technical writing, and the necessity of engaging decision-makers.

Conclusion

This deconstructivist survey aimed to explore the diversity of knowledge production regarding public policies in Egypt as a first case Study within the Arab region, challenging the perceived exclusivity and performance centrality of the various groups operating within the three distinct sites of public policy knowledge production as identified in this paper. Rather than viewing these sites as wholly separate categories, the survey tried to underscore the interconnectedness of these entities and the fallacy of the assumption that influencing decision-makers through public policy knowledge production is inherently fraught with challenges.

The paper specifically addressed the misconception that reliable public policy knowledge cannot be generated in an environment characterized by institutional opacity and information withholding, typical of many Arab political systems. It advocated for a nuanced understanding of the complex interrelations between different knowledge production sites, highlighting the limited room for innovation and influence due to structural constraints such as funding accessibility, audience reach, and the adherence to uniform professional standards across various platforms and methodologies.

Furthermore, the paper reviewed the barriers to exerting influence beyond the conventional models previously considered paradigmatic for each site. It emphasized the need to detach the knowledge production channels and patterns from their originating contexts to prevent performance rigidity, whether the aim is to better support political systems, social programs, or to critique specific policies. The division between these sites and methodologies is not something that can be overcome by top-down decisions or political mandates. Instead, it calls for a gradual cultivation of networking opportunities within a constrained public sphere, encouraging critical self-reflection among knowledge producers about their original positions and the myopic nature of their perspectives, which tend to view public policies either as a monolithic forest, isolated trees, or invasive poison ivy to be systematically eradicated through public advocacy and pressure.

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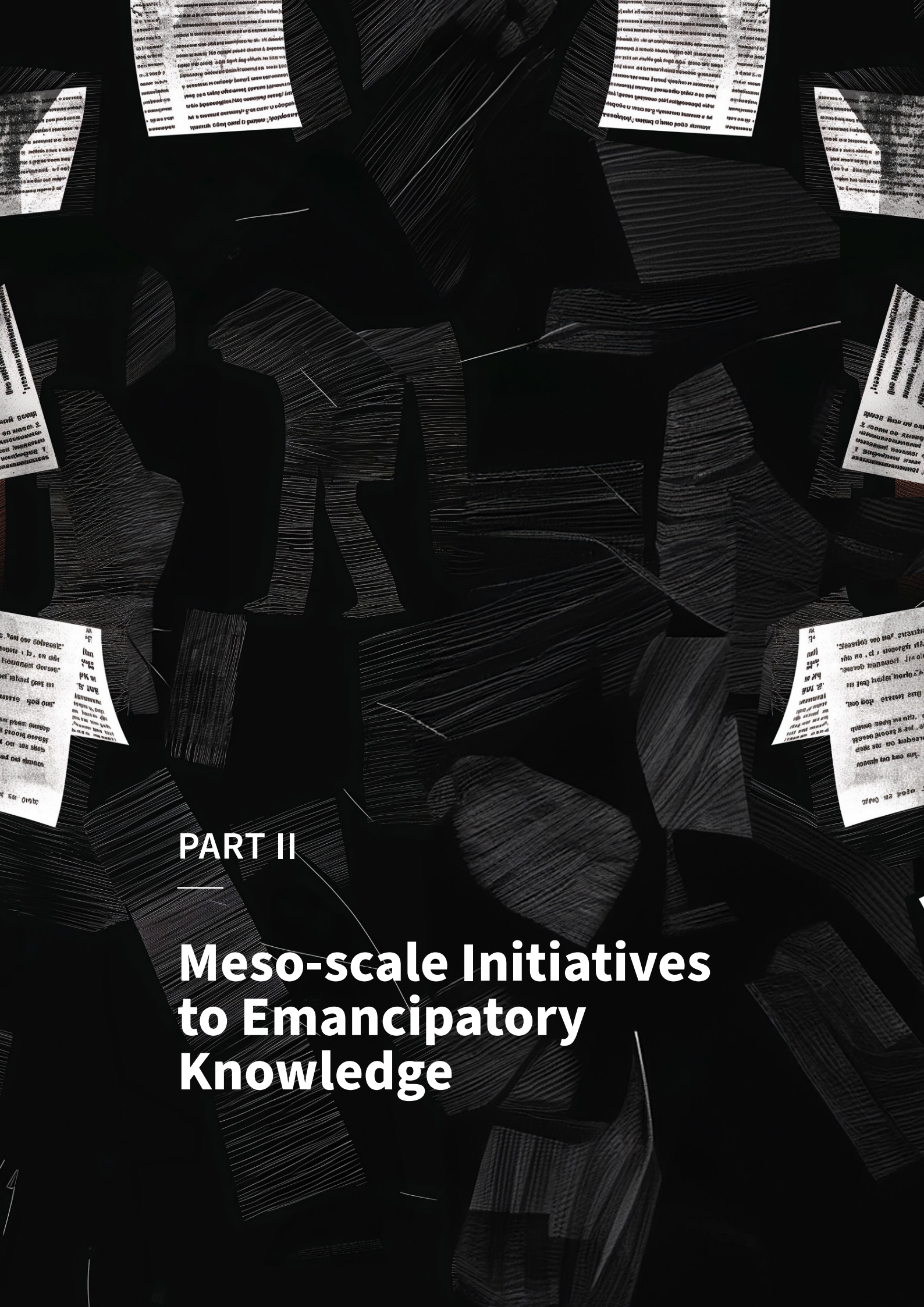

PART II

Meso-scale Initiatives to Emancipatory Knowledge

Expanding Access to Humanities in Egypt: Alternative Pathways to Knowledge

Mai Amer

Introduction

Over the past decade in Egypt, numerous initiatives aimed at making diverse fields of knowledge accessible to the wider public have been launched by experts across all fields against a backdrop shaped by the January 25 Revolution in 2011, the digital communication revolution, and the COVID-19 pandemic. These initiatives adopted various approaches including live sessions, content creation and publication, workshops and training sessions, short video production for social media platforms, and audio podcasting. Some of these initiatives have preserved their independence through self-funding efforts, like those from Tahrir University, or by gathering public subscriptions, such as the Story and Novel YouTube series by writer Belal Fadl. Others have secured funding from cultural and developmental organizations, as did the Salmon podcast by journalist Israa Saleh. Others still, such as the Into Civilization YouTube series by Mohamed Saadani, have also made significant contributions on various media channels.

Several of these initiatives showcased a diverse range of content, such as the al-Daheeh program by Ahmed Ghandour, which aimed to simplify and merge applied sciences with the humanities to enrich its subject matter. In contrast, other initiatives focused exclusively on a single field. For example, the al-Espitalia channel on YouTube offered medical seminars by Dr. Iman Imam, while the Speak, History initiative by Alia Muslim dedicated itself to exploring historical topics.

In the midst of this intellectual activity, the humanities received special attention from scholars and educators. This focus was driven by the humanities' role in understanding the world, especially in light of the January 25 Revolution. This event not only prompted questions about the new world shaped by its aftermath but also analyzed the old world that led many to take to the streets demanding change. Consequently, several initiatives emerged to make humanities accessible beyond the confines of Egyptian universities, offering alternative and participatory forms of learning.

Numerous initiatives aimed at making the humanities accessible through simplification, enrichment, and presentation. These efforts addressed personal, group, and societal issues, shedding light on the theoretical frameworks that underpinned them or the theories developed to explain periods of change. They also included experimental research on contemporary topics that researchers encountered in their daily lives. These initiatives include Seket Maaref,[1] the Cairo Institute of Liberal Arts and Sciences,[2] the Anthropology in Arabic YouTube series,[3] the Shubra Archive Center,[4] the

1 See Seket Maaref, available at https://seketmaaref.com/

2 See The Cairo Institute of Liberal Arts and Sciences (CILAS), available at http://www.ci-las.org/

3 See "AnthropologyBel3araby" Facebook page, available at https://www.facebook.com/AnthropologyBel3araby/

4 See "Shubra Archives" Facebook page, available at https://www.facebook.com/shubra.archives/

Boring Books blog,[5] Qira2at.com,[6] and the Into Civilization program.[7]

Some of these initiatives kicked off shortly after the revolution, during a time of significant political shifts in Egypt marked by several changes in leadership, starting with the interim presidency of Adly Mansour, followed by Mohamed Morsi of the Muslim Brotherhood, and leading up to the current term of President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi.

These initiatives varied in their engagement with the evolving political, social, and economic landscape, navigating through phases of openness, tightening, and shutdown. Such fluctuations in the public sphere directly influenced how these initiatives operated and evolved. The COVID-19 pandemic and its accompanying social distancing measures also had a significant effect on many initiatives. Many were able to leverage technological advancements to adapt by shifting their activities online, which not only allowed them to continue but also to reach Arabic-speaking audiences from other countries. However, initiatives that prioritized in-person interaction for their sessions paused operations for nearly two years; some of these are still inactive. The impact of these conditions on the sustainability of these initiatives underscored the importance of documenting their experiences and understanding the challenges they face.

In this research paper, we specifically focus on two initiatives, Seket Maaref and Anthropology in Arabic, for their emphasis on the humanities and their exploration of various topics and issues. Seket Maaref, launched in 2014 by a group of humanities professors, prioritized live meetings for its activities. In contrast, Anthropology in Arabic, started in 2019, initially made its mark with video episodes on social media platforms.

The shared goal of these two initiatives, alongside the differences in their management approaches, operational processes, and the backgrounds of their founders, sparked a keen interest in examining their relationship with the changes in the Egyptian context – specifically, the January 25 Revolution and its aftermath, the digital communication revolution, and the COVID-19 pandemic. It also raised questions about how they designed their methods, their approaches to language and translation, their economic strategies for sustainability, the challenges they encountered, and the founders' vision for future continuity.

The researcher, deeply involved in the humanities through her master's and doctoral studies in cultural studies, benefited greatly from various initiatives aimed at making the humanities accessible. Specifically for the two initiatives being studied, she served as a coordinator for Seket Maaref and actively followed the visual content of Anthropology in Arabic, even participating in one of its workshops.

The study's primary objective was to document the operational processes of two Egyptian initiatives dedicated to making humanities more accessible. It sought to answer key questions about the aims of these humanities-accessibility initiatives, the challenges they encountered, and how these challenges are related to the Egyptian political, economic, and social landscape.

Employing a qualitative approach, this descriptive study gathered data through a structured series of six in-depth interviews – three for each initiative. The interviewees included the founder, a translation coordinator, and a beneficiary from each initiative, in addition to the researcher's direct observations from participating in initiative activities and ethnographic analysis and based on her experiences as a beneficiary.

The Status of Humanities in Egypt

The humanities, perceived as theoretical and less practical, are often in stiff competition with the applied sciences, which are viewed as directly beneficial for societal progress. For many years, the Egyptian Ministry of Higher Education has reinforced this dichotomy, placing faculties such as medicine, pharmacy, and engineering at the pinnacle of academic hierarchy. These faculties, known as Summit Colleges, require high entrance grades from high school, underscoring their prestige. All these colleges focus on applied sciences, with the notable exception of the College of Economics and Political Science.

The humanities is typically housed within the arts faculties in most Egyptian universities. Departments like sociology, history, and languages are longstanding and integral to these faculties. However, disciplines like anthropology are

5 See Boring books, available at https://boringbooks.net/

6 See Qira2at, available at https://qira2at.com/category/العلوم-الإنسانية/

7 See Into Civilization, Ana Alaraby, available at https://www.facebook.com/watch/AnaAlarabyTV/528772811568451/

less common. Farah Hallaba,[8] founder of Anthropology in Arabic, notes: "I didn't even know what anthropology was, so I initially studied cinema. It was in Turkey that I discovered anthropology and developed a passion for it, leading me to pursue further studies in England. A major aim of my initiative is to introduce high school students to anthropology." While anthropology is offered within the sociology department, it was not until recently that it was established as a separate department at Alexandria University, where it welcomes undergraduates and postgraduates. Anthropology is also taught at the Institute of African Research and Studies at Cairo University, offering postgraduate diplomas, master's degrees, and doctoral degrees.

Postgraduate studies in Egyptian universities come with a heavy load of bureaucratic requirements, one of which includes having an undergraduate degree in the same field of study as one's postgraduate interests, according to Nourhan Allam, a participant in both of these initiatives: "After engaging with Seket Maaref and exploring sociology, I wanted to study it despite my background in science. The only option I found was at the Institute of African Research and Studies at Cairo University. Now, I'm studying biological anthropology, the closest field to my interest." Ahmed Hegazy, involved with the Anthropology in Arabic initiative, shares a different perspective:

Initially, I joined the Faculty of Commerce due to my high school grades but found a passion for economics. When I pursued higher education in Germany, I gravitated toward the humanities, particularly the anthropology program in Arabic, due to its ability to demystify complex concepts. The academic environment abroad felt elitist, often making people feel unworthy of understanding certain topics.

The American University in Cairo stands out as a leading institution for studying the humanities in an innovative and contemporary way at both the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. However, its tuition fees are beyond the reach of middle- and lower-income families. The university attempts to mitigate this barrier by offering a very limited number of master's scholarships. These scholarships require applicants to have a high level of English proficiency and only cover a portion of the costs. Muhammad Bashir, involved with Seket Maaref,[9] comments on this challenge:

I found the effort needed to apply for a master's at the American University in Cairo to be comparable to that of seeking a scholarship at a major university in Europe or America. Maintaining a scholarship at the American University demands academic excellence, dedication, and networking. Balancing this with military service and work commitments is incredibly difficult for me.

The Initiatives and Their Founders

Seket Maaref is managed by a cadre of humanities professors from the American University in Cairo. This team has a rich background in the critical examination of knowledge, focusing on producing and translating scholarly works for the public in Arabic, with several members also having experience in public engagement. Notable among their contributions is the publication, "How We Read the Arab World Today".

The collective's commitment to fostering critical knowledge circles beyond academic confines in order to facilitate social transformation was the driving force behind these professors coming together to form the Free Social Science Knowledge Circle in 2014. Reem Saad,[10] a sociology professor and cofounder of Seket Maaref, reflects on this motivation: "The initiative was our method of participating in the broader society. I personally have a reservation about public endeavors tied to institutions or political parties. Hence, the appeal of turning teaching into a public endeavor accessible to anyone interested in the humanities resonated with me".

The other initiative under examination, Anthropology in Arabic, was created by Hallaba, who earned a master's degree in social anthropology and visual ethnography from the University of Kent. Hallaba embarked on her anthropology master's journey in 2019, diving into new concepts and formulating research questions in a field she had never studied before. Unaccustomed to theoretical studies, Hallaba conceived the idea of "engaging with the audience", which meant she would clarify her understanding of her readings in front of a camera and in colloquial Egyptian. She produced 15 episodes on YouTube exploring key anthropology concepts.[11]

Upon examining the location of the individuals behind both initiatives, whether professors or students, it becomes

8 Personal interview with Farah Hallaba on June 20, 2023.

9 Personal interview with Muhammad Bashir, as a beneficiary of Seket Maaref initiative, on May 2, 2023.

10 Personal interview with Reem Saad, a sociology professor, as one of the founders of Saket Maaref initiative.

11 See Farah Hallaba Youtube channel, available at https://www.youtube.com/@farahhallaba292

evident that they aimed to share their knowledge with a broader audience, prioritizing accessibility, simplification, and presentation. This approach aligns with Antonio Gramsci's notion of organic intellectuals who are committed to fostering awareness among their audience, enabling them to partake in changes for the betterment of humanity.[12] It also aligns with the idea of independent intellectuals, who are devoted to sharing their knowledge with those traditionally excluded and marginalized in order to accomplish individual or collective objectives.

Objectives, Approaches, and Methodologies of the Initiatives

Seket Maaref embraced an interactive approach to presenting the humanities, aiming to make it accessible to a broad audience including both established researchers and those looking to expand their critical understanding. The initiative utilized live meetings to engage with the public, where a diverse group of professors would gather to identify topics and issues relevant to the Egyptian context. They took into consideration the participants' questions on critical concepts and discussion topics. Ahmed Srouji, the initiative's coordinator, shared that sessions were held bimonthly before the COVID-19 pandemic temporarily halted these gatherings. Bashir, a participant in the initiative, noted: "The consistent scheduling of Seket Maaref's sessions and the advance notice of their dates allowed me to plan my military service leaves accordingly, enabling me to attend most of the sessions." Participation in these sessions typically involved nonmandatory reading of two or three texts to facilitate discussion on the selected topics.

In the early stages of Anthropology in Arabic, Hallaba focused on simplifying and clarifying concepts in her YouTube episodes. Later, she shifted her emphasis toward interactivity and collaborative knowledge creation through workshops and training. Initially, Hallaba adhered to key concepts from the anthropology curriculum as she prepared for her master's degree. However, she eventually allowed the choice of topics to be influenced by "the inspiration of daily conversations with her peers", in her own words.

The video series started with webinars aimed at demystifying anthropological concepts. Subsequently, Hallaba led participatory workshops, notably in visual anthropology both within and outside Egypt on topics like social class and migration to the Gulf. These efforts culminated in the 2022 exhibition and publication, "Being Borrowed: On Egyptian Migration to the Gulf", alongside hosted discussions with anthropologists researching topics related to the Arab world. Hallaba continues to lead her initiative, remaining open to collaborative opportunities and blending efforts to generate and share knowledge.

As someone who has benefited from both initiatives, I observed that they went beyond merely involving participants in reading, writing, and viewing activities for educational purposes. They elevated the experience to foster an understanding, a process Vicki Jacobs highlights in her article, "Reading, Writing, and Understanding"[13], as the ultimate objective of learning. This is achieved through various methods, including interactive text discussions, relating one's personal experiences to a text, identifying contemporary examples that support the text's arguments, and evaluating these examples' relevance and accuracy with the facilitators.

For instance, in its inaugural season of meetings, Seket Maaref asked participants to examine theoretical texts in practical contexts. Dr. Madiha Doss, a professor of linguistics, explored the concept of diglossia (the coexistence of written and spoken Arabic) by applying it to the debate ignited by the awarding of the Sawiris Cultural Award in February 2019[14] to the novel The Newborn by Nadia Kamel, which is written in colloquial Egyptian. I personally contributed by cofacilitating a session on the use of language in Mahragan songs, a topic I explored in my master's thesis[15]; the goal was to empower participants to connect theoretical concepts from texts like Charles A. Ferguson's paper, "Diglossia", and Niloofar Haeri's book, Sacred Language, Ordinary People, to modern colloquial literary and lyrical works.

For her part, Hallaba was keen to demystify theoretical anthropology concepts for her audience by relating them to real-life experiences. To explain social capital – a concept

12 حيدر علي محمد، **إشكالية المثقف عند غرامشي**، 2004، متاح على https://www.academia.edu/43661607/إشكالية_المثقف_عند_غرامشي

13 Jacobs, Vicki A. "Reading, writing, and understanding." Educational leadership 60.3 (2002).

14 انظر سكة معارف، **اللقاء السادس: الثنائية اللغوية وعلاقتها بقضايا الوطنية والحداثة**، كانون الأول/ديسمبر 2017، متاح على https://seketmaaref.com/2017/12/07/اللقاء-السادس-اللغة/

15 انظر سكة معارف، **اللقاء الأول- موسم الربيع** 2019، شباط/فبراير 2019، متاح على https://seketmaaref.com/2019/02/09/اللقاء-الأول-موسم-الربيع-2019/

introduced by Pierre Bourdieu as a contrast to economic capital – Hallaba illustrated the ideas through two fictional characters: al-Haj Abdel Ghafour al-Borai, from the TV series I Will Not Live in My Father's Robes, and al-Baz Effendi from the film Hamido's Son. Hallaba's efforts extended beyond merely translating terms and making theoretical texts more accessible; she placed a significant emphasis on connecting these concepts with examples that resonate with the Egyptian and, by extension, the Arab collective memory.[16]

Beyond Academia: Alternative Pathways to Knowledge

The views on what constitutes alternative knowledge varies among the founders of these initiatives. Saad, a cofounder of Seket Maaref, states: "Whether people come or not is up to them. Sometimes we have four attendees, sometimes 40. We're not focused on numbers. There are no certificates or evaluations." Saad's statement underscores the principle of free or unrestricted access to knowledge, highlighting both the facilitators' and participants' freedom to engage, inquire, and steer the learning focus. Seket Maaref has consistently operated independently of formal academic institutions, evolving into a mobile entity that navigates between spaces and institutions to broaden critical engagement with society, history, philosophy, and metanarratives for those interested, offering alternative means of understanding and analysis.

This vision aligns with Manish Jain's views, founder of Shikshantar: The Peoples' Institute for Re-thinking Education and Development in India, who critiqued the traditional credentialing system in his piece, "Healing Ourselves from the Diploma Disease". Jain argued that certificates and diplomas do not reflect an individual's passions, interests, and values, but rather uphold the status quo of the global political economy and social order. In contrast, spaces that foster free learning promote a community of passionate, dedicated individuals who value skills and diversity in life paths, thereby empowering them in their quest for justice. Saad and Malak Rouchdy, in their research paper "Beyond the University Gates: The Story of the Free Social Science Knowledge Circle", articulate the mission of these free knowledge sessions: to bridge the gap between the academic realm of social sciences and the broader public by creating a learning environment guided by participants' questions and experts' insights devoid of a fixed curriculum, mandatory attendance, or completion certificates. The sole academic requirement is engaging with knowledge and discussing scholarly texts, thus marrying the academy's knack for organizing knowledge and identifying issues with the freedom to choose discussion topics and facilitation methods.

Hallaba launched her initiative driven by a personal desire to learn anthropology, critiquing both the traditional education system's failure to offer it at the secondary level and its complex, detached presentation in academic institutions. Her goal was to enhance participants' ability to interpret their personal stories, emotions, aspirations, and realities through the lens of anthropology, fostering a learning environment where education is mutual. Hallaba says, "I learn a lot from each workshop, and from each round of discussion that takes place." Her approach challenges the conventional learning model, where knowledge flows from teacher to student, instead promoting a circular, interactive learning process where both she and the participants learn from each other, making it a shared experience.

Allam, who has participated in both initiatives and studies biological anthropology at the Cairo University's Institute of African Research and Studies, expresses significant challenges in her studies due to the absence of laboratories for sample analysis, turning her coursework into a historical inquiry based on outdated sources. She also encounters ideological biases from professors, with one explicitly rejecting the theory of evolution as blasphemy. Bashir, who discontinued his cultural anthropology studies at the same institution, states: "I noticed a stark contrast between the outdated college curriculum and the progressive discussions at Seket Maaref; they were light years apart."

All study participants regard the initiatives' environments as free spaces that ignite a passion for the humanities and help individuals discover their interests. Yet, they have not entirely left behind formal academic systems. Professors and researchers continue their work within these traditional frameworks, even as participants use the initiatives as a springboard to explore their academic interests further in pursuit of their degrees. This dynamic echoes Ron Miller's conclusion in "A Brief History of Alternative Education", in which he states that while a fully alternative educational system may be distant, "if our society does in fact move in this direction, it may well be alternative educators who show the way."

16 انظر صفحة «انثروبولوجي بالعربي» على موقع فيسبوك، **الحلقة** 10: **عبد الغفور البرعي و الباز افندي؟**، نيسان/أبريل 2020، متاح على https://www.face-book.com/AnthropologyBel3araby/videos/663240531177810/

Impact of the January 25 Revolution on the Initiatives

It is notable that the knowledge-sharing movements and initiatives surged following the 25 January Revolution in 2011. This period sparked aspirations for a democratic society and a clear path toward change, deeply desired by various societal segments. For intellectuals and founders of these initiatives, democratizing science was seen as a pivotal role in their communities.

The revolution raised questions about comprehending the newly shaped world and scrutinizing the old one that had driven the majority to demand change in the streets. Postrevolutionary Egypt underwent significant shifts in governance, transitioning from a military council to the Muslim Brotherhood under President Mohamed Morsi and eventually to President al-Sisi's leadership since 2014.

This political upheaval and its inherent tensions led to substantial alterations in the political, social, and economic landscapes, subjecting the public sphere to phases of openness, restriction, and shutdown. These changes had a profound impact on the initiatives aimed at making humanities accessible.

We can see, for example, a close link between Seket Maaref and the January 25 Revolution. In their research paper, "Outside the University Gates: The Story of the Free Social Sciences Department",[17] Saad and Rouchdy discuss how the concept of free knowledge sessions emerged when Saad received an email in late 2012 from someone keen to learn anthropology. Months later, she and Rouchdy met with young individuals on Mohamed Mahmoud Street, a focal point for postrevolution protests, to discuss their eagerness to understand the postrevolution world through the social sciences. Bashir noted: "After the revolution, we saw experts voicing complex opinions about the state, the revolution, and the socioeconomic systems. This sparked a curiosity to understand their discussions, especially as we recognized our potential to influence change and make choices." Saad further explains:

Our initiative was born out of the young adults' thirst for knowledge and their inquiries. We delved into the concept of the state and the interplay between state agencies and individual roles in the public sphere. This was driven by the youth's eagerness to comprehend their contributions within volunteer groups and popular committees.

When asked about how public sphere restrictions influenced the selection of discussion topics, Saad acknowledged their inevitable impact on freedom of speech. However, she emphasized that the group consistently navigated the realm of what was possible. She noted that political shifts over the decade have transformed the inquiries and needs of participants: for example, since 2021 there's been a surge in questions about pursuing further education through scholarships, both domestically and internationally. Participants are often uncertain about choosing their research topics and will seek guidance on academic writing. This has prompted Seket Maaref to plan a new series for spring 2024 aimed at enhancing research skills and facilitating discussions around these needs.

Conversely, Hallaba does not explicitly link her Anthropology in Arabic series to the January 25 Revolution. Launched in 2019, her aim was to cultivate a knowledge-sharing platform for a broad audience. She observed that while many initiatives to democratize the humanities demand significant engagement from participants, her episodes cater to a wider audience with no stringent commitment required.

However, Hegazy, a participant in Hallaba's initiative, views the landscape of knowledge in Egypt as interconnected, arguing that Anthropology in Arabic indirectly stems from the intellectual awakening triggered by the January 25 Revolution. To underscore this connection, Hegazy references Arwa Saleh's poignant phrase, "The magic of a dream once touched him", from her book, The Stillborn: Notebooks of a Woman from the Student-Movement Generation.

Hallaba acknowledges the necessity of navigating the political landscape cautiously, given the prevailing restrictions. While her YouTube episodes are crafted with this in mind, offering a broader discussion platform, the more intimate setting of her workshops allows for deeper, more candid conversations with participants. Hallaba believes that studying the humanities fosters a critical understanding of reality without directly, or necessarily, challenging the political regime. This perspective enables a nuanced examination of how the policies of the political regime can affect daily life, or drawing parallels with experiences in other countries. She encapsulates this approach as: "You can say everything without having to say it outright." An example of this indirect critique is her "Being Borrowed" workshop on Egyptians' migration to the Gulf, which critiqued labor and immigration policies under

17 Aziza Boucherit, Héba Machhour and Malak Rouchdy, "Mélanges offerts à Madiha Doss. La linguistique comme engagement", Institut français d'archéologie orientale, Vol.42, 2018.

Mubarak's administration.

The January 25 Revolution marks a pivotal moment that broadened the horizons for knowledge. It sparked questions about social transformation, necessitating alternative insights into social phenomena and the analysis of societal structures. This emerging curiosity among the youth to seek answers from experts ignited the formation of the first initiatives, such as Seket Maaref and the Cairo Institute of Liberal Arts and Sciences. Their success and the evident demand for knowledge among young people led to the creation of other initiatives. While these varied in form and targeted different demographics, their ultimate aim was the same: to establish platforms for alternative knowledge for those interested in the humanities. These initiatives experienced various shifts in the public sphere, influencing how experts approached their study topics. This is reflected in Hallaba's Anthropology in Arabic, which delved into personal practices, individual crises, and their connections to societal structures. Moreover, political unrest shifted the focus of knowledge seekers. The urgency for social and political understanding receded, giving way to academic pursuits in comprehending the humanities for study opportunities both domestically and internationally.

Impact of COVID-19 on Initiative Operations

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic prompted the Egyptian government to implement social distancing measures to curb the outbreak, leading to a surge in virtual communication via platforms like Zoom and Google Meet as individuals stayed home and physical institutions were shuttered. This shift posed a significant challenge for initiatives that relied on in-person meetings, such as Seket Maaref, which paused operations for nearly two years. The initiative's founders were concerned about the health risks associated with their gatherings. Srouji, Seket Maarif's coordinator, reflected on the situation: "It was a critical time. Attendance was increasing session by session, and with our professors being older, the risk of infection was high. We considered moving online, but many in our group were opposed, so we halted our sessions until it was safe to resume, which we finally did for one last season in spring 2023."

Saad highlighted the fundamental role of interactive engagement between students and professors, a dynamic hard to replicate in virtual settings. With the eventual reopening of institutions, the team contemplated relocating from the Elnahda Jesuit Cultural Center in Cairo to the open garden of the Dominican Institute for Oriental Studies to mitigate risks. However, the high attendance and customary practices like warm greetings, hugs, and close contact remained concerns for safety.

Unlike Seket Maaref, Hallaba saw the COVID-19 pandemic as an opportune moment, given that people were confined to their homes and eager for educational content. She remarked: "Without COVID-19, our episodes might not have reached so many viewers." During the pandemic, Hallaba launched online visual anthropology workshops, enabling Arabic-speaking participants from various countries to join. With the gradual return to normalcy postpandemic, Hallaba expanded her activities to include collaborations with institutions like the Arab Digital Expression Foundation (ADEF), Makouk, and El Safina, and even organized the visual exhibition portion of "Being Borrowed" at the Center for the Contemporary Image.

The approaches to navigating the COVID-19 pandemic varied among initiatives. An interesting observation is their response to the sociopolitical developments of the crisis. As institutions reopened and vaccines were distributed without extensive testing, life began to shift back to normalcy. In his Mada Masr article, "COVID-19 Vocabulary: Crisis", Chihab El Kachab reflects on this transition:

If we consider that COVID-19 has intensified various crises, how can we encapsulate it within the broader concept of the "crisis" as a pervasive, elusive specter? Furthermore, how do we identify the critical turning point necessary to emerge from the crisis, distinguishing it from the seemingly endless series of crises?

By February 2022, Egypt had largely returned to prepandemic life, with institutions and individuals forgoing many of the earlier precautionary measures despite no official declaration of the pandemic's end. As noted by El Kachab, this led to a murky conclusion to the crisis, blurring the line for when it could be considered truly over. This ambiguity influenced the timeline for resuming in-person activities for the initiatives: Hallaba hosting her first live workshop in July 2021,[18] while Seket Maaref waited until February 2023 to restart their interactive sessions.[19]

18 انظر صفحة «انثروبولوجي بالعربي» على موقع فيسبوك، **ورشة الانثروبولوجيا البصرية**، تموز/يوليو 2021، متاح على https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1014279526041503

19 انظر سكة معارف، **اللحظة والأزمة في إطار دراسات الزمن والزمنية**، شباط/فبراير 2023، متاح على https://seketmaaref.com/2023/02/10/اللحظة-والأزمة-في-إطار-دراسات-الزمن-وا/

Economic Policies of the Initiatives

Both initiatives primarily operated through the self-driven efforts of their founders. Saad considers herself an activist, explaining: "I view myself more as a public activist, similar to those involved in political parties, who don't typically identify as volunteers." Srouji highlighted that the initiative was a labor of love from its founders, with all planning and facilitation of tasks carried out voluntarily and without financial reward. The professors involved contributed small amounts to cover food expenses for participants. The venues used for meetings, such as the Elnahda Jesuit Cultural Center or the Dominican Institute, were provided at no cost.

The translation lab, which is a part of Seket Maaref discussed in more detail below, sought external funding and was awarded with a grant from the Small Grants Program of the Arab Council for the Social Sciences. This grant supported a collective translation workshop that culminated in the discussion, translation, editing, and publication of a book of collected texts titled The Beach Beneath the Street.

Seket Maaref maintains financial independence as an economic policy, viewing it as essential to safeguarding its intellectual freedom. This approach shields the initiative from the pitfalls of institutionalization and the pressures to meet conventional standards of quality and success.

Anthropology in Arabic freely shared its self-produced episodes on YouTube, but adopted a different approach for its workshops by charging participants fees ranging from 400 to 800 Egyptian pounds (about US$10 to US$20) per workshop. Hallaba believed these fees would ensure attendees' commitment while affording her the flexibility to enrich the workshops with diverse materials and cover transportation costs. Hallaba notes, "I made sure the fee was affordable for most interested individuals, comparable to what one might pay for any course. For those interested but unable to pay, I offered options like partial scholarships or installment payments." Hallaba is keen to secure funding to expand the initiative's offerings, with a preference for support from institutions that respect the project's integrity and share its vision. She values collaborations with various organizations as a way to enhance the initiative's work and production quality.

The stable salaries of the professors involved in Seket Maaref likely facilitated their ability to self-fund the initiative. In contrast, Hallaba, who was at the early stages of her academic and professional journey, found herself in continuous search of collaborative and funding opportunities. Despite their differing financial strategies, both initiatives emphasize the importance of maintaining their independence.

The interviewees consider funding an important means for enhancing the operational scope of their initiatives, introducing new avenues for engagement, and addressing educational gaps, like translation for Seket Maaref's knowledge dissemination or improving video quality for Anthropology in Arabic. Yet a common concern among the founders is the potential loss of autonomy in selecting subjects, as well as in determining the style and substance of their activities. This apprehension led the facilitators of Seket Maaref to decline transforming the initiative into a funded cultural or developmental project, maintaining their independence until the opportunity arose with the Small Grants Program, which offered a grant that did not dictate the initiative's direction or operations. Hallaba's approach to seeking support mirrored this cautiousness; she consistently looked for funding and collaborations that would not compromise her freedom, prioritizing grants and partnerships that respected her initiative's independence.

Language Use and Intellectual Output of the Initiatives

The language issue is particularly complex. Translating from English and French into Arabic poses a significant hurdle for participants, as well as a challenge for the founders given that many of the academic texts in question were in English or translations from French. Bashir noted, "The English used in these texts isn't the kind we're accustomed to in the College of Science. It requires someone who's not just proficient in English but also well-versed in humanities terminology and academic writing styles."

