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The social sciences in the research on Arab higher education: Lebanon and Egypt as examples[1]

Jonathan Kriener

Ruhr-Universität Bochum

Abstract

Faculties of social sciences and humanities educate by far the largest share of university students in the Arab World. Unemployment of university graduates mainly results from this quantitative over-capacity, which is widely assumed to be accompanied by qualitative deficiencies. In terms of educational research, planning, and funding, however, the social sciences and humanities are paid the least attention among the academic disciplines in Arab countries. When addressed in the research literature, their authenticity and academic freedom are the 'hottest' issues. In an attempt at sorting out tilled and untilled fields of research on the Arab social sciences and humanities, this article summarizes the macro-statistical works about Arab higher education at large and others that deal with the Arab social sciences and humanities in particular, focusing on Egypt and Lebanon. It refers to funding policies, institutional diversification, concepts of quality assurance, and the contested field of the epistemological and ideological concepts by which teaching and research are conducted.

Introduction

Social sciences and humanities at Arab universities are often described as suffering from a lack of academic freedom. However, institutional autonomy and the individual academic's opportunities and constraints in Arab countries seem to differ considerably between institutions and individuals conducting social sciences and humanities research and education under different configurations of local, regional and international influences from the state, the market and the civil society. Academic freedom, research and educational autonomy is a complex topic, including much more than merely laws and explicit regulations or interferences by state authorities. It concerns the autonomy of institutions to define their aims of research and education, their policies and contents in the face of interests on the part of the state, their donors, and an array of pressure groups within a given country and beyond. It further concerns the autonomy of

individual academics facing their institution and the aforementioned forces in pursuing their scientific and pedagogic interests. Institutional autonomy can expand at the cost of individual autonomy and vice versa (Müller-Böling, 2000, pp. 35–78). Regulations, if effective at all, are necessary to secure it, but can likewise restrict it.

The broad lines of change in Arab higher education and research during the last twenty years have been documented in considerable width and depth. Documentation and interpretation of the particular role and situation of the social sciences and humanities (SSH) in the Arab academia, however, remain fragmentary and little coordinated thus far. Under what particular constraints from inside and outside their institutions do Arab SSH work and what opportunities do their institutions and environments offer them? What regulations structure them? Which sources of funding are there for them and what funding strategies do they follow? How do these conditions influence their services? What criteria for admission, graduation, and employment do they apply? What forces define their role and their epistemological outlook? This article is intended to provide an overview over findings by Arab as well as international authors who address these questions so far, in order to prepare the ground for further research. It introduces the literature about this topic that was published since 2005 and is available through international catalogues and databases, provided on the internet or could be otherwise obtained. Particularly influential works of earlier years are regarded, too, such as the much debated *Arab Human Development Report* of 2003 (UNDP, 2003).

The article focuses mainly on Egypt and Lebanon. The two countries were chosen because they have the longest history of modern higher education in the region.[2] They can be considered the mainland of the so called *nahda*, the cultural and political renaissance of the Arab people going on during the second half of the 19th and the first half of the 20th century. Both countries experienced abrupt and unexpected political change recently: Lebanon in 2005 and Egypt in 2011. The relations between state, religion, civil society and other factors, however, are fairly different, as well as their configurations of religious pluralism. In Egypt, with roughly 86 Million inhabitants by far the largest Arab country, state security controlled public institutions tightly at least until 2010 (Sika, 2010). Religious pressure is exerted mainly by Sunni Islam, with the *Muslim Brotherhood* as the leading force. In Lebanon, on the other hand, a country of near to 4 Million people belonging to 19 officially acknowledged denominations, state administration is more an arena for bargaining than a tool of control. Religious influence, restrictive though it often is, comes from a variety of strong players. Higher education policies also diverge considerably: Private higher education has a long and dynamic tradition in Lebanon reaching back to the late 19th century, while in Egypt it has gained momentum only with the worldwide trend towards liberalization since the beginning of the 1990s and corresponding legislative changes in 1992.

In section 1 and 2, I extract from the research reports about higher education in the Arab World what concerns the material conditions – quantitative relations between

enrolment, staff, funding, the labor market, and the institutional diversification that began at different stages in each Lebanon and Egypt – as well as the approaches of quality management applied to the SSH. Section 3 addresses influences from beyond the institutions affecting their work. Section 4, finally, deals with how authors perceive of the role and the epistemology of the Arab social sciences.

Causes and approaches of the research literature

As for planners, donors, and consultants of Arab higher education and research, international educational research (e.g. UNDP, 2003; Galal, 2008; Maktoum Foundation, 2009) and liberalization policies (see e.g. Fergany, 2005) have stirred the flow of educational ideas and organizational concepts among them since the beginning of the 1990s (e.g. Lamine, 2010; UNESCO, 2007; Fergany & Abd ad-Da'im, 2005). Different phases of expanding national school systems, the last one during the 1990s, led to a multiplied demand for higher education as compared to the 1960s. After the end of the Cold War, development cooperation shifted from alliances with one of the two former superpowers to an ostensible dependency on development agencies like the *World Bank*, the IMF, UNESCO, the UNDP, the OECD, USAID etc.[3] Conditions for cooperation changed toward liberalization of education, parallel to the liberalization of other markets. While before 1990 the majority of the Arab countries maintained centralized systems of (higher) education, with public universities run by the state exclusively, meanwhile most of them have started a sector of private higher education after corresponding legislative changes. The so called *Yomtien Initiative* (Education for All – EFA) and the exponential growth in mass media and information facilities, such as the internet and supra-regional Arab newspapers and broadcasting companies, propelled awareness for a needed change in scientific and pedagogic approaches. Finally, the prospect of a final settlement between Israelis and Palestinians as envisioned in the Gaza-Jericho Agreements and further factors inspired a wave of experiments with democratization in e.g. Jordan, Kuwait, Algeria, Morocco (1997) that reflected on educational planning and philosophies, too. Thus, research projects were initiated and the state of the art cumulated to comprehensive data collections, such as four internationally funded reports about the Arab educational and research landscape at large (UNDP, 2003; Galal, 2008; Maktoum Foundation, 2009; Zaitūn, 2005 and, since 2009 yearly, Muʾassasat al-Fikr al-ʿArabī, 2010). Further reports dealt with Arab higher education at large (Fergany, 2005; El Amine, 2010), with higher education in particular Arab countries (OECD & World Bank, 2010; Bustani, 1997), certain aspects of them (Lamine, 2010, pp. 69–796), such as quality management (Bashshur, Courbage & Labaki, 2006; Lamine, 2010, pp. 199–504), academic freedom (Human Rights Watch, 2005), and more (Lamine, 2010, pp. 67–198, 505–796).