From the outset, the founders of Seket Maaref recognized this difficulty and were selective in their reading choices, favoring texts already translated into Arabic or those in simpler English. For academic texts in complex English, they made sure to provide an introductory overview to participants before delving into discussions. This led to the creation of a translation lab within the group, where members with translation experience or academic proficiency in English collaborated on translating readings for wider accessibility. This initiative received the grant from the Arab Council for the Social Sciences that resulted in The Beach Beneath the

Street. Although there was discussion about translating into colloquial Egyptian, it was ultimately decided to publish in Modern Standard Arabic to ensure accessibility for a broader audience outside of Egypt. Seket Maaref's workshops are conducted in colloquial Egyptian, and summaries of these discussions were made available on its website in both Modern Standard Arabic and colloquial Egyptian.

Integrating colloquial Arabic into formal discourse represents an effort to challenge the dominance of Classical Arabic and its monopoly over cultural and intellectual discourse. If language serves as the conduit for thought, then it is natural for ideas to be expressed in colloquial forms. However, due to the entrenched belief that Classical Arabic is the medium for significant communication, there is a tendency to translate thoughts from colloquial to Classical Arabic. This perspective is supported by Doss during her session at Seket Maaref titled "The Struggle over the Colloquial and Classical" where she remarked:

I'm not opposed to intellectual works being in colloquial, because it reaffirms its validity and counters the notion that it lacks linguistic structure or teachable rules. I'm not advocating for the displacement of Classical by colloquial language; rather, from a linguistic standpoint, I believe no language is inherently inferior or weak. Languages evolve, transitioning from dialects or everyday speech into fully developed languages with standardized rules and widespread acceptance, both over time and organically.

Conversely, Hallaba shares the linguistic hurdles encountered in her initiative. She conducted her episodes and workshops in colloquial Egyptian while keeping the source material in English, assuming that nonexperts would be content with the episode's explanations and that those seeking to delve deeper into the sources would possess the necessary English proficiency. Hallaba acknowledges the complexities of employing colloquial Egyptian for conceptual representation and its application to Egyptian reality, noting:

Occasionally, Arab viewers would comment that they did not understand the episode. I'd then clarify in the comments. I was also wary of Egyptian centrism, often drawing examples from Egyptian drama and music, but they were widely recognized. I would always encourage in my workshops, if anyone didn't understand, to just ask.

Hallaba challenges the widespread belief that translation alone makes content accessible, observing that content in Arabic often requires proficiency in English or a deep understanding of Arabic to be fully grasped. She emphasizes that simplification is challenging yet essential for truly broadening access.

Hallaba also views visual language as a fresh avenue through which her work communicates, serving as a crucial element in the simplification of her content. This prompted her to start creating and sharing episodes on YouTube, and to later convert the outcomes of the "Being Borrowed" workshop into a visual exhibition. She partners with organizations like El Safina and ADEF that support integrating theoretical concepts with visual art and is currently developing a workshop to create anthropological games with the Makouk Foundation, which focuses on educational gaming as a method of knowledge dissemination.[20]

Doss reinforces these ideas through her examination of colloquial Egyptian in Abdullah al-Nadim's writings and the linguistic divide between colloquial Egyptian and Classical Arabic in Egypt.[21] While Classical Arabic has long been the formal language of governance, literature, and intellectual discourse, colloquial Egyptian has evolved with its own set of rules, making it a fully-fledged language rather than a mere derivative of Classical Arabic. Doss critiques the negative perceptions surrounding the use of colloquial language in literature and journalism and highlights how some thinkers have embraced colloquial Arabic, recognizing its potential as a complement to Classical Arabic. Doss encourages a nuanced understanding of both languages, noting that neither Classical nor colloquial Arabic is monolithic, with each encompassing a range of dialects and levels of comprehension.

Both initiatives have embraced Doss's insights, understanding that the engagement with theoretical texts should take place in a language that is both accessible and contemporary. This approach extends beyond merely translating texts from English and French into Classical Arabic; it involves rendering them and their explanations in straightforward colloquial language or presenting them in widely understood Classical Arabic. Hence, Seket Maaref not only focused on translating texts but also engaged in interactive discussions about terminology using colloquial Egyptian. Additionally, it provided reports on the sessions, primarily in simplified Classical Arabic interspersed with colloquial expressions. Hallaba, on the other hand, aimed to present her content through various linguistic avenues: this goes beyond the choice between Arabic and English to include both visual and written forms, diving deeper into simplification as a means to truly enhance accessibility.

20 See Makouk, available at https://makouk.com/

21 مديحة دوس، «لغتنا العربية في معركة الحضارة»، دار قضايا فكرية، العدد 4/19، 1998.

Summary and Results

The landscape for studying humanities in Egyptian universities and international institutions within Egypt is quite restrictive. Admissions regulations and policies for postgraduate programs impose bureaucratic requirements like consistent specialization, grade evaluations from undergraduate years, full-time attendance, or a work permit. Moreover, the curricula are often outdated, lacking relevance to contemporary social realities. The American University in Egypt stands out with its humanities departments but demands substantial tuition fees, making it accessible primarily to those from financially well-off backgrounds. With each devaluation of the Egyptian pound, the cost of tuition, which is pegged to the US dollar, escalates. Although the university does offer a limited number of master's scholarships, they necessitate a high level of English proficiency, and the scholarships are limited and contingent upon academic excellence.

This context, from 2014 to 2019, catalyzed the establishment of the initiatives examined in this study, creating open spaces for education and alternative, critical methodologies for humanities instruction that confront traditional practices in Egyptian academia. These varied perspectives on what constitutes alternative knowledge – with some critiquing the formalization of education and others the teaching methodologies – are all aimed at providing interested individuals with a free, collaborative environment for engaging with the humanities.

The impact of the 25 January Revolution on these initiatives varied significantly. For Seket Maaref, the revolution was a key motivator, whereas Anthropology in Arabic saw no direct connection between the revolution and its activities. Postrevolution tensions led to a constriction of public discourse, prompting existing initiatives to increase self-censorship. Unexamined initiatives, such as the Cairo Institute of Liberal Arts and Sciences, even altered their operational structure from a civil society organization to a training company, adapting to the changing sociopolitical landscape.

Overall, examining the discourse and topic selection by the founders of these initiatives reveals an evolution in focus. Initially, for example, Seket Maaref addressed themes like state governance, social change, and political ideology – collective issues in line with the revolutionary zeal for communal solutions. Over time, the discourse expanded to include more personal and philosophical concepts such as time, space, the gift economy, and social class, reflecting a shift toward individual experiences.

The approaches of the initiatives in blending real and virtual activities also varied. Seket Maaref opted for live, interactive sessions with participants, whereas Anthropology in Arabic began with online activities before integrating in-person workshops, adapting to safety measures during the COVID-19 pandemic. Anthropology in Arabic initially utilized virtual platforms like YouTube for its outreach, continuing its international engagement during the pandemic until transitioning some workshops to live sessions upon the founder's return from overseas study.

Economically, Seket Maaref committed to volunteerism and free access to its activities, securing support for supplementary activities and publishing translations in print. Anthropology in Arabic managed production and video publication through self-funding, charging for workshops while establishing policies to ensure accessibility for participants across economic backgrounds.

Both initiatives engaged in collaborations for logistical support and venue provision, with partnerships varying between paid and unpaid arrangements. Despite participating in each other's activities, there was not a concerted effort for joint collaboration on a unified front encompassing multiple initiatives.

Translation emerged as a critical issue for both, with Seket Maaref incorporating a translation aspect into its sessions despite conducting them in Arabic. Anthropology in Arabic did not prioritize translation, opting to present source materials in its video episodes. The founder emphasized the importance of delivering content in Arabic and sought to translate key concepts into colloquial language, leaving further research and translation to the audience.

In conclusion, the intellectual outputs of these initiatives have diversified and evolved. Seket Maaref held distinct sessions, developed a website for archiving its work, and published translated texts in book form. Anthropology in Arabic focused on visual content, sharing episodes on social media, and the "Being Borrowed" workshop, which culminated in a visual exhibition featuring participants' narratives and their families' experiences in the Gulf.

Analysis

These two initiatives work to make the humanities accessible, bringing knowledge of these fields beyond the confines of universities and academic institutions. By engaging with key texts and theories foundational to the humanities and applying them to contemporary realities, these initiatives sought to generate content that offered critical perspectives in parallel to traditional academic discourse, attracting a diverse audience regardless of their backgrounds.

The restrictive environment for humanities studies underscored the critical need for open spaces where enthusiasts, academics, or laypersons could explore current issues through the lenses of humanities and social sciences. This included understanding research methodologies for further study both within Egypt and internationally, or simply enhancing the audience's analytical skills, irrespective of its direct application to their professional lives. These initiatives can be seen as a series of influential waves, each shaped by the revolutionary zeitgeist and the legacy of preceding efforts. The drive for public engagement in knowledge exploration was ignited by the revolutionary fervor that questioned existing norms.

Unlike formal educational institutions, these initiatives did not seek official recognition or the provision of accredited certificates. They aimed to offer an alternative knowledge, distinct and liberated from the academic rigidity and hierarchy prevalent in traditional social science education.

The period from 2015 to 2018 witnessed a notable decline in the launch of new humanities initiatives. This lull followed President al-Sisi's rise to power in mid-2014, accompanied by policies that aimed to constrict the public sphere, scrutinize funding sources, and shut down several civil society organizations. During this time, numerous directors were accused of corruption and alleged involvement in activities purportedly against national interests. Initiatives experienced further hardships with the COVID-19 crisis; some halted their activities during lockdowns, others shifting to online formats, and a few adopted a blend of in-person and virtual methods by holding events in open-air settings.

The founders of Seket Maaref and Anthropology in Arabic place a high value on retaining their autonomy when seeking financial aid, preferring partnerships that safeguard the creative freedom of their content. Although wider funding sources could expand their range of activities, the freedom to operate independently of external influences is their highest priority.

In spite of the founders' dedication to making knowledge accessible to all and bridging social and cultural gaps, primarily through the use of colloquial Egyptian, it appears that the majority of those who participate are from the middle to upper classes. This phenomenon is not solely due to financial obstacles but also to the role of social capital, as defined by Pierre Bourdieu. Engaging with these initiatives generally requires a baseline of education and cultural insight, which facilitates a deeper understanding and involvement in the discussions.

Moving Knowledge to and from the Margins

Dina Wahba

Introduction

In this article I tackle the condition of the postcolonial scholar in the context of the experience of immigrant scholars post-2011. I argue for an approach that centers the margins as an epistemology that entails that researchers focus on marginal epistemologies and attempt to carve spaces of radical openness (hooks 1989). As an example, I illustrate my proposal through briefly discussing an initiative I co-organized in 2020-2021 in Berlin, Al Salon, with other scholar-activists to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the first wave of revolutions in the Middle East. I elaborate how we, revolutionaries from the Middle East, have been let down by western academia. As a result, some of us in the diaspora have resorted to carving out marginal spaces that are academic adjacent, such as Al Salon, to explore and prioritize neglected research questions, theoretical approaches, and epistemologies. Western academia has consistently failed to produce or even provide the space for differentiated knowledge that can help revolutionary struggles or oppressed populations. Rather, western academia has become a site of struggle, a tool for cooptation, a machine draining the energy, knowledge, talents, and potential of immigrant scholars. Western academia can no longer present itself as a space for critical reflections; it is part of the problem, and unless these institutions become accountable to the communities they are researching, they will continue to be part of their oppression.

The Postcolonial Scholar and the Promise of Academia

As revolutions broke out across the Middle East in 2011, many of the revolutionaries who participated in the making of such momentous uprisings sought academia as a space to reflect, to analyze, to try to understand and explain the historical juncture in which they were living. Many of us migrated from the global south seeking knowledge in the global north. Those of us who were already in the diaspora turned to academia believing that it would have something meaningful to offer. This might have been a naïve assumption to begin with, seeing how those same academic institutions both in Europe and the US have played and continue to play a major role in the subjugation and the dehumanization of our people. Experts who provide "expert opinions", academic consultants who work with military regimes, and irresponsible academics who squander money over meaningless conferences are all implicated in a knowledge regime that, at best, does not prioritize the academic needs of oppressed populations in developing countries or in Europe and the US. Instead of finding a space conducive for making sense of the challenging realities of revolutions and their aftermaths, migrant scholars like me find ourselves trapped in a role predetermined for us: the native informant (Spivak 1999). Our primary duty is data mining to feed the endless machine of big data based on the needs and priorities of host countries. Funding institutions, such as European governments, set the research agenda through approval of only those research projects that fit into the grand narratives and political goals of these states. Hence, every study that vilifies Islam is welcomed; or, put another way: any research that indulges cultural relativism and Orientalist tropes is portrayed as exemplary. The good immigrant scholar is immensely and constantly grateful for an opportunity to get an education at prestigious, high-ranking western institutions. After all, these opportunities are rare and cutthroat and most of us work for years just to access the knowledge that is available to our European and American colleagues. Scholars who grew up in the diaspora, who come from immigrant, working-class families face similar (but not the same) challenges of constantly proving their worthiness, and are often subjected to the trap of tokenism in order advance in a neoliberal academic institution. So much for the postcolonial promise of academia. So much for critical thought.

Many of us are disillusioned by the promise of academia, resorting to jokes and comments or at times venting, screaming and crying among ourselves, away from the gaze of our white professors and token colleagues who blame us for not be grateful, not integrating well enough, or for just not doing our job of data excavation, for searching for a bigger role and calling for accountability and being critical of the kind of knowledge being produced, because at the end it touches us, it harms us, it is dangerous to our homelands, our families, and our peoples. While white scholars can make a career of being a Middle East expert, for them it is just another job. I am aware that not all white scholars are like that, but this is not the space to cater to white feelings; I have been doing that for far too long. This emotional labor is also somehow part of our jobs as immigrant scholars. We become the problem, we become historical subjects who see racism everywhere. Western academia does not need critical immigrant scholars; we are unwanted, to be discarded, declined, rejected and simply unapproved. Neoliberal western academia needs tokens to sustain the illusion of diversity and data miners to gratify their incessant need for information. We are constantly disappointing serious researchers who cannot begin to find answers to the pressing questions of their complicated realities, and when we speak up, we become the problem: the defiant colleagues, the insubordinate. ungrateful immigrants. We find ourselves engaged in lengthy conversations with ghosts of other white male scholars – who through their canonical works have forced themselves into the creation and sustenance of the oppressive regimes of knowledge – just to prove ourselves worthy of the knowledge bestowed on us. These endeavors, which seem to most of us as a rite of passage into western academia, waste our precious time. The amount of effort it takes to explain our complex realities to the white male academic and to prove that brown minds can actually theorize, could be better spent in setting and executing our own research agendas which we often do as side projects, despite and not because of academia.

Centering the Margins

The mainstream has never run clean, perhaps never can. Part of mainstream education involves learning to ignore this absolutely, with a sanctioned ignorance. (Spivak 1999, p. 2)

Historically marginalized populations – such as indigenous peoples, women, LGBTQI+, and religious minorities – have been changing societies from the margin in both Europe and the Middle East. This has become more evident post-2011. The early days of the so-called Arab Spring opened a space to radically re-signify the relation between the two regions (Dabashi 2012). It was a moment that challenged a global order and questioned the legitimacy of knowledge and security regimes that target Arab, Muslim and Middle Eastern bodies. However, post-revolutionary narratives centered on the fear of immigration; invoking terrorist tropes provided an easy way to attack political Islam, echoing international security paradigms and serving to relegate Middle Eastern bodies back to where they ostensibly belonged. Beyond questions of failure and success, I argue for an approach that explores how the first and second wave of uprisings in the Middle East, coupled with migration waves to Europe, opened spaces for marginalized populations to effect change in both contexts. I go beyond the importance of including marginalized voices in research. I acknowledge the vitality of historically marginalized groups in changing Europe and the Middle East, and attempt to trace those societal, political, and economic changes. I start with the assumption that to make sense of Europe one needs to look over to the other side of the Mediterranean. The Middle East and Europe are two regions and civilizations that have been historically interlinked, more so post-2011. I seek to produce knowledge that not only accounts for the contributions of marginalized communities but rather examines the linkages and connections between the margins and the centers, and that is consumable for researched communities. Inspired by subaltern studies and postcolonial and feminist theories, I understand the margin as an epistemology. bell hooks reminds us: “Understanding marginality as position and place of resistance is crucial for oppressed, exploited, colonised people” (hooks 1989, pp. 21-22). She continues: “We are more often silenced when it comes to speaking of the margin as a site of resistance” (hooks 1989, pp. 21–22). Choosing to center historically marginalized peoples responds to bell hooks’ call to conceptualize the margin as a place of resistance and radical openness (hooks 1989, p. 26).

Those of us who live, who “make it”, passionately holding on to aspects of that “downhome” life we do not intend to lose while simultaneously seeking new knowledge and experience, invent spaces of radical openness. Without such spaces we would not survive. Our living depends on our ability to conceptualise alternatives, often improvised. Theorising this experience aesthetically, critically is an agenda for radical cultural practice. (hooks 1989, p. 19)

bell hooks denotes critical knowledge production as a survival strategy for historically oppressed populations. According to hooks, our very existence depends on our ability to carve a space for ourselves in cultural and academic institutions: to find a language, a voice to narrate the experiences of

the marginalized and to theorize their existence. Beyond tokenistic notions of diversity management and decolonizing academic jargon, inventing 'spaces of radical openness' that are by choice located in the margins is an essential task for critical theorists. Feminist epistemology (Harding 1987) urges us to ask questions about the politics of location (hooks 1989). To discuss critically the political economy of knowledge production, one needs to address several questions urgently: From where do we write? To whom? With what languages? How and where do we disseminate this knowledge? Who can access and consume this knowledge and who can't (Said 1982)?

Berlin: Disrupting the Center

"Our very presence is a disruption" (hooks 1989, p. 19).

As discussed above, when revolutions broke out across the Middle East in 2011, many activists and academics who participated in the making of such momentous uprisings sought academia as a space to reflect, analyze, understand, and explain the historical juncture in which they were living. Berlin is often celebrated as a hub for Arab scholars, academics, activists, and intellectuals (Ali 2019) especially as the city became a destination for many immigrants and refugees after the Arab Spring. Indeed, since 2015 the Arab diaspora has expanded greatly in all of Germany and especially Berlin; however, more examination is needed to understand the possiblities and limitations of Berlin as a cultural and political hub for immigrant communities. It is vital to examine whether academic institutions in Berlin are providing space to immigrant scholars conducive to researching the challenging realities of revolutions and their aftermath, or whether instead academics are trapped in the predetermined role of native informant (Spivak 1999). Moreover, exclusionary practices have affected the Arab diaspora, casting doubt on Berlin's potential as an immigrant hub. These practices hinder attempts for more organized and collective work within and among Arab immigrant communities. Patriarchy, sexism, and different forms of violence in the public sphere against women and LGBTQI+ communities exist in most intellectual and activist communities in Germany. and the Arab diaspora is no exception. Practices that make women and queer people feel unheard or unsafe are often tolerated; this makes these populations feel excluded, especially when they are dealing with the multiple burdens of being people of color, immigrants, or refugees. Extending solidarity to the most privileged individuals with the most social and economic capital is an exclusionary practice inherited from activism in home countries. The groupings and tight-knit affiliations that were often created under authoritarian regimes to protect political groups from infiltration – a practice that was inherited from the leftist movements and the anti-colonial struggle that had to work for years in secrecy and depended on exclusion for its survival – has continued. This practice characterizes most of the Arab diasporic communities and unfortunately limits solidarity to group membership rather than issue- or politics-based solidarity. There is a clear hierarchal difference between second generation citizens or older diasporic communities and the newly immigrated, which can manifest in generational differences, language skills, the ability to understand legal frameworks, social and economic capital, or citizenship and nationality.

Berlin became a cultural and intellectual hub as it is very attractive for Arab scholars and writers for several reasons. However, intellectuals among the Arab diasporic community have created echo chambers that are increasingly closed off from the wider diasporic community and detached from home countries. It is becoming an academic bubble that talks mainly internally to itself, risking its own relevance. Being able to immigrate and live in Europe requires economic and financial capabilities that are usually only available to middle- or upper-middle-class Arabs. Many immigrants from the Arab world haven't been able to reflect on their class privileges or what it means when engaging with a wider public sphere. Class issues and anti-racism politics are not on the priority list for Arab diasporic communities, which leads to both their failure to engage with wider issues in the German community or Europe and the exclusion of people from lower economic classes and Afro-Germans (Afrodeutsche) or black Arabs, who often experience discrimination and racism within Arab diaspora communities. Immigrants, especially Muslims, in Europe for political reasons are usually pushed to one stereotype or the other: They feel pressured to be either religious or secular, with no space in-between. The in-betweens are where most of the Muslim world exists, but being racialized pushes you to be attached to a certain group or category with its visible markers and practices. Moreover, polarization in home countries based on complicated political realities post 2011 have further entrenched these differences within the Arab diaspora. These exclusionary practices hinder organized and collective work among the Arab diaspora, and until these issues are prioritized and dealt with any effort toward collective work in the Arab immigrant community in Berlin would be futile.


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18 Days of Events


الصالون
AL SALON
10 YEARS OF MOVEMENTS
عشر سنوات من الحِراك
TO APPLY BEFORE
1ST OF NOV. 2020
NOVEMBER 2020 - FEBRUARY 2021
BERLIN
نوارة
NAWARA
ROSA
LUXEMBURG
STIFTUNG
ميادين التحرير
BAYNATNA

ما هو الصالون؟

يستضيف "الصالون" خمس حلقات نقاشية في مدينة برلين الألمانية بين شهري نوفمبر | تشرين الثاني 2020 وفبراير | شباط 2021، حيث تلتقي مجموعة من الباحثين والنشطاء مع ضيوف حلقات الصالون المختلفة في نقاش جمعي ونقدي حول عقد من الثورات الشعبية في المنطقة العربية.

حلقات "الصالون" ليست محاضرات أو ندوات بالمفهوم التقليدي، بل هي تسعى لخلق مساحات تشاركية وتفاعلية أكبر للنقاش، للتفكير والتعلم.

من يستطيع التقدم للمشاركة؟

النشطاء السياسيين والباحثين والباحثات من المنطقة أو من المهتمين بها. الأفضلية لمن كانت لهم علاقة مباشرة بثورات المنطقة إما بالمشاركة الفعلية، بالتأثير فيها والتأثر بها بمختلف الأشكال أو بالبحث، الكتابة والدراسة حولها.

كيف يمكنكم/كن التقدم؟

الرجاء ملء استمارة التقدم حتى
الأول من نوفمبر| تشرين الثاني 2020

نوارة NAWARA
ROSA LUXEMBURG STIFTUNG
ميادين التحرير
بيناتنا BAYNATNA

Al Salon: 10 Years of Movements

In 2019, fueled by frustration from the lack of spaces led by immigrant scholars and struggling to make sense of our difficult realities whether in our home countries or in diaspora, I along with a group of scholar-activists in Berlin founded a loose informal network: NAWARA which is a Berlin-based collective of migrant scholar-activists with ties to North Africa and West Asia (NAWA) committed to an intersectional feminist praxis. It aims to build spaces for critical reflection, engagement, knowledge production, and creative dissemination. In 2020, we launched our first project, Hur/k, a series of events that took place in Berlin between 2020-2021 to engage the NAWA diaspora communities in Germany in a range of activities commemorating the first wave of revolutions. We captured the continuous motion of people, ideas, and movements as opposed to the narrative of stagnation that had become associated with the failure of the revolutions. We also showcased the ways in which NAWA revolutionaries and their allies have continued to engage in various forms of activism all while moving across borders and countries.

The year 2021 marked the tenth anniversary of the outbreak of the revolutionary uprisings in the Middle East in 2010-2011. To commemorate collectively, NAWARA Berlin organized discussion circles, titled Al Salon: 10 Years of Movements. Al Salon al-thaqafy (cultural/intellectual Salon) is a practice that developed over the years across the Middle East wherein scholars, public intellectuals, and activists set up regular meetings to discuss pressing current issues. In this vein, we revived this practice to reflect on the 10-year-anniversary of the so-called Arab Spring. We intentionally opted for an approach that differed from a formal panel or lecture as Al Salon was meant to be interactive, less hierarchical, and participatory. In 2021, we organized five discussion circles, called Salon Thaqafy, with two speakers invited to each session. They gave a short talk and then a facilitator helped the groupto reflect collectively on the points raised. We published a call for applications expecting 15 participants in September 2020 and ended up with 60. The participants were researchers, artists, students, scholars, and activists based in Europe and the Arab world. Al Salon was held online due to the COVID-19 pandemic from November 2020-January 2021 and it focused on five main themes: defeat, the second wave of uprisings, the politics of the urban poor, recovery and healing, and the role of the diaspora. Prior to each discussion circle, readings and other preparatory materials were shared with participants. In addition to documenting these conversations, participants were strongly encouraged to write texts or record their thoughts in other media forms.

Setting the agenda

In her seminal book Decolonizing Methodologies, Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999) outlines 25 indigenous research projects, including: claiming, testimonies, storytelling, celebrating survival, remembering, reading, writing, representing, gendering, sharing, restoring, networking, naming, democratizing, and reframing. Guided by these notions and defying the logics of neoliberal research institutions and western academia, Al Salon aimed to be a process-oriented initiative nurturing a knowledge-sharing journey for its participants that was not geared solely toward producing high-ranking academic publications, securing research grants, or other career-oriented, self-serving goals. Starting with agenda-setting, it was essential for us that the Al Salon organizers set the agenda for discussion alongside the speakers. The topics selected came from our personal experiences, questions, research interests, and the envisioned priorities of researched communities as validated through discussions with the speakers; we utilized everyone's expertise while prioritizing representation for researchers from the region, early career researchers, and scholars in exile. As establishing personal connections and solidarity was an essential goal, we held a preparatory session for all participants so we could agree on the values and chosen research ethics that would guide the five discussion circles and define our shared space. The result was the following statement:

Al Salon is pro-revolution/social change transnational space where participants critically engage with transnational public issues that touch their lives, their activism, their study and/or their interests. Al Salon is not a therapy session but an opportunity for people to share their own stories with proper trigger warning. We will try to move towards a productive discussion. We will take an interdisciplinary approach that is flexible in content and opens the space for discussion. We will share space and entertain a diverse array of perspectives and backgrounds to reflect the diversity of participants. We respect each other's differences and diversity. We will uphold a safer space by practicing ethics of care such as: developing a mechanism within the sessions for intervention, being mindful of language, allowing the discussion to flow organically, helping connect the personal with the intellectual question(s), and drawing our personal boundaries. We critically reflect on the past, but also look for possible future strategies. We think collectively, not only from an academic perspective. We communicate and engage with each other without judgments/classifications. We sympathize/show compassion towards others' experiences. We don't attack each other. We acknowledge the complexities of reality. We evoke reflection on personal transformations. We raise questions around the temporality of being in the diaspora and

looking back at the homeland. We do not monopolize and try not to repeat ourselves. We respect each other's time. We do not like academic jargon and give space to non-academics. We build between different exile communities and learn from one another. We care about those in the diaspora and the Arab world. We try to build a support system for one another.

Agreement on shared values and goals allowed us as moderators to hold each other accountable. To anchor a journey that starts with defeat and ends in the diaspora, one that highlights movement rather than inertia. Our journey allowed us to remember collectively through reading, writing, storytelling, and testimonies; to celebrate survival; to represent the diversity of our research interests and production; to network; to reframe; to name our struggles; and most importantly to democratize our research fields.

The question of defeat

In the first session of Al Salon, we started with the question of defeat. We invited two Arab scholars who have written extensively about this topic from different perspectives, Yassin Al Haj Saleh and Khaled Fahmy. We circulated selected readings of their work to participants to prepare beforehand and encouraged participants to prepare reflections, short remarks, and questions to be discussed in the session. In this salon, the question of defeat was approached historically in relation to earlier defeats, such as 1967, which left its mark on the political situation in the region. We discussed how defeat is not only political but also personal and looked at how the trajectory of the different revolutions greatly impacted the lives of activists and scholars from the region, with Syria being the starkest tragic outcome. Despite similarities between Syria and Egypt, Saleh suggested ways in which Syrians and Egyptians understood defeat and how its national representation differed massively between the two countries. Fahmy shared historical anecdotes on how defeat was communicated to the Egyptian public and how it was in turn understood. Fahmy also insisted on the importance of writing counternarratives to history: to see ourselves as historical actors in these moments, so as to avoid historical erasure. We ended the session with a discussion of the defeat of some of the revolutions in the region might have informed and led to lessons learned for the second wave of revolutions which was to be the topic for the second salon.

The second wave

In the second session of Al Salon, two scholar-activists from Sudan and Algeria gave their reflections on the political mobilization and organization in the recent wave of revolutions, as compared to the first wave in 2011-2013. Berlin-based Sudanese scholar and activist Sara Abbas and Algerian scholar Naoual Belakhdar shared their thoughts with us in December 2020 on the most recent movements in Sudan and Algeria. As in the first session, a list of suggested readings or videos were provided to the participants, who prepared their questions and reflections beforehand. For this session, we invited Berlin-based activists from Egypt, Yemen, Tunisia, and Syria to participate in the discussion. We tackled the challenges and the tactics of political organizations in the recent revolutions – not only in the countries discussed but also from the diaspora – and reflected on how and in what ways these activists were influenced or not by the first wave of revolutions. Abbas diligently explained the dynamics vis-à-vis Sudanese society, pointing out the lessons learned from earlier movements and what mistakes were repeated. Abbas emphasized the importance of understanding the intersections of class within the Sudanese uprising to grasp the inter-workings of Sudanese civil society. Belakhdar similarly reflected on what the 2011 moment meant for Algeria and how the lessons learned were extrapolated from the Syrian and Egyptian experiences. For Algeria, Belakhdar explained how the country's post-civil war history with internal strife strongly colored how Algerians viewed the most recent protest movement. She said this not to point to socio-political cleavages, but rather to explain how Algerian society remains touched by the continuities in its recent history.

Revolutions and the urban poor

Tarek el-Tayeb Mohamed Bouazizi was a Tunisian street vendor who set himself on fire on 17 December 2010. The third salon was dedicated to commemorating his memory and opened questions about the struggle of urban youth living in poverty after the Arab Spring. We invited Berlin-based historian Leyla Dakhli and Egyptian urbanist Omnia Khalil to join this third session to share their insights with Al Salon attendees. Both have worked on this topic extensively and gave a short talk followed by discussion among the participants. Some of the questions that were raised were: How has the situation changed for urban populations living in poor over the past 10 years? What kind of political avenues and opportunities, if any, have arisen as a result of the revolutions? How does gender and class intersect to produce subjectivities among high-poverty urban populations? Dakhli elaborated on how urban poverty played a critical role in Tunisia's revolutionary moment in late 2010, pointing to the complex layers of urban poverty in Tunisia. She explained how our understanding of urban poverty must permeate its many layers in order to understand the injustice that was inflicted onto Bouazizi, as well as others who self-immolated.

Khalil discussed the urban change in Cairo over the past decade, explaining how the Egyptian state has functioned as a sort of "urban realestate broker", through evicting urban poor and selling the land to investors. She discussed how insecure housing directly impacts the ability of Cairo's urban population in poverty to sustain a decent standard of living. She contextualized this in the long history of such tenure in Cairo and how these tactics are deeply embedded in Cairo's urban change. Khalil suggested that these practices are not necessarily novel to Cairo; however, it is perhaps the degree to which these changes are happening that is unprecedented.

At the close of this salon, two sessions remained, both on significant dates for the Egyptian Revolution: 28 January and 11 February.

Healing and restoration in times of revolutions

Inspired by the feminist movement, we discussed in this session how healing and restoration is an essential part of any revolutionary struggle. We brought forward the question of the sustainability of activism as well as self-care and community care. The session was anchored by the important works of several women human rights defenders on this topic, including the well-known books What Is the Point of Revolution If We Can't Dance? by Jane Barry and Jelena Djordjevic and Even the Finest of Warriors written by the Egyptian feminist Yara Sallam; Sallam was invited to share with us her input and reflections alongside Berlin-based activist Ahmad Awadalla. In our fourth session, we asked: What can recovery and healing look like in revolutions? What does it mean to recover in the aftermath of a revolutionary moment? In what ways can we heal?

The role of diaspora

In the aftermath of the Arab revolutions, many people involved in the revolutions fled to other countries because they were personally in danger or it had become impossible for them to live in their countries. We are witnessing a growing Arab diaspora in many countries in Europe especially from activists, artists, and academics who were involved in the revolutions. The last session of the series tackled the question of the roles of the different Arab diasporas in supporting the ongoing struggles in the Arab world while also critically reflecting on our capacity to act from abroad and the question of security. We closed the series and our fifth session on the role of the diaspora with Syrian activist Wafa Mustafa and Sudanese activist Ahmed Issam. We engaged with existing conversations on the role of diaspora groups in Europe and beyond in nurturing and supporting attempts at political change in the region. What can we do from our localities in Europe? How can we engage with the places we have left, remaining in touch with reality on the ground and without speaking on anyone's behalf?

After Al Salon: postmortem

The idea for the Al Salon began with a conversation on disenchantment with academia. For many of us who took part in the movements in 2010-2011, academia seemed to offer a sort of toolbox to help decipher what we had just experienced and how we could move forward. However, a decade on, we were realizing just how betrayed or failed we felt. By bringing together individuals with a variety of backgrounds, Al Salon hoped to reorient the conversations held in academia over the past decade, engaging activists, artists, and the wider public. Al Salon's insistence on a non-hierarchical structure was also rooted in this value, as we hoped to make these conversations accessible to those without experience in academia. While the conversations in Al Salon were eye-opening and refreshing, they were also extremely challenging and emotional. From reflecting on the meaning of defeat in 2021 or on healing to historicizing our experiences, organizers and attendees alike have had personal experiences in which these discussions were rooted; this made the conversations in Al Salon as rewarding as they were inevitably difficult.

In late 2019, when the idea for Al Salon was still on the drawing board, there were no quarantine or travel restrictions in place as this was before the COVID-19 pandemic. Besides the pandemic's logistical hindrances, having these conversations under those circumstances proved to be increasingly difficult for all of us; regardless, many participants pushed through and continued to join Al Salon for every session. For many attendees, they wished to foster a sort of collective presence while exploring the topics and connecting with like-minded people, whether located still in the NAWA region or in the diaspora. This encouraged many of us to connect across borders and shores and to continue our work of remembering, recounting, and reflecting on our memories, hopes, and experiences. Al Salon is but a small part of the space filled with many other attempts to emulate a similar experience; however, it succeeded in fostering a space for us to come together and converse with one another.