On the basis of these data, some contributions analyze the educational situation of the Arab World in more or less purely socio-economic and educationalist terms and

conclude with recommendations on the different areas of economic and educational planning, such as resource development, quality assurance, re-structuring of administration and political environment etc. (UNESCO, 2010; El Amine, 2010; Galal, 2008, Fergany, 2005). The *MENA Development Report 2008* by the World Bank and the OECD (Galal, 2008) as well as the yearly *Arab Report on Cultural Development* (Muʾassasat al-Fikr al-ʿArabī, 2010) illustrate many of their findings by providing parallel data from e.g. Latin America and East Asia, regions, which started from similar socio-economic conditions as the Arab World in the middle of the 20th century. With their plethora of statistical tables and graphs they are the best to serve as a reference works about Arab educational development. Other works (Zaitūn, 2005; UNDP, 2003; Maktoum Foundation, 2009) combine their empirical effort with reflections on the fields of epistemology, educational philosophy or philosophy of science. The *Arab Knowledge Report 2009* (Maktoum Foundation, 2009) was composed with much the same approach and many of the same authors as the *Arab Human Development Report 2003* (UNDP, 2003), and can thus be regarded as an update of the latter.

Few articles are intrinsically dedicated to the SSH. One of them (El Amine, 2009) draws on the statistical material, most of which is mentioned above, and involves, in addition, the personal knowledge of the author about the academic scene in Arab countries from his decades long activity as an educational researcher, himself having contributed much to the report work done in the last two decades. A report by *Human Rights Watch* (2005) explored the situation of academic freedom in Egypt by a micro-sociological approach. All the others are less systematic, trying to trace epistemological and ideological influences on the modern SSH in Arab countries since their beginnings (Kawtharani, 2010; Sayyid, 2010; Yassin, 2010), or at present (Nasser & Abouchedid, 2007; Hanafi, 2010; Kabbanji, 2010).

1 Material conditions

Enrolment and (non-)absorption into the labor market

Absolute and relative numbers of Arab tertiary enrollment have steeply increased since the 1990s. In Lebanon they grew from 28 % in 1985 to 48 % in 2003. In Egypt they reached 28 % in 2009.[4] The share of women in Arab tertiary enrolment increased significantly in the last decades, to 62 % in Lebanon and to 45 % in Egypt in 2006 (Muʾassasat al-Fikr al-ʿArabī, 2009, pp. 76–78). The number of universities in the Arab World more than doubled from 150 in 1995 to 398 in 2009.[5] In 2008, there were 28 universities in Lebanon and 38 in Egypt, as compared to 9 and 7 in 1988 (ibid., p. 67). In Lebanon, the ratio of students per teacher remained clearly under 20 during the last 40 years (Galal, 2008, p. 308); in Egypt it is 80. Here, differences between disciplines are enormous: While this ratio is eight at the medical faculties, at the law departments it is 300 (El Baradei, 2010).

The vast majority of the Arab tertiary students, nearly 70 %, were enrolled in the SSH in 2006, 65 % in Lebanon, and 78.6 % in Egypt. Their share steeply increased between 2000 and 2006. While it increased in Egypt, the Arab country with the largest population, as well as in other large countries like Algeria, Morocco, and Saudi-Arabia, in Lebanon and other small countries it decreased. SSH teachers, however, constituted only 39 % of the faculty (El Amine, 2009).

With their high output of graduates, the SSH produce by far the largest share in the unemployment of academics, which seldom hits graduates of medical, natural and technological disciplines. The average unemployment rate in Arab countries is 14 %. Unemployment of people with a secondary degree, however, is even higher in most Arab countries, reaching 28 % in some of them (Galal, 2008, pp. 212–213; El Amine, 2010, p. 55).

Despite the confessional fragmentation of Lebanon's educational system, little does a graduate's confession influence her/his career opportunities. For them, the studied disciplines are decisive. As elsewhere, graduating in the SSH provides the least career prospects (El Amine & Faour, 1998, pp. 111–174).

Funding and allocation of resources

Egypt's *Higher Education Reform Strategy*, launched in 2002, is funded with loans of 63 million US$ in the frame of the *Stabilization and Adjustment Program*.[6] Contrary to the popular dictum of the withdrawal of the state from expenditure on education (Zaitūn, 2005, pp. 45–49; Fergany, 2005, p. 119), Egypt increased the share of funds for education in its public budget from 9.5 % in 1990 to 16 % in 2005. In 2005, a third of these expenditures, more than 5 % of the public budget, went into higher education, approximately the percentage the German and the US government spent on higher education. The average investment per tertiary student was nevertheless only 413 US$ per year in 2004 (as compared to 10,000 US$ in the average OECD country), less than in the mid-1990s (El Baradei, 2010). The proportion of expenditure of the GDP on higher education decreased slightly during the first years of the new millennium, which was due to the rise in GDP (OECD & World Bank, 2010, p. 51). So did the number of teachers per students, which is below the OECD average in most disciplines (ibid., pp. 258–263). Professors are chronically under-paid (El Baradei, 2010).

Around the turn of the millennium, expenditures on higher education took an increasing part of the Egyptians' private budgets, 8 % of their income in 2005. Besides private higher education also the creation of special programs, mostly in English, by the public universities is permitted since the middle of the 1990s. As the universities are allowed to raise fees for them, this allows public institutions to increase their income (ibid.).

In Lebanon, the Ministry of Education raised expenditures on education from 176 million US$ in 1993 to 600 million in 2006. The share for education in the public

budget increased from 6.6 to 8.4 % between 1993 and 1998 (3 % of the GDP; Galal, 2008, p. 11), more than 70 % of which were allocated to the LU (*Lebanese University*).

Parents in Lebanon spend up to 25 % of their income on education. Education for their children is thus their second priority, after nutrition, and above housing and health (Kriener, 2011, p. 71). In the 1990s, universities that follow the Anglo-Saxon system demanded fees ranging between 4,700 (*Notre Dame University*) and 7,000 (*American University of Beirut* – AUB, *Lebanese American University* – LAU) US$ per year. Francophone universities were less expensive with 1,500 (*Kaslik University*) or 2,500 (*Université Saint Joseph* –USJ) US$ per year. *Beirut Arab University* demanded 1,200 US$, while the LU and most Islamic institutions took only symbolic fees (El Amine & Faour, 1998, pp. 65–70; Kiwan, 1997).

High rates of unemployment, moonlighting, and brain drain make public investment in higher education appear inefficient (Galal, 2008, pp. 211–277; Arab Regional Conference on Higher Education, 2010, p. 62). Although figures about the distribution of funds between the exact sciences and the SSH hardly occur in the literature, authors are determined that much more money and means are invested into the natural and applied sciences because they are perceived as more important for national development, an international trend, which is particularly strong in the Arab World, though.[7] This situation leaves SSH academics with a high workload of teaching under sparse conditions and accordingly little time and means for research and other measures of ongoing qualification.

Diversification and private sector growth

Up until the 1970s, the *American University of Beirut* (AUB), the *Beirut Arab University*, the *Lebanese American University*, the *Université Saint Joseph* (USJ), and a number of small universities belonging to different Churches in Lebanon, as well as the *American University in Cairo* (AUC), were the only private universities throughout the Arab World.[8] After Lebanon, where private education remained legal after independence, the first Arab states to permit the foundation of private universities were Morocco in 1984 and the United Arab Emirates in 1985. Egypt and Jordan followed in 1990 and 1992, and Syria and Saudi Arabia came latest in 2000.

70,000, i.e. 60 % of the Lebanese university students study at the single public university of the country, the *Lebanese University* (LU). *Beirut Arab University* follows with 15,000 students, then the *Université St. Joseph* with 10,000, the *American University of Beirut* and *Lebanese American University* with 7,000 each.

During the Lebanese civil war (1975 to 1990), the LU opened branches of many of its departments in the different parts of Lebanon, which were separated amongst each other by the forces of confessional militia, in order to spare the students dangerous travelling between home and university. For the same reason, a number of religious

institutions, formerly mere theological faculties, achieved university status in the middle of the 1980s: the Shii *Islamic University of Lebanon* (university status in 1996), the Sunni *Beirut Islamic University* (university status in 1986), the *Imam Ouzai University* (1986), the Catholic *Université Antonine*, the Christian Orthodox *Balamand University* (1988), *Notre Dame University* (1986) and the *Middle East University*. As was always customary in Lebanon, most of them have ties abroad. The *Beirut Islamic University* (BIU), e.g., was initiated by a group of Lebanese *Azhar* graduates. *Jinan University* (university status in 1988), which is affiliated to the Salafist *Jama'a Islamiyya*, was founded in cooperation with the Sudanese *University of Umm Durman* (Kiwan, 1997). *Middle East University* belongs to the Seventh Day Adventists, whose center is in the federal state of Maryland/USA, and so on. Staff and clientele of a Lebanese university or LU department are often nearly homogenously composed of one or few of the 19 officially acknowledged denominations only.

The growth in tertiary education in Lebanon during the last three decades is thus partly due to confessional fragmentation (Jabbour, 2006; Kiwan, 1997). With the worldwide trend to private higher education around the turn of the millennium, also Lebanon saw the establishment of new higher education institutions that focus on applied sciences like business administration, IT, and natural sciences, and part of which are run commercially.

Accreditation of private institutions became one of the pillars of the Egyptian reform strategy in the new legislation of 1992, not least for reasons of the sheer constraints in public budget. Since then, besides the *American University in Cairo*, which was founded in 1919, 16 private universities plus numerous colleges were founded by a variety of providers, e.g. *6th October University* (founded in 1996), which is funded by public and semi-public enterprises, *Heliopolis University* of the SEKEM-Foundation, *Pharos University*, *Sinai University* and *Future University* (all four founded in 2006). The curricula of these institutions overwhelmingly comprise exact and applied sciences. In 2009, the public sector enrolled 80 % of all Egyptian tertiary students, while 20 % studied at private institutions (Said, 2010; El Baradei, 2010).

Besides new universities, diversification in Egypt and some other Arab countries is achieved also by establishing new units inside existing universities. These include research institutes funded by endowments and enterprises' donations, which partly refund themselves selling their expertise, and additional teaching units affiliated to existing departments (Fergany, 2005).