The Future of the Al Salon Movement

We Call It Revolution: Transnational Activism in Berlin

Living as we did – on the edge – we developed a particular way of seeing reality. We looked both from the outside in and from the inside out. We focused our attention on the centre as well as on the margin. We understood both… Our survival depended on an ongoing public awareness of the separation between margin and centre and an ongoing private acknowledgment that we were a necessary, vital part of the whole. (hooks 1989, p. 20)

As of this writing, Al Salon is being featured at the October 2023-March 2024 exhibition titled We Call It Revolution organized by FHXB Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg Museum. The exhibition seeks to understand how Berlin is in many ways shaped by transnational political movements, both in its public spaces as well as Berlin's overall political landscape. My proposition to carve out the spaces of radical openness that are crucial for academics wherever they are is not an invitation to isolate ourselves from the larger communities we live in; rather, it is a call to engage with a deep understanding of our relevance to the margins and centers. We cannot afford to isolate or ignore centers of power and knowledge, as hooks notes above. However, as we move knowledge from and to the margins, we need to be careful not to lose ourselves and be subsumed by knowledge regimes the contribute to our further oppression not liberation.

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Speaking the Tahrir Truth to Apparatuses of Knowledge: Subalternity, the January revolution's event, and the battle over Knowledge

Mario Mikhail

Introduction

Tahrir is the name of the main square which became synonymous with the Egyptian revolution. The Arabic name of the square in the literal sense denotes the meaning of emancipation. And the revolutionary juncture of Tahrir square was indeed a moment of liberation in many respects. But after more than a decade passing, speaking of the Egyptian revolution-liberation nexus may sound redundant to many, considering the multitude of scholarly and societal discussions surrounding this topic. Nevertheless, it is often overlooked that the moment of Tahrir square gestured an idiosyncratic form of emancipation, an emancipation from established and predominant knowledges. Consequently, signifying new phase in the Egyptian sociopolitical terrain, with its distinctive implications and characters.

The profound effects of the Egyptian revolution rendered the Egyptian sociopolitical landscape into a battle arena – and a laboratory at instances - in which multiplicities of knowledges and truth exercised and collided. In this paper, I aim to elucidate the decisive role which knowledge played amid the struggles and conflicts between different actors in revolutionary Egypt. The paper also aims to illustrate the idiosyncratic rupture of Tahrir Square in relation to disputes of power surrounding knowledge. I argue that the moment of Tahrir Square beckoned the emergence of subaltern possibilities which consequently disturbed established knowledge regimes. This pivotal moment of the breakdown in established knowledge prompted retaliations and reactions from the Egyptian state and Western neoliberal institutions to contain these novel potentialities. Western neoliberal institutions and the Egyptian state differed in values. Nonetheless, both powers attempted to halt the emancipatory possibilities of Tahrir Square while simultaneously battled over whose knowledge would prevail utilizing relatively analogous governmental technologies.

In order to shed new light on the impact of Tahrir Square and the conflicts over knowledge in post-revolution Egypt, I'm employing a synthesis of theoretical notions to aid my analysis. The theoretical framework will include Alain Badiou's notion of the event, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's and J. Maggio's conceptions of the subaltern, and Foucault's ideas on truth and governmentality. I will then proceed to analyze the case of Tahrir Square and the practices of the Egyptian states and Western neoliberal institutions through the theoretical framework developed throughout the paper.

Truth Contra Knowledge

Many researchers analyzed the Egyptian revolution and the struggles surrounding it from different perspectives. Previous studies tackled the role of social movements and activists.[1] Other scholars examined the dimensions of space,[2] affect,[3] and social media.[4] Scholars studied the revolution within a lens of Gramscian hegemony,[5] while others engaged with subaltern perspectives.[6] However, the studies on the Egyptian revolution neglected the role of knowledge. The scholarly literature lacks an investigation scrutinizing the position of knowledge in the processes of struggles and contestations after and during the 25 January 2011 revolution.

Knowledge is a contested term and interpreted differently by various scholars. Knowledge is conventionally regarded as a product of official institutions such as universities or think tanks. However, against this orthodox interpretation there are informal forms of knowledge produced by the ordinary through everyday practices.[7] The association between knowledge and the subaltern is exemplified by Spivak. The subaltern are in possession of their own alternative forms of knowledge. However, the epistemic violence of colonialism silenced subaltern voices and subjugated subaltern knowledge to a hierarchal scale in which it was deemed inferior to scientific or Western knowledge.[8] Dominant Western and international institutions constitute means which contribute to undermining subaltern knowledge.[9] The examination of subaltern knowledge contributes to countering elite knowledge production by revealing the existence of silenced voices, which disrupts mainstream knowledge.[10] Spivak's subalternity is fundamental for elucidating the multiplicities of knowledge and epistemic violence which marginalized voices are subjugated to. Notions of subalternity are critically relevant to the Egyptian revolution. As actors participated in the 2011 revolution belonged to the subaltern, (e.g., working class and inhabitants of the urban peripheries).[11] Nonetheless, confining the analysis to a subaltern knowledge approach overlooks the exceptionality of the moment of Tahrir Square and its disruptive context. Although the practices of the revolutionaries were partly drawn from their prior knowledge. Nevertheless, other practices were relatively detached from any prior knowledge. These novel possibilities and practices emerged from Tahrir could only have been devised with this singularity of action through the moment of Tahrir Square.

Badiou's event as a rupture in established knowledge and order provides fundamental conceptual framework for grasping the exceptionality of the moment of Tahrir, subaltern politics, and knowledge. Bensaïd notices that, for Badiou, the only possible politics is subaltern politics,

1 Nahed Eltantawy and Julie B. Wiest. "The Arab spring| Social media in the Egyptian revolution: reconsidering resource mobilization theory," International Journal of Communication, Vol.5, 2011, pp. 1207–1224. (Eltantawy and Wiest, The Arab spring).
Vivienne Matthies-Boon, "Shattered worlds: political trauma amongst young activists in post-revolutionary Egypt," The Journal of North African Studies, Vol.22 No.4, 2017, pp. 620-644.

2 Hussam Hussein Salama, "Tahrir Square: A Narrative of a Public Space," ArchNet-IJAR: International Journal of Architectural Research, Vol.7, No.1, 2013, p. 128. (Salama, Tahrir Square).
Karen A. Franck and Te-Sheng Huang, "Occupying Public Space, 2011: From Tahrir Square to Zuccotti Park", in Miodrag Mitrašinović and Vikas Mehta, eds. Public Space Reader, Routledge, 2021, pp. 182-189.

3 Jessica Winegar, "The privilege of revolution: Gender, class, space, and affect in Egypt," American Ethnologist, Vol.39 No.1, 2012, pp. 67-70.

4 Mohammed El-Nawawy and Sahar Khamis, "Political Activism 2.0: Comparing the role of social media in Egypt's "Facebook Revolution" and Iran's "Twitter Uprising"," CyberOrient, Vol.6 No.1, 2012, pp. 8-33.
David Faris, Dissent and revolution in a digital age: social media, blogging and activism in Egypt, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013.

5 Brecht De Smet, Gramsci on Tahrir: Revolution and counter-revolution in Egypt, Pluto Press, 2016. (De Smet, Gramsci on Tahrir).

6 John Chalcraft, "Egypt's 2011 Uprising, Subaltern Cultural Politics, and Revolutionary Weakness," Social Movement Studies, Vol.20 No.6, 2020, pp. 669-685.
Salwa Ismail, "Urban Subalterns in the Arab Revolutions: Cairo and Damascus in Comparative Perspective," Comparative Studies in Society and History, Vol.55, No.4, 2013, pp. 865-894. (Ismail, Urban Subalterns).

7 Ann Swidler and Jorge Arditi, "The New Sociology of Knowledge," Annual Review of Sociology, Vol.20 No.1, 1994, p. 321.

8 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg, eds. Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture, Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988, pp. 271-313.

9 Siavash Saffari, "Can the subaltern be heard? Knowledge production, representation, and responsibility in international development," Transcience Journal, Vol.7 No.1, 2016, pp. 36-46.

10 Mohan Dutta and Mahuya Pal, "Dialog Theory in Marginalized Settings: A Subaltern Studies Approach," Communication Theory, Vol.20 No.4, 2010, p. 364.

11 De Smet, Gramsci on Tahrir, pp. 185-186.
Ismail, Urban Subalterns, pp. 890-891.

detached from the domains of the state and the party.[12] This form of politics is defined by the fidelity of the oppressed to the event.[13] The event is a rupture in the existing order creating unimagined possibilities in which subjects come to existence in truth processes.[14] Badiou describes truth as a process of " fidelity to an event: that which this fidelity produces in the situation".[15] The event is an "imminent break" which does not have meaning in the prevailing language and knowledge.[16] Truth punctures the established knowledge systems, or, as Badiou emphasizes: "a truth-process is heterogeneous to the instituted knowledge of the situation. … it punches a 'hole [trouee]' in these knowledges."[17] Truth is generated through the subjects' actions in relation to their fidelity to the event, contrary to the situation of the absence of truth in which there is only classified knowledge ordered by the structures of domination.[18] Participating in the event entails expressing pure fidelity to its possibilities.[19] For the event, "fidelity to the declaration is crucial."[20] The eventual "truth of a declaration and its consequences" emerges at a point in which knowledge breaks down.[21] The significance of the event lies in its consequences and results.[22] A critical reader may notice theoretical tensions between subalternity and truth procedures, since truth has to be declared and communicated [23] while the subaltern cannot speak. However, Maggio argues that the actions of the subaltern have communication functions not comprehensible in Western language; thus, Maggio reformulates the question to, "can the subaltern be heard?" instead Spivak's question "can the subaltern speak?"[24] Thus, the subaltern have the capacity to declare and communicate truth procedures emanating from a subaltern fidelity with an event. However, for predominant powers, these truth procedures are incomprehensible in their technical and scientific language; thus, the truths cannot be heard. Consequently, making subaltern truth procedures tyrannized by predominant powers' epistemic violence and technical scientific knowledge.

The Tahrir Square Truth Procedures

The moment of gathering and protest at Tahrir Square is an astounding event which immensely disrupted predominant politics and knowledge. Tahrir Square constituted a protest camp which subverted dominant politics and articulated an alternative order with its own value system.[25] The moment of Tahrir square manifested an exceptional protest camp liberated from the normal order and in which new expressions of radical solidarity emerged.[26] The moment of Tahrir Square created holes in the sovereignty of the Egyptian state.[27] Badiou noted that the 25th of January revolution was

12 Daniel Bensaïd, "Alain Badiou and the Miracle of the Event," in Peter Hallward, ed. Think Again, Alain Badiou and the Future of Philosophy, Continuum, 2004, p. 100. (Bensaïd, Alain Badiou and the Miracle of the Event).

13 Bensaïd, Alain Badiou and the Miracle of the Event.

14 Keith Bassett, "Badiou and Lazzarato on the Politics of the Event: Formalism or Vitalism?," Theory & Event, 2021, pp. 651-652.

15 Alain Badiou, Ethics:An Essay on the Understanding of Evil, Verso, 2001, p. 42. (Badiou, Ethics).

16 Badiou, Ethics, p. 43.

17 Badiou, Ethics, p. 43.

18 Keith Bassett, "Thinking the Event: Badiou's Philosophy of the Event and the Example of the Paris Commune," Environment and Planning D: Society and Space, Vol.26 No.5, 2008, p. 899.

19 Alain Badiou, Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism, trans. Ray Brassier, Stanford University Press, 2003, p. 45. (Badiou: Saint Paul).

20 Badiou, Saint Paul, p. 15.

21 Badiou, Saint Paul, p. 45.

22 William Watkin, Badiou and Indifferent Being: A Critical Introduction to Being and Event, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc., 2017, p. 161.

23 Badiou: Saint Paul, p. 109.
James D. Ingram, "Can universalism still be radical? Alain Badiou's politics of truth," Constellations, Vol.12 No.4, 2005, p. 568.

24 J Maggio, ""Can the Subaltern Be Heard?": Political Theory, Translation, Representation, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak," Alternatives: Global, Local, Political, Vol.23 No.4, 2007, pp. 419-421.

25 Adam Ramadan, "From Tahrir to the world: The camp as a political public space," European Urban and Regional Studies, Vol.20 No.1, 2013, p. 146. (Ramadan, From Tahrir to the world).

26 Elisa Pascucci and Adam Ramadan, "Urban protest camps in Egypt: the occupation, (re)creation and destruction of alternative political worlds," in Irit Katz, Diana Martin, and Claudio Minca, eds. Camps Revisited: Multi-faceted Spatialities of a Modern Political Technology, Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018, pp. 212-3.

27 Ramadan, From Tahrir to the world.

a decisive moment in history and a break from old politics.[28] Badiou remarks that the Egyptian revolution is an event which did not create new reality, but rather unimagined possibilities. Notions such as Western democracy or the petit bourgeoisie notion of social development were absent from Tahrir Square, and replaced by slogans/calls for a new Egypt manifesting the unknown possibilities of the event.[29] Badiou cites some examples, including the solidarity between Copts and Muslims in the square.[30] However, although Badiou's observations are extremely illuminating for understanding Tahrir Square, some of what he regarded as novel possibilities should be read with caution. For example, notions of solidarity between Christians and Muslims do not constitute break from old politics because this notion of Muslim-Coptic unity already exists in old politics (including the state's nationalist discourse). Nonetheless, Badiou's general framework is fundamental in understanding the complexity of the moment in Tahrir Square and its consequences.

The moment of Tahrir Square event generated endless possibilities in multiple arenas, and perhaps, one article cannot be inclusive enough to consider every element. However, the alternative infrastructural and social organization of Tahrir Square is a prominent example. The location of Tahrir Square was vital to the revolution. It was an ideal square for the revolution due to its proximity to the metro, its large open space, and its visibility from different angles.[31] The initial strategic choice of the square and its occupation constituted spontaneous action which did not result from administrative nor spatial-planning expert knowledge. The Tahrir square's location provided an ideal geography for erecting the revolution's infrastructure. Protestors reclaimed and reinvented Tahrir Square to meet the needs of the revolutionary event. The protestors reappropriated the public space by hanging banners; drawing graffiti; constructing gates from available materials; building functioning services such as restrooms, clinics, and stages; and organizing artistic exhibitions.[32] Tahrir Square was transformed into nonsovereign momentary space in which utopian forms of self-organization were realized.[33] The revolutionary activity of Tahrir is characterized by horizontalism, spontaneity, decentralization, creativity, and leaderless actions.[34] Although notions of authority existed in Tahrir square's internal organization, however, it was multiple, fluid, and without rigid hierarchies.[35] Tahrir demonstrators distributed duties among themselves based on skills, while dividing themselves into committees/groups with different tasks (e.g., storing medicine, protecting entrances, security watch, and garbage collection).[36] Plumbers invented a means for water distribution and toilets. Barbers provided their services free of charge, with the rationale that they did not want the demonstrators to leave the square for any reason, including haircuts.[37] Electricians built electrical infrastructure and artists performed or otherwise presented their arts. These spontaneous arrangements of Tahrir articulate the emergence of new possibilities for infrastructural planning and social organization; thus, divorcing from the State's knowledge in these areas. The alternative arrangements of Tahrir Square pierced the established administrative knowledge of the state to declare the birth of unimagined potentialities for grassroot modes of organization.

Moreover, the moment of Tahrir distinguished itself from the logic of capital and exchange. In fact, the circulation of goods and services did not correspond to any established economic system, neither capitalism, nor central State distribution, nor social welfare.[38] Tahrir Square signaled new mode of economic organization.[39] Food and services were distributed between protestors without charge. Individuals with different skills and talents offered their services without

28 Linda Herrera and Dina El-Sharnouby, "Alain Badiou on the Egyptian Revolution, Seven Years Later," Verso Books, 30 January 2018, available at https://www.versobooks.com/en-gb/blogs/news/3596-alain-badiou-on-the-egyptian-revolution-seven-years-later (El-Sharnouby and Herrera, Alain Badiou on the Egyptian Revolution).

29 Alain Badiou, The Rebirth of History:Times of Riots and Uprisings, Verso Books, 2012, p. 109.

30 Sharnouby and Herrera, Alain Badiou on the Egyptian Revolution.

31 Eltantawy and Wiest, The Arab spring, p. 1211.

32 Salama, Tahrir Square, pp. 135-137.

33 Jeroen Gunning and Ilan Zvi Baron, Why Occupy a Square? People, Protests and Movements in the Egyptian Revolution, Oxford University Press, 2014, pp. 263-273. (Gunning and Baron, Why Occupy a Square?).

34 John Chalcraft, "Horizontalism in the Egyptian Revolutionary Process," Middle East Report, Spring 2012, p. 262. (Chalcraft, Horizontalism in the Egyptian Revolutionary Process).

35 Gunning and Baron, Why Occupy a Square?, pp. 267-269.

36 Gunning and Baron, Why Occupy a Square?, pp. 263-265.

37 بي بي سي، «لجان لتنظيم ميدان التحرير وحمايته»، 30 يناير 2014، متاح على https://www.bbc.com/arabic/multimedia/2014/02/140130_close_up_egy_uprise2_clip1

العربية، «حلاقان مصريان يساهمان في «الثورة» بالحلاقة مجاناً للمعتصمين»، 09 فبراير 2011، متاح على https://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2011%2F02%2F09%2F136894

38 Chalcraft, Horizontalism in the Egyptian Revolutionary Process.

39 Chalcraft, Horizontalism in the Egyptian Revolutionary Process.

monetary compensation. These economic dispositions also transgressed class boundaries. It was not middle class individuals only – who, given their relatively stable financial situation, are more able to forgo compensation – who provided supplies and services, but also individuals from lower classes and precarious professions. The plumbers, electricians, and barbers previously mentioned are only few examples of individuals who offered their services without compensation to the collective at Tahrir Square. The 25th of January's revolutionary event interrupted capitalism's knowledge and economic rationale. Annulling the logic of exchange in Tahrir opened new potentialities for socioeconomic relations and arrangements. These potentialities resemble some of the most radical forms of utopian economics imagined (e.g., the economy of the gift or an economy founded on common property).

Even in the domain of security, the event of Tahrir generated its own truths regarding security and social safety. The revolution in Tahrir Square signaled the emergence of a new space in which new collective subjectivities arose through the process of gathering and the transformation of the square.[40] The collective performance of individuals in Tahrir Square created an emancipatory, post-liberal model of security constituted by the prevalence of feelings of trust and safety during the gathering, while abolishing hierarchies of us versus them (e.g., gender and religion).[41] The clashes with the police started from the early days of the revolution, but by 26 January 2011, protestors were already making progress by crossing security barriers in Tahrir Square, Mohandessin, and the high court.[42] The protestors gradually controlled Tahrir Square until it reached its full capacity, and from there they branched out into the side streets.[43] The protestors also demonstrated versatility and innovation when countering the police attacks. They used common items such as vinegar, onions, plastic bags, and soda to recover from the symptoms of teargas.[44] During the revolution, protestors used social media to circulate visual guidelines describing tactics for avoiding the police. These guidelines and recommendations, which educated the protestors about police attacks, became a mainstay of the protests even after the first 18 days. The alternative security effects of the moment of Tahrir Square persisted after the first 18 days. For example, during the 2011 protests of Mohamed Mahmoud, demonstrators erected barracks, created barriers to protect their space from the police, held truces with security forces when necessary, organized checkpoints, appointed guards, dispersed different groups to strategic places, and formulated strategies to counter surprise police attacks.[45]

The possibilities of alternative modes of security which initially started in Tahrir square reverberated throughout the country. During the revolution, the police retreated from the streets. In an attempt by the people to protect their neighborhoods, they formed popular committees acting as neighborhood watches. The popular committees devised mechanisms to protect their properties (e.g., monitoring the neighborhood by placing individuals on high structures, inventing gas-spraying tools for combating gangs, distributing guards on roofs or underneath buildings, and coordinating between groups through group leaders).[46] The popular committees persisted after the 18 days, and continued organizing activities to provide services for the community, (e.g., repairing urban spaces, painting houses, cleaning streets, and even organizing political campaigns raising awareness regarding constitutional amendments).[47] The domain of security which is conventionally classified as an integral part of the state's knowledge has been fundamentally contested. The consequences of Tahrir square in realm of security diffused the new potentialities encompassing alternative arrangements of safety and protection throughout the country. Grassroot subaltern security formulations emerged, rooted in values of solidarity and trust, constituted by innovative spontaneous security procedures and collective action.

40 Derek Gregory, "Tahrir: Politics, Publics and Performances of Space," Middle East Critique, Vol.22 No.3, 2013, pp. 241-244.

41 Ali Bilgic, "'Real people in real places': Conceptualizing power for emancipatory security through Tahrir," Security Dialogue, Vol.46 No.3, 2015, pp. 281-285.

42 المصري اليوم، «إنذار .. الآلاف يتظاهرون ضد الفقر والبطالة والغلاء والفساد.. ويطالبون برحيل الحكومة»، 26 يناير 2011، متاح على https://www.almasryaly-oum.com/news/details/1835091

43 بي بي سي، «يوميات مدون مصري: تواصلت المظاهرات حتى رحل مبارك»، 27 يناير 2011، متاح على https://www.bbc.com/arabic/mid-dleeast/2011/01/110127_egyptian_bloger_diary_tc2

44 محسن سميكة، «الأمن استخدم القنابل المسيلة للدموع لتفريق المتظاهرين.. والشباب دافعوا بـ «الخل والبصل»»، المصري اليوم، 30 يونيو 2011، متاح على https://www.almasryalyoum.com/news/details/1819008

45 العربية، «يوم دامٍ في ميدان التحرير.. وانهيار الهدنة بين الأمن المصري والمتظاهرين»، 21 نوفمبر 2011، متاح على https://www.alarabiya.net/arti-cles/2011%2F11%2F21%2F178340

46 شادي زكي، «اللجان الشعبية» تبتكر أساليب جديدة لـ«حماية الأرواح والممتلكات»، المصري اليوم، 01 فبراير 2011، متاح على https://www.almasry-alyoum.com/news/details/1833766

47 Asya El-Meehy, "Egypt's Popular Committees," Middle East Report, Winter 2012, p. 265.

The medical domain also became entangled with Tahrir's truth procedures. Doctors provided medical care to injured protestors in field hospitals. Egyptian revolutionaries turned streets, shops, mosques, and churches into clinics, and used motorcycles to transport the injured.[48] Makeshift hospitals first emerged as a reaction to the arrest of the injured protestors by the security forces in public hospitals; but later, between the 18 days of the revolution until the subsequent protests against the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) , field hospitals became increasingly organized.[49] Field hospitals were main targets of police attacks.[50] Doctors exemplified high degrees of agility in emergency situations. In some situations, doctors were required to stitch wounds without anesthetization.[51] The doctors of Tahrir Square improvised and attempted to aid large numbers of injured demonstrators despite their limited resources in nonmedical settings. Observers recall doctor's practices – which seem contradictory at times - throughout the revolutionary period. In instances, the doctors proudly "captured" regime-affiliated criminals and detected "suspicious-looking" patients.[52] In other instances, the doctors crossed lines to treat injured police and the regime-affiliated criminals.[53] Commentators explained this shift in practices as positive evolution reflecting gradual adoption of the ethics of medical neutrality which encompasses impartially treating the injured regardless of their affiliation.[54] However, the paradoxical practices of Tahrir doctors can be understood as emergence of new possibilities regarding medical ethics. The ideal medical ethics adopted by predominant medical institutions stress on the medical medium's neutrality and assert that doctors should treat all patients equally. In a stark contrast, the Egyptian state had its own medical ethics. The state's medical ethics demanded doctors to take sides by cooperating with the police and handing over demonstrators, even if they need critical medical care. Although the idealized conception of ethics in the medical profession and the state's medical ethics diverge greatly in values. As the former reflects idealized perceptions regarding medicine while the latter is excessively politicized. However, both ethical positions regarding medicine and medical professionals are manifestations two prevalent forms of medical knowledges adopted by different institutions.

The doctors of Tahrir Square did not conform to neither. Undeniably, the Tahrir Square doctors were not neutral actors as they exemplified fidelity to the event. The doctors were integral participants of the revolutionary process and actively partook in the event by providing their medical skills. The Tahrir square doctors stood against an enemy which may not 'deserve' treatment. It is documented that doctors adopted militant position by capturing state-affiliated individuals and refusing to provide care for 'suspicious' persons. Nevertheless, it is also documented that doctors provided medical care for the 'enemy'. They were willing to risk their lives by crossing the lines to treat police and regime affiliated criminals. It would be reductive to explain these contradictory practices as linear evolution towards an unbiased medical ethics grounded in treating everyone equally. These contradictory practices are perhaps manifestation of unforeseen truth procedures regarding medicine. The ethical groundings of Tahrir doctors defy the state's medically violent ethics toward the other. But simultaneously reject prevalent idealized notions of neutral care provision. Thus, demarcations between ethics of unbiased care and politicized biased care are blurred. The result is an articulation of perplexing and disordered medical ethics developed in a moment of rupture which does not conform to neither violent partiality in providing care, nor romanticized conceptions regarding impartial medical care. Contra the established medical knowledges, Tahrir's potentialities regarding medical ethics is characterized by fluidity, fluctuations, and not confined to a single ethical notion.

The event of Tahrir Square ruptured existing state of knowledge, and its consequences reverberated in the Egyptian landscape beyond the space and time of Tahrir. As Dina Wahba argues, the disruptive moment of Tahrir Square, "provided a political playing field, a space and time in which certain political practices developed through the collision of different political worlds in Tahrir Square", which transformed the practices of local activism and neighborhood struggles against the regime.[55] Tahrir Square was detached from the state's knowledge of social and economic order and

48 محمد محروس، «بالفيديو.. المستشفى الميداني يستقبل مئات المصابين في اشتباكات اليوم الثالث بميدان التحرير»، الشروق، 21 نوفمبر 2011، متاح على https://www.shorouknews.com/news/view.aspx?cdate=21112011&id=-d4432e6c-ecb6-4530-b215-3e30371a5552

49 Amani Massoud, A Brief History of Field Hospitals in Tahrir Square, Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, November 2011, available at https://eipr.org/en/blog/amani-massoud/2011/11/brief-history-field-hospitals-tahrir-square (Massoud, A Brief History of Field Hospitals in Tahrir Square).

50 المبادرة المصرية للحقوق الشخصية، «شهادات أطباء الميدان عن استهداف المستشفيات الميدانية على يد الشرطة والجيش»، 01 ديسمبر 2011، متاح على https://eipr.org/press/2011/12/المبادرة-المصرية-للحقوق-الشخصية-شهادات-أطباء-الميدان-عن-استهداف-المستشفيات-الميدانية

51 خالد محمد علي، «المستشفى الميداني.. ثمرة الثورة في ميدان التحرير»، الإمارات اليوم، 11 فبراير 2011، متاح على https://www.emaratalyoum.com/politics/news/2011-02-11-1.354748

52 Massoud, A Brief History of Field Hospitals in Tahrir Square.

53 Massoud, A Brief History of Field Hospitals in Tahrir Square.

54 Massoud, A Brief History of Field Hospitals in Tahrir Square.

55 Dina Wahba, "Counter Revolutionary Egypt From the Midan to the Neighbourhood," Routledge, 2023, pp. 3-4.

security. The demonstrators at the event produced radically novel possibilities regarding sociopolitical organization. The moment of Tahrir Square opened new possibilities generating truths by virtue of the fidelity of its subaltern subjects with the event of Tahrir Square. The truth procedures of Tahrir Square punctured a hole in the state's organizational knowledge and spawned new possibilities for alternative modes of organization. Furthermore, the subaltern truths of Tahrir Square did not fuse nor conform with the knowledge of the systems of representative liberal democracy, neoliberal economics, nor even social democracy. Instead, the subaltern event in Tahrir signalized the emergence of unimagined political, social, and economic possibilities. The truth procedures of Tahrir extended to other times and spaces in subsequent protests, demonstrations, and local practices beyond the revolution's 18 days.

The Rationale of Governmentality

In order to scrutinize the reactions of Western institutions and the Egyptian state, introducing additional theoretical motions is fundamental for understanding the conflict over knowledge. Foucault argued that the prevalent truth in one society is determined by the discourses, procedures, and mechanisms which distinguish between truth and fiction, as well as the status of the people who produce those truths.[56] Truth is the result of constraints and sanctions induced by dominant powers and apparatuses.[57] In the regime of truth, truth is produced through interplay of knowledge and power.[58] The combination of practices of power, regulations, and the regime of truth form a knowledge-power dispositif .[59]

Governmentality as mechanism organizing subjects' conduct is another essential Foucauldian concept for analyzing the functioning of power and truth. The regime of truth is closely associated with the notion of governmentality.[60] According to Foucault, governmentality is the primary mechanism of rule in liberal governments as it replaced imposition of rules/regulations and the subjugation to them with a new mode of governance which integrates freedom into the process of the efficient management of populations.[61] Governmentality is an articulation of political knowledge which produces new forms of knowledge and contributes to inventing new domains for government, regulation, and interventions.[62] It is a complex form of power directed towards the population with "political economy as its major form of knowledge, and apparatuses of security as its essential technical instrument".[63] Foucault argues that liberal states resting on premises of individual autonomy govern their subjects by directing their free choices in a particular way; thus, subjects govern their own social, economic, and political behaviors in accordance to the conduct of the government.[64] Therefore, governmentality is the "conduct of conduct" and the direction of the possibilities of actions of groups and individuals.[65]

It is fundamental nonetheless to consider that truth for Foucault is also contested. Foucault argues: "There is a battle 'for truth', or at least 'around truth... a battle about the status of truth and the economic and political role it plays.'"[66] There are apparent divergences between Foucault's and Badiou's notions of truth. For Foucault, the regime of truth relates to operations of dominant powers, while truth for Badiou is associated with the event of the oppressed. Nonetheless, both notions are essential for understanding the diffusion of knowledge and conflicts surrounding it. In fact, Foucault did not deny the existence of a certain notion of truth countering power. In his description of the parrhesia (i.e., speaking truth to power) he states: "If there is kind of 'proof' of the sincerity

56 Michel Foucault, "The political function of the intellectual," Radical Philosophy, No.17, Summer 1977, p. 13.

57 Michel Foucault, "The political function of the intellectual," Radical Philosophy, No.17, Summer 1977, p. 13.

58 Daniele Lorenzini, "What is a "Regime of Truth"?," Le foucaldien, Vol.1 No.1, 2015, pp. 2-3.

59 Michel Foucault, The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-1979, ed. Michel Senellart, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, p. 18-19.

60 Stephen Legg, "Subject to truth: Before and after governmentality in Foucault's 1970s," Environment and Planning D: Society and Space, Vol.34 No.5, 2016, pp. 858-876.

61 Michel Foucault, Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College De France, 1977 - 1978, ed. Michel Senellart, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, pp. 352-353. (Foucault, Security, Territory, Population).

62 Thomas Lemke, "Foucault, Governmentality, and Critique," Routledge, 2015, pp. 7-8.

63 Foucault, Security, Territory, Population, p. 108.

64 Sam Binkley, "Governmentality and Lifestyle Studies," Sociology Compass, Vol.1 No.1, 2007, p. 118.

65 Michel Foucault, The Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984, Vol. 3, ed. James D. Faubion, trans. Robert Hurley, The New Press, 2001, p. 341.

66 Michel Foucault, Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977, The Harvester Press, 1980, p. 132.

of the parrhesiastes, it is his courage. The fact that a speaker says something dangerous – different from what the majority believes – is a strong indication that he is parrhesiastes."[67] Nevertheless, in order to avoid confusion, I will employ the term truth in my discussion regarding the event of Tahrir Square. On the other hand, I will use the term knowledge in my analysis of the Western neoliberal powers and the Egyptian state's operations.

Hijacking Tahrir Square: The Neoliberal Technology

On the one hand, the Egyptian revolution distressed dominant Western powers. But on the other hand, the revolution opened a window of opportunity. To tackle the neoliberal Western initiatives in post-revolutionary Egypt, it is essential to examine the elements of neoliberal governmentality. Neoliberal governmentality functions in shaping the subjects' conduct by instrumentalizing freedom as tool which results in producing governable subjects.[68] Neoliberal governmentality also entails the valorization of free markets, and the hostility toward the State's economic interventions, while asserting the primacy of rational personal choice.[69] Furthermore, neoliberal governmentality utilizes nonpoliticized notions and constructs an entrepreneurial, autonomous, self-interested subject capable of self-government.[70] Western powers and media (particularly in the US) framed the 25th of January as revolution led by Westernized and peaceful middle-class youth, equating it to the pro-Western color revolutions in Eastern Europe.[71] However, this Western myth concealed that the revolution was composed of ordinary people from lower classes, and that the revolution engaged in decisive bloody conflicts against the regime.[72] Some scholarly Western frames of the Arab Spring utilized metaphors portraying the course of the revolution as unpredictable and disordered, while incorporating Western liberal democracy into the narrative to restore order and predictability through Western interventions, which consequently undermined the open-ended transformations of the revolutions.[73] These frames and discourses were not merely rhetoric. Western powers indeed intervened through governmental mechanisms to disseminate neoliberal values by fostering connections with local civil society actors, funding democracy promotion projects, and funding economic initiatives to rein in the consequences of the revolutions.[74] The aim was creating a self-governing civil society and entrepreneurial subjects in accordance to neoliberal economic values and the affiliated Western liberal democratic model.[75] The disturbance in the State system of knowledge caused by the event of Tahrir Square motivated neoliberal institutions to engage with the process of change to embed neoliberal knowledge into Egyptian society. This moment constituted opportunity for Western institutions for two reasons. First, Hosni Mubarak's repression heavily restricted Western institutions activities due to their promotion of values which challenged Mubarak's authoritarianism. Secondly, dominant Western powers regarded the event of Tahrir Square as a potential danger if left unchecked. Tahrir Square's possibilities and consequences were uncontrollable. It was becoming apparent that the Egyptian revolution generated alternative potentialities and novel arrangements which disengaged from - and even contradicted - prevalent Western modes of political and economic knowledge which are centered around the State and capital.

67 Michel Foucault, Fearless Speech, ed. Joseph Pearson, Los Angeles, Semiotext(e), 2001, p. 15.

68 Daniele Lorenzini, "Governmentality, subjectivity, and the neoliberal form of life," Journal for Cultural Research, Vol.22 No.2, 2018, pp. 154-166.

69 Margaret Thornton, "Neoliberal Governmentality and the Retreat from Gender Equality," in Ashleigh Barnes, ed. Feminisms of Discontent: Global Contestations, Oxford University Press, 2015, pp. 71-83.

70 Shoshana Pollack and Amy Rossiter, "NEOLIBERALISM AND THE ENTREPRENEURIAL SUBJECT: Implications for Feminism and Social Work," Canadian Social Work Review, Vol.27 No.2, 2010, pp. 155-169.

71 Zeinab Abul-Magd, "Occupying Tahrir Square: The Myths and the Realities of the Egyptian Revolution," South Atlantic Quarterly, Vol.111 No.3, 2012, pp. 565–572. (Abul-Magd, Occupying Tahrir Square).

72 Abul-Magd, Occupying Tahrir Square, pp. 565-567.

73 Andrew R Hom, "Angst springs eternal: Dangerous times and the dangers of timing the 'Arab Spring'," Security Dialogue, Vol.47 No.2, 2016, pp. 165-183.

74 Halit Mustafa Tagma, Elif Kalaycioglu, and Emel Akcali, "'Taming' Arab social movements: Exporting neoliberal governmentality," Security Dialogue, Vol.44 No.5-6, 2013, pp. 375-392. (Tagma, Kalaycioglu, and Akcali, 'Taming' Arab social movements).

75 Tagma, Kalaycioglu, and Akcali, 'Taming' Arab social movements, pp. 383-387.

Thus, Western governments invested in funding projects aiming at diffusing their knowledge and containing Tahrir square's consequences. These initiatives and programs particularly aimed to disseminate neoliberal values in Egyptian society, especially among youth. Examples of these initiatives are the Active Citizens (AC) program sponsored by the British Council, and the Young Arab Voices (YAV) program sponsored by the British Council and Anna Lindh Foundation). The AC and YAV programs were introduced after the revolution to promote the values of liberal democratic citizenship and global citizenship.[76] Their activities involved engaging individuals in the programs through participation in debates and/or designing curricula.[77] These two programs reflected neoliberal governmentality in two ways. First, the values of the programs articulated neoliberal mode of conduct (e.g., self-reliance, the promotion of neoliberal conceptions of freedom, and active participation in social affairs). Secondly, the techniques used in engaging individuals with the programs manifest governmental notion of regulation of the self and the creation of "free agency" by incorporating participants in active processes of design and debates.

Examining the two programs' discourse articulates these elements. The British Council's discourse reveals the centrality of timing in which the programs inaugurated (i.e. after the revolution). In article on the British Council's website regarding the YAV program, the authors compare two Arab youth surveys to stress the importance of the year 2011 for the program, because the in 2011 survey's results, the majority of youth favored democracy over stability; however, in 2016 the majority favored stability.[78] This comparison indicates that the opening which the revolution created constituted an opportunity for the British Council to be captured. In the British Council's annual report foreword, the director states: "In the months that followed 25 January 2011 we spent a lot of time listening to people in Egypt."[79] The director's discourse also demonstrates that 2011 was a critical timing for the British government 's interventions. Moreover, this rhetoric indicates that interventions were preceded by technical calculations and strategic planning (e.g. use of surveys). The YAV program located several problems required intervention in targeted countries (including Egypt). These problems ranged from economic issues (e.g., unemployment) to political issues (e.g. extremism and weak political participation).[80] Authors of the previously mentioned article stressed that there are urgent problems necessitated the program's intervention which encompass the exclusion of youth from "meaningful political participation or representation", the enlarged public sector caused by governments "flex[ing] their public sectors to soak up unemployed graduates", and educational systems which "do little to foster creativity or entrepreneurial skills".[81] Here, the YAV articulates neoliberal knowledge aiming to cultivate values of entrepreneurship and free market while delegitimizing State interventions. Moreover, YAV hosted dialogues in Egypt with figures such as former US President Jimmy Carter, which indicates the program's affinity with the predominate sociopolitical knowledge of Western governments.

The AC program utilized operations functioning to organize the Egyptian youth's conduct. AC activities' encompassed artistic projects, (e.g., "Movie Nights" which organized movie screenings to promote the program's values of inclusion and coexistence, and the "Seven Girls' Story Telling Performance" project, aiming to foster "self-expression and personal transformation").[82] The British Council also established educational projects and other initiatives such as "Connecting Volunteers", "Futures Team", and "Up", to disseminate values of volunteering and entrepreneurship.[83] The project "Free Your Will" was designed to aid youth to "identify their dreams, fulfill their potential and set a plan to achieve their dreams." The annual British Council's report of 2012 echoes the neoliberal spirit of the program. The director stated that they initiated a program to reward entrepreneurial and creative individuals. Moreover, the program report assesses the impacts of their governmental interventions. The report uses statements such as, "We built creative entrepreneurship and cultural leadership skills", and, "We promoted international development and the empowerment of

76 Madeline Waddell, "Citizenship Education in Egypt," Summer Research, 2013, p. 171, available at http://soundideas.pugetsound.edu/summer_research/171

77 Madeline Waddell, "Citizenship Education in Egypt," Summer Research, 2013, p. 171.

78 See David Knox and Alasdair Donaldson, Young Arab voices, British Council, May 2016, available at https://www.britishcouncil.org/research-policy-insight/insight-articles/young-arab-voices (Knox and Donaldson, Young Arab Voices).

79 See British Council, Egypt's Annual Report 2012, 2012, available at https://www.britishcouncil.org.eg/sites/default/files/egypt_annual_report_2012.pdf (British Council, Egypt's Annual Report 2012).

80 Knox and Donaldson, Young Arab Voices.

81 Knox and Donaldson, Young Arab Voices.

82 See British Council, Community Initiatives - Arts and Dialogue, available at https://www.britishcouncil.org.eg/en/programmes/society/active-citizens/community-initiatives/arts-dialogue

83 See British Council, Community Initiatives- Youth Civic Engagement and Education, available at https://www.britishcouncil.org.eg/en/programmes/society/active-citizens/community-initiatives/youth-civic-engagement-and-education

individuals and communities."[84] The British Council's report regarding the societal impact, states that they "developed community leaders" and "established youth networks".[85] The British Council, through these programs, attempted to institute neoliberal regime of knowledge. The programs operated through governmental mechanisms organizing and arranging Egyptians' 'will' 'dreams' and 'aspirations,' instead of traditional vulgar ideological indoctrination. Moreover, the council created neoliberal 'leaders' and 'networks' to create self-regulating Egyptian subjectivities who are also capable of transferring these values to others. Despite veil of free participatory involvement, the British Council inaugurated hierarchies and coherent systems to disseminate the neoliberal knowledge. These mechanisms of governmentality function to situate Egyptian youth (who are regarded as the main actors of the revolution) within a neoliberal value system. Consequently, these mechanisms would halt the truth procedures of Tahrir Square. As discussed, Tahrir Square demonstrated possibilities of subaltern sociopolitical dispositions which ruptured from the predominate Western social, economic, and political knowledge. The neoliberal programs attempted to replace the truth procedures of Tahrir Square and its resulting potentials for emancipatory socioeconomic activity with hierarchical structures and networks informed by neoliberal socioeconomic values. Moreover, the neoliberal initiatives also aimed to challenge the state's system of knowledge which is characterized by authoritarianism and antidemocratic elements.

Activities of Western neoliberal institutions were also visible in the political sphere. The USA is another major Western actor which directed its activities and investments towards post-revolutionary Egypt, particularly regarding in the political dimension. The US Agency for International Development (USAID) increased the funding for supporting democratic processes in Egypt after the revolution to US$65 million and these funds were directed towards transmitting American knowledge on democratization and electoral politics (e.g., tutoring activists about elections, conducting and using opinion polls, arranging campaigns, and the recruiting and managing of volunteers).[86] USAID also relied on local partners to disseminate American political knowledge, as their website states that their national partners disseminated information among local communities allowing Egyptians to "participate in the debate on political reform".[87] Hence, USAID was disseminating Western dominate values regrading political organization, and particularly in its American form. The USAID's political knowledge is centered around representative democracy and American electoral politics. Contrary to the political truths of Tahrir Square, which opened unlimited possibilities for grassroot political arrangements, USAID aimed to ingrain liberal American democracy. Thus, muzzling the political potentialities of Tahrir Square and instating the knowledge of liberal representative democracy by engaging local actors in processes employing techniques of governmentality.

The Knowledge of the State Contra the Truth of Tahrir Square

Following January 2011, the Egyptian state's main concerns were containing the consequences of Tahrir Square, countering the Western initiatives, and reinstituting its sociopolitical knowledge. After 2011, a discourse appeared encouraging the inclusion of youth into the political structure; however, this discourse made a distinction between the pro-government "good" youth and the anti-government "bad" youth.[88] From early days, there were attempts to co-opt notable individuals from the revolution, particularly youth activists. Shortly after the fall of Mubarak, the SCAF met with several activists including Ahmed Maher, Asmaa Mahfouz, and Wael Ghonim. Later the media widely disseminated a famous photo from this meeting which featured the current president Abdel Fattah El-Sisi (who was during that time the director of military intelligence and reconnaissance). There are stark differences between the SCAF's meeting and the meeting Omar Suleiman (the vice-president during Mubarak's final days and former Director of the General Intelligence Directorate) held with the opposition during the revolution. Omar Suleiman invited representatives of traditional Egyptian politics (e.g., El-Wafd, the Muslim Brotherhood, the National Progressive Unionist Party, the Nasserist party, and even Mustafa El-Nagar represented semi-institutionalized youth

84 British Council, Egypt's Annual Report 2012, p. 34.

85 British Council, Egypt's Annual Report 2012, p. 34.

86 See The Nation, Can USAID Be a Force for Good In Egypt?, available at: https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/can-usaid-be-force-good-egypt/

87 See USAID, Storytelling Hub, available at: https://blog.usaid.gov/2011/04/from-the-field-our-ongoing-efforts-in-egypt/

88 Nadine Sika, "The Disguise of Youth Inclusion in Egypt," power 2 youth, (2016), p.14.

movement by being a delegate of El-Baradi's Campaign). However, after the revolution, the SCAF decided to hold a meeting with activists because authorities realized that the actions of Tahrir Square were beyond the limits of traditional Egyptian political knowledge. Thus, merely co-opting or persuading traditional politicians would not be sufficient to control the moment. Inviting the notable activists was a mean of containing their demands. Moreover, disseminating the famous photo in the media acted as political propaganda aiming to control the uncertainty of the moment and the Egyptian public's growing demands. Another manifestation of the attempt to control the consequences of the Tahrir Square was the political parties' law. The new law eased the previous restrictions imposed on establishing new political parties.[89] Despite the fact that the law contained elements which could restrict the establishment of parties, the number of parties in Egypt unprecedentedly increased.[90] Permitting and easing the establishment of new parties was a mean by the SCAF to absorb the uncontrolled political possibilities of Tahrir Square into established political knowledge.

Despite the SCAF's attempts of including youth and opposition in the state's official regime of knowledge, the SCAF's initiatives were not successful. The period in which the SCAF controlled the government proved to be unstable. There were growing resentments against the SCAF, particularly from Egyptians who hoped for change. The streets were reenergized again by popular actions and activities against the SCAF. The frequency of demonstrations, protests, labor strikes was hallmark of this period. The state employed its violent apparatuses to bring order back to the streets. But the SCAF's repressive methods failed to achieve notable successes. This period was a warning sign to the state, signaling that new technologies of control need to be devised to halt the revolutionary repercussions of Tahrir Square. It was evident that old simple formulas of co-optation and state violence are inadequate in terminating the unprecedented political and social consequences of Tahrir Square. Thus, the Egyptian state since 2013, following the overthrow of Mohamed Morsi (Former president affiliated to the Muslim Brotherhood who held power after the SCAF), started to develop more sophisticated governmental technologies to disseminate the state's knowledge and to incorporate subjects within the state's system of knowledge. Under the umbrella of the National Training Academy (NTA), the authorities created several programs such as the Presidential Leadership Program, which is an eight-month training program aims to:

qualify [youth] for political, administrative and community work. This is achieved through the provided training on theories of management, scientific, practical planning that helps in increasing their abilities on applying the modern methods to address the problems surrounding the Egyptian state.[91]

The program's extra-curricular activities included arranging visits to the parliament and important monuments in the new capital, and attending lectures at the Nasser Academy on national security.[92] Another similar initiative is the Executive Presidential Leadership Program, which aims to "empower the country's efficient cadres to become capable of understanding and using modern methods in policy-making[and] management of decision-making".[93] These statements from the official website epitomize the essence of these programs, which is employing expert scientific knowledge to prepare youth for the fulfillment of the state's objectives. The programs are producing a new Egyptian subject conditioned by the political values and organizational knowledge of the Egyptian state. Candidates who successfully complete the program would become self-governing subjects guided by the internalized political and administrative logic of the state.

The state created these governmental technologies to harness the energies of youth, prevent another revolution from happening, and contain the influence of Western sociopolitical values by implanting the values of the Egyptian state into the participants. In a published study (which appears to be highly biased and propagandist) on the Executive Presidential Leadership Program, the author states that the revolutionary energy of youth had to be transformed into energies for development, adding that the youth's abilities had to be contained in order to prevent youth from being lured by political forces/conspiracists, while stressing on the importance of strengthening the communication line between youth and the State.[94] The author concludes that

89 See The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, "Egypt Opposition Divided over New Political Parties Law", available at: https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/egypt-opposition-divided-over-new-political-parties-law

90 See Jadaliyya, Party life in Egypt after the revolution... between take-off and faltering, available at: https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/27493

91 Presidential Leadership Program, National training academy, available at: https://nta.eg/plp.html

92 See veto gate, https://www.vetogate.com/4668150
See dostor, https://www.dostor.org/4155889

93 Executive Presidential Leadership Program, National training academy, available at: https://nta.eg/eplp.html

94 Mohamed Mohamed Hassan Ibrahim, "the directions of university youth towards the presidential leadership program," no. 12, 2018, pp. 11-39, available at: https://jfss.journals.ekb.eg/article_63157.html

the NTA and Executive Presidential Leadership Program use modern scientific methods to create responsible leaders equipped with necessary skills for addressing challenges and creating positive impact in society,.[95] This article is patently propagandist and biased toward the regime. However, the article's importance lies in articulating the underlying rationale behind the program. Moreover, several articles from state-sponsored media outlets echoed the same ideas.[96] Another government-biased article published a news site, the author states that the Presidential Leadership Program prepare graduates to become "responsible" "statesmen" and "leaders" who will assume future senior positions in the state (the author also points out that many graduates are currently employed as assistants and deputies for governors and ministers).[97]

In addition to these systematic programs, the Egyptian state also devised other initiatives with governmental dimensions. The state established a miniature model simulating the Egyptian state (resembling model united nations) by making youth take the roles of state officials. There is also the World Youth Form which invites youth to participate in conversations and lectures regarding contemporary social, economic and political issues concerning the Egyptian state. In these initiatives, Participating youth are engaging with state structures and values through mechanisms giving a sense of agency. However, this agency is only practiced within the limits of the state's broader vision and goals. The illusion of free agency produced by these initiatives creates new Egyptian youth subjectivities capable of conducting themselves according to the state's knowledge framework. On the political level, the Egyptian state established the Coordination of Party's Youth and Politicians (CPYP). The coordination functions as the political counterpart of the previously mentioned programs and initiatives. The CPYP integrates youth into the state's official political knowledge through youth's inclusion within the authority's preplanned, sanctioned, and drafted political domains of the Coordination.

It may be unfamiliar to discuss governmental technologies in the context of nonliberal states. However, there are significant and strong interlinks between authoritarianism and governmentality. As Mitchell Dean argues, the liberal regime of governmentality contains authoritarian aspects. The history of liberal governmentality is based on dividing populations between the people possessing attributes of responsibility and self-improvement, while excluding others who are perceived as lacking these qualities because of their identities (e.g., race, nationality, sexuality, gender).[98] Moreover, the "free subjects" of liberalism engage in self-despotism by modifying their behaviors in order to achieve a higher self through habit.[99] Although liberal and illiberal regimes may differ in values, they share the common goal and ideal of creating communities capable of regulating themselves with minimal interventions from the government.[100] Previous research in non-Western/non-liberal contexts detected the use of governmentality.[101] The literature identified hybrid forms of governmentality combining neoliberal governmental technologies with authoritarian values.[102] Thus, speaking of governmental regime in Egyptian politics is not peculiar as it may seem.

As previous examples exemplify, the state installed subtle technologies of government to advance its knowledge diffusion procedures to control the revolutionary repercussions of the event at Tahrir Square. Among these technologies, the National Dialogue remains one of the most significant. The authorities' announcement that the NTA is the chosen institution to host the national dialogue was met by many Egyptians with confusion, and even sarcasm. However, after dissecting the primary governmental role of the academy, the choice of this pivotal institution becomes comprehensible. The revolution alarmed the state. The event of Tahrir Square indicated that the state's established status-quo of social, political, and economic knowledge had been profoundly disturbed. The state's traditional ideological apparatuses proved its inadequacy in curbing the consequences of Tahrir Square. This deficiency can be attributed to two structural factors. First, the deep-rooted problem of the Egyptian educational system's fragility - due to the limited resources and decades of neglect - which caused

95 Ibrahim, 2008.

96 See ahlmasr news, available at: https://ahlmasrnews.com/471023/من-هم-شباب-البرنامج-الرئاس

97 See soutalomma, available at: https://www.soutalomma.com/Article/997476/البرنامج-الرئاسي-لتأهيل-التنفيذيين-هنا-يُصنع-القادة

98 Mitchell Dean, "Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society," Los Angeles: SAGE, 2010, pp. 156-62.

99 Dean, 2010, 156-7.

100 Elaine Jeffreys and Gary Sigley, "Governmentality, Governance and China," essay in: Elaine Jeffreys (ed.), "China's Governmentalities: Governing Change, Changing Government," London: Routledge, 2009, pp. 6-7.

101 Gary Sigley, "Chinese Governmentalities: Government, Governance and the Socialist Market Economy," Economy and Society 35, no. 4, 2006, pp. 487–508, available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/03085140600960773. Alam S. M. Shamsul, "Governmentality and Counter-Hegemony in Bangladesh," Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

102 David A. Palmer and Fabian Winiger, "Neo-Socialist Governmentality: Managing Freedom in the People's Republic of China," Economy and Society, Vol. 48, no. 4, ,2019, pp. 554–60, available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/03085147.2019.1672424.

failures in fulfilling the apparatus's ideological role. Secondly, state sponsored media lacks credibility in public perceptions. The credibility of the state-owned media is frail, and its trustworthiness declined even more after the revolution. Similarly, the legitimacy of private state-sponsored media gradually eroded due to overuse and its conspicuous bias.

Thus, the apparatus of the NTA was invented to reestablish the supremacy of the state's knowledge in a complex manner. The NTA is a mechanism which ingrains state knowledge into the souls of its subjects, not through naïve propaganda, but by using governmental means to conduct the conduct of the participants. The Presidential Leadership Program and the Coordination of Party's Youth and Politicians are directed toward the youth, while the national dialogue is directed toward political parties, syndicates, unions, and leading figures in the Egyptian sociopolitical landscape. Authorities chose to include various groups in the National Dialogue whom are considered by the state as sources of instability (e.g., youth, opposing political parties, syndicates, academics, and leading public figures) in quasi–decision-making processes which produce appearance of free agency in rules-making. This explains the National Dialogue's numerous committees. Each of the three main axes – economic, social, and political – is divided into several subcommittees. The topics covered include every aspect of the social, political, and economic life (e.g., political parties, elections, cultural identity, family issues, health, arts, women's issues, local governance, labor unions, syndicates, and political freedoms). The overabundance of subdivisions does not primarily aim to propose new ideas (although new ideas could potentially improve the governmental regime). The multitude of committees is fundamentally directed towards engaging as many groups and individuals as possible with the greatest number of topics. These processes of governmentality aim to produce subjects who will absorb the values and knowledge of the state, and practice an agency within the state's sanctioned limits, not outside it. Thus, the National Dialogue's subjects will self-govern according to the state's prescribed rules and values.

The Egyptian state's resort to governmental technologies to halt the possibilities of Tahrir Square could be attributed to several factors. Firstly, the state observed the success of governmental technologies in preserving order in Western democratic countries, (and perhaps the governmental techniques employed in authoritarian regimes such as China). Secondly, Western institutions' governmentality proved to have some successes in the ideological interpellation of Egyptian youth in pre- and post-revolutionary Egypt. Thirdly, the aggravated economic crisis in Egypt and the public's growing discontent with the situation urged the state to advance its mechanism of governance. Fourthly, international pressures on the Egyptian regime to improve human rights conditions in the country and to stop the violations against the opposition created pressures on the regime to reduce the overuse of policing and arrests as methods of control. This in turn driven the state to find novel mechanisms of maintaining order. Lastly, the Egyptian state is embracing the neoliberal economic regime in an unprecedented manner. Although, neoliberalizing the economy is not synonymous with liberalizing politics, as authoritarian neoliberalism is a common phenomenon. However, the factor remains vital to consider, particularly in upcoming future developments in Egyptian politics.

The Laboratory of the New Republic

The Egyptian state's implementation and planning of governmentality assimilates distinct authoritarian features into the process. As participants in the national dialogue reported, the board of trustees appointed by the authorities modified the outcomes and recommendations discussed during the dialogue by excluding and adjusting some recommendations; while other participants reported that the final recommendations submitted to the president have been unanimously agreed upon by the board, including individuals belonging to the opposition.[103] This indicates that the process was intended to operate within the State's regime of knowledge and arranged domain. Another vital feature is that the governmental technologies were not directed toward the population at large, but only small, educated groups: middle-class educated youth, activists, public figures, human rights defenders, politicians, and academics. This can be attributed to the governmental reason entailing the exclusion of groups perceived to be lacking the qualities responsibility and self-improvement. The infamous and incisive statement by Omar Suleiman in which he states that Egyptians are not ready for democracy, articulates the logic guiding contemporary practices of the Egyptian state. This rationale implies that the general Egyptian population is not ready for an advanced governmental regime because they lack the attributes of the responsible subject who is capable of self-direction with minimal state interventions.

Therefore, the new governmental technologies introduced by the Egyptian state after regaining control are only directed toward certain groups of the population in localized

103 See Mada Masr, https://www.madamasr.com/ar/2023/08/29/news/u/مصادر-بالحوار-الوطني-مجلس-الأمناء-تعا/
See masr360, at: https://masr360.net/توسيع-المناخ-العام-قبل-إجراء-الاستحقا/

institutions. The president's rhetoric also articulates this governmental rationale. The president stated that they accept opposition, but only with the condition that they understand "what they are saying" and understand the challenges.[104] This statement indicates that free opposition may be tolerated, but its conduct must conform to the values and visions of the Egyptian state, which requires neoliberal sense of responsibility in subjects. Moreover, this discourse and rationale can be situated with a broader goal of enhancing the technologies of rule. President El-Sisi stated that the generation of the "30th of June revolution" is the most capable of "taking the responsibly of building the country and constructing the modern state".[105] This is not the only instance in which notions of responsibility and self-improvement appeared in the presidential discourse. President El-Sisi held people responsible for several issues and urged them to act upon these issues: he urged people to lose weight by playing sports and following healthy diets; called on Egyptians to reduce birth rates to solve the problem of overpopulation; proposed a solution for inflation by advising citizens to stop purchasing expensive products; and criticized food waste during the month of Ramadan.[106] The president also criticized the media multiple occasions. He considered that the media is failing to raise people's awareness regarding the challenges and problems facing the country.[107] These discourses and practices demonstrate that the Egyptian state is perhaps attempting to manufacture a new generation capable of self-conduct. This also explains the focus on new generations of youth. Youth are in a blank state, not yet corrupted by the ethics of irresponsibility shared by the general population (i.e., ordinary Egyptians) nor prior ideological prejudices (i.e., as in politicians, academics, and intellectuals etc.). The future vision of what authorities vaguely termed as the "New Republic" is perhaps grounded in this governmental rationale and regime of knowledge. The New Republic is a republic of self-governing citizens who operate and exercise their agency within the general framework of rules and values arranged by the state. Hence, the NTA constitutes the governmental laboratory of the new republic.

The Activist as Target and Instrument

While there are various means and channels which national and global powers employed to diffuse their knowledge and values, the figure of the activist remains in the forefront of these means. The activist was portrayed as the representative of Tahrir Square by both the state and Western institutions. This may have not been an analytical mistake by power, but rather a deliberate strategy to contain the possibilities of Tahrir Square and disseminate the predominant powers' knowledge. This strategy reduces the complexity of the multitude of Tahrir Square possibilities to simplified mode of representation which facilitates the processes of governmentality and knowledge dissemination. It is important to understand why the activist cannot represent the possibilities and truths of Tahrir Square. Spivak stated that if the subaltern can speak, they will not be subaltern anymore.[108] But to rephrase Spivak's position using Maggio's definition, the subaltern will lose their subalternity as soon as they can be heard. Moreover, as Foucault remarks, intellectuals cannot bear universal truth since they are entangled with their own position and to the general apparatus of truth.[109] This is irreconcilable with the event. As Badiou argues, although truth has particular origin, it is able to transcend this particularity.[110] Truth "erupts as singular" but the singularity is "immediately universalizable."[111] The Tahrir square's subaltern opened new possibilities by virtue of their positionality as silenced groups and their fidelity to the revolution. Activists however, cannot articulate the subaltern truths of Tahrir Square. The position activists acquire within networks of established knowledge and power, prevents them from doing so, even if some of them initially emerged from a position of subalternity. The moment they can be heard, they cease to be a part of the Tahrir Square subaltern. Thus, they can only represent their individual position, ideology, and interests within the established knowledge.

104 See Youm7 at: https://www.youm7.com/5208615

105 See Youm7 at: https://www.youm7.com/6228196

106 See aljazeera at: https://www.aljazeera.net/politics/2020/6/18/%D8%A7%D8%A7-8

107 See masrawy at: https://www.masrawy.com/news/news_various/details/2016/5/24/851215/بالفيديو-الإعلام-صداع-في-دماغ-النظام

108 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "The New Historicism: Political Commitment and the Postmodern Critic," essay in: Harold Aram Veeser (ed.), The New Historicism, New York: Routledge, 1989, p. 283.

109 Michel Foucault, Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977, Brighton, Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1980, p. 132.

110 James D. Ingram, "Can Universalism Still Be Radical? Alain Badiou's Politics of Truth," Constellations, Vol. 12, no. 4, 2005, p. 567, available at: https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1351-0487.2005.00433.x.

111 Badiou: Saint Paul, p. 11.

Activists were an object of interest for both the Egyptian state and Western neoliberal institutions. From the early stages after the January revolution, the state attempted to co-opt activists by arranging meetings with them. The SCAF failed in these attempts during 2011. But with the inauguration of the national dialogue, it appears that attempts to insert opposition into the established knowledge system is becoming more successful, since some activists and politicians - who had notable roles during the revolution - are participating in the dialogue. The state is inscribing its sociopolitical knowledge into the conduct of activists through their participation in dialogues around social, political, and economic issues. The difference between the meetings with the SCAF and the national dialogue is that the national dialogue induces the mirage of freedom and the sensation of agency, unlike meetings which are intended to promoting certain public image (as the activists probably realized) and to merely hear their opinions without active participation. These factors explain the relative success of the dialogue in appealing to activists.

Western neoliberal institutions also wagered on activists to disseminate their neoliberal sociopolitical and economic knowledge. USAID directed its funds toward the inclusion of activists into their programs and financially supporting applicants from activist organizations who had a notable role in revolutionary and post-revolutionary Egypt (this approach dates back before 2011; for example, USAID offered funding to the prominent opposition movement 'Kefaya', but Kefaya refused.)[112] Some activists indeed confirmed that they attended lectures by institutions such as Freedom House, a US nonprofit promoting democracy, regarding democratization.[113] There have been rumors that members of the Egyptian April 6 Youth Movement sought funding from Freedom House, which caused a split in the movement.[114] According to leaked WikiLeaks documents, several movements in the region (including the April 6 Movement) received training and funding from US-sponsored institutions such as the International Republican Institute, the National Democratic Institute, and Freedom House.[115]

The infamous Case No. 173 (known as the foreign funding case) encapsulates the conflict over knowledge. This case led to the closure or/and freezing assets of several NGOs and banning their members from traveling. Most commentators regard this case as an expression of the Egyptian state's hostility toward independent NGOs. This is indeed a valid argument. Nonetheless, beneath the surface there is an underlying dispute over knowledge. US official reports and government-affiliated research centers regarded this case as disastrous to the realization of their objectives.[116] Case No. 173 was a reflection of the contestation over knowledge between the Egyptian state and Western institutions. A battle between the state knowledge and the Western neoliberal knowledge. It is fundamental to note that this is a battle between two hegemonic, elite powers. Truth procedures do not compete with the established opinions; they only break the existing order to open new alternatives, transforming the relation between the possible and the impossible. [117] Thus, the event of Tahrir Square, its subaltern, and its truth procedures did not engage in a battle over the hegemony of knowledge. On the other hand, the activists by their detachment from the event and the affirmation of their position in relation to the established predominate knowledge, were instrumentalized by both the state and Western institutions to terminate and limit the consequences of Tahrir Square, though for different ends.

Conclusion

In 2011, the habitual circulation of established knowledge in Egyptian society was suddenly ruptured by the event in Tahrir Square. The subaltern of Tahrir Square, with their fidelity to the event, broke with all predominant knowledge to produce liberatory truth procedures. The event of Tahrir Square punctured a hole in all established knowledge whether in the status-quo of the state's knowledge or Western neoliberal knowledge. Unimagined possibilities for social, economic, and political arrangements abruptly opened. The consequences of Tahrir Square surpassed the spatiality of the square and even the temporality of the event. However, the moment of Tahrir

112 Erin A. Snider, and David M. Faris, "The Arab spring: US democracy promotion in Egypt," Middle East Policy, Vol. 18, no. 3, 2011, p. 54, available at: https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-4967.2011.00497.x

113 See BBC at: https://www.bbc.com/arabic/middleeast/2011/01/110127_egyptian_bloger_diary_tc2

114 David Faris, "The end of the beginning: The failure of April 6th and the future of electronic activism in Egypt," Arab Media and Society, Vol. 9, 2009.

115 See NewYork Times at: https://www.nytimes.com/2011/04/15/world/15aid.html

116 Office of Inspector General ,Audit of USAID Egypt's Transition Support Grants Program, AUDIT REPORT NO. 6-263-13-002-P, October 22, 2012, available at: https://oig.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2018-06/6-263-13-002-P%20USAID%20Egypt%20Transition%20Support%20Grants%20Program.pdf

U.S. Government Accountability Office, Democracy Assistance: Lessons Learned from Egypt Should Inform Future U.S. Plans, Jul 24, 2014, available at: https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-14-799

117 James D. Ingram, "Can Universalism Still Be Radical? Alain Badiou's Politics of Truth," Constellations, Vol. 12, no. 4, 2005, pp. 567-568, available at: https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1351-0487.2005.00433.x.

Square only perforated the order of knowledge. Thus, the predominate apparatuses were already devising technologies of rule to obliterate these possibilities. Western institutions intensified their governmental technologies in Egypt to capture the moment and contain the actions and effects of the subaltern's politics of fidelity. The Egyptian state was also profoundly alarmed by the consequences of Tahrir Square, and gradually enhanced its governmental mechanisms to reestablish its own order, values, and knowledge. Although, predominate Western neoliberal institutions and the Egyptian state diverged in values. However, they shared common technologies and mechanisms engaging in a battle over whose knowledge and values would prevail. However, the essence of their technologies and goals remained the same. Both Western neoliberal institutions and the Egyptian state, with their expert scientific knowledge, determined that the unimaginable grassroot potentialities of Tahrir Square would be catastrophic and concurred that the voices and actions of the subaltern must be silenced, or rather, must not be heard.

My analysis should not be understood as an idealization or a romanticization of the Egyptian revolution. The framework of the event may exalt the revolutionary event to a certain extent, but also reveals its limits. As Badiou explains, although the event "brings to pass 'something other' than the situation, opinions, [and] instituted knowledges", the event can also be a "hazardous (hasardeux), unpredictable supplement, which vanishes as soon as it appears".[118] This elucidates why the Egyptian state and Western neoliberal institutions reigned and achieved relative success in establishing their dominance, while the possibilities of Tahrir Square were being gradually debilitated. More than a decade later, protests and dissent seem increasingly sparse, and the revolutionary spirit is eroding. This does not imply that the possibilities and effects of Tahrir Square are completely obliterated. However, due to the ephemeral character of the Tahrir Square event, the truth procedures of Tahrir Square did not concretely sustain their robust initial presence in society over the long term, especially against the endeavors of dominant powers who are armed with complex technologies and mechanisms operating to terminate the effects of Tahrir Square. On the contrary to the momentary and unpredictable dispositions of Tahrir Square, the Egyptian state and Western neoliberal institutions devised deliberate strategies aiming to entrench their knowledge and values into the soul of the Egyptian society by fabricating perpetual and durable self-governing subjects who are exercising their agency only within the confines of the rules and established knowledges of predominant powers. This does not indicate that the Egyptian state nor Western neoliberal institutions are triumphant in their attempts. Nonetheless, their strategies are inherently directed toward establishing knowledge in an everlasting and persistent manner.

118 Badiou, 2001, p. 67.

PART III

International Actors in Local Policymaking: Mechanisms, Modalities, and Obstacles

The Challenges of Knowledge Sharing: How Impact-Oriented Communications Can Lead to Transformative Policymaking

Ola Sidani

Introduction

In 2017, the Lebanese government initiated its plans for implementing the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (the 2030 Agenda). To localize this revolutionary and ambitious global agenda – which introduced new concepts to policymaking within a context of fragility, the urgent need to attract private sector resources mobilization, and incorporating civil society organizations in order to bridge gaps in government interventions – a novel approach to policy formulation was needed. In fact, the 2030 Agenda notably calls for inclusive, government- and society-wide approaches in formulating transformative national development policies.

The ambitious, global 2030 Agenda came at a turning point in the narrative of development decision-making in Lebanon. There were growing pressures from the international community to engage civil society in reform policy consultations, aiming for more transparency and accountability. Although consultations with nongovernmental experts had taken place for various sectoral, developmental, or reconstruction policy planning in Lebanon, the narrative of the international community at the onset of the 2030 Agenda was inclined toward advocating for more active engagement with and by nonstate actors in public policy design. Although multistakeholder engagement through collaboration and consultancies do take place on many occasions, State and nonstate actors continue to compete and criticize each other. Efforts toward sustainable, mutual trust and engagement in knowledge sharing continue, as communication alone is insufficient for creating a new social contract between both sides.

This process highlighted two primary challenges: creating a high-quality knowledge base that is trusted and valid; and making this knowledge a public good that can be used by national and international stakeholders learning about the developmental decision-making process at the national level and people who in some way take part in shaping the developmental policymaking process in Lebanon. Given the Lebanese context – with missing and interrupted data provision, and where different actors want to take credit for policymaking – there was a need for an innovative solution in order to bring all of these actors to one table and to give them national ownership of a joint, international process.