The Arab countries with the least internal efficiency of their educational systems, i.e. with the largest gap between enrolment and graduation figures, did not resort to privatization so far. In the countries with the highest internal efficiency, Jordan, Lebanon, and Kuwait, the emergence of a private sector enhanced the autonomy and the mechanisms of internal control and internal incentives also at public sector institutions (Galal, 2008, pp. 191–203).

In Lebanon, foundation of new Islamic universities with a strongly religious profile as well as new Western style universities teaching applied and exact sciences, indicate that the division of labor between two realms, one oriented towards educating professionals, and another towards anthropological, religious, and/or ideo-political education is becoming more distinct. The relatively smaller private sector in Egpyt, too, overwhelmingly offers education in the applied and exact sciences and is highly commercialized. There is no proof yet that academic education in the sense of universal education is decreasing in absolute terms, but it does not grow at the same pace as tertiary education at large does.

Next to the division of disciplines, a division between SSH teaching and research is emerging. As private investors are reluctant to invest into research at the very large public universities with their lack of efficient and transparent administration, external funding resulted in the fragmentation of the SSH into scarcely funded and poorly equipped university departments, on the one hand, which are occupied mainly with teaching, and a growing sector of separate research centers and institutes on the other (Hanafi, 2010; Kabbanji, 2010; El Amine, 2009). The latter's conferences and well equipped libraries are little accessible to the public and their research activities little coordinated mutually. There are national ones: e.g. the *National Center for Scientific Research* in Beirut, the *National Center for Sociological and Criminological Research* (NCSCR) and the semi-public *Ahram Center for Strategic Studies* in Cairo, ones affiliated to universities: e.g. the *American Research Center in Egypt* of the AUC or the *Social Science Research Center* at *Cairo University*, and a third category, which are neither affiliated to the state nor to a university: e.g. the *Center for Arab Unity Studies* and the *Lebanese Association for Educational Studies* in Beirut, the *Ibn Khaldoun Center for Development Studies*, the *Centre d'Études et de Documentation Économiques, Juridiques et Sociale* (CEDEJ) and the *Center for Epistemological Studies* in Cairo, the latter a branch of the Islamist *International Institute for Islamic Thought* in the US.

Summing up the record so far, the SSH in Lebanon, Egypt, and similarly so in many other Arab countries, are constrained by an under-capacity of resources that is caused by the rapid expansion in student numbers and disproportionately sparse funding. The growing importance of funding from non-state actors causes an institutional fragmentation, which poses a further challenge to the coherence of teaching and research as well as between both. On the other hand, the sheer masses of SSH students and graduates promise for sure that there are excellent ones among them. So what strategies and practices are there perhaps to cope with this situation so that the potential of these latter can be made available for themselves as well as for academia and for society as a whole?

2 The question of quality

It is commonly assumed that the rapid expansion of higher education proceeds at the cost of the quality by which it works (Bashshur, Courbage & Labaki, 2006, pp. 203–205; Hafaiedh, 2007; Arab Regional Conference on Higher Education, 2010, p. 61). Counting the topics of conferences on higher education organized by the *Association of Arab Universities* (www.aaru.org.jo) on 2010-12-13, and of contributions to the *Arab Regional Conference on Higher Education* 2009 (Lamine, 2010) revealed that topics related to quality management made for the most entries.

The administrative preparations for the educational reforms in both Egypt and Lebanon were followed by a variety of evaluation and quality enhancement measures in the middle of the 1990s (El Amine, 2005a, pp. 579–613). Salamé (2005) expounds how large a variety of different measures can be subsumed under the term quality assurance and how different their reach. They comprise accreditation, supervisory and ex-post evaluation, self evaluation or peer reviewing, and concern one or several realms of academic work, such as research, teaching, administration, other services, or the policies of resource allocation. Accreditation alone can mean very different procedures. Among the ones listed in a statistical report about Arab universities some took three days, while others proceeded over three years (El Amine, 2005b, pp. 601–619).

Several initiatives to coordinate quality assurance of higher education were started on institutional, national, regional, and international levels. Some of these focus on disciplines of the natural sciences and technology. Conversely, it is not verifiable from the available literature, or from websites of institutions like the *Association of Arab University*'s *Arab Council for Accreditation and Quality Assessment* or the program *Quality Assessment of Higher Education in the Arab World*, how far the SSH are regarded in existing quality assurance regimes.

In the frame of its *Higher Education Reform Strategy* the Egyptian government invested in research about accreditation abroad and in pilot studies at three large public universities that had already established procedures of accreditation and evaluation. After that, quality assurance units were installed at every public university. That their chairs were chosen by the rector of the respective university itself, earned them critique. As Said (2010) remarks, the *Higher Education Reform Strategy* followed a top-down approach, because the job market and structures in higher education do not provide incentives for bottom-up initiative. The current structure of employment in higher education caused fears from quality assessment measures amongst the established staff. Babiker (2010) maintains that accreditation of institutions and programs in Egypt is still decided upon rather spontaneously according to criteria which are little transparent. But the strategy includes not only control: part of it is a training program for faculty and administrative staff in the use of new data processing software, not least the new electronic *National Network for Scientific Research*, which is intended to digitally connect and coordinate between all universities in the country and their libraries.

In Lebanon accreditation was reformed in 1996. A commission for accreditation of institutions and programs was established by a decree in 1996. In the same year standards for programs of law, medicine, and engineering were decreed. Still in 1996, two new universities as well as new departments and programs at existing universities were accredited, part of which did not fulfill the set standards (Bashshur, 2005, pp. 133–143). Like the types of universities, their quality assurance regimes are extremely divert. The American universities[9] are regularly evaluated by the US-based university associations they belong to, and have internal quality assurance units. The USJ established a *Laboratoire de pédagogie universitaire* in order to provide counseling and to harmonize between the teaching approaches of its faculty (Moghaizel-Nasr, 2010). The LU introduced the LMD-system[10] a few years ago, which was in force in most private universities since long, and founded three doctoral institutes for the supervision and coordination of postgraduate studies according to coherent standards.