By reflecting on Lebanon's experience in its institutional setup for implementing the UN's sustainable development goals (SDGs) and the process toward drafting its first Voluntary National Review (VNR), this paper aims to highlight the challenges in effective communication between state

and nonstate knowledge providers.[1] It will shed light on both the national institutional setup that was established to inclusively create public knowledge and the VNR validation exercise, which exposed areas of policy incoherence and misalignment of resources and efforts. The paper will present takeaways from this institutional communications exercise as a basis for impacting integrated planning and policy cohesion, will reflect on challenges faced throughout the process, and will provide lessons learned to be utilized for transformative reform policymaking.

This paper aims to highlight the lessons learned and good practices in communication between state and nonstate actors in Lebanon, with an emphasis on the national development goals policymaking as the basis for this case study. It presents the process of Lebanon embarking on the global 2030 Agenda in a time of political tensions and efforts to bring in a comprehensive approach to needed structural and financial reforms that will be intertwined with sustainable development planning.

As a public policy practitioner working in my capacity as an economic officer at the Office of the Prime Minister at the presidency of the council of ministers in Lebanon for more than ten years, and a strong advocate for building strong institutional systems, I struggled in my communications with nonstate actors; I wanted to share a fair and realistic image about the efforts of some state institutions and decision-makers in producing quality information and scientific public policy decisions given the many limitations. Through my experience, I realized that both state and nonstate actors have their advantages and disadvantages in their levels of information and their processes for policymaking and knowledge production.

To this end, and within the framework of this project, it became clear to me the need to utilize impact-oriented communication between both parties; this is why I decided to write this case study about lessons learned and good practices in Lebanon's state and nonstate actors' communication for SDG policymaking. The findings of this paper are based on interviews with major stakeholders involved in the process along with my personal insights and experience; it is a narration of a process that I was deeply engaged with at its core, whereby I witnessed and learned about many aspects in the internal process of national policymaking.

This paper is divided into six sections, not including the introduction and conclusion: section one describes the launching of the 2030 Agenda project in Lebanon; section two introduces the VNR process, including the role of nonstate actors; section three reflects on the resistance in collaboration between state and nonstate actors during the process; section four describes the mitigation measures used to counter the mutual resistance; section five highlights challenges in communication; and section six presents lessons learned from the VNR process.

A Propitious Environment for Enlarged Participation in Policymaking

Lebanon committed to the 2030 Agenda during Prime Minister Tammam Salam's speech at the UN General Assembly in September 2015. Later, the cabinet issued a ministerial decision establishing a National Committee for SDGs (the National Committee) in June 2017; it was to be headed by the prime minister and its members included the director generals of line ministries and several public-sector administrations and entities, as well as representative from nonstate actors (two representatives each from the private sector and from civil society organizations (CSOs)).[2] In October 2017, a decision was announced naming the specific members.

The National Committee, which comprised 55 individuals was composed of five clusters according to the five 'P's of the global agenda: people, planet, prosperity, peace and strong institutions, and partnerships. A statistics-oriented cluster, called the SDG's statistics taskforce, was created instead of

1 The VNR is a report that countries produce periodically to document their process and progress towards achieving the SDGs and implementing the 2030 Agenda. Countries present their VNRs at the UN High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), which is a platform for the exchange of experiences and following up on global, regional, and national progress toward the 2030 Agenda.

2 The role of the National Committee is to convene major stakeholders in the process, within a platform for communication, collaboration, and reporting on the national progress in the design and implementation of public policies and initiatives related to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

a "partnerships" cluster because the latter, despite some inefficiencies, is a de facto practice embedded in the usual business modality of policymaking in Lebanon. The National Committee's secretariat chose to focus on statistics instead because that is where Lebanon's policymaking had the most apparent weakness, and this was seen as an opportunity to surmount the problem of poor data-sharing, particularly among state actors, outside the 2030 Agenda framework.

While the ambitious global 2030 Agenda called for adopting government- and society-wide approaches in its implementation, international experiences show difficulties and misconceptions in including the whole of society, as is reflected in the discussions and multistakeholder-dialogues that took place during the HLPF as well as during the VNR workshops conducted by the UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) and other UN entities. Lebanon, however, was innovative and proactive by officially involving representatives from nonstate private sector entities and CSOs within the National Committee. There was a growing rhetoric about the need to involve the private sector and CSOs in development projects to bridge the gap where the Lebanese government could not intervene efficiently and in due time.

There was also a growing narrative to encourage mobilization of nonstate actors' financial resources to fund development projects, within the general framework of a government designed development plan, such as the "Conference Économique pour le Développement du Liban par les Réformes avec les Entreprises" (CEDRE) plan.[3] The aim of having nonstate actors within the National Committee was to actively engage both state and nonstate actors in development planning from the inception phase.

It is important to highlight at this point that the nonstate actors in the committee – namely the Tripoli Chamber of Commerce and the Beirut and Mount Lebanon Chamber of Commerce representing the private sector, and Caritas Lebanon and the Hariri Foundation for Sustainable Development representing the CSOs – were chosen to represent their sectors and not themselves as their own entities. Nonstate actors were given full autonomy by the government to conduct their own sectoral consultations and to draft their own sections within the VNR – knowing that, according to UN guidelines, the VNR was a government-led process.

3 CEDRE is the "Economic Conference for Development of Lebanon through Reforms with the Private Sector", which was held in April 2017.

The VNR Process: A Communications Tool for Knowledge Sharing

While the UN identifies the VNR as a tool to for reporting on progress toward the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda, Lebanon aimed in its first VNR process to utilize it as a reform-monitoring tool based on effective collaboration between the relevant stakeholders. The objective of their VNR process was to create knowledge that is evidence based, open to everybody, inclusive, and that captures people's actual developmental needs from their own lens. In drafting the country's first VNR, Lebanon committed to abiding by UN guidelines and procedures, including the outcomes of UN-led workshops and peer learning exercises.

Why the VNR? It is a reporting tool that helps compare progress across time and regions; or from another view, it is a communication tool for sharing knowledge between the state and nonstate actors now and in the future. It was meant as a stock-taking exercise for Lebanon to identify what has been done so far at the sustainable development level, what was in the pipeline, what were the challenges, and what resources were needed. It was also a reporting tool for creating a baseline from which to measure currently planned and to-be-planned reforms, particularly within the context of the CEDRE framework. As a report, it articulates the process of the institutional setup and the guidelines to be followed in the process. Moreover, all references used to draft the VNR were documented in the last section of the VNR, providing accountability and transparency. There was no bargaining or gold plating; facts, issues and challenges were stated in the VNR as they were stated by interviewees or as they were presented in the consultants' questionnaires, with the utmost reflection of their realities Another aim of the VNR was to make it a Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) tool for decisionmakers and accountability follow up.

The next stage of the VNR drafting process was training state and nonstate actors members of the National Committee on identifying development priorities at the target level, with a policy cohesion and integrated-planning approach. Separate workshops were organized for each of the National Committee members to educate them about the global UN agenda, the means to localize it and the importance of

national ownership. It was important to strengthen the state actors' sense of ownership over the agenda at the national level in order to strengthen their trust in the process.

Lebanon's first VNR was drafted at the goal, or SDG, level, despite the ability to gain information at the target level particularly in the education and health sectors (the Ministry of Education and Higher Education and the Ministry of Public Health) due to their significant involvement in the UN's previous 2015 global development agenda and its resulting Millennium Development Goals.[4] The aim of the first VNR in 2018 was to create homogeneity in reporting on the goals of the 2030 Agenda as a first step.

The design of the National Committee allowed for interdisciplinary communication between state actors. After gathering the necessary information and data from the stakeholders and synthesizing them into sections of the VNR under each of the SDGs, a validation exercise took place, whereby these goal-oriented sections were sent to the relevant stakeholders in order to validate the information and the key messages drafted. The validation exercise showed gaps in communication and coordination between public administrations and ministries; for instance, some were not aware that other administrations worked on similar or complementary projects or initiatives. This had led to inefficient knowledge sharing and the classic bottleneck of poor sharing of administrative data despite the existence of supportive legislation. The validation exercise was a pivotal in highlighting and strengthening future coordination among public administrations and state actors.

Despite the challenges in the process, the VNR process adopted by the Lebanese government allowed for input from state and nonstate actors to be incorporated within the same report, unlike some other countries that refuted civil society contributions into their national VNRs.[5] The aim of this practice was to pave the way for easier mapping and coordination between both agents for the common public good.

It should be noted in this framework that the creation of knowledge in the VNR process was not subject to any donor agenda; rather it was a government-led exercise as per the 2030 Agenda. The UN Development Programme country team in Lebanon served to provide technical assistance for the National Committee in the tools and framework used in producing a VNR, and financed an external consultant, who was selected through a bid, to synthesize the first draft of the VNR. Given that the budget was limited, it was agreed that the consultant would provide a general stock-taking of the developmental status rather than an in-depth analysis of the situation.

The UN presented various forms of engagement for nonstate actors, namely CSOs, within the 2030 Agenda at the global level, with the ability to localize these initiatives at the national and subnational levels. The High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF), which takes places every July at the UN headquarters in New York, acts as a platform for multidisciplinary engagement between state and nonstate actors in the processes for sustainable development through various plenaries, sessions, and side events. It also acts as a platform for showcasing lessons learned, challenges, and best practices in communication between state and nonstate actors in different countries of the world.

In Lebanon, the private sector and CSOs were officially represented and part of the National Committee. Both groups of actors were given training to raise their awareness and understanding of the 2030 Agenda and its processes and prospects in Lebanon. They were provided with guiding questions to be used in their consultation processes with their members, and they were given full autonomy in drafting their own sections within the VNR document, reflecting on their ongoing projects for sustainable development, future aspirations, and challenges within their sectors. This approach reflects a modality of knowledge sharing and communication between the state and nonstate actors intended to strengthen coordination between state and nonstate actors in development decision-making, whereby government plans for development and reform and their ideas and aspirations were shared at inception with nonstate actors with the goal of joint collaboration in achieving them.

Mutual Resistance: How Different Policy Logics Decrease Knowledge Sharing

It is worth noting that, at the time Lebanon was actively engaging with the 2030 Agenda and preparing its first VNR,

4 The UN's 2030 Agenda includes 17 goals for sustainable development, or SDGs; each SDG is comprised of a set of concrete and specific targets that are to be measured by given statistical indicators.

5 Refer to UN DESA and the HLPF for insights about other countries.

the global process itself was still subject to hands-on learning and reflections from other countries' experiences. Localizing the global agenda and implementing both the government- and society-wide approaches was a big challenge for all countries. And while the VNR process was government-led, it also called for effective partnerships at a time when distinct stakeholders understood things differently, each from their own perspective and ambitions.

As the VNR was a government-led process, according to UN guidelines, which was in turn updated on a yearly basis according to comments and recommendations by member states, the role and function of the VNR was not clear to some CSOs and nonstate actors.

On the other hand, some state actors needed reassurance that they would maintain the national ownership of the SDGs and the VNR process, and that the 2030 Agenda's localization would be according to national needs and challenges. Hence, there was some resistance from state actors against the agenda as a whole and its process, as they saw it as a duplication of previous work, particularly strategies and reports pertaining to national, sectoral, or thematic development.

In Lebanon, the narrative has always been that state and nonstate actors have different policy logic when it comes to development. Is it sectoral – such as agricultural, public health, or education – or thematic – such as gender issues, violence and peace, or public administration reform? Is it regional or centralized? How do we identify and prioritize needs? According to Ziad Abdel Samad, "The mentality of the comprehensive process was not available."[6] More precisely, Lebanon's first VNR did reflect honesty in showcasing the developmental status of the country as it was, without embellishment, yet the national developmental approach dimension was missing. The national developmental approach was to be reflected in the CSOs' active role in formulating development plans at the national, subnational, and thematic levels, in addition to their de facto role of monitoring, assessing and evaluating government policies.

Moreover, public policy practitioners tend to have resistance toward disruptive ideas from nonstate actors, because they are trained to be pragmatic and are bounded by public administration legislation and bureaucracy; hence, the often opt for low-hanging fruit and piecemeal solutions. On the other hand, nonstate knowledge providers tend to have limited understanding the necessarily pragmatic limitations of public policy practice, which is subject to the short lifetime of cabinets and conflicting political interests. Therefore, the golden question becomes: how to set proper communications dynamics and who is informing whom?

Mitigation Measures: Creating an Institutional Mechanism for Communications

At the beginning of the VNR process, many people particularly from the CSOs wanted to be included despite the fact that they did not have a clear understanding of the 2030 Agenda and often confused it with previous global development initiatives, particularly those focusing solely on the environmental aspect of sustainable development. Some Lebanese development experts objected to and criticized the institutional process that the government utilized – even unofficially at the margins of the 2018 HLPF. While the government may not have been able to solve the dilemma of mutual misconceptions in the short period of time between announcing its voluntary commitment to present a VNR and the date of the 2018 HLPF – which was less than a year, the National Committee emphasized its efforts to create a strong institutional setup that would enhance the communication channels between the relevant stakeholders.

The leadership of the National Committee followed UN guidelines and peer learning from other countries during the VNR process, including concluding several trainings and workshops conducted by UN DESA, UN Institute for Training and Research, the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, the UN Office for Sustainable Development, and others. Training outcomes were utilized in the VNR process, particularly in relation to active engagement of both state and nonstate actors.

Communication was a key pillar in this process based on identifying stakeholders, identifying evidence through data and statistics (both qualitative and quantitative), and ensuring no embellishment, i.e. that facts were stated clearly and accurately. To enhance communication between state and nonstate actors, a webpage was established under the main page of the presidency of the council of ministers where legislation, documents, and related events would be posted. Also, a dedicated email address was established for communication between the secretariat of the National

6 Interview 2, Member of Arab Network of NGOs for Development (ANND), 31 March 2023.

Committee and its members, as a means to institutionalize and properly structure the whole process, in addition to the standard official communication through hardcopy documentation.

Challenges in Communication

Resistance from both sides of the spectrum materialized in the form of communication challenges. It can be said that the history of mistrust between state and nonstate actors, particularly civil society being more vocal than the private sector, was reflected in the chaotic relations and objections prior to the established, institutional communication. There was a need to promote awareness and knowledge creation about the 2030 Agenda, the VNR process, and what Lebanon intended to do at that point in time.

Localization of the ambitious 2030 Agenda gave the Lebanese government and advantage in crafting and leading the narrative; hence, it was important to clarify limitations at the policy and practice level among all stakeholders, including members of the National Committee, the UN country team, and the independent consultant in order to establish clear and rigorous ground rules.

Challenges in communication with state actors

To eliminate any potential prejudice, an official letter was sent to state members of the National Committee, notifying them that an independent consultant would be meeting with them to assess Lebanon's developmental progress from the perspective of their administrations, along with a list of guiding questions to help them prepare for the consultative process. The consultant decided that sending a questionnaire to state actors with a briefing about her role would serve as an entry point; it made her approach "less offensive" to them and helped to reduce potential resistance to cooperating with her.[7] The quality of responses differed, which reflected their level of interest or engagement and, more importantly, their understanding of the project. Sometimes the consultant had to follow up with whether a stakeholder had received the questionnaire; at other times, responses to the questionnaire were not precise, with full documents being returned instead of clear, straightforward answers.

According to the consultant's observations, there seemed to be some weaknesses in the mutual channels of communication, which some of the public administrators demonstrated in their reluctance to coordinate or their belief that they were already doing the work and the presidency of the council of ministers was merely repeating it. In other words, there was no alignment in the objective and process among state actors themselves. This misalignment was also present in the opinions of civil society development experts, who felt that the concept of "policy" was not present among state actors. Some administrations were more advanced than others in terms of their understanding of public policies and had more clarity toward the SDG agenda and the integration of development concepts into policy planning. As a result, there was a challenge in the institutional mechanisms that was reflected as a challenge in the communications process as well.

Challenges in communication with nonstate actors

To facilitate awareness raising and knowledge creation about the SDGs and the VNR process for nonstate actors, a set of guiding questions was prepared by the secretariat of the National Committee to be used during the consultations conducted with nonstate actors.

The VNR process revealed a willingness by the representatives of the CSOs and the private sector to reflect on the development efforts in which agents in their respective sectors were engaging. Yet, this approach was not sufficient for some agents within their sectors. As the VNR project consultant stated during her interview, nonstate actors also experienced challenges due to the project's short timeframe, which created a feeling of pressure in the process and did not give space for stakeholders to develop a full understanding of the agenda and their role in its implementation.

Although 300 nongovernmental organizations were consulted under the CSO framework in almost all of the governorates in the country – compared to a generally much lower number being consulted in other countries, and only targeting entities in their capitals – it is nevertheless important to highlight that the CSOs themselves faced challenges in reaching out to each other, and in terms of their varying levels of understanding

7 Interview 1, VNR consultant, 22 March 2023.

of the 2030 Agenda, of development policymaking, and their difficulty gaining access to the right person or entity who could help them deepen their understanding. Also, the limited budget allocation did not allow for further outreach; new financing was needed for that purpose.

As for the private sector, there were also disrupted communication channels; for instance, small and mid-sized enterprises had their own challenges that were not well-considered or reflected upon.

Lessons Learned

There are lessons we have learned on communication between state and nonstate actors from Lebanon's experience in the VNR process: some reflect worthwhile actions that should be continued and repeated for the next VNR, while others are opportunities for improvement.

Lessons to be repeated

There was great benefit in conducting the stakeholder engagement according to UN guidelines. In particular, this allowed implicated parties to benefit from the regional and global VNR workshops provided by UN DESA in collaboration with other UN entities, as well as trainings provided by the UN Institute for Training and Research and UN DESA on strengthening stakeholder engagement for the implementation and review of the 2030 Agenda.[8]

Part of this engagement included the invitation of a CSO representative to the official delegation at HLPF 2018 and the provision of space for her to speak. It is worth noting that during HLPF 2018, the international community reflected on the Lebanese experience in stakeholder engagement and communication as the "Lebanon model", in comparison with other countries' experiences that were not up to expectations – including some countries of the global north that did not actively engage civil society in the institutional structure for the VNR drafting or sustainable development policy planning. Indeed, Lebanon's engagement of CSO representatives was successful, and the validation exercise was extremely important and should be brought forward in future processes.

Areas to be improved upon

There was a need for more open dialogue between state and nonstate actors at the inception of a new phase of policymaking, to be based on mutual trust and good faith in each other's interests and limitations. Such dialogue should include technical assistance and capacity building in order to orient policymaking toward evidence-based and data-driven decisions, strengthening the role of Central Administration of Statistics (CAS). Accompanying research should have higher budget allocations in order to develop deep situation analyses.

More precisely, this dialogue should be coupled with a clearer specification in the Terms of Reference (ToRs) of private sector and CSOs within the National Committee's five clusters and with targeted capacity building to identify sectoral and thematic priorities in development policymaking.

The scope of these dialogues should also be expanded to include other public entities with interdisciplinary profiles, where necessary, at the thematic level within the work of the National Committee, to ensure more inclusivity and a wholistic approach. It is also imperative that this process start immediately upon commencement of future similar processes.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper is to share the experience of a state policy practitioner in public knowledge production and communication with nonstate actors, particularly academics and researchers who might lack the practitioner's dimension in their research approaches. It gives a critical voice to the process of knowledge production in the internal workings of public policymaking as a means to improve the process and minimize inefficiencies, while at the same time shedding light on the advantages and disadvantages of the interaction between state and nonstate actors and their positioning against each other.

This paper shows that the lack of proper internal and external communication between state and nonstate actors affects knowledge production and sharing through the following channels. First, without proper communication, bias will remain – whether due to lack of access to full information or

8 The UN Institute for Training and Research and UN DESA provide online courses for countries to strengthen their capacities and know-how on certain themes related to the 2030 Agenda. These trainings target the national coordinators for the SDGs and 2030 Agenda implementation. The online course on "Strengthening Stakeholder Engagement for the Implementation and Review of the 2030 Agenda" was taught from 29 January 2023 through 4 April 2023.

to protect one's position – and hence will cause imbalances in decision-making that may have negative spillover effects on geo-societal and geo-economic development. Second, both state and nonstate actors must acknowledge that none of them can alone obtain full knowledge of every aspect or perspective, and that both must accept their limitations, such as time, resources, context, etc.; in fact, they complement each other for the common public good. Third, the work dynamics in the state sector may lead to the production of knowledge that remains not addressed by nonstate actors for reasons such as security or foreign relations; it is thus important to communicate open information as much as possible in due time to maintain a minimum level of transparency and sharing. Fourth, proper communication of knowledge produced by both parties strengthens state-citizen relationship building and the trust between state and nonstate actors. This is of particular importance in ensuring transparency and enforcing accountability in the public knowledge produced by the state regarding its citizens or nonstate actors; otherwise the state will not be held accountable on issues that it did not declare openly or inform the public or nonstate actors about.

Knowledge Production through Evaluations of Development Programs in Jordan: Challenges of Realizing Local Relevance and Value

Dima M. Toukan

Introduction

Jordan suffers from a number of development challenges that were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war. Hosting the second-highest share of refugees per capita in the world has also taken a heavy toll on the country's economy. Refugees from various regional conflicts continue to strain the country's limited resources and services, and refugees are also competing for jobs. Unemployment in Jordan stands at 22.9% and has reached 47.2% among 15-24-year-olds.[1]

To address challenges, Jordan has historically relied on various forms of foreign assistance that include financing for employment, education, agriculture, and infrastructure programs. The country benefits from aid packages provided by various countries and organizations including the US, the EU, the World Bank, and Gulf nations among others. The total foreign assistance committed to Jordan in 2021 reached about US$4.4 billion in grants and concessional loans among other forms of support.[2] The United States Agency for International Aid (USAID) provides the most aid. The US remains a longtime ally for Jordan, providing it with $5.323 billion over the past four years (2019-2023) alone. The latest signed memorandum of understanding with the US, signed in 2022, represents a more than US$200 million annual increase over the last five-year agreement.[3] Assistance covers budgetary support, military assistance, USAID projects, and additional funding for economic reform.

To help the country respond to its continuing hardships, international donors run shoulder-to-shoulder development programming across Jordan. The sector includes large donor institutions and their satellite implementing organizations, both international and local. Many development interventions in Jordan are three-to-five-year programs and are usually framed linearly. This means they tend to adopt relatively closed theories of change, treating the immediate universe in which they operate as one where linear reform is possible. This makes progress measurement easier and generally inspires confidence and predictability about how

1 The Jordan Times, "0.4% Drop in Unemployment Rate in Q4 2022-DoS," February 2023, https://jordantimes.com/news/local/04-drop-unemployment-rate-q4-2022-%E2%80%94-dos

2 Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation, Foreign Assistance Committed to Jordan Report, 2022.

3 David Schenker, "Abdullah, Biden Need to Discuss Economics Too," The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, February 2023.

funds will be used.[4] In reality, programs targeting systemic challenges, as those faced in Jordan, are rarely sufficient to produce the intended impacts alone. Programs usually produce the impact in conjunction with other programs or policies alongside other contributing factors to do with the implementation environment.[5] Considering the complexity of Jordan's challenges, its development sector would benefit from a more iterative and adaptive management approach at the program level, as well as more harmonized and strategically sequenced development work nationally.

The country's reform architecture includes a multitude of sectoral and national strategies. Despite their record of modest achievement, these strategies offer an overarching strategic direction for the various social and economic sectors. The Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation (MoPIC) in Jordan is responsible for coordinating development programs.[6] In coordination with other relevant ministries, MoPIC approves programs that are broadly aligned with national strategies and requires reporting for tracking progress and follow-up.

Within this context, research use in policy and institutional decision-making is limited. Various structural factors impede evidence-informed practice including limited investment in research, a knowledge and capacity deficit, and a generally weak culture for knowledge use. Researchers do not often contribute to the public debate in Jordan. Like elsewhere in the Arab world, they often fear the repercussions of being visible in a restricted political space, with professional and critical research tending to be disconnected from society's needs.[7]

Against this limited supply and demand for research, and as part of their development programming, international development organizations and their contractors fund and produce nonacademic research that informs their donor country strategies and programming. The development-assistance sector generates knowledge in the form of various studies and reports that include sector assessments and policy analyses. In particular, donors commission various types of evaluations of their programming within the country. Program evaluation is an applied research activity that aims to inform program management decisions.[8] Local organizations, including consulting firms, research institutions. and NGOs, participate in and sometimes lead these evaluation studies. The studies are expected to follow systematic methods to assess how well development programs can achieve intended outcomes, considering in the process local dynamics and context. Impact evaluations, for example, are expected to undertake causal attribution to investigate the links between a program and observed changes based on the program's theory of change. In this way, an impact evaluation can produce important knowledge that can contribute to the evidence base about what works and what does not in the local context.

With a focus on Jordan, this article argues for a more strategic orientation of evaluation practice to serve local knowledge needs and inform policy and action. Donor-supported research that includes practitioner and policy literature (reports, policy briefs, working papers, and development and humanitarian program evaluations) can inform more effective development solutions, and because of donor influence may be less inhibited during the translation or communication of its results. In a heavily donor-funded context challenged by political restrictions, socioeconomic hardship, and a weak culture for research use, these donor-funded outputs can be reoriented to be more responsive to local knowledge needs.

This article draws on 15 years of development work in Jordan and the region during which I participated in and led program evaluations and other research projects for different-sized international and local organizations. The article also draws on a literature review and several interviews with representatives from the donor community and the government. This article does not seek to comprehensively cover problems with evaluating development aid in Jordan, but rather explores specific issues I have regularly encountered as a development practitioner in the country. The article first examines Jordan's development landscape and the role of evaluation research, with a focus on the government's limited coordination, monitoring, and evaluation capacity; the limitations of evaluation practice itself; and the challenges to the translation of evaluation results within the local context. The following section proposes actions for improving the evaluation practice and strengthening its impact.

4 OCDE, "Dealing with Messy Realities in Monitoring and Evaluation," 2023.

5 Patricia Rogers, "Overview: Strategies for Causal Attribution," UNICEF, 2014.

6 https://mop.gov.jo/Default/En

7 Sari Hanafi, "Knowledge Produced but Not Used: Predicaments of Social Research in the Arab World," 2018.

8 For differences between evaluation and social science research please see S. Mathison, "What is the Difference between Evaluation and Research—and Why do we Care," Fundamental issues in evaluation, 2008, 183-196.

Jordan's Development Landscape and Evaluation Research

Why aid evaluation is needed

Problems with development aid have long been well documented.[9] Aid evaluation aims to improve aid efficiency and effectiveness essentially through lesson-learning. Evaluation research can inform planning, improve decision-making related to ongoing or future development interventions, and provide an evidence stream for measuring progress and effectiveness.[10] With more governments trying to identify the best available evidence to inform their decisions, an overall strong evaluation system can help measure and communicate impact and demonstrate the comparative advantage of specific approaches or program models for learning and adaptive management.

The International Initiative for Impact Evaluation, which produces rigorous evaluation evidence on development effectiveness, has identified seven types of evidence use and impact for its own generated evidence, including but not limited to changes in policies or programs; closing or scaling programs; informing discussions of policies and programs; improving the culture of evidence use; and informing the design of new programs.[11] Beyond this mostly instrumental role, evidence use can also be conceptual – helping to provide new ideas and raise awareness – or symbolic, such as in cases where the evaluation itself is used to persuade or convince.[12] At the same time, and depending on the rigor of the research, evaluation results can be of questionable credibility and be subject to manipulation or cherry-picking.[13] While bias and technical flaws may manifest within the creation, selection, or interpretation of available research results, a strengthened local capacity to shape evaluation research and assess its quality can help mitigate these risks.

Evaluation research is particularly critical for ensuring the integration of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in core polices and for progress toward their achievement. As called for by sustainable development goal number 17, achieving the goals requires the collective and harmonized action of all development stakeholders through effective partnerships that can deliver impactful and sustainable development results. Program evaluations can assess the respective roles within these partnerships, and whether they are generating, or expected to generate, their intended effects while bridging knowledge gaps.

The need for evaluation research to promote more harmonized development work in Jordan becomes increasingly evident when one considers the country's slow development track, the government's limited capacity to strategically coordinate foreign assistance, and donors' insufficient alignment with national priorities. The Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, a multistakeholder platform established in 2011 by 163 countries to strengthen the effectiveness of partnerships and help achieve the sustainable development goals, supports governments monitor their progress toward four internationally agreed development effectiveness principles: country ownership, focus on results, inclusive partnerships, and transparency and mutual accountability.[14] Effectively what is monitored is whether development interventions draw their objectives and indicators from national strategies, use government data and statistics for monitoring, and involve government in evaluations. Jordan participated in the 2018 monitoring round and, according to the resulting country profile, development partners align with Jordan's priorities only to

9 Results of aid have generally been disappointing as noted by Ovasko, 2003; Burnside and Dollar, 2000; Easterly, 2001; Escobar, 1988; Carapico 2002; Traub, 2008, among others.

10 Arjan de Haan, "In focus: Stepping up Support for and Use of Southern Research in Development Co-operation Report 2023: Debating the Aid System," OECD, 2023.

11 International Initiative for Impact Evaluation, "3ie's Evidence Use and Impact Measurement Approach," April 2021, https://www.3ieimpact.org/sites/default/files/2021-01/3ie-evidence-use-measurement-approach-web.pdf

12 Kelli Johnson, et al., "Research on Evaluation Use: A Review of the Empirical Literature from 1986 to 2005." American Journal of Evaluation 30.3, 2009, 377-410.

13 Norton Wise, "Thoughts on the Politicization of Science through Commercialization," Social Research, 2006.

14 Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, "Making Development Cooperation More Effective: Headlines of Parts of 1 and II of the Global Partnership 2019 Progress Report." ; and also: https://effective-cooperation.org/topic/gpedc-glance

a medium extent (56%).[15] The reality could be more dire considering the monitoring report is government led and the calculation methodology has since then been revamped. Ideally, development partners should be contributing to national targets with the government monitoring and evaluating implementation to ensure that its own efforts, and those of the donors, are optimally coordinated and harmonized.

This is where evaluation research can help ensure that development work adheres to principles of development effectiveness and is well coordinated, harmonized, and country-owned, with local actors determining priorities and donors measurably supporting those priorities using national systems and capacities. Development research, including evaluations, can feed coordination efforts, help align development assistance to needs, and support the effective implementation of programmatic interventions based on a nuanced understanding of local context and challenges.[16] Sector evaluations, for example, can highlight challenges and propose solutions to the development situation in Jordan characterized at times by short and incongruent programming, conflicting approaches, and fragmentation of efforts. Several evaluation reports have in fact pointed to the short-termism of and relatively siloed approach to development programming in Jordan, with donors only loosely aligned with national objectives and without having to report their contribution to specific national indicators or targets. Sector studies have also highlighted redundancy and the overlap in programming.[17]

Jordan's complex development challenges tend to be embedded in systems whose dynamics are affected by political economy considerations specific to each system. In such a context, imported solution blueprints that assume a generalizability of effect do not always pan out within the local context. Studies regularly refer to the need for deeper impact and longer timeframes to address Jordan's structural challenges and context-sensitive development policy and practice. The hidden costs of the current development programming modality in Jordan have not been assessed. However, many of these concerns have now spewed into risks that may affect the country's development prospects.

A generally weak evaluative culture across Jordanian institutions does not help. It manifests in a limited understanding of the role and value of monitoring and evaluation (M&E), and how to benefit from an M&E function. This curtails the government's ability to benefit from donors' program evaluations that could potentially feed development policy and coordination efforts. That said, the government has recently demonstrated greater awareness of the importance of data-driven and evidence-informed decision-making. Ministries have recently established monitoring and delivery units, with donors pledging to strengthen associated monitoring, evaluation, and learning skills for using research to inform strategic planning and decision-making.

Limited government coordination and m&e capacity

The proliferation of development actors in Jordan continues to be a growing coordination challenge that evaluation research can help to address. While MoPIC is responsible for the overall coordination and follow-up of foreign assistance programming, its technical and administrative capacity needs to be bolstered. A proactive coordination effort requires a national anchor with the capacity and resources to generate efficiency gains by harmonizing programming and ensuring needed systemic reforms and alignment to needs. When it comes to development assistance, however, MoPIC's limited institutional strength and resources dampen its ability to drive development efforts while centering national priorities: "Staff are mostly reactive, allowing the flow of money into the country with limited ability to coordinate efforts or optimize the impact of assistance."[18] Understandably, some sectors receive more attention than others. "Broadly speaking, the ministry is focused on core sectors such as water, education, and health with softer sectors such as civil sector, women's, and youth empowerment receiving less attention even though donors are very active in them", said a government respondent.[19] Another government official pointed to the need for additional capacity to define priority areas for donors and to coordinate aid more effectively at the sector levels: "The Ministry plays an active role in every development program's startup phase, ensuring the relevant ministry is engaged and agrees with the overall design and objectives, but the process to secure this agreement requires more strategic action and a standardized vetting process at

15 SDG 17.15.1, Jordan Country Profile, Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, 2018, https://effectivecooperation.org/system/files/2020-06/jordan2018.pdf

16 OECD, Development Co-operation Report 2023: Debating the Aid System, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2023, https://doi.org/10.1787/f6edc3c2-en

17 See for example USAID Civil Society Assessment, 2016, https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00M5C4.pdf

18 Interview with international donor representative 1, Amman 2023.

19 Interview with government respondent 1, Amman 2023

the sector level against national priorities and targets."[20]

Follow-up by MoPIC of ongoing programs is also challenged by its ability to analyze available data. When ministries complain about the direction of running programs or their progress, MoPIC has limited recourse. Referring to the need for additional M&E capacity within the government, a government employee said: "We have a problem with the handover of programs and we don't know how to capture long-term impact... when I am asked what our results mean I find it hard to respond." Government staff can support specific programs assigned to their ministry, but a bird's eye view of a particular sector is uncommon among them.[21]

A 2019 needs assessment of one ministry's monitoring, evaluation, and learning capacity and functions pointed to the ministry's production of various learning products that could inform decision-making, However, the study also noted that the reports do not always reach their intended beneficiaries, with many providing "summary data rather than analysis and with analysis of data for decision-making still a noted gap".[22] The assessment also noted that data utilization for strategic planning to improve outcomes is limited. Two rapid assessments conducted in 2020 and 2021 of two other ministries covering staff capacity for M&E also revealed a low demand for data and an emphasis on quantitative output-level activities as an overall performance indicator, with less regard for impact.[23] In both studies, the majority of government staff found it difficult to articulate data-related challenges or needs to support future planning and decision-making beyond financial resources and hardware. When asked, government staff identified staff capacity as a main barrier to data analysis and evidence-informed decision-making. Government staff also exhibited limited understanding of the utility of data, especially the role of data in decision-making related to programmatic interventions. When research is made available to staff, their capacity to analyze and reflect on results remains modest.

Recognizing the need to bolster the capacity and performance of human resources in government, Jordan has launched its Public Sector Modernization Roadmap, which in over time is expected to deliver needed capacity support and strengthen institutional outcomes. Several international organizations have also been alerted to existing M&E deficiencies and have already rolled out capacity strengthening programs. UNICEF, for example, is helping to build evaluation capacity among government actors in Jordan and the region. USAID is also providing vital M&E support and proactively engaging the government in the production of its program evaluations to promote collaboration and learning and support local stakeholders. The results of these efforts are yet to be seen: "Our [donors'] efforts need to be more intentional but then again the government is not always ready to be engaged."[24]

Limitations of evaluation practice in Jordan

While evaluation research can generate learning to inform donor programming and national development efforts, the research can suffer from several weaknesses that affect its outcomes and uptake. Most evaluations in Jordan are undertaken for the purpose of accountability to international donors. Evaluations are usually commissioned by the donors themselves, and their country offices in Jordan have a vested interest in positive findings. The latitude that evaluation research teams have to challenge program-related decision-making and power structures across implemented programs varies from donor to donor.

An evaluation usually reflects a preoccupation with its particular program's logic model and tries to validate casual linkages between already determined results. This makes measurement easier but leads to reductionist analysis that reinforces siloed rather than needed systems thinking.[25] With a focus on the programs themselves, less attention is given to the systems in which they operate.

Donors determine or approve study designs and objectives with limited or no input from local stakeholders. As most are program focused and bound, evaluations are short-sighted in scope: often failing to consider the impact of programming on broader development outcomes in Jordan, or how well the programs are aligned with national strategies and targets or other existing development interventions. The scopes of these studies are also seldom shared with communities,

20 Interview with government respondent 2, Amman 2023

21 Interview with government respondent 2.

22 Desk Review and Needs Assessment of Ministry X, unpublished confidential document, 2019.

23 Ministry Z Rapid Review of MEL and Analytic Capacity, unpublished confidential document, 2020; and Rapid Capacity Needs Assessment of Ministry Y, unpublished confidential document, 2021.

24 Interview with international donor representative 2, Amman, 2023.

25 Scott Chaplowe, and Adam Hejnowicz. 2021, "Evaluating Outside the Box: Evaluation's Transformational Potential," Social Innovations Journal 5 (March), https://socialinnovationsjournal.com/index.php/sij/article/view/704.

civil society, or the government, which hinders ensuring that research questions are responding to local knowledge and learning needs. While donors regularly emphasize the importance of participatory approaches and stakeholder engagement in evaluations, these approaches are subject to the interpretation of the donor, and often prove to be tokenistic, limited to informational sessions, or focused on "consultation", which satisfies proof of engagement but is seldom adequately systematic or structured to serve as meaningful bidirectional processes.

The majority of evaluations follow the Organization for Economic Cooperation Development's assistance criteria: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability. The criteria standardize the evaluation practice, but the exercise itself has often proven to be superficial with limited utilization of results.[26] The criteria have also been criticized for being limited in scope, promoting linearity, and being insufficient to capture changes in context or political economy considerations.[27] The criteria were revised and adapted in 2018 to respond to the complex nature of required change and to better capture linkages and systems thinking; however, many evaluations do not meaningfully address this.[28] Evaluation teams are seldom asked to examine system connections, despite the complex and chronic nature of national challenges, the number of linkages, overlap with other development programs and policies, and the multi-institutional settings in which programmatic interventions take place.

Evaluations vary in quality and methodological rigor and are usually restricted in type. Because evaluations are linked to program-funding cycles, most donors commission program evaluations halfway through their programs and near or at the end of program cycles. These end-of-program summative evaluations are able to capture the status of programs near the end of their completion but cannot meaningfully predict their impact years after. Impact evaluations, with their emphasis on causal attribution, are limited. Ex post evaluations, which can verify whether a program's outcomes continue to be seen after one to seven years, are also seldom commissioned. Thematic or sectoral evaluations of various donors' support are rare.

An evaluation report in itself does not mark the end of the evaluation process but supposedly ushers in the hardest part.[29] Without effective feedback and engagement with the research findings the whole process may end up being cosmetic.[30] Afterall, evaluations take place within the structural framework of a donor-recipient relationship, which ultimately determines the fate of evaluation recommendations.[31]

In Jordan, the impact of evaluation reports beyond the circles of donors and their implementers is not always clear. Knowledge generated through evaluations is primarily targeted toward foreign donors and international organizations rather than local actors. Evaluation results for multimillion-dollar programs operating in Jordan in various sectors are often passively disseminated to government institutions. The government can sit idly on findings, having limited incentive, capacity, and resources to systematically incorporate learning into policy and practice or to follow-up with donors to ensure necessary course corrections or adaptation. In this regard, a government respondent said that the utilization of incoming evaluations depends on who receives the results.[32] The government has had no systematic approach to assess the quality of evaluation reports or process their findings. Formal responses from the government to donors about the reports are uncommon.[33]

Evaluation results are also seldom shared with program participants or the communities in which the programmatic interventions take place. While data is usually collected from program participants themselves, they are seldom invited to engage with research findings.

As a result of these deficiencies, research findings and recommendations tend to repeat themselves across evaluation reports, such as the often-stated need for a change in laws or regulations. Because of the limited involvement of local stakeholders in these studies, and often the lack of political will for needed reforms, the translation of evaluation recommendations and findings into action is deterred. As a result, several structural impediments that have challenged

26 Mateusz Pucilowski, "From Evidence to Action: Stakeholder Coordination as a Determinant of Evaluation Use" in Assessing the Impact of Foreign Aid, 2016

27 The DAC Network on Development Evaluation, "OECD DAC Evaluation Criteria: Summary of Consultation Responses," November 2018.

28 See "Better Criteria for Better Evaluation: Revised Evaluation Criteria Definitions and Principles for Use," 2018, https://www.oecd.org/dac/evaluation/revised-evaluation-criteria-dec-2019.pdf

29 Basil Edward Cracknell, Evaluating Development Aid: Issues, Problems and Solutions, Sage, 2000.

30 Ibid.

31 Claus Rebien, "Participatory evaluation of development assistance: Dealing with power and facilitative learning," Evaluation 2.2, 1996.

32 Interview with government respondent 2, Amman 2023.

33 Interview with international donor representative 1, Amman 2023

development programs in the past continue to challenge new programming.

Knowledge translation: challenges to the utilization of evaluation knowledge

Even though the significance of knowledge on policy and practice is hard to capture, one way to assess research quality is through its impact.[34] In general, the Arab world has more problems using than producing knowledge.[35] Research uptake by policy actors in particular is inhibited by various factors including a lack of political accountability, underdeveloped research infrastructure, and closed political systems.[36] Informality in policymaking, inadequate funding, and a generally poor culture of learning and evidence use are also culprits.[37]

There have been three generations of thinking about how the research-policy-practice cycle, also known as the knowledge to action cycle, works:[38] The first generation, linear models, emphasized a classical one-way communication from researchers to policymakers that sees the production-to-application process as moving in predictable stages. The next generation of relationship models incorporated linear model principles for dissemination while emphasizing the interactions between people using the knowledge, with collaboration and shared learning as core processes. The third model is the systems approach, which seeks to build on the first two models by adding dynamic systems that impact the types of interactions among the multiple actors.

The linear model, where findings are shared with audiences and are expected to be automatically adopted by them, is too simplistic.[39] Linear approaches to research dissemination cannot have much impact in the absence of a culture that values the production and use of knowledge.[40] In the same vein, the overemphasis on certain knowledge-translation practices can be detrimental to the cause of meaningful uptake and action, especially when knowledge translation is in the form of written outputs in a culture that values informality and verbal channels.[41] Equally important is the capacity to process knowledge and the mechanisms and systems through which knowledge can flow to inform policy and decision-making in general.

In Jordan currently, the communication of evaluation findings tends to be a one-way dissemination of results rather than what should be a multidirectional engagement with the results and their implications. Most evaluations therefore facilitate program-specific, single-loop learning changes but rarely address needed sectoral or national-level strategic pivots.

As mentioned earlier, the government of Jordan has shown increased interest in improving governance through M&E, a drive that is supported by international donors. This interest has partly manifested in the welcomed establishment of performance monitoring and delivery units at various government ministries as well as the Prime Ministry. The Prime Ministry has also developed an impact evaluation tool.[42] However, the organizational culture in the government tends to be averse to change and adaptation that a strong M&E system would likely demand. Government staff often feel suspicious of and threatened by evaluations they feel may target them individually. The limited awareness among the ranks of middle management in government of how good data can be harnessed and used is also inimical to learning

34 Emilie Combaz, Melanie Connor, and James Georgalakis, "Knowledge Translation in the Global South: An Exploratory Mapping of the Literature," IDS Working Paper 592, Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, 2023.

35 Hanafi, "Knowledge Produced but Not Used," 2018.

36 Ruth Stewart, Harsha Dayal, Laurenz Langer, and Carina van Rooyen, "Transforming Evidence for Policy: Do We Have the Evidence Generation House in Order?" Humanities and Social Sciences Communications, 2022.

37 James Georgalakis and Fajri Siregar "Knowledge Translation in the Global South: Bridging Different Ways of Knowing for Equitable Development," Brighton: Institute of Development Studies, 2023.

38 A. Best & Holmes, B. "Systems Thinking, Knowledge and Action: Towards Better Models and Methods," Evidence & Policy, 6(2), 2010, 145-159, https://doi.org/10.1332/174426410X502284

39 Barnard, G., Carlile, L., & Ray, D.B., "Maximising the Impact of Development Research," IDS, University of Sussex, 2008.

40 Anna Hopkins, et al. "Are Research-Policy Engagement Activities Informed by Policy Theory and Evidence? 7 Challenges to the UK Impact Agenda." Policy Design and Practice 4.3 (2021): 341-356.

41 Georgalakis and Siregar "Knowledge Translation in the Global South: Bridging Different Ways of Knowing for Equitable Development."

42 https://pm.gov.jo/Default/Ar

and adaptation.[43]

Specifically, the challenges to the utilization of evaluation studies in Jordan boil down to several supply and demand factors. While several international development agencies regularly publish their program evaluations, their research cycle ends with the publication and dissemination of the reports. Some donors are starting to hold workshops with the government to cocreate recommendations or discuss and inform of research findings.[44] However, because the process is still ad hoc and program linked, junior government staff with limited decision-making authority may end up participating. This renders the activity more of an awareness-raising exercise rather than what ought to be a decisions-supporting engagement.

In addition to publishing reports, some donors also publish the studies' complete datasets alongside summarized research outputs to improve access and digestibility. However, evaluation studies are mostly published in English with Arabic executive summaries. Most donors do not track utilization or uptake by local actors. Once the evaluation report is published, most donors or implementing organizations develop an internal action plan or management response document to follow-up on the implementation of the recommendations, with only a few publishing these responses that include key actions to be taken, their due date, and the responsible party. In fact, and in most cases, once the evaluation report is out, it is difficult to determine the actions taken in response to the findings and recommendations of the evaluation.

On the demand side, and as stated earlier, several factors including capacity (skills, knowledge, and attitudes), incentives, access, and available resources tend to affect the inclination of local actors to make use of research outputs. Specifically, turf battles and the frequent lack of a shared state of knowledge related to a particular sector leaves public sector staff with fragmented knowledge that deters their ability to take strategic stances.

A Way Forward

International development actors in Jordan continue to commission expensive program evaluations while defraying their costs through the country's foreign assistance lifeline. Despite their potential to generate, with enough rigor, a wide range of robust evidence to inform local policy and practice, evaluation studies remain underutilized by local actors.

To strengthen local actors' evaluative demand, the government must first ensure that donors' approaches and interventions feed into an integrated systems-based development approach that recognizes the interconnectedness and complexity of Jordan's challenges. National objectives will also need to be measurable through clear results chains and metrics that development partners support and measurably contribute to. New development programs and their evaluations can then be used to test these results chains and assess progress while tight feedback loops with program implementers are maintained.

But evidence use in policy requires changes within both the policy system as well as the evidence system to ensure the two are coherent.[45] This partly means that knowledge producers and brokers, whether local or donor sponsored, should first develop a clear understanding of the local information ecosystem and how information supply interacts with information demand. They should then ensure they are in sync with the workflow of local actors. This means aligning with any government frameworks for knowledge generation and management, and with the policy environment in Jordan, including how and where policy is formally and informally processed.

For effective engagement, local actors would have to enjoy sufficient technical capacity and agency to support the selection of evaluation types and engage with their design and results, inclusive of the ability to review and critique evaluation products themselves. Knowledge-translation activities will also have to be grounded in a capacity-strengthening program that targets both organizations and individuals. Such a program would have to cultivate broader demand for knowledge (beyond the higher echelons of government) and have the capacity to synthesize and reframe knowledge for different audiences.

43 Rapid Review of Ministry Y MEL and Analytic Capacity, unpublished confidential document, 2020.

44 Interview with international donor representative 2, Amman, 2023

45 Ruth Stewart, Harsha Dayal, Lauremz Langer et al. "Transforming Evidence for Policy: Do we have the Evidence Generation House in Order?" Humanities and Social Sciences Communications 9, 116, 2022.

With capacity checked, any large-scale development program would then have to trigger a backbone process to engage relevant local actors in the early stages of the program's design. During this phase, local actors would codevelop a program's action research plan and its monitoring, evaluation, and learning system. In particular, this would allow local actors the opportunity to integrate their own learning agenda into the program and ultimately ensure that any program-related and donor-sponsored research is addressing local knowledge gaps and policy needs.

Local input on evaluation types and methodologies will be important to determine what constitutes sufficient and credible evidence in a context of limited resources and significant needs, like that of Jordan. Randomized controlled trials, for example, are very costly and tend to ask narrow questions; therefore they may not be well suited to answer certain policy questions.[46] At the same time, systems level, developmental, and ex post evaluations, as well as sector evaluations and sectoral synthesis of evaluation findings, may serve broader knowledge needs. The cost of these studies can be covered by different donors to inform the government's efforts to manage the development process in Jordan.

Regardless of their type, the traditional scope of evaluation studies will also need to be deepened to assess more closely a given program's relevance to needs, its coherence with national priorities and ongoing and planned interventions, and its contribution to national indicators and targets. This way, evaluation studies can help calibrate the development system, accelerate needed local action and reform, and support more synergistic efforts between the government and the donor community. They can also help identify and outline needed systemic change pathways.

Specifically, evaluations would have to assess progress toward the alignment of development work with the principles of effective development cooperation and the aid-localization agenda. For example, every evaluation would be expected to reflect on how the donor development work is contributing to localization imperatives in terms of a measured reconfiguration in the dynamics of development aid toward local stewardship and ownership of the development process. This would necessarily cover all related knowledge production, assessing how much of its design, implementation, and translation have been locally enabled.

46 See Sunil Mitra Kumar, "RCTs for better policy? The case of public systems in developing countries," 2016. Debates on the usefulness of RCTs also range from concerns about internal and external validity (Worrall 2007; Cartwright 2007, 2011) and the tendency to ask narrow questions (Reddy 2012; Rodrik 2009) to concerns regarding its policy prescriptions (Fravereau 2014).

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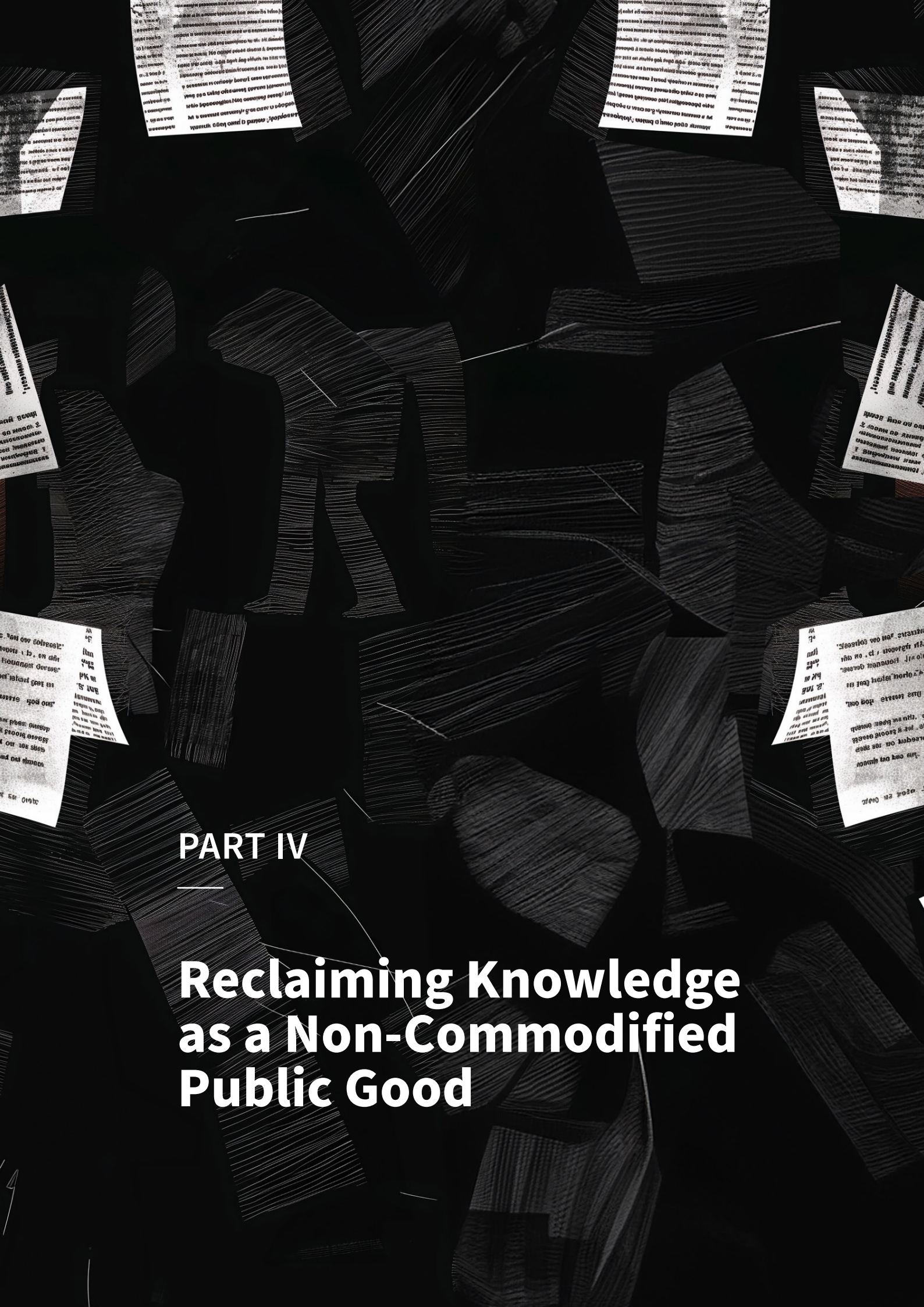

PART IV

Reclaiming Knowledge as a Non-Commodified Public Good

Utopias and Limits of Alternative and Open (Social) Science in Lebanon: The Experience of the Centre for Social Sciences Research and Action

Marie-Noëlle AbiYaghi and Léa Yammine

Introduction

Social science research has been going through deep transformations in the global north. The decline of public funding concomitant with the prevalence of project-based scientific funding and production has led to greater precarity of researchers, transformed universities into "academic enterprises", and aligned research agendas with funding agency priorities. These dynamics and processes also affect the Arab region and specifically Lebanon.[1]

In the region, social sciences are generally considered to be produced by "scholars working in academic and public institutions".[2] In Lebanon, universities (whether public or private) tend to focus more on teaching than producing research.[3] While research centers in universities do exist, they appear to function more like social clubs – voluntarily joined and with an absence of research production – or inspired by western think tanks following research policy market agendas.[4] In this context, knowledge producers have emerged outside of the typical and canonical fields (in the Bourdieusian sense) of university campuses, borrowing the scientific methods from their respective disciplines to develop and publish research for broader audiences.

Traditional and emerging knowledge producers have, however, operated in silos, rarely collaborating, leading to tensions between researchers in academia and those labeled as experts in alternative knowledge-production spheres. Taking stock of this existing tension and the limited

1 See The Centre For Social Sciences Research and Action Social Science for change, Political economy of research in social sciences in the Arab world (En-Fr-Ar) (this cfp is closed), August 2019, available at https://civil-society-centre.org/content/political-economy-research-social-sciences-arab-world-en-fr-ar-cfp-closed

2 Rigas Arvanitis, Roland Waast and Abdel Hakim Al-Husban, "2010 World Social Science Report: Social sciences in the Arab world," International Social Science Council, 2010, p. 1.

3 The American University of Beirut (AUB) and Saint Joseph, established in Beirut in 1863 and 1875 respectively, and the Lebanese university was created in 1953.

4 عدنان الأمين، إنتاج الفراغ. التقاليد البحثية العربية، الدار العربية للعلوم، 2021. Candice Raymond, Myriam Catusse, and Sari Hanafi, "Un miroir libanais des sciences sociales," Diacritiques Éditions, 2021, pp. 364. (Raymond, Catusse, and Hanafi, Un miroir libanais des sciences sociales).

recognition that may exist between so-called science that is produced in the academic realm and applied or action-oriented science published outside the campus, this contribution will however not abide by such opposition and rather considers the hybridity of the knowledge-production space.[5]

Globally, researchers have resorted to open science to produce knowledge and publish it outside of the traditional methods in a bid to make research accessible and break away from the limits of paywalls and gatekeepers. Indeed, the last couple of decades have witnessed an increased discussion in the realm of knowledge production and academic publishing on open science (OS) and open access (OA). The definition of OS remains fluid: it aims to make research, knowledge, and data openly available for use and reuse by any member of society.

As an inclusive construct, OS seeks on the one hand, to allow all to partake in scientific knowledge creation, evaluation, and dissemination. On the other hand, it can facilitate and ease sharing of data and information and enhance collaborations, both for the advancement of science and for the benefit of society as a whole.[6] From this perspective, OS contributes to the democratization of science beyond traditional scientific fields and institutions, such as universities, with public good embedded in its philosophy. In theory, OS is multidisciplinary and multilingual. It can encompass various elements and scholarly and publication practices, such as OA, open source, open dissemination and communication, open dialogue between civil society actors, and open software and hardware, among others. For OS to be impactful and effective, it is necessary to be reliable and credible, based on sturdy methodologies, and undergoing rigorous and transparent evaluation and review, all the while ensuring axiological neutrality.

The paper is largely based on the personal experiences and trajectories of the authors, currently co-directors of the Centre for Social Sciences Research & Action (CeSSRA), which is an independent, action-oriented, social sciences research center. Each of the authors hails from a different background: one from a traditional education in political science and one from a creative field. They have, within CeSSRA, combined both backgrounds and approaches to produce knowledge that is one the one hand based on scientific methodologies and publishing standards and, on the other, developed innovative ways to visualize and disseminate CeSSRA's research in-line with the objective of making knowledge openly accessible. This paper, through examining the experience of CeSSRA, seeks to shed light on the limitations in praxis of such utopian knowledge production and publishing approaches while taking stock of the structuring effects of the knowledge-production field as a whole on its actors, including alternative and nontraditional ones.

This contribution will therefore seek to shed light on the research production panorama in Lebanon, its inherent tensions and limitations, and will question the utopian endeavor to publish reliable and accessible research in service to the public good.

Producing, Aggregating, Classifying, and Accessing Data

Lebanon is notoriously known for a lack of data and openly accessible information. The last official population census was conducted in 1932, and public institutions are known to operate in an obscure manner, rarely revealing or relying on accurate data. Although the Access to Information Law was passed in 2017, it came with a number of notable limitations relevant to its implementation, which does not include specific mechanisms for application nor penalties, and only encompassed public institutions while excluding private ones.[7] Additionally, the law does not foresee a budget for these institutions to digitize and collect their

5 On this point and focusing on political science in the USA:
See Rogers M. Smith, "Still Blowing in the Wind: The American Quest for a Democratic, Scientific Political Science," Daedalus, Vol. 126, No. 1, 1997, pp. 253-287.
On Lebanon, and more recently, See Raymond, Catusse, and Hanafi, Un miroir libanais des sciences sociales.

6 See UNESCO, Development of the UNESCO Recommendation on Open Science, 2021.

7 See United Nations Development Programme Lebanon, THE RIGHT OF ACCESS TO INFORMATION, available at https://www.undp.org/lebanon/projects/right-access-information
"The administrations obligated by the law are a wide array of public and private entities in charge of a public interest, particularly: ministries, independent councils and funds, public institutions, municipalities and unions of municipalities, courts, private companies in charge of managing public services or public facilities and public interest associations."

data.[8] Therefore, the law failed to address the infrastructure problem of collecting, processing, and making data publicly available, not to mention the absence of political will to make information accessible.

Indeed, the Gherbal Initiative – a nonprofit organization that aims to monitor transparency in public institutions and their compliance with the law –requests information every year from public administrations and issues a report on the response rate; their 2022 report states that just over half (108; 53%) of the administrations contacted (204) responded to requests, and only 28 of those (44%) provided complete answers.[9] Hence it would not be an exaggeration to state that the public sector gathers little data, if it does so at all, and it rarely makes it openly accessible: "Even the public bodies explicitly tasked with collecting data – such as the National Council for Scientific Research and its affiliated research centers – do not make their data open and easily accessible due to severe underfunding that leads them to sell the data in order to stay operative".[10]

In the same vein, the Central Administration of Statistics, whose mission according to its website is to "collect, process, produce, and disseminate social and economic statistics at the national level and to provide all users with evidence-based information for decision making", fails to make up-to-date information available and publishes data on a website that is difficult to navigate and not user-friendly.[11] Moreover, it lacks financial autonomy, often working via grants, and its statistical reports have oftentimes been criticized over methodological issues such as sampling, geographical coverage, and poor survey quality.

Not only are public institutions riddled with poor data and absence of coordination among bodies, but so is the private sector, most notably the UN system and the nonprofit sector.[12] This has been most prevalent during one of the most recent crises in the country, the Beirut port explosion, and the myriad of associative interventions that operated with a notorious absence of "needs assessments".[13]

These dynamics also structure the sector of knowledge producers. They constitute an important hurdle when it comes to accessing, relying on, and using reliable and scientific secondary data, which can push some to launch their own quantitative surveys (resources permitting, though oftentimes on limited scales in terms of sampling or geographical coverage, for example). These types of surveys are essential; however, they remain limited in impact as national baseline data remains obscure or unavailable. Additionally, these dynamics contribute to processes of isomorphism in the sector, or, dare we say, reproduction of existing modus operandi whereby some knowledge producers retain their data, publish their research behind paywalls, and rarely engage in knowledge-exchange or data-sharing initiatives.

The democratization of knowledge, and knowledge as a public good, are the main tenets of the OA philosophy. Early OA advocates called for removing access barriers to research and knowledge by use of digital technologies.[14] It was thought that this would help solve accessibility problems for readers and the scope of impact that research could have; the publishing world and the subscription model rely on creating an artificial scarcity of information by restricting access and gatekeeping research, even research that was publicly funded by taxpayers.[15] In the absence of an OA policy globally and in Lebanon particularly, data and research availability is at the discretion of each institution.

8 See Kareem Chehayeb, Access to Information in Lebanon, The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, June 2021, available at https://timep.org/2021/06/23/access-to-information-in-lebanon/

9 See Gherbal Initiative, Conclusion of Gherbal Initiative Fifth Annual Report: Transparency in Lebanese Public Administrations 2022, 2022, available at https://elgherbal.org/reports/nHVHAyu9hrirufmnOSht

10 See Karim Merhej, The Promise of Open Data in Lebanon, The Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy, January 2021, available at https://timep.org/2021/01/15/the-promise-of-open-data-in-lebanon/ (Merhej, The Promise of Open Data in Lebanon).

11 See Central Administration of Statistics, available at http://www.cas.gov.lb/index.php/about-us-en

12 We will not delve in this paper into the sector of public opinion polling as this will require a separate research altogether.

13 See The Centre for Social Sciences Research and Action, Solidarity Initiatives in Lebanon: Data Iteration 1, August 2020. Response to the Beirut Blast, August 2020, available at https://daleel-madani.org/civil-society-directory/centre-social-sciences-research-and-action/resources/solidarity-initiatives-lebanon-data-iteration-1-august-2020-response-beirut-blast

14 See Budapest Open Access Initiative, Read the Declaration, February 2002, available at https://www.budapestopenaccessinitiative.org/read/

15 See Peter Suber, The taxpayer argument for open access, September 2003, available at https://dash.harvard.edu/bitstream/handle/1/4725013/suber_taxpayer.htm?sequence=1
See Peter Suber, 5-2. Problems and Opportunities (Blizzards and Beauty), in Knowledge Unbound. 1st ed., 2019, available at https://knowledgeunbound.mitpress.mit.edu/pub/mm4qzuo4/release/1

The nucleus of what would become CeSSRA saw light more than a decade before what was dubbed the open data movement in Lebanon, which emerged after the Beirut port explosion in 2020 when science-based or tech-savvy activist groups demanded access to open and reliable data.[16] CeSSRA was founded in 2006, in the midst of Israel's July War on Lebanon, by a handful of PhD students and activists; it was formed while the relief response for the internally displaced was unfolding in a cacophony, in a bid to gather, create, compile, and make understandable and usable data from civic and civil society efforts. From the moment of its establishment, CeSSRA was driven by the principle of OA for data and free access to information. The primary endeavor at the time seemed simple: gather data on civil and civic initiatives involved in the aid efforts for people that had been internally displaced from southern Lebanon to Beirut, organize and classify the data, and make it universally available. This final point implied making the data available for the actors themselves, to facilitate coordination between them and reduce duplication of efforts, as well as to the wider public.

Since its launch in 2006, the platform has grown exponentially, necessitating two rehauls in 2011 and 2017 to be able to cater to its millions of visitors. It became the reference for all civil society related matters in the country. As its credibility grew, actors increased their demands for greater use of the gathered data and research-production that could constitute an evidence-based resource for all actors in the ecosystem.

CeSSRA promptly started producing knowledge products and data visualizations on issues pertaining to civic space and public action (two pillars of CeSSRA's research), including mapping of vulnerabilities, elections mapping, visualizations of key socioeconomic indicators, and reports on civil society organizations' interventions.[17] These efforts were institutionalized in 2013 into one of CeSSRA's official research pillars. This pillar was built on the in-house interdisciplinary expertise of the core team alongside the 2013 launch of an online platform that made research publicly accessible.

From the outset, CeSSRA's primary concerns were relying on scientific, sturdy methodologies; aiming for excellent publishing standards that aligned with international publishing standards; and remaining committed to producing contextual, locally driven research. This unwavering commitment sets CeSSRA apart from other knowledge producers in Lebanon and the region. In practice, this commitment was translated into a variety of publishing formats – from long articles, policy notes, reports, case studies, maps, and visualizations – that all had to abide by scientific publishing standards requiring sound methodologies, recourse to peer review, and clear and evidence-based writing and referencing.

CeSSRA was inherently interdisciplinary; this was organic to the makeup of its research pillars and its identity as an institute. It implies more than merely borrowing methods or approaches from various disciplines, rather producing research that integrates various approaches and methods from the initial research conception and design to the publication and dissemination. This organic interdisciplinarity also reflects the composition of the core team members, who hail from various fields including tech, creative, and social sciences.

The interdisciplinarity of the team was, however, more than disciplinary convergences; it also constituted converging trajectories and career choices, and disillusionments: disillusionment with the not-for-profit sector alongside the conviction that, with the proper tools and means, the sector would better fulfill its role; disillusionment with creative industries and their commodification logic and limited role and impact; and disillusionment with the academic sector's scarcity and gatekeeping of academic posts and its general disconnect from matters that impact the polis.

In practice, this interdisciplinarity can be examined in the development and publishing of interactive mappings, notably the mappings on collective action.[18] These mappings are based on protest event analysis[19] and a typology of collective actions devised by the CeSSRA team, which has led to the team's collection of data on collective actions in the country

16 Merhej, The Promise of Open Data in Lebanon.

17 See The Centre for Social Sciences Research and Action, Mapping of Vulnerabilities in Lebanon, Lebanon Support, 2008, available at https://civilsociety-centre.org/resource/mapping-vulnerabilities-lebanon
See Hisham Achkar, Mapping of The Lebanese 2009 Elections, Lebanon Support, 2010, available at https://civilsociety-centre.org/resource/mapping-lebanese-2009-elections
See The Centre for Social Sciences Research and Action, Mapping of Key Socio-Economic Indicators, Lebanon Support, 2011, available at https://civilsociety-centre.org/resource/mapping-key-socio-economic-indicators
See Bassem Chit, Nahr el-Bared Statistical Report 2009, Lebanon Support, 2009, available at https://civilsociety-centre.org/resource/nahr-el-bared-statistical-report-2009-0

18 See The Centre for Social Sciences Research and Action, Map of Collective Actions in Lebanon, 2017, available at https://civilsociety-centre.org/cap/collective_action

19 Swen Hutter, "Protest Event Analysis and Its Offspring", in Donatella della Porta, ed. Methodological Practices in Social Movement Research, Oxford Academic, 2014, pp. 335–367.

followed by data triangulation, in an effort to document, classify, and code the data into an openly accessible, interactive geographical map. The choice to render this particular data on a map was driven by various factors, including the aim to deconstruct a widespread essentialist idea that Lebanon is a social movement desert and that mobilizations are driven by confessional interests; to shed light on more subdued and less visible forms of contestation across the various regions in the country; and to showcase varied grievances and popular demands on the one hand, and varied mobilizing actors on the other. The development of a map from scratch also allowed for publishing the data in an interactive and user-friendly format, while allowing the team to define the level of granularity of geographical localization; this could ensure the protection of protesters while allowing nuances in the visual representation such as moving away from regional mobilization clusters (e.g., showing a large number of mobilizations concentrated in the capital) and instead adopting a dynamic clustering that could change based on the user's navigation of the map.