A lack of networking is one of the central obstacles to quality enhancement. Like at the LU, most libraries at public universities in Egypt and other Arab states do not provide access to international databanks and catalogues and seldom subscribe to electronic periodicals. Financial as well as political constraints prevent SSH academics from organizing and taking part in regional and international conferences and research projects (Muʾassasat al-Fikr al-ʿArabī, 2010, pp. 43–61).

Teaching

The scarce higher education facilities and job opportunities for SSH academics and high dropout rates at SSH departments raise the question if SSH departments found ways and means to adjust student numbers to their capacities and to the demand on the local job market, be it through minimum achievements in secondary degrees, admission tests, foreign language requirements, scholarships, through fees, or through some kind of clientelist, confessional, ideological criteria etc. (El Amine, 2010, pp. 44–45). Dropout rates can obviously be reduced through fees (Galal, 2008, p. 191).

Students are usually admitted to the SSH after simply having graduated from the secondary level, while applicants for the natural and applied sciences often have to fulfill additional conditions like admission tests or enrolment fees. Students who do not meet these conditions tend to enroll in the SSH, although their chances for employment would be better in a variety of non-academic professions (El Amine, 2009; OECD & World Bank, 2010, pp. 60–63).

In Egypt, the *Supreme Council of Universities* yearly defines the maximum number of students for each faculty in every university. Applicants with the best secondary degrees are accepted. As this causes many families of secondary students to enlist expensive private tutoring, this mode of admission has been criticized as socially unbalanced. Suggestions were put forward either to introduce subject specific admission tests, to give preference to subject specific achievements in the secondary exams, or to

reorganize the whole secondary stage into a differentiated system of subject courses, so that students' preferences can influence their exam results. The discussion is still going on, however, and the hitherto valid system is still in place (Hammoud, 2010).

Most private universities in Egypt as well as the new teaching units at public universities that are subject to fees accept applicants with weaker secondary degrees than the regular departments at public universities do, or value performance with an enhanced focus on subject related marks (ibid.). In doing so, they assemble those students from wealthy families, who are not admitted to the same disciplines at public universities.

Measured by UNESCO's International Recommendation concerning the *Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel* of 1997, Salamé (2010) considers instruction at Egyptian universities as below the average. Many SSH teachers do not hold a doctoral degree, but obtain the status of assistant professor merely after long periods of teaching at the same institution. Most positions are not or are only formally advertized. Very often graduates from the advertizing institution are selected. Therefore, and for their scarce publication and conference activities, many Egyptian and Arab professors work in isolation from both the national and the international scientific community. On the other hand, contracts often do not contain transparent conditions of performance, but are liable to termination on grounds that are not subject specific, such as political or other frictions or taboos. For many teachers private tutoring is a vital part of their income and thus an incentive to design their university lectures in ways that keep students dependent on it.

In Lebanon, not only the private universities, but also the LU's faculties define their own admission standards themselves. Most of them conduct admission tests and foreign language tests. Like everywhere in the world, admission to the medical, natural, and technological disciplines is harder to obtain than to most SSH (Hammoud, 2010; El Amine & Faour, 1998, pp. 65–90).

At the LU, weak restrictions for admission and a scarce offer of consulting to students generate high dropout rates, particularly in the SSH. No official curricular standards and no supervision concerning instruction are implemented in most SSH disciplines. It is not known or defined how instruction by a professor and an assistance professor differ from each other regarding quantity and quality (El Amine, 2009). SSH departments at the LU, e.g. law and history, are flooded with students from Syria, making for the majority of many classes. Their secondary education is clearly below the level in Lebanon. Moreover, the climate at SSH departments is often highly politicized. The negligible fees motivate rather many students to over-emphasize their political activities at the cost of studying. Notwithstanding its rather low reputation, the LU provides for upward social mobility for many of its students from families with a low income (El Amine & Faour, 1998, pp. 169–182).

Although SSH students in Lebanon and Egypt, unlike in e.g. Saudi Arabia or Syria, are permitted to apply theories and methods they learn during instruction in surveys and interviews, their instruction is still focused on textbooks and seldom gives room to their autonomous contributions (El Amine, 2010, pp. 24, 29, 45–47; Hafaiedh, 2007). Exams focus on the reproduction of content. Even M. A. and doctoral theses at the LU's SSH departments often rely on only two sources of publications: the ones by the *Center for Arab Unity Studies* and the Kuwaiti journal Alam al-Ma'rifa (World of Knowledge, see El Amine, 2009). But also among students at private universities in Lebanon, the ability to reflect critically upon social phenomena does hardly increase during their university studies, as a study of 2007 revealed (Hassan & Madhum, 2007).

Research

The report literature describes the situation of research in Arab countries as feeble. During the 1990s, academic publishing in Arab countries increased significantly less than in other emerging economies such as China or South Korea. Arab publications nearly exclusively deal with applied research and hardly ever with basic research or new technologies. Accordingly, Arab authors are hardly quoted in the international research literature. Public as well as private investment in research is very scarce and rarely are findings translated into investment (UNDP, 2003, pp. 69–76). Some countries, among them Egypt, newly undertake to promote research by establishing research parks and to mutually coordinate their efforts (UNESCO, 2010, pp. 25–26). Finally, the share of publications from the Muslim Middle East in the worldwide research output seems to increase since the beginning of the millennium.

Egypt and Lebanon rank highest in the Arab World in research output, together with Saudi-Arabia, Morocco, and Jordan. A number of Egyptian universities newly offer financial incentives for their staff to publish in peer reviewed periodicals listed in international databanks. The *American University of Beirut* as well as 11 public universities and 2 research centers in Egypt were among the top 25 institutions in the Arab World measured by their output of studies published in such periodicals between 1996 and 2008. During the same time span, the absolute number of scientific publications doubled in Egypt, while it increased fivefold in Lebanon.[11] Alas, few periodicals from the Arab World occur in international databanks. In 2009, Scopus-Elsevier listed only 74 Arab periodicals among more than 28,000, 16 of them Egyptian and four Lebanese. Of a total of more than 11,000, the INIST databank for SSH contained 36 Arab periodicals, among them 9 Egyptian and 3 Lebanese (Muʾassasat al-Fikr al-ʿArabī, 2010, pp. 43–61).

One of the main conclusions of the *MENA Development Report 2008* is that quality assurance in most Arab countries relies too heavily on measures of social engineering and accountability to ministerial bureaucracy, which are rather expensive and difficult to control. Countries with a higher or improving efficiency of their educational sys-

tems shifted the weight of quality measures to incentive measures and accountability to the public (Galal, 2008, pp. 149–161, 165–207, 292–296). However, if the impact of medical, natural and technological research is not easy to forecast before a patent or product is accomplished, in the SSH even the value of results is difficult to gauge. It is certainly easier to tell the difference decimal calculation, refrigerators, genetic engineering and microchips make for mankind than the one psychoanalysis, historical materialism or post-structuralism do. Counting quotations is not as revealing in the SSH as it is in the exact sciences, because in SSH writing, quotations often relate to differing or even opposite statements. Critical thinking is an often used catchphrase in Arab educational literature. How to measure its advance, however, is nowhere an issue. No piece of the literature on Arab higher education and SSH addresses the criteria by which the SSH could sensibly be evaluated.[12] Therefore, these disciplines are certainly more liable to political interferences, epistemological and ideological arguments, the issues of the next two sections.

3 Institutional autonomy, academic freedom, and restrictive influences

Lebanon, Jordan, and Kuwait, the countries with the highest internal efficiency of their educational systems in the Arab World, are at the same time the ones with the highest degree of democratization, i.e. separation of powers, freedom of press and opinion, and a legally anchored civil society. Conversely, these mechanisms are least developed in the countries with the least efficiency of their educational systems: Djibouti, Iraq, and Yemen (Galal, 2008, pp. 191–203). Accordingly, the Arab reports on education urge for democratization, academic freedom, and institutional autonomy, through the rule of law and a reduction of bureaucracy (UNDP, 2003, pp. 147–160; Maktoum Foundation, 2009, pp. 17, 61–66; Muʾassasat al-Fikr al-ʿArabī, 2010, pp. 43–61).

In the last decade, Egypt was among the Arab countries with the most liberal media legislation and the largest number of academic publications. Nevertheless, Egyptian university teachers who did not obey certain taboos in the realms of politics, religion, and sex, had to fear repression from either the state or from Islamist pressure groups (Human Rights Watch, 2005; Lange, 2005, p. 85). At least until January 2011, the state sent its security personnel into the public universities in order to prevent criticism of the regime (Sika, 2010).

The most prominent example of repression by the state was the professor for sociology Saad Eddine Ibrahim. Under his leadership, the *Ibn Khaldoun Center for Development Studies* in Cairo reported about faked elections, the ethics of certain enterprises, the Mubarak family, discriminations against Christians, and other sensitive topics. In 2000, he and other fellows of the Center were arrested for more than two years, and the Center was shut until 2003 (Human Rights Watch, 2005, pp. 45–48).

Another case that created quite a stir was that of the professor for literature at *Cairo University* Nasr Hamid Abu Zaid. His postdoctoral thesis, an analysis of the Koran by a method from the literature studies, was not accepted by his faculty for its alleged blasphemy. Denunciation by another member of his faculty set in motion a trial that ended with Abu Zaid being declared an apostate and divorced from his wife (Human Rights Watch, 2005, p. 70).

These affairs were only the tip of an iceberg covered in international media. Although political activity is prohibited at universities since 1977, Islamic activist students were allowed to erect religious centers and mosques at numerous Egyptian universities under the pretext that their activity was social and religious, not political. This infrastructure helps them in propagating their ideology, in pressing female students, Muslim as well as Christian, to wear the *hijab*, and in sabotaging curricular and extra-curricular activities, such as music, drama, coeducational lectures etc. Already since the early 1970s, professors have been subject to violence by radical groups, such as *Al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya* and *At-Takfir wa-l-Jihad*, as well as repression from inside their faculty. Many university teachers had to resign for accusations allegedly on the basis of Islamic principles, including cases of violence and harassment. In the wake of Abu Zaid's case, numerous more theses were declined by academic commissions for fear from anger among Islamists. Prominent authors' works, e.g. by Nawal as-Saadawi, Maxime Rodinson, and Mohammed Choukri, were banned from literature classes even at the liberally renowned AUC upon pressure by students or their parents. A decree by the Minister of Justice in 2004 allowed sheikhs from the Islamic *Azhar University* to raid bookshops and confiscate hundreds of books, films, and other media, because they allegedly contradicted Islamic principles. As a consequence, an attitude of self censorship became common among university teachers, researchers, artists and literati (Human Rights Watch, 2005, pp. 69–78; Mougheeth, 2001).