The issue of participant protection was also at the core of implementing an openly accessible research platform, where the publication of data and research complies with ethical considerations in order to circumvent breaches of privacy and confidentiality. CeSSRA was confronted with similar pressures and issues regarding the geolocated mapping of conflicts in Lebanon. This mapping's objectives were to deconstruct the widespread ideas that conflicts were driven by confession/religion or that they would increase due to the presence of refugees, driven especially by the context of the Syrian refugee crisis. Throughout the mapping (between 2014 and 2019), CeSSRA received various proposals and faced hacking attempts that tried to access its granular data. Where CeSSRA sees that an interest in its raw data is motivated by the intent to instigate or perpetuate conflict or violence or justify increased securitization, it restricts the extent of its data sharing and raw data access. The data serves to develop nuanced research published by the center; to remain consistent with its vision for public good, the center does not intend to see its data used for malicious purposes.

The activist versus the sage

Career paths that move between academia and the nonprofit sector, and in the knowledge-production field more specifically, are not new, especially in a context characterized by the scarcity of academic positions and the rarity of disciplinary research publishing in the Lebanon's universities. Positions in both academia and the nonprofit sector are equally characterized by a degree of precarity. However, as nonprofit research producers provide more material rewards for academic job seekers in Lebanon, they are considered attractive employers that can offer better remunerated jobs. They also offer a degree of symbolic gratification as they allow researchers to entertain the illusion of impactful research and working for the public good thanks to the possibilities and potential offered by OA publishing that allows for a relatively broader readership.

In practice, and in spite of these gratifications, tensions continue to prevail between the "activist researcher" and the "sage academic researcher". These are accompanied by tensions that structure the knowledge field to this day, whereby academic research is considered at odds with expert research in the nontraditional or nonprofit sector. While some researchers consider work in academia to be removed and disconnected from the field, others seek the social capital and recognition associated with positions within universities. This tension is amplified by feelings of frustration among some researchers feeling that choosing a more stimulating research arena outside of the academe may be tempered by shorter temporalities that could undermine more theoretical explorations.[20]

Dynamics that are increasingly structuring the academic realm (globally and in Lebanon), are leading some to liken universities to academic enterprises that follow liberal logics in the selection of actors, the production of project-based research following grant cycles, and the reliance on metrics to evaluate both. Similar processes and dynamics structure the nonacademic and nonprofit research production fields. However, at a moment when university autonomy and independence from market logics is questioned more than ever, the perceived social capital associated with a position in academia most often supersedes that associated with positions in nonprofit research centers.[21] This dichotomy is, oftentimes, translated in practice in extractive position seeking within the alternative knowledge-production sector as a vector toward more valorized positions within the academe. This leads to difficulties within knowledge-production sectors identifying, selecting, and retaining

20 Raymond, Catusse, and Hanafi, Un miroir libanais des sciences sociales.

21 Millicent Churcher and Debra Talbot, "The Corporatisation of Education: Bureaucracy, boredom, and Transformative Possibilities," New Formations, 2020, pp. 28-42.
See David Harvey, Anti-Capitalist Chronicles: The Corporatization of Academia, Democracy At Work, April 2023, available at https://www.democracyatwork.info/acc_the_corporatization_of_academia
Yancey Orr, "The Death of Socrates: Managerialism, metrics and bureaucratisation in universities," Australian Universities' Review, Vol.58 No.2, 2016, pp. 15-25.

sustainable expertise. These processes, combined with the predominant casualization of work, contribute to transient skills and the prevalence of consultancy-based mindsets and practices. In this context, the nonprofit knowledge-production sector appears to be considered as merely a supplemental or complementary source of income or a platform for competitive publishing and creating a professional CV. In the experience of CeSSRA, finding skillful researchers that would abide by its adopted scientific methodologies, processes (such as peer review), and publishing standards constitutes a significant challenge. While CeSSRA receives large numbers of applications during every recruitment phase, trained and skilled social scientists appear to be a rarity. Moreover, when recruiting from traditional academic trajectories, we are often in situations where a renowned academic would submit subpar deliveries or would not want to engage with the applied side of the research that is at the core of the CeSSRA's action-oriented mission.

The corporatization and market logics of universities also mold research questions and their temporalities in the academe. Theoretical questions on longer temporalities do require resources, whether human or financial, that remain difficult to secure when an institution of any kind is enmeshed in repeated cycles of fundraising and short-term projects.

Interestingly, nonprofit knowledge producers appear to have carved a negotiated space of autonomy that characterizes their disciplinary identity, but also displays a continuity in the more theoretical underpinning of their long-term research agendas and strategies. The Legal Agenda – a Lebanese nonprofit research and advocacy organization – work on the legislative observatory since 2020, or CeSSRA's axes on social justice or collective action, illustrate this point.[22]

These labeling of and distinction between professional versus public social scientists contribute not only to creating cognitive dissonance among certain researchers, but also to framing how nonprofit knowledge production is perceived, regardless of its quality and standards.[23] However, and in the practice of a few knowledge producers, these dated dichotomies and hierarchies do not apply; fundamental and action-oriented research are not at odds with each other as long as scientific methodologies are respected and adopted for all publications. The experience of the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies during the years 1990-2000 is a testament to the possibility of combining theoretical questions and academic methods on the one hand and action- and policy-oriented approaches on the other.[24] The experience of CeSSRA, described as "novel", reflects the same modus operandi of combining and integrating the two approaches: relying on methods, analysis, and publication formats rooted in social sciences, and pursuing its objective of serving the public good via its OA policy, which will be further developed below.[25]

The way that the above processes intersect with gender dynamics adds a layer to the labeling and valuing of research; women researchers (and even more so women-led knowledge producers) can be confined to working on women's rights and issues. They can be reduced to words such as angry, difficult, or ideological.

Beyond all these structuring factors, OA and OS aimed at democratizing science – hence contributing to the public good by making scientific tools available and exchangeable – are considered an 'unfinished revolution,' as the majority of scientific results and publications remains under the control of traditional, closed-access publishers who base their business models on vast commercial databases.[26] While the theory of OA is premised on the question of access to data, writing, and publishing science, it reinforces the "Western knowledge hegemony" and existing power dynamics by failing to address and challenge questions such as: "Who is allowed to publish where, for what reasons, and what are their nonmaterialist premises (requiring nonredistributional but cultural considerations)".[27] While CeSSRA relied on the OA approach in its mission of taking research out of the campus and making it accessible and usable by all, it recognizes the limitations of OA, as will be developed below. Nevertheless, CeSSRA maintains its belief in the importance of an OA approach even in negotiations with partners who would initially request closed publishing licenses.

22 See The Legal Agenda, Legislative Observatory, available at https://english.legal-agenda.com/legislative-observatory/

23 Sari Hanafi, "University systems in the Arab East: Publish globally and perish locally vs publish locally and perish globally," Current Sociology, Vol.59 No.3, 2011.

24 Raymond, Catusse, and Hanafi, Un miroir libanais des sciences sociales.

25 Raymond, Catusse, and Hanafi, Un miroir libanais des sciences sociales.

26 Thomas Margoni, Roberto Caso, Rossana Ducato, Paolo Guarda, and Valentina Moscon, "Open Access, Open Science, Open Society, " Trento Law and Technology Research Group, Research Paper No. 27, 2016.

27 Marcel Knöchelmann, "The Democratisation Myth: Open Access and the Solidification of Epistemic Injustices," Science & Technology Studies, Vol.34 No.2, 2021, pp. 65-89, available at https://hcommons.org/?get_group_doc=1003678/1602685150-Knchelmann_OpenAccessandthe-DemocraticMyth_Preprint.pdf

From the Ivory Tower to the Digital Echo Chambers: To What Extent is OA Accessible and Impactful?

While the promise of OA relies fundamentally on digital technologies to take research out of academic ivory towers and from behind paywalls, its potential success remains limited by the perimeters of current existing power dynamics in publishing and research production, and of internet and technology accessibility.

The promise of open and online access stumbles in reality upon the digital divide and the discrepancy in people's abilities to access and use digital technologies, whether due to lack of access to the infrastructure and high-speed internet connections, or to insufficient technological and digital literacy levels.[28] Digital publishing inherently implies exclusions. These exclusions are amplified by modes of online dissemination, whether search engines or social media networks, and their respective algorithms, which dictate the reach of publications based on metrics such as numbers of clicks or followers. Moreover, paid advertising and sponsoring of publications on online platforms directly impact their visibility and reach. As such, and faced with the tyranny of algorithms, publishers seeking to reach a broader audience – with an eye toward maximizing their readership and impact – must grapple with the difficulties of breaking out of digital echo chambers.

Therefore, OA publishing carries high publication and dissemination costs. Taking stock of the limitations of OA, the CeSSRA sought from the beginning to diversify its research publication formats. These different types of publications target CeSSRA's diverse audience and readership. Scholars may be more drawn to longer reports, practitioners to briefing papers, and the wider public to more reader-friendly and visually attractive formats such as data visualizations. Inscribed in its editorial line, and with the goal of making its research as accessible as possible, CeSSRA adopts a vulgarization of terms, steering away from jargon that might exclude readers from accessing knowledge and research findings. Accessibility is, thus, at the heart of its work and not merely restricted to questions of publishing and dissemination.

This, however, comes with a few caveats. OA does not automatically mean OS, which raises methodological, ethical, and political issues. OS implies clear data protection regulations. Any product of scientific investigation may contain information considered personal (i.e., relating to an identified or identifiable natural person) or even sensitive (i.e., racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, trade-union membership, health status, or sex life). It may also include politically sensitive data that, if not interpreted and analyzed within sturdy methodological frameworks, could be used to inform biased or politically driven agendas.

CeSSRA made a conscious decision to adopt only an OA approach, as opposed to an OS or open data approach, as this ensured it could control the methodology used for the analysis of the data it collects, aggregates, and produces.[29] Additionally, and in the case of specific mappings (notably, mappings of collective actions or conflicts), the data published was often sensitive, and CeSSRA had the ethical responsibility to avoid jeopardizing the privacy and safety of individuals or groups, or have its data utilized in a way that goes against its definition of public good.

While OA may promise a wider audience and a broader impact in terms of readership, this does not necessarily entail nor ensure a linear impact without delving into the sociological and political underpinning of what is meant by social change. OA publishing as a vector for public good may, by definition, constitute an end in and of itself for publishers seeking such an objective. Thus, a distinction must be drawn between action-oriented or applied research, and knowledge production that methodologically and openly claims the role of lobbying and influencing policy and politics.

Lastly, another caveat that dampens the sought-after broader reach and impact is the intrinsic nature of scientific research, which remains quite technical and necessitates a degree of nuance away from blanket statements. This, in spite of the

28 This term was first coined by Lloyd Morrisett to describe the gap in technology access.
See Donna L. Hoffman, Thomas P. Novak and Ann E. Schlosser, "The Evolution of the Digital Divide: Examining the Relationship of Race to Internet Access and Usage over Time", in Benjamin M. Compaine, ed. The Digital Divide: Facing a Crisis or Creating a Myth?, The MIT Press, 2001, pp. 47-98.

29 Two phases in the data processing cycle are considered here: the phase of data collection with its pillar of research participants informed consent, and the phase of publication of research findings that may contain personal or sensitive data.

vulgarization of publications and of OA approaches, illustrates the limits of inclusivity, leaving knowledge producers to face two possibilities: either engaging in oversimplification of their research, or committing to scientific methodologies at the expense of popularity. The latter option poses the issue of a certain degree of reproduction of the existing exclusionary dynamics that shape the academic realm, and which the alternative knowledge production sector has attempted to distance itself from.

Conclusion

This paper, based on the experience and trajectories of its co-authors within CeSSRA, aimed to examine research production in Lebanon and its inherent tensions and limitations, while putting into perspective the publishing of accessible research with a public good objective.

In a context of data scarcity and limited publications from universities, Lebanon saw the emergence of alternative and nontraditional knowledge producers, outside of typical fields of research production. However, in practice, alternative knowledge producers' modus operandi did not always succeed in making their research, publications, and data accessible, given that adopting an OA policy remained at the discretion of each institution. Moreover, the hybrid ecosystem is characterized by competition, labeling processes, and lack of mutual recognition, as well as by extractive practices.

Since its creation, CeSSRA has sought to publish openly accessible research in service of the public through reliance on an OA policy, all the while maintaining sturdy and scientific methodologies, long temporalities for its research questions, scientific publication standards, and interdisciplinarity. All of these features constitute, today and throughout its almost two decades of existence (as of the time of writing), its core identity.

With a steadily increasing readership (from 5 million reads in 2020 to 25 million in 2022), CeSSRA's publications contribute to significant issues in public discourses and on policy agendas. While we are aware of the limitations that are inherent to OA publishing, as we have discussed, and while we seek to distance ourselves from mere quantitative metrics of evaluation, we are more committed than ever to the processes of scientific yet accessible research production using interdisciplinary and OA approaches, rather than abiding by neoliberal metrics of assessing impact – a notion that we do not conceive of as linear and that also remains to be defined.

Social Sciences, the Humanities, and the Causes of Human Rights, Democracy, and Social Justice: A Case Study of the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights

Alaa Al-Talibi

Introduction

Sociological and anthropological research in Tunisia, as well as in the broader Arab region, has historically been influenced by the state of democracy and human rights within these areas. Despite a surge in social science activity following the 2011 revolutions, these fields have seen a decline in their appeal and impact. This decline can be attributed primarily to two factors: the government's cautious stance on critical social science discourse, and deliberate efforts to diminish the role of humanities and philosophy in public discussion. The government embarked on a cultural and political endeavor to reverse the progress made by the revolutions, notably by suppressing critical analysis and empirical observations of social and cultural phenomena. Furthermore, internal changes within the research practices of economics, sociology, philosophy, and other human sciences led to their self-isolation from societal engagement, often appearing detached and superior. In our view, the most significant barrier to the tangible influence of social sciences has been the lack of scholarly debate among researchers, and between researchers and practitioners in the fields of social democracy and human rights, beyond the challenges of institutional limitations and reduced funding for field research.

The isolation of sociologists and economists, along with the inequities surrounding their work and the limited spaces for thoughtful debate, have robbed these fields of their ability to self-direct and engage meaningfully with those committed to resistance and change. This situation also undermines the accumulation and influence of the theoretical frameworks these researchers develop. Furthermore, the contributions of social science literature to proposing new models of interpretation and analysis in the context of societal changes in Tunisia are lacking, thereby diminishing its role in shaping the social and political landscape of these transformations.

This paper examines the case study of the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights (Forum Tunisien pour les Droits Economiques et Sociaux, hereafter called "the Forum" or

FTDES).[1] The Forum represents an exception to the norm, striving to connect practical fieldwork with intellectual, analytical, and critical endeavors. This approach is central to its philosophy, particularly its focus on engaging with social movements as a foundational aspect of its work.

The paper is structured into three main sections. The first section outlines the broader context that led to the emergence and evolution of the Forum as a dynamic, unstructured activist group operating at the intersection of trade unions, legal, political, and academic spheres. This background sets the stage for understanding the Forum's unique position and approach to activism.

In the second section, the focus shifts to the Forum's support of social movements, highlighting its significant role as a key player in Tunisian civil society dedicated to advocating for economic and social rights.[2] The Forum has established itself as a trusted authority through its involvement in various critical issues, including immigration, the struggles of female textile workers, arbitrary expulsions, the Gafsa mining basin protests, access to water, environmental concerns, and precarious employment and unemployment. Its efforts encompass supporting social initiatives as well as conducting monitoring, research, and analysis.

The third and final section examines the tangible effects of the Forum's work on social movements. It explores how the Forum's contributions have propelled social efforts for change across multiple fronts and have sought a democratic method to engage citizens directly in advocating for political transformation. This involves building a diverse social coalition capable of challenging the unfair policies fostered by neoliberal ideologies, which disproportionately benefit specific groups, segments, and elites who subscribe to and participate in these ideologies.

1 Since its inception in March 2011, FTDES, an NGO, has dedicated itself to advocating for and promoting the universal and indivisible rights related to economics, society, culture, and the environment. This organization has contributed significantly to the protection of rights for both Tunisians and migrants, focusing its efforts on migration, social vulnerability, and the development of skills through approaches that incorporate gender and environmental considerations. With its branches in Monastir, Kairouan, and the Gafsa mining basin, the Forum has actively engaged in regional activities, ensuring direct engagement with citizens and addressing the needs of those in Tunisia's most underserved communities.

2 Refle Jan-Erik, "Civil society and democratic framing in Tunisia. How democracy is framed and its influence on the state," University of Lausanne Open Archive, 2019.

Origins: Awareness of Field Work as a Source of Knowledge

Social Issues as a Starting Point for Civil Struggle, 2002-2008

To understand the significance of the FTDES within the social movement and civil society landscape, it is crucial to revisit the context and factors that led to its emergence and the role it has played. This review will also consider the Forum's key activities and contributions, highlighting its unique position as both an association and a participant in the broader social and civil society movement. Reflecting on these elements, we can then contemplate strategies to address challenges and plan for future efforts, ensuring the Forum continues to fulfill and enhance its mission – especially in light of the current challenges posed by democratic backsliding, autocratic governance, and stalled social change – in pursuit of social and economic justice and the reinforcement of democratic principles.

In the early 1980s, Tunisian political life began to shift toward more active engagement within civil society, moving beyond traditional avenues of participation that leftist and democratic elites had previously navigated such as student and labor movements and clandestine political organizations. This period saw a growing interest in the Human Rights League, established in 1977, and the formation of the first core of the Democratic Women's Association, marking a significant moment for the feminist movement. The era was also characterized by a strengthened struggle within professional associations in critical fields like law, the judiciary, and journalism, aimed at defending civil society's independence from the state and resisting the ruling party's policy of containment. The independence movement within the Tunisian General Labor Union, regional unions, and other significant sectors became increasingly prominent. These developments were paralleled by efforts in academic and cultural spheres at both local and national levels laying the groundwork for the emergence and influential role of the FTDES in Tunisia's social and civil activism.

This effort led to the creation of a diverse Tunisian elite within the country and abroad that plays a significant role in various closely knit circles of democratic and civil activism. These elites are dedicated to maintaining the autonomy of civil society from governmental control and are increasingly involved in promoting active civic and associational work to broaden political participation and free public spaces from the state's repressive influence.

However, the initial phase and the years that followed were marked by significant hesitancy and noticeable confusion in visions and strategies. This uncertainty caused these effective elites to lose their unity and disrupted their role in society at large. This was due to several factors:

- A significant portion of the leftist elite harbored reservations about engaging in civil society and human rights efforts, partly due to ideological biases. There was a conflation of the rejection of bourgeois society with a mistrust of democratic struggle methods, coupled with a fear of becoming reliant on foreign financial and political networks of influence. This ideological skepticism sometimes led to reluctance to fully embrace the opportunities and strategies for democratic engagement within civil society.

- The lack of a cohesive vision and strategic framework capable of uniting efforts toward the civil and peaceful democratic struggle for democracy and political reform. This fragmentation resulted in many initiatives failing to be channeled positively, as there was no common platform to guide and consolidate these diverse efforts toward a unified goal.

- The absence of a broad consensus on a universal framework for human rights, exacerbated by ideological and political divisions. These tensions not only impeded the advancement of the human rights cause but also transformed many associations into battlegrounds for ideological disputes and mere platforms for political posturing rather than effective activism.

In the late 1990s and the early 2000s, Tunisia experienced a pivotal moment with the implementation of structural reform programs and its economic integration into the globalized market. This period marked a significant shift through the privatization of numerous public institutions, the liberalization of the economy and foreign trade, and a reduction in the state's role in economic and social spheres, particularly in environmental protection and infrastructure development.

This transformation had profound impacts on the labor market, notably in the Sahel region, which faced a dramatic upheaval following the collapse of the textile industry. The response from laid-off workers marked a significant change in activism methods, highlighting the traditional union frameworks' inadequacy in addressing these new challenges. Notable movements included the textile company IKAP's machinery workers in November 2002, followed by actions at Sotapax and Confortex in July 2003, Hotreva in 2004, and continued with the activism of the General Union of Tunisian Students in Sousse in 2007, among others. These social movements, characterized by hunger strikes and sit-ins, emerged across various internal regions and signaled a shift toward more direct and often-grassroots forms of protest against economic reforms and their social consequences.

The evolving socioeconomic landscape necessitated new methods of collaboration across various domains, including the political, trade union, legal, media, and intellectual spheres. This period saw the active involvement of university students and researchers from diverse fields such as economics, sociology, geography, and demography. They came together through national committees to support social movements, bringing together participants from a wide range of disciplines. This interdisciplinary approach bolstered the impact of their actions and allowed them to tap into the burgeoning global resistance against capitalist globalization and its effects on communities worldwide.

Between 2002 and 2008, the landscape of activism broadened to encompass student movements, the unemployed, and civil elites advocating for freedom. This era was marked by an expansion of collaborative efforts and networking, which proved beneficial on multiple fronts, including trade union, legal, media, and political arenas both within Tunisia and internationally. This growing network of activists and movements gained new momentum and effectiveness, posing a significant challenge to political authorities and becoming a pivotal force within civil society in the fight against oppression.

The Monastir symposium, organized by the human rights chapters of Sousse, Monastir, Mahdia, and Kairouan in October 2002, played a pivotal role in charting a new course for social and human rights advocacy in Tunisia. The call for a Tunisian social forum, backed by a wide-reaching petition, signaled a concerted effort to find unified platforms to bolster the social and human rights movement both within Tunisia and on the international stage.

The symposium, focusing on the social cost of globalization, marked a critical point of convergence between grassroots activism and scholarly research, highlighting the adverse

effects of globalization and proposing sustainable alternatives. This event significantly enhanced the communication channels among various social movements across the Arab region and with the international antiglobalization movement. It indicates the importance of the Tunisian civil and social movements' participation in a collective endeavor aimed at innovating strategies, mobilization techniques, and methods of communication.

The establishment of a Tunisian social forum emerged from this context as a concrete initiative, as a unified effort to bring together diverse actors and activists under a common cause. This idea represented a strategic pivot toward strengthening collective action and advocacy, one which continued to progress despite a political environment that is restrictive of public spaces and freedoms.

The 2008-2011 turning point: the Gafsa mining basin uprising

The 2008 Gafsa mining basin uprising in Tunisia was more than just a transient or isolated event; it marked a significant shift in the nature of popular movements in the country. Its impact was profound due to its widespread popular support, organized leadership, legitimate grievances, and resilience in the face of repression, legal challenges, and the tragic consequences of casualties and injuries. This uprising catalyzed a unified direction for the previously fragmented and ineffectual political, union, and legal efforts, compelling a reevaluation of strategies and goals across these sectors.

The uprising led to the transformation of the National Committee to Support the People of the Mining Basin into a crucial and dynamic participant in the struggle. Drawing on the lessons learned from past experiences, the committee was instrumental in breaking through the domestic and international political and media blockade surrounding the events in the mining basin. It succeeded in framing the local struggles and sacrifices as part of a broader political battle against the corruption and authoritarianism of the political system. Moreover, it positioned these efforts within the global context of resistance against the neoliberal policies advanced by the forces of economic and financial globalization.

The achievements of the mining basin uprising extended far beyond merely breaking the barrier of fear and revitalizing street activism; the uprising fundamentally challenged and transcended traditional frameworks for social and political engagement. This pivotal event set a precedent for reinvigorating the commitment to freedom, justice, and development, and it spurred innovation in organizing grassroots activities. This influence was evident in the subsequent spread of similar movements to Firyanah in June 2008, Skhira in 2009, and Ben Gardane in August 2010, culminating in the notable events in Sidi Bouzid in December 2010 that prefaced the Tunisian Revolution of 2011.

The profound political implications of the Gafsa uprising, within local and global contexts, paved the way for the 2011 revolution. The uprising highlighted the critical roles of women, trade unionists, and youths and garnered widespread international support, laying the groundwork for a new dynamic in the struggle between the state and democratic forces. This shift suggested that lasting change in favor of transformative forces would require not just a new vision for political engagement but also the creation of innovative strategies for action.

The social movements by the underprivileged in Tunisia and the broader wave of protests across the region and globally– such as in Sidi Ifni in Morocco, by the Mahalla weavers in Egypt, and including various movements in India, Brazil, Mexico, European suburbs, and the bread uprisings in Africa – all reflect a growing global consciousness around the themes of freedom, dignity, justice, and resistance against the policies of neoliberal globalization. These movements signify a collective awakening to the importance of challenging economic and social injustices and advocating for fundamental human rights.

Amid these myriad factors – the significant shifts in collective awareness, the experiences garnered from collaborative efforts via national committees supporting social and civil movements, the deepening of fieldwork, and the establishment of Maghreb and international networks – the groundwork for the Forum was laid in October 2010, with the Tunisian Revolution and the subsequent legal recognition of the right to organize greatly facilitating the Forum's formal establishment in March 2011. This context provided the impetus for its formation as an independent entity, envisioned as a hub for knowledge, activism, and advocacy. The legal acknowledgment allowed the Forum to operate lawfully and expand its activities, encompassing on-the-ground work, local-to-international networking, and research into economic, social, and environmental issues.

The Tunisian Forum and Democratic Transition: A New Stage and a New Role

The establishment of the FTDES on the national stage was not a spontaneous or impromptu response to the revolutionary fervor and the subsequent fall of the regime. Instead, it represented the culmination of a decade-long commitment to resisting tyranny. The Forum's emergence marks the beginning of a new chapter that aligns with the ongoing process of democratic transformation in Tunisia.

The FTDES achieved three significant milestones between 2011 and 2017, despite the prominence of political challenges during the initial transitional period, alongside a booming internal social movement across various areas, a rise in the phenomena of regular migration, and the effects of the civil war in Libya:

- It established itself as a pivotal entity in the newly formed civil society landscape. With its legal status, social mission, and field orientation, it became a central networking platform connecting traditional and emergent social movements.

- It significantly expanded its influence and operations across various societal segments by leveraging its comprehensive reports, publications, and engagement with a broad spectrum of issues.

- It became a respected negotiator with governmental and official institutions, reflecting its growing importance and maturing role, to the point where it represented civil and social interests.

Recognizing the critical role of civil society in fostering political and intellectual activities independent of state and influential circles, promoting the culture of democracy and human rights, and combating all forms of inequality and vulnerability, the Forum's efforts focused on establishing a set of dualities to challenge the official tendency to dominate the narrative on rights and freedoms. This dominance is often reflected and reinforced through public policies in various sectors such as education, health, transportation, and the environment. The FTDES's strategy aimed to counteract this by advocating for and implementing policies informed by diverse perspectives grounded in rigorous academic research and statistics that move beyond a one-dimensional viewpoint. The vision of the Forum was based on a set of core guiding principles:

1. First: It was committed to deepening the understanding and practice of human rights, enhancing political participation among citizens to assert their rights, and fostering collective consciousness against tyranny. This involved supporting transitional justice to ensure accountability, reconciliation, preserving historical memory, and preventing future violations.

2. Second: It sought to develop a unified national strategy to combat the threats posed by terrorism and extremism. This included crafting educational, cultural, and developmental programs aimed at mitigating the spread of extremist ideologies and the influence of violent groups, thereby protecting the democratic process and the achievements of social movements.

3. Third: It aimed to leverage constitutional progress to secure tangible improvements in economic and social rights through legal and policy reforms. This effort is geared toward establishing the foundations for local democratic institutions.

4. Fourth: It strived to consolidate various social movements within civil society, establishing a new collaborative framework called the coordination of social movements. This initiative aimed to harness the collective energy of organizations, associations, and activists in the social arena to respond effectively to the needs of these movements and strengthen civil society's capacity to support and connect social movements with FTDES's research departments – comprising over 150 researchers working either permanently or on a project basis, with focuses including environmental and climate justice, economic studies, social inequality, migration, transitional justice, and the examination of economic and social violations against working women. Through this integrated approach, FTDES sought to craft viable alternatives and advance toward a more equitable social democracy, bolstering the power of democratic societal change.

The atmosphere of freedom unleashed by the 2011 revolution opened new civil and political arenas beyond the conventional boundaries of thought and action that had previously confined civil society. This newfound dynamism and rapid pace of change transcended the restrictive frameworks of the authoritarian era preceding 2011 – an era during which, despite genuine intentions, civil society struggled to enact substantial democratic reforms against the Ben Ali regime.

The Forum's research production: Between scientific analysis and addressing the social problems resulting from government policies

In recent years, there has been a notable, spontaneous surge in various movements – including citizen, trade union, feminist, and youth movements – all united in their advocacy for political rights, public and individual freedoms, gender equality, minority rights, and artistic and cultural expression. This upsurge reflects a broader societal resilience and a collective yearning for a better, more equitable life that stands in opposition to authoritarianism, domination in all its manifestations, and the resurgence of policies rooted in violence and impunity. These movements have played a crucial role in amplifying democratic demands and the values of freedom, justice, and dignity across all spheres of life.

A segment of civil society has taken a militant and intellectual stance, championing the fundamental rights (e.g., social, economic, and environmental) of marginalized and overlooked communities. This approach has served as a fertile ground for social engagement, utilizing sociological analysis to differentiate between spontaneous social movements and the interplay of spontaneity and randomness. Moreover, there has been a deliberate effort to connect with social realities through the concept of the history of the present, marking a departure from traditional methodologies.

The discourse has evolved from the classic debate over the dichotomy between the notion that the isolation and detachment of the social sciences researcher from bias or social commitment is essential for maintaining the scientific nature of their work and its legitimacy, and the argument emphasizing the critical need for, and legitimacy of, a declared social bias or commitment within the social and human sciences. This latter perspective does not detract from the necessity of scientific validation within the community but instead enriches it by aligning with oppressed groups and challenging the neoliberal policies supported by expert and research findings that often favor state and economic power structures.

This deliberately intellectual and research-oriented stance has provided a platform for the new movements to amplify the voices of those on the fringes, the excluded and the overlooked, shifting them from the shadows to the forefront of political activism. By asserting their presence in the public sphere, these movements have helped bridge the gap between elite discourses and grassroots demands for rights, freedoms, and democratic reforms. They have refocused the locus of conflict to the grassroots level of society and dismantled barriers to broad political participation.

This approach represents a strategic departure from spontaneous and haphazard activism to a more deliberate and consistent method adopted by the Forum. It embodies a comprehensive strategy that navigates the complexities of protest and citizen action through an analytical lens. This methodology seeks to understand the interplay between protest as an act of rebellion, resistance, or demand, and the overarching democratic imperative, covering both legal and political aspects of change.

This approach, bolstered by research, continuous observation, and field engagement, has affirmed the intrinsic link between social movements and new forms of civil and political activism amid the decline of traditional methods of social engagement. It has also highlighted the connection between the current protest waves and the overarching demands for human rights, democracy, and development, placing these demands at the heart of societal conflicts. Thus, it counters the narrative that protests are either pointless or destructive. Instead, within their contexts of genesis, demands, rhetoric, and impacts, protests are identified as integral components of democratic engagement. Public participation extends beyond the confines of electoral and representative democracy, manifesting more broadly through protest actions, indicating that the crises facing representative democracy in Tunisia and globally are being challenged by the forces of street democracy and protest movements.

The term field actor has been reaffirmed, recognizing the role played by such actors before, during, and after the revolution. When demands emerge from the lived experiences of the people, linked to their hardships, they not only find real and tangible support but also galvanize individuals and groups into action. These actors, driven by a deep understanding of their cause and its implications, are equipped to advocate passionately for their rights. Today, they identify themselves as field actors committed to addressing everyday issues – contributing to the critique of social systems and advocating

for change – and position themselves as part of the movement seeking to offer democratic and developmental alternatives.

Appreciating the growing solidarity and alignment between social movements and their institutions could redefine the role of civil society and protest movements, distinct from their function in the early years postrevolution. Initially, efforts were focused on establishing settlements and consensuses framed as national rescue strategies; however, this ultimately led to counterrevolutionary agreements that facilitated corruption and legitimized the antidemocratic coup in July 2021. The electoral setback experienced by this broad coalition of political and civil entities pointed to a compounded failure: failure to establish a unified, stable political force, and failure to influence public policies through participation in governance directly or through parliamentary means. Instead, this vacuum allowed their political adversaries, despite their own many failures, to gain ground, paving the way for the emergence of populism and authoritarianism. This shift threatens to undermine the nascent democratic gains in Tunisia, endangering both the state and society by dismantling the intermediary structures essential for the democratic journey's continuation. It has also led to widespread disillusionment among citizens and disengagement from the democratic process.

More than a decade after Ben Ali's regime was overturned, societal disparities in wealth creation and distribution persist alongside policies of disdain and marginalization. Living conditions have deteriorated, and the socioeconomic divide has deepened.

Methodology for producing critical knowledge

The generation of critical knowledge outside traditional frameworks presents a pivotal chance to reintegrate social issues into the core of democratic political discussions, especially against the backdrop of austerity measures that disproportionately impact vulnerable and middle classes. These measures, enforced by the state's coercive power amidst its dwindling popular legitimacy, have confirmed the inseparability of the fight for social justice from the broader struggle for freedoms and rights. Achieving substantive progress in these areas necessitates shifting the power dynamics toward a robust citizen base capable of championing these causes.

Such progress is contingent upon moving beyond conventional and elitist understandings of knowledge toward an alternative, critical perspective that delves into the lives of the marginalized and the invisible. This involves investigating their interactions with the state and various societal actors (including the media, associations, and political parties), as well as uncovering the internal dynamics within these communities, such as power relations and inequalities. This approach not only facilitates a deeper understanding of identity and belonging but also accounts for the spatial dimensions of vulnerability in terms of land and resources alongside the conflicts that arise from them in the context of ongoing environmental and climate challenges.

The prevailing consensus suggests that without the emergence of a strong alternative political force, overcoming the deadlock that hinders democratic progress remains an elusive goal. The absence of such a force makes it challenging for isolated movements to alter the status quo, as genuine democracy cannot flourish without a concerted struggle within the political arena aimed at transforming public policies, governance practices, and the foundations of democratic state institutions. This ambitious objective can only be realized through embracing critical knowledge that reevaluates social relationships and addresses the underlying causes of societal fragility, both visible and invisible.

The mission of overcoming the democratic deadlock presents actors with two critical tasks. First, there is a pressing need to break away from the current state of isolation and limited social engagement, addressing the pervasive sense of demoralization and fragmentation within their ranks that have been exacerbated by increasing restrictions on freedoms that threaten the safety of all actors. Second, there is an urgent need to foster broad and sustained solidarity networks among these actors and with their social environment in anticipation of a positive shift following a series of disappointments.

The Forum is uniquely adapted to address these issues, as it exemplifies the richness of pluralism, diversity, and experience that many social democratic actors bring to mobilization, advocacy, research, knowledge production, and their role as dissenting voices within the social sciences and humanities. This approach aligns with efforts to evolve the research framework in these disciplines and to refine academic programs, particularly through enhancing quantitative methodologies. Such advancements bolster scholars' ability to grasp the intricacies of social phenomena, encourage alternative analytical perspectives, and foster a new generation of researchers. These scholars are poised to navigate beyond the constraints of conventional research paradigms, pioneering novel approaches to understanding reality and its connection to societal and social transformations.[3]

3 See Hakim bin Hamouda, Scientific Research from a Different Perspective: Spain's Approach as a Model, Al-Maghrib Newspaper, October, 2022, available at bit.ly/3rrh7Bw

Accurate Data and Monitoring as an Input for Understanding Social Issues

In 2013, recognizing the gap in independent analysis of social issues in Tunisia, the Forum took a significant step by establishing the Tunisian Social Observatory. This department was dedicated to addressing social matters through continuous, in-depth, analytical exploration alongside its commitment to advocating for economic and social rights on legal and political fronts. The initiative was spurred by the realization that, at the time, the primary sources of information on social movements and the analysis of social issues were official government channels. These sources often provided only a partial view, focusing predominantly on labor movements (such as strikes, work stoppages, and sit-ins) and overlooking other critical social dynamics like rural populations, unemployed, and citizens' movements.

Furthermore, when it came to social indicators related to unemployment, poverty, and vulnerability, official accounts tended to obscure the true scale of these issues. This obfuscation was achieved through the employment of questionable methodologies for calculation and analysis, leading to the presentation of data that downplayed social inequalities.[4]

The observatory aims to fill this void by rigorously examining all facets of the social question. Its work involves analyzing data, assessing the effectiveness of social policies, and developing new social indicators that more accurately reflect the realities on the ground. These findings are then discussed with a network of specialized researchers, fostering a dialogue grounded in both commitment and independence. The outcomes of these discussions, including proposed alternatives, are intended to enrich the efforts of social movements.

Working to mitigate divisions within social movements

Since the old regime, Tunisia has witnessed significant social mobilization around various critical issues, including legal, social, economic, political, and environmental concerns. The Forum has observed a fragmentation among social actors, exemplified by the situation in the Gulf of Monastir. Here, workers have protested over working conditions, while others have raised concerns about environmental pollution from industrial facilities, leading to widespread community backlash. These movements, though driven by genuine grievances, often remained siloed, focusing either on health and economic impacts on fishers and farmers or on labor rights within factories.

This scenario highlights the necessity for a more integrated approach to social activism. Many movements in Tunisia encounter roadblocks, largely because they struggle to transition from protest to proposing viable alternatives. Bridging these movements and creating collaborative spaces is essential for developing holistic solutions that address issues comprehensively and structurally. Addressing the challenges in the Gulf of Monastir, for instance, requires a multifaceted strategy that includes transitioning to less polluting industrial processes, revising labor rights, and improving the management of public infrastructures like treatment plants. Such an approach aims not only to mitigate immediate grievances but also to ensure the well-being of the local population and the revitalization of the fishing and agricultural sectors.

The Forum's establishment of the Tunisian Social Observatory signifies its commitment to capturing the full spectrum of social and economic challenges faced by communities. It aims to foster spaces for crafting alternatives that address these challenges effectively. By enhancing community dialogue and thus augmenting traditional social dialogue, the observatory acknowledges that social issues extend beyond internal company matters to encompass broader concerns like environmental preservation, community integration, development initiatives, and efforts to address exclusion and poverty.

The development of a vibrant and assertive civil society in Tunisia is inexorably linked to the building of citizen institutions ready to engage in dialogue with emerging actors. It is also essential to communicate with all relevant

4 علاء الطالبي، تجربة المرصد الاجتماعي التونسي 2013-2020، معهد الأصفري للمجتمع المدني والمواطنة في الجامعة الأميركية في بيروت، ص. 25-2، 2021.

external parties, as their inquiries may offer opportunities or present challenges.

Additionally, there is a critical role in generating knowledge that is both accessible to and reflective of social actors, drawing inspiration directly from grassroots movements and the realities faced by marginalized communities. This involves continuously creating platforms for encounters, dialogue, the exchange of experiences, and the enactment of civil and civic actions, exemplified by initiatives like the National Conference for Social and Citizenship Movements. Such gatherings have fostered significant projects and events, such as amateur film festivals in Kelibia, thereby broadening the scope for documenting, writing, analyzing, and producing critical and innovative knowledge. This process is key to advancing discussions beyond mere repetition, potentially laying the groundwork for a political alternative originating from within civil society. However, achieving this requires a concerted effort to align visions and commit to long-term work toward coherent social, political, and legal objectives.

It is also necessary to thoroughly examine the civil space and display a willingness to make decisive choices about which components may no longer be viable due to inherent limitations, internal weaknesses, or an inability to address their challenges. Nevertheless, this process should not detract from efforts to maintain the diversity of the scene, integrating it within an overarching vision and values, breaking from past practices, and engaging in regular evaluations. The systematic accumulation and analysis of data and statistics are instrumental in drawing insights that may inform conclusions and future policies.

The Forum's 2020 annual report on social and protest movements reaffirmed observations and conclusions from 2016, highlighting the persistence of social issues and demands as demonstrated by the high number of protests, the diversity of the demands, and the involvement of diverse social actors. The report documented specific instances of mobilization, predominantly stemming from numerous organized social struggles that were not necessarily unionized, spanning a variety of sectors and topics. These included the movement in the Jamna municipality advocating for the recovery of agricultural lands and the promotion of a solidarity economy in 2013, the Manish Msameh (I Won't Forgive) movement against the reconciliation law in 2015, the Petrofac protests against sea pollution by petroleum companies in 2016, and the al-Kamour sit-in demanding social responsibility from petroleum companies in 2017. Other notable movements included: Fash Nestanao, which opposed austerity measures by the state in 2018; Learn Awam, which aimed to combat police impunity in 2018; the al-Hawaidiyah women's sit-in for water rights in 2019; and Manish Masab, focusing on the right to a sound environment in 2021. These events reflect a broad spectrum of civic engagement and protest, underscoring the dynamic nature of social activism in addressing and challenging a range of issues.

From quantitative to analytical: identifying problems, anticipating crises, and offering alternatives

The analytical papers and studies conducted by the Forum have enabled a nuanced understanding of the significant shifts occurring after the 2019 elections, revealing a profound crisis in the model of legitimate representative democracy. This model is starkly contrasted with the type of social democracy advocated by protest movements, which fundamentally diverges from the political party system foundational to Tunisia's political landscape since 25 July 2021. Organizational and grassroots initiatives have emerged as the vanguards of innovative and creative movements, seeking to disrupt the status quo of a nonrepresentative democracy that fails to bridge societal divides.

The Forum's methodology is holistic, extending beyond simple observation and quantitative analysis. It endeavors to interpret these findings within two primary frameworks:

- The Forum aims to cultivate a nuanced understanding and critical perspective of the sociopolitical context, critiquing public policy failures and spotlighting the disparities fracturing Tunisian society. This is achieved through collaborative research across its departments, notably between the Department of Economic Studies and the Inequality Observatory, fostering a well-rounded critique of societal inequities.[5]

- Leveraging these substantial research outputs, the Forum seeks to empower social actors, encouraging them to utilize this knowledge as a basis for advocacy and to build a momentum of informed pressure. Since 2014, the Forum has adeptly positioned itself as a pivotal

5 See Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights, Inequality in Tunisia, March 2022, available at https://ftdes.net/rapports/inegalites.ar.pdf

force in redirecting public discourse toward pressing social issues, steadfastly advocating for rights and freedoms without yielding to initial disputes centered around identity issues.

The Forum's extensive involvement in the protest space and with social actors, guided by its strategic approach, has distilled into three crucial lessons:

- A significant number of protest movements have originated in small towns and rural areas, as highlighted by an analysis of the intersection between the geography of protests and the geography of poverty, visible through interactive maps on the Forum's platform.[6] This trend toward the democratization of the protest space is evidenced by the emergence of new local actors and innovative protest methods, signaling a widespread citizen's awakening and aspiration for political engagement. This evolution has expanded the protest space beyond traditional centers and dominant groups, incorporating actors deeply familiar with their operational terrains. This inclusivity has spurred the utilization of local and symbolic resources, such as collective memory, fostering a stronger sense of commitment and broadening mobilization networks.

- There has been a notable convergence of and repeated interactions between traditional social actors and emerging social movements. This dynamic has facilitated the creation of new collective identities, established connections, and shared spaces, and provided access to comparative experiences and robust solidarity networks among grassroots movements. Such convergence offers a wider political dimension for various demands, marking the initial steps toward solidarity with a political vision that transcends narrow factional interests, although it does not immediately translate into a systematic change in the nature of social and political conflicts or power balances.

- Many social movements have strategically framed their actions within the constitutional and legal context, leveraging them as a central pillar in their engagement with the state. This strategic positioning has shifted numerous movements from basic mobilization and advocacy to entering negotiations, securing agreements, and influencing legislation (examples include Jamna, al-Kamour, Kerkennah, and the implementation of Law 38).

6 See Al-Forum, Digital Report of the OST, February 2024, available at https://al-forum.org/TableaudeBoard

Conclusion: Critical Knowledge and the Role of Civil Society

Fostering a unique relationship between researchers, activists, and actors is crucial for unraveling the complexities of their languages, symbols, goals, aspirations, and capabilities. Amid challenges of contempt, injustice, and oppression, social science researchers can, through engagement with activists and actors in democratic change and human rights, develop critical methodologies anchored in the fundamental rights of dignity and recognition for individuals and groups. The Forum poses questions about the potential for alliances and interactions between critical research in social sciences and civil and human rights activists, examining the balance between bias and objectivity, the opportunities for such collaborations, and the ethical considerations and methodologies involved.

Reflecting on accumulated experiences, we delve into the role of researchers across human, social, legal, economic, and communication sciences in supporting vulnerable groups through committed scientific research. The aim is to establish effective research and nurture a new generation of scholars who advocate alongside marginalized communities. By enhancing civic spaces for academics and artists to address pertinent issues, new connections within academic, cultural, and artistic domains can be forged. Moreover, improving communication channels and organizing forums for constructive dialogue underscores civil society's vital role in advocating for socioeconomic alternatives at the political level.

There is a need for alternative models of collaboration and action principles that can serve as inspiration for further initiatives. This involves creating partnerships; building capacity; empowering local civil society, experts, social actors, and cultural and artistic communities; enhancing resources and their developers; and promoting the production of evidence-based knowledge with stringent methodologies. This approach aims to bridge the research divide between academia and active researchers and between researchers and marginalized groups. It encourages a unified approach where both the researcher and the researched engage in a mutual struggle for common causes, driven by a clear strategy.

The methodological approach the FTDES intends to implement brings together young researchers from the humanities, social sciences, legal studies, and economic fields in a unified space. Over the course of a week, through workshops, discussion panels, and work sessions, these researchers engage directly with various vulnerable groups (including household workers, female agricultural workers, informal sector workers, and migrants). The aim is to forge communication and understanding between researchers and these groups, breaking down barriers and misunderstandings that have historically existed between them. The culmination of this engagement is the drafting of a charter for scientific research dedicated to human rights issues at large, with a specific focus on social and economic justice. This initiative also outlines an action plan and a strategy for creating a network among researchers, laying the groundwork for collective efforts. The overarching goal is to nurture a new cadre of researchers deeply committed to human rights, providing a platform for their work, struggle, and networking. This approach seeks to pave a pathway for activism through the lens of critical knowledge, fostering an environment where academic inquiry and social advocacy intersect, ultimately contributing to the advancement of human rights and social justice.

How the Public Becomes the Client: Transitions for Architecture and Planning in Egypt after 2011 and the Case of 10 Tooba

Yahia Shawkat and Ahmed Zaazaa

Introduction

The rallying call during the 2011 uprising in Egypt, "Bread! Freedom! Social justice!", led some professionals in different fields to translate the latter demand into policies. This inspired us as architects to work on housing, land, and the built environment, first focusing our efforts on local coproduction, advocacy, and awareness initiatives through design, film, and writing. In 2014 as the revolutionary wave was subsiding, three architects decided to consolidate their community-centered work, and 10 Tooba was born: an interdisciplinary, applied-research studio that supports residents and civil society organizations seeking to improve their housing situation and their neighborhoods.

This paper aims to provide a reflective journey on 10 Tooba's attempts, after nigh on a decade of work, at advocating for more just policies of public spending and urban planning, raising awareness about laws and the predatory real estate industry, engaging with local councils on upgrading initiatives, and training future practitioners on spatially-just methods. The first part of this paper offers a background of housing and urban inequities as well as the struggles leading up to the January 2011 uprising, in order to give context to the activism and rights work during and after the uprising. The second part then explains the background that led to establishing 10 Tooba, including the professional shifts of two of the cofounders that happened during that period. The third section reflects on 10 Tooba's methods and tools and discusses the processes and challenges of policy research and coproduction with communities. The conclusion then presents a summary of the main points discussed throughout the paper.

Mubarak's Urban Disasters: 2011 Was Predictable

The constant and consistent assault on Egyptians' housing rights that has been taking place since 2014 has made many forget their plight under the Mubarak regime, and indeed, wish for one more day under his rule (Balad 2014). However, hundreds were killed and millions were displaced from their homes during his three-decade tenure (1981-2011) by both the regime's neglect of, and its interest in, their homes. In terms of neglect, nothing could be more scathing than the 1992 Dahshur earthquake that rendered over 100,000 families homeless within a minute (Shawkat and El-Mazzahi 2023). Almost half of these families lived in villages close to the earthquake's epicenter. Two years later, villages in Upper Egypt would bear the brunt of a horrific series of events, where 22,000 families were made homeless due to flash floods (ReliefWeb 1994). In the village of Durunkah, 600 people perished as a flash flood blazing with fire wiped out their village. A disproportionate number of urban poor households lost their lives, their loved ones, and their homes

when a chunk of the Mokattam plateau broke off and landed on their self-built homes in el Dweika in Cairo (Shawkat, Khalil, and Al-Moghazy 2018). Criminal levels of neglect in regulatory oversight of construction meant that many of the deaths and housing losses were avoidable. Neglect was also present in how many of those affected were precariously rehoused, or simply abandoned.

On the other hand, many were adversely affected by the regime's interest in their homes, though for reasons other than their well-being. The Dahshur earthquake was used as an excuse to fast track the eviction and demolition of many inner-city communities labeled as dangerous. Between 1997 and 2010, at least 30,000 families were evicted in slum clearance projects in Cairo, many of which were at the behest of real estate gentrification projects (Shawkat 2013). In the small city of Luxor, a significant portion of the population was displaced for the sake of tourism in two places: the village of Old Qarnah (Al Jazeera 2006), and those that lived in the way of the Sphinx Avenue project (McGrath 2010). The neoliberal structural adjustment program that started in 1991, infamous for its adverse economic effects on the working class and people living in poverty, also resulted in an untold number of evictions from public housing after interest rates on subsidized cooperative housing loans rose five-fold overnight (al-Ahaly 1991). In rural Egypt, the liberalization of land rents is known to have led to the evictions of almost one million families from their land (Saad 1999). A large number were not only losing livelihoods, but also their homes that were part of the ezbas their land belonged to (Land Center for Human Rights 2004).

These displacements did not happen without resistance. Residents legally fought against expropriation and eviction decrees or appealed to UN bodies, many with the help of rights organizations. Some residents, such as those of Ezbet Khair Allah and Dahab Island, won their cases (Tadamun 2013; Habitat International Coalition 2009), while others lost theirs, as did the residents of Hikr Abu Doma (Sobhy 2005). Mobilization, while rare, also happened through demonstrations or sit-ins, either against evictions or to demand housing (Hassanein 2008; Fahmy 2005; Mawhoub 2006). When that failed, residents simply stood their ground during evictions, as in the example of the land tenants; many were arrested and hundreds lost their lives (Land Center for Human Rights 2004). Other activism indirectly fought for housing rights, such as in the case brought by the Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights lodged against the Ministry of Housing for allocating land to crony real estate developers for next to nothing (El-Wardani 2010).

A Needed Shift: The Establishment of 10 Tooba

In 2011, Mubarak's injustices precipitated the uprising that led to his ouster and a reinvigoration of rights work across Egypt. Organizations expanded and multiplied despite their severely constricted resources and a highly restrictive security climate. The civic space that was excised from the regime's clutches allowed these organizations to expand from primarily working on crisis management, rushing to attend to emergency situations, to addressing challenges at their roots. This shift coincided with a wave of professionals quitting their nonactivist jobs to join political campaigns, establish socioeconomic initiatives, and join rights organizations (Stadnicki 2015).

10 Tooba was one such organization. Founded by architects who chose to formally reapply their training in designing homes and cities from serving the private sector to addressing public needs. Egypt had a history of lawyers working pro bono and setting up organizations that gave free legal aid, such as the Hisham Mubarak Center and the Egyptian Center for Housing Rights to name a few. Doctors, as well as religious groups, have a long history of establishing medical aid centers that relied on charitable contributions, including the Ghoneim Urology and Nephrology Center, the Magdi Yacoub Global Heart Foundation, and al-Gam'iya al-Shar'iya, which runs many hospitals. In housing, some organizations already existed before 2011 that helped to build or repair homes through microloans or, less frequently, through grants, such as the Better Life Foundation. However, few architects or urban planners in Egypt had provided design services for free, unlike the Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects, which has professionally supported low income households in architecture, urban design, and civil engineering needs (Global Design News 2023). At the same time, there was a dearth of independent policy research on housing.

Of course, the provision of housing is much more expensive than legal counseling or medical treatment. However, for many housing issues, the solution is not necessarily to build a home. Another explanation may lie in how architecture is seen and treated as an elite profession. Housing is thus also seen strictly as a commodity, and not a service, and this conditioning starts very early. College training, even in public universities where we trained, encourages students to design projects that are out of touch with the reality of most Egyptians: malls, skyscrapers, luxury villas, and gated

developments. The social aspect of architecture is limited to rare instances of designing social housing blocks or expropriating informal housing for its demolition. Moving on after graduation, one's class was more determinative than their skills in helping architects to capture better jobs, where clients are upper-middle class, rich entrepreneurs, or individuals that can afford their own designs. The system promotes designs by elites for elites. Those architects that wish to go further and set up their private practice must be able to access clients that can afford their own real estate and design, and therefore also the capital to set up the business.

10 Tooba cofounder Yahia Shawkat went down this path: designing private villas, tourist resorts, and malls, both in practices and as a freelancer. He was able to find a rare practice that also specialized in public buildings and social housing, experiencing firsthand the limitations of attempting to design a way out of the housing crisis. This led to early exploration of how policies should be better addressed through a blog called "Shadow Ministry of Housing", created shortly after the 2008 el Dweika rockslide. After the 2011 uprising, the blog expanded into an initiative to further explore the housing crisis through documentaries and a data-driven identification of key housing and urban issues (Shawkat 2013), much inspired by the book Mapping Istanbul, which presented crucial data on Turkey's capital in a very creative and compelling publication. Shawkat's career shift was cemented after having joined the Egyptian Initiative on Personal Rights for two years.

10 Tooba cofounder Ahmed Zaazaa had gained participatory design expertise working with MADD Platform in various coproduction processes with marginalized communities, such as his work with Maspero neighborhood residents on their community-based redevelopment of their neighborhood.[1] These projects have also included various governmental agencies as main stakeholders in the coproduction process, which has revealed the different political dynamics of urban regeneration projects, particularly in the government's tendency to prioritize the value in land and investment potentials over social or heritage values. The production of official narratives to back up the government's investment objectives has triggered a crucial need for a platform that can present counternarratives through raising awareness and advocacy.

In the end, it was the combination of our awareness of social inequities and our first-hand experiences dealing with government agencies – whether as clients or regulators – that led us to re-appropriate our professional expertise as trained architects while asking ourselves, "How could the public become the client?"

Building a Research Studio

After many meetings and discussions, we decided that 10 Tooba was going to be a place where we could apply our existing design expertise to social demands. Our initial vision of the place was partly inspired by architects and planners that took communities, rather than businesses or governments, as their clients. These include the charity-model platform Architecture for Humanity (now Open Architecture Collaborative) – which sought to match (mostly Western) architects to (mostly global south) communities – and other architectural practices that worked for the public, such as the prime example of Chilean architectural practice Elemental, which has created famous public-housing designs – breaking with decades of uniform, top-down–designed housing blocks – by listening to and addressing local needs.

However, 10 Tooba was not only going to focus on designing problems away; other initiatives have focused their responses to housing and urban needs through architectural and urban solutions. Indeed, we were not satisfied with the research and data on housing and urban issues available at the time, which reflected biased, incomplete, or simply inaccurate stories of what we saw on the ground. We also believed that in order to widen the scope of change, the sharing and dissemination of data with communities and other professionals that wanted to initiate change would amplify these efforts. Here, we found more limited inspiration, though one effort that stood out was the aforementioned Mapping Istanbul. This led us to decide that from the start we would work in a loop of research-driven design and application and real world-driven research.

Almost a decade on, 10 Tooba has settled into two units that follow this mantra: the Housing Policy Unit (HPU) and the Coproduction and Knowledge Unit. The HPU primarily works on research toward policy change, as well as generating public interest articles that address the wide audience affected by these policies. Its main project became known as the Built Environment Observatory, and it also conducts workshops and training based on the research methodologies it has developed. The Coproduction and Knowledge Unit focuses on outreach and knowledge sharing. Both of these units have developed particular sets of tools; in the following paragraphs, we will reflect on the evolution, success, or failure of some of these toolsets.

1 MADD Platform is an independent group of urban designers working closely with local communities in marginalized and deprived neighborhoods on urban upgrading (Madd 2015).

Counter-policy analysis

Up until 2012, most publicly available policy analyses – which were rare in themselves – were written from only two points of view: that of the government or of international financial institutions and donor agencies. These naturally reflected these agencies' own interests, and given the lack of any other outlets, represented the only sources of information on the built environment. The exceptions to this were Milad Hanna's books and articles (Hanna 1988, 1996), which while philosophically sound, contained statistical information and policy analysis which had become largely outdated. As with some post-uprising initiatives, such as Tadamun and Mahaliat, we set out to write from a different point of view, that of the residents. Here we set up the Built Environment Observatory as 10 Tooba's policy analysis and dissemination arm, which later evolved into the HPU. Its first series, "Myths and Plans of Urban Planning in Egypt", reviewed the mainstream urban planning regime that had been presenting the same top-down, high-modernist plans to various housing problems since the 1950s, without any measurable success in providing adequate homes. We showed how and why all previous schemes had failed in meeting their social targets, and argued for better planning approaches. Over the ensuing few years, many tools were developed to aid in policy analysis, as described below.

a. Data-based analysis

In another early HPU series, "The Built Environment Budget", we analyzed public spending on housing, transportation, and urban utilities to prove how it was not based on geographic population or deprivation. Our decision to study this topic was based on our belief that the data we needed existed if only we looked hard enough for it: we trawled government agency websites and manually copied rows of numbers from PDFs into manageable Excel spreadsheets. The effort paid off and in turn established our methodology of data-gathering and analysis tools that could be applied to other socioeconomic sectors by scholars or activists. Since then, we have developed tools to read market monopolization tactics through the ultimate beneficial ownership investigation, "Who Owns Cairo?", in which we assess how much Egyptians benefit from state-owned real estate companies; we have also worked on sharing and disseminating these tools through workshops and collaborations, as detailed below.

b. Visualizations

Our in-depth investigations found an audience in the rights and academic worlds, which were our target from the start: we wanted to provide a form of technical support to organizations more focused on local issues and narrative alternatives to the dominant narratives mindlessly repeated in lecture halls and among architects, urban planners, and economists. In most of these cases, our primary aim was to fill a knowledge gap for both residents and rights defenders as seen from the street. This kept us exploring the best and simplest ways to explain data to a wide audience, a significant part of which is illiterate.

Visualizations became our primary medium for this communication; we evolved them from the sleek, more modern or minimalist images hinged on our training as architects, to ones that are more contextualized for wider audiences. Abstract stickmen became less-abstract silhouettes of people in galabias, dollar signs switched to Egyptian pounds or coins. Computer-generated graphics were replaced with hand drawn ones. We also had to keep reminding ourselves that data was not the end but the means to explain the inequities and show how alternatives could be applied.

c. Public interest pieces

As we learned that in-depth investigations took months to prepare, and were only popular among a select audience, we started applying a more journalistic style to the HPU's work through shorter, more succinct, timely (where possible) public interest pieces. Early pieces showed how electricity price hikes affected households. Then we turned our focus to social housing offers made to thousands of potential applicants, regularly presenting simplified analyses of these advertisements, while highlighting key facts and caveats hidden in the fine print.

Laws, like data, tend to be ambiguous and hard to understand. Moreover, the quick development and passage of urban legislation that would disproportionately affect poverty-stricken or precarious households had to be presented in a more legible manner. Here, we started with the highly complex Construction Violations Reconciliation Law, which aimed to legalize informal homes under certain conditions in exchange for a fine. Our articles were written from the point of view of residents' questions, such as: Does this law affect me, and if so, how? What am I expected to do? And most importantly, how much am I expected to pay in fines? One of the toughest challenges we faced with this law was how to provide general pointers for something that was to be applied on a case-by-case basis with an almost infinite number of outcomes. Here, the Ministry of Housing, the executive branch responsible for the law, in a step it rarely takes, issued a explanation booklet with schematics providing a range of different examples, which we then used to aid our own explanations. Another challenge was how to gather information on the fines that would be applied differently by various governorates or cities. For that, we could only initially provide the ballpark

figures the law supplied, supplemented by a few early governorate decrees that stated the fines. During the ensuing months after the law's passage, other governorates followed suit, while a barrage of supporting legislation was issued or amended. We responded to that by creating a page dedicated to these documents, updating it on a regular basis with each new issuance.

Coproduction: The participatory upgrade unit

In parallel to the HPU, 10 Tooba activated the Participatory Upgrade Unit in 2016 to work closely with local communities in coproducing action plans for upgrade services and public spaces in deprived contexts. This unit aimed to involve the various stakeholders: residents, community-based organizations, civil society, academia, and the relevant government agencies. However, a new reality governing the coproduction process swiftly unraveled in one of the participatory projects that 10 Tooba was responsible for when government officials expressed their reservations about involving the residents in the participatory needs assessments and prohibited any mapping or surveying exercises. This was a clear message that field work was now restricted, and it had become unsafe to communicate with local communities without permission and official oversight. The restrictions not only affected the participatory upgrade but also made fieldwork research challenging and insecure. Hence, our efforts have been redirected in order to reach and communicate with local communities differently. 10 Tooba has produced a "Participatory Needs Assessment Manual", which includes several toolboxes and research and planning tools that can be used easily by nonprofessionals such as community members, civil society activists, and students in the application of coproduction processes.

More recently, new entry points through partnerships created with local NGOs that work closely with local marginalized communities have reopened the doors to fieldwork through projects that focus on services provision (e.g. infrastructure, waste management, health services). These types of projects overlap directly with issues such as urban inequity, quality of life and well-being, and adequate urban management strategies. Within these projects, the coproduction tools are being developed to include multiple disciplines. The intersectionality between the disciplines has enriched the processes with tools that focus on networking with the different community groups and engaging them within the processes.

The Participatory Upgrade Unit was subsequently able to function effectively again, and expand its outreach to more NGOs in both urban and rural areas. Despite challenges in establishing connections with NGOs that align with 10 Tooba's principles – primarily due to the scarcity of such organizations for the reasons previously mentioned – these partnerships have played a crucial role in rekindling the potential for connecting with on-the-ground realities.

Furthermore, and regardless of this new potential, restrategizing was inevitable for overcoming the limitations of conducting fieldwork. Since the different products of the two components of 10 Tooba revolve around the users of the built environment, the synthesis for these products can benefit a wider audience. Hence, a third component has been developed to expand the outreach.

Awareness and education tools

Here we reset our sights to academia, where we found that topics such as sociospatial justice, climate change, rights to the city, and coproduction are not included nor tackled critically in universities' curricula. Moreover, the gap between academia and the public was sufficiently wide enough that they functioned as two separate worlds. Therefore, using different educational tools became vital to consider in our work, to ensure advanced outreach and create bridges that deliver scientific facts and arguments to the public in convenient and user-friendly ways. Hence, we set up the Knowledge Production Unit, and below are some of its key tools.

a. Awareness and advocacy

The power of multimedia tools for learning comes from the significant freedom to imagine and create different worlds and contexts using a mix of text, visuals, and sounds that can be easily circulated among different platforms and social media in order to deliver crucial facts and ideas and raise awareness among a wider audience. Here, we introduced a new component focusing on awareness and education to transform our ongoing and previous research and studies into simplified and user-friendly material, targeting the general public and extending their utility beyond the small circle of professional architects and urban planners. Different media tools for disseminating our products and ensuring a larger outreach were tested, including animated videos, graphic novels, infographics, and podcasts. Our first attempt at testing these new tools was the production of "Lina fel Madina" (Lina in the city), a short animated series that provides counternarratives about issues related to urbanism through simple arguments and facts from reliable

resources. The "pilot season" from "Lina fel Madina" centered on informal urban growth, highlighting the reasons behind this dominant urban typology in Cairo. The series tackled topics and issues such as the origin and growth of informal housing, the history of urban policies, public housing, and the official narrative in dealing with slums, through a chronicle of the growth of greater Cairo. This tool has provided significant potential in its ability to change freely between different contexts and times, and offers simplicity in a final product that was approachable to a type of audience that we had never before been able to reach. This encouraged 10 Tooba to capitalize on the experience with media tools and start an ongoing project to produce a graphic novel series concentrating on intersections between urbanism and other fields, such as the environment, the economy, and politics.

b. Knowledge sharing: Workshops and internships as learning tools

Education was another main focus for disseminating the principles for understanding the meaning of a just city. Building on the cofounders' expertise in teaching urbanism, this effort was much helped in pinpointing deficiencies that needed to be countered through more inclusive pedagogical narratives; this effort has been was tested throughout the past years of 10 Tooba, where workshops and internship models have shown efficiency in reaching out to students and young professionals and creating knowledge, experience, and skills exchanges between academics and practitioners. The workshops have allowed interdisciplinary participants and experts to work hands-on with the issues of urban planning and housing in Egypt, while the internships have focused more on actual projects run by 10 Tooba, thus engaging students in real-life working processes. The focus of the most recent internship was on data collection and data-analysis tools in order to conduct a series of dynamic timelines of various components that produced and operated informal housing in Egypt. The internship was a partnership activity as part of the Tahayyuz alliance that was formed in 2022 between 10 Tooba, Megawra, and Mansour for Architecture and Conservation to create the Built-environment Institute for Applied Studies, an interdisciplinary institute that focuses on the built environment and its local and regional intersections in Africa and the Middle East. It is a complementary educational program dedicated to fostering sociospatial and ecological justice within the built environment. This commitment is realized through nonextractive methodologies that equally prioritize various disciplines. Through coproduction, it embraces contextual critical practices that are nonprescriptive, particularly by empowering various stakeholders.

By employing both awareness and pedagogical approaches, we have actively endeavored to coproduce and exchange knowledge with a broader audience. This expansion has created opportunities for partnerships with diverse groups across multiple disciplines that align with the organization's ethical perspective, partnerships that have allowed self-development and empowerment for the organization and the sector in general.

Conclusion

Almost a decade on from shifting our careers – a decade it would not be an understatement to say has been hard on residents both politically and economically – we can only say that there is still much to be done. Over this decade we have had to navigate increasingly complex challenges, such as security restrictions over data collection processes, what type of information could be published, and a shrinking number of organizations to collaborate with. In parallel, 10 Tooba has expanded its audience; what started as a focus on architects and urban planners and has now expanded to reach a range of disciplines and backgrounds with our collaborators and readers. Nevertheless, our challenge remains in learning how such an approach can help raise the quality of life for residents of Egypt's cities and villages, and encourage new generations of architects, planners, and other practitioners to recognize the social function of their skills.

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Yahia Shawkat, Omnia Khalil, and Ali Al-Moghazy, “The Duweika Disaster: Ten Years On,” Built Environment Observatory, 2018, available at: https://marsadomran.info/en/category/state-of-housing/2018-the-dweiqa-disaster-state-of-housing/, https://marsadomran.info/en/category/state-of-housing/2018-the-dweiqa-disaster-state-of-housing/. Introduction: Taking Stock, Setting the Agenda

Contributors

Ahmed Zaazaa - Co-founder of 10 Tooba research studio and is an urban designer and researcher, focusing on spatial and climate justice issues in housing and planning.

Alaa Talbi - Director of the Tunisian Forum for the Economic and Social Rights.

Andrew Findell-Aghnatios - Senior Programme Coordinator at the Arab Reform Initiative.

Dima M. Toukan - Development practitioner and researcher in policy analysis, and development strategy and monitoring, evaluation and learning systems.

Dina El Khawaga - Associate Professor of Public Policy at Cairo University and worked as policy expert and program director for different international organizations

Dina Wahba - Postdoctoral Researcher at Freie Universität Berlin at the Department of History and Cultural studies.

Jamil Mouawad - Assistant Professor of Politics and Policy at the Department of Political Studies and Public Administration at the American University of Beirut.

Léa Yammine - Co-director of the Centre for Social Sciences Research and& Action (CeSSRA).

Mai Amer - Feminist researcher in the field of Ccultural studies and teaches Ur urban Aanthropology at the Faculty of Engineering at the French University of Egypt.

Marie-Noëlle AbiYaghi - Co-director of the Centre for Social Science Research and Action (CeSSRA).

Mario Mikhail - Writer and researcher in the areas of continental social theory, political philosophy, political sociology, cultural studies, and social and cultural history.

Ola Sidani - Development economist and public policy expert.

Sarah Anne Rennick - Deputy Director for Research and head of the Youth as Political Actors program at the Arab Reform Initiative.

Yahia Shawkat - Co-founder and research coordinator of the 10 Tooba research studio, Cairo.

About the project

"Fostering Critical Policy Analysis" aims to provide academic capacity building and create diverse fora for discussion to help in this bridging of academic expertise and policy development. More precisely, in working with social scientists across the region and building academic partnerships, we aim to reinforce the ability of members of the social science research community to utilize their knowledge production for the purpose of improving public policies.

About the Arab Reform Initiative

The Arab Reform Initiative is an independent Arab think tank working with expert partners in the Middle East and North Africa and beyond to articulate a home-grown agenda for democratic change and social justice. It conducts research and policy analysis and provides a platform for inspirational voices based on the principles of diversity, impartiality, and gender equality.

contact@arab-reform.net
Paris - Beirut - Tunis