Lebanon is certainly among the freest Arab countries in terms of civil rights and according legislation. Other than in Egypt, where until 2011 leading positions were appointed by the government, here rectors, deans and heads of departments are traditionally elected by their faculty. Its legendary press freedom caused Lebanon to be the country with the highest number of publishing houses per capita worldwide at the end of the last millennium (Rosiny, 1999, p. 8). It is not only due to legislation, though, that Lebanon does hardly control its media and science output, but also because institutions of the state lack the power to control the educational system. Educational researchers observed that the allocation of jobs was dominated by confessional and political more than by professional competition (Abdul-Reda Abourjeily, 2003, p. 8; Jabbour, 2006). At the LU, for instance, confessional and political groups interfere with appointment decisions by academic commissions at times, exerting pressure on them in order to secure certain posts for their clientele (Scheffler, 2011; Sinno, 2011). At the many religious universities, too, considerations to secure jobs and influence for the

respective confessional clientele have high priority. An attitude of self-censorship can be sensed also in Lebanon (Weiss, 2005, p. 42). As the series of assassinations of the years 2005 to 2009 and the violent clashes of May 2008 have shown, it may be dangerous to criticize certain powerful groups or interfere with their political interests, particularly when they are allied with Syria or Iran.

4   The role ascribed to the Arab SSH and their epistemological confinements

In sum, over-enrolment relative to the demand for SSH graduates, under-funding, a lack of consistent, if any, quality criteria, as well as religious and political sensitivities restrict the academic SSH in Egypt and Lebanon in unfolding their potential. El Amine, secretary of the *Lebanese Association for Educational Studies* and a fellow at UNESCO's *Regional Bureau for Arab States* in Beirut, sees a lack of attention on the part of academic planning at the root of this disparity. In his contribution to the yearly *Report on the Cultural Development of the Arab World* by the *Arab Thought Foundation* (El Amine, 2009), he laments a questionable but popular categorization of disciplines into 'hard' and 'soft' ones which ascribes to the SSH a status among the latter, i.e. a status of minor seriousness, as 'subjects for girls and underachievers'. When talking about sciences, Arab ministers would imply the exact and applied sciences only. This, El Amine goes on, was the result of a historical process in which the SSH in the Arab World first served the colonial powers to gain better control of the colonized peoples. After independence, they had an important task in social planning for some decades, following a trend of adherence to socialist ideals and Soviet patronage. Only with market liberalization and the corresponding withdrawal of the state from social planning, their appreciation lessened (see also Hassan, 2010). Although still strictly regulated, their planning, coordination and quality was not taken care of appropriately anymore. A vacuum in social services was thus created, which fundamentalist groups started to fill in, El Amine concludes.

The SSH's task as defined by governments in Egypt was not only to look after social, but also a kind of ideological engineering. Gorman (2003) depicts historiography in 20th century Egypt in the light of historians' institutional affiliation or non-affiliation. At least since the officers' coup of 1952, the state authorities watched out in favor of a popular nationalist historiography at the universities, in the frame of which elements of women's, class, and Islamic political history were tolerated. History of minorities, on the other hand, as well as more liberal, cosmopolitan or communitarian approaches, were written only by independent historians outside the universities or in exile. Influential keyterms of today's historical and social discourse, such as 'internal imperialism' or the antagonism between the concepts of 'the external' (*al-wāfid*) and 'the inherited' (*al-mawrūṯ, al-aṣīl*) were coined by Islamist authors in the 1980s (ibid., pp. 131–138). In the first half of the 20th century, a prominent Professor for history

didactics concludes, "… it had not been common to condemn Marxism, existentialism, pragmatism, Darwinism, and the various schools of social and psychological analysis using moral attributes like 'atheist schools of thought', as it is nowadays" (Mougheeth, 2001).

A symposium organized by the *Center for Arab Unity Studies* in Beirut in 2010 (Ḥanafī & Balqazīz, 2010) corroborates these findings. Sayyid (2010) narrates how the editorial work on classical Arabic texts started by European orientalists in early modern times, was taken up by Arab, foremost Egyptian and Lebanese historians and philologists in the late 19th and early 20th century. During this period, the *nahda*, it went on in Arab-European cooperation that was not yet marred by strong reservations, particularly at *Cairo University*.[13] Soon after independence, however, in the 1960s, Sayyid notices among Arab historians a tendency of dealing with the Arabic literary tradition motivated by the search for a distinct Arab or Islamic epistemology more than by a thirst for knowledge. During the 1970s and the 1980s, Islamists, such as the *Muslim Brothers* and Salafist groups, made selective use of the classical texts in order to create a contemporary Islamic concept of science distinct from both the liberal and the Marxist currents of that time. Fanned by Saudi sponsorship, they made their influence felt also at universities, as Sayyid experienced as a student in Egypt (Sayyid, 2005, pp. 222–230). So, fundamentalists began to till the field of academic SSH in Egypt long before the government retreated from shaping a national consciousness through defining the epistemology of the SSH.

Lebanon has never been as strong a state as to be able to direct the epistemology of its academic SSH in a way Egypt did. Here, the confessional groups exert such power. According to Havemann (2002), histories of local confessional groups, former minorities of the Ottoman state, constitute large part of the local historiography. They do not necessarily interfere with the mutually competing approaches of Arabic and Lebanese national history or Marxist theory, but rather merge with one or the other of them. Here as elsewhere, liberal approaches were on retreat after independence. Debates going on elsewhere, such as critical theory, existentialism, Annales etc., were missed out. Both Havemann and Gorman found that historiography in Egypt and Lebanon remained broadly committed to positivist paradigms such as historism, religiously defined approaches, or somewhat popular versions of Marxism.

Islamization

What do Islamists have in mind when they speak or write of an Islamic concept of science? The *Beirut Islamic University* features on its homepage the Arab language periodical Aslamat al-Ma'rifa (Islamization of Knowledge) that is issued by the US-based *International Institute of Islamic Thought* (IIIT). In it, Muslim academics deal with the general situation of education and/or science in the Arab or Muslim World, and focus on the epistemological or philosophical aspects without occupying them-

selves much with the empirical or the logical (e.g. Malkāwī, 2010; Rafī', 2010). The 'Islamization of Knowledge', in fact the surrender of education and research to religious Islamic premises, is a concept first propagated by the Palestinian in US exile Ismail Faruqi in 1986. In his 60-page pamphlet 'The Islamization of Knowledge' (1986), he states, in sum, that science and education the Western way are at the root of the Muslim World's misery. Therefore, in order to get the Islamic *umma* back on the path of progress, Islamic education should be rigorously applied to all parts of the Islamic countries' societies, Muslims and non-Muslim minorities alike. The journal's authors somewhat sophisticate Faruqi's very simple and rigorous concept, e.g. connecting interdisciplinarity with the Islamic concept of *tawhid*[14] by theological arguments and expanding it to a unity of ratio with revelation (Malkāwī, 2010). Both Kawtharani (2010) and Yassin (2010) in their critical analysis of Arab historiography and social sciences, mention the IIIT as one attempt to somehow indigenize science, which failed in the sense that it could not provide an alternative to the modern social sciences as they emerged in Europe. It has not failed to find fertile ground in the Arab World, however. It influenced the educational policies of the *Muslim World League* and the *Organization of the Islamic Conference*. With branches in Amman, Beirut, Cairo, Jidda, and capitals of the Islamic Far East it exerts considerable influence also into universities (Abaza, 2002, pp. 143–173). Books and pamphlets of a similarly simplistic and irrational approach as the ones in the IIIT's publications are legion in Arab bookshops and on Arab book fairs.[15]

The IIIT and its affiliations are of Sunni denomination. Rosiny (1999) classifies publications of Shii publishing houses in Lebanon as ones that aim to modernize Islam and others that aim to islamicize modernity, making for about 50 % each of Shia's publishing in Lebanon. Thus, also with the Shia the tendency to submit science to religious principles is very influential. It is not surveyed yet how it influences academic life in Lebanon or what role universities play in this context, neither pertaining to the fairly young, Shii affiliated *Islamic University of Lebanon*, nor to other institutions of higher education in the country.

Further pains with the Western heritage

Even the much debated Arab Human Development Report 2003, although empirical and anthropocentric in its research approach and following the assumption that democracy and the rule of law enhance academic freedom, scientific performance and human development, makes a statement against political secularism, based on the old and much contested argument that a separation between religion and polity makes no sense in Islamic societies because Islam was not organized in a clerical hierarchy (UNDP, 2003, pp. 119–121).

But not only Islamists are concerned with Western influences on Arab SSH. The Lebanese educationalists Nasser and Abouchedid (2007, pp. 1–3) criticize Arab SSH

as alienated and proclaim a need for indigenous topics and epistemology. They also work with the term 'indigenous colonialism', meaning that Arab academic teachers accepted the colonial legacy, carry it on, and defend 'alien' knowledge with authoritarian methods. In the same article, however, they provide evidence that colonialism is not at the roots of today's problems anymore. On the one hand, they advocate the search for an indigenous epistemology and collectivist approaches to development, but, on the other hand, hint to the academic freedom and success of countries that adopted 'market-style fundamentals' to their academic institutions, such as India and countries in Latin America, and to the achievements of researchers with an extraordinarily individualist mindset. While in one part of their article they call quality assessment by international agencies useless, later on they recommend it in order to improve academic work. It is not evident from their article, what could improve if topics and epistemology were indigenized without the authoritarian structures being removed. Conversely, if they were removed, would not teachers and students come up with the topics relevant to them?

Some authors regard the alleged dependence of the educational system upon Western and international development agencies at the root of its incompatibility with Arab needs. Zaitūn laments a global imbalance of forces since the breakdown of the Soviet Bloc. She sharply criticizes the cooperation of Arab governments with international development agencies in the frame of the *Stabilization and Adjustment Programme*, GATT and GATS,[16] viewing them as a form of cultural imperialism with a tendency towards a 'market culture' and individualist values (Zaitūn, 2005, pp. 17–18, 55–57). Like her, Abi Mershed (2010, pp. 2–3) criticizes the *World Bank's* approach to human and educational development as a kind of one size fits all,[17] and ascribes to education the task of preserving national culture.

Hanafi (2010) and Kabbanji (2010) detail the impact of donor agencies upon the structure and perspectives of Arab SSH research. Competition for resources, Hanafi states,

> … allows for research to be dictated by an obsessive commitment to the paradigm of identity at the expense of social criticism. Contemporary sociological analysis has over-stated externalities; the negative role of colonialism upon the local society and under-stated the internal factors and the contradictions inside this society. Additionally, the themes of study borrowed from the west and promoted by the donors such as democratization, or public satisfaction do not reflect the internal processes organic to contemporary society (2010, pp. 551 f.).

The privately funded research centers, he goes on, indulge in short term research activities, mainly consisting of quantitative surveys. Hanafi does not regard the international donors' influence as entirely bad. He obviously prefers long term funding, like the *Ford Foundation*'s decades long sponsoring of local research institutions, from short term projects. He considers projects laudable that interpret social development in terms of class and social conflict, or, like the *Böll Foundation*'s Cultural Globalization project, promote regulation of media and cultural markets by quota for local production or

protection from foreign investment. When projects emphasize the role of enterprise and individual endeavor, like the *Mediterranean Development Forum*, or focus on the confessional aspect of the political fabric, they earn Hanafi's critique.

Kabbanji deals with the Lebanese situation in a similar approach: The state largely departed from the public funding of social research. Therefore, and for its liberal legislation, Lebanon is an open market for local and foreign players. Kabbanji, too, focuses on the influence of international and Western players: After 1990, the end of the civil war in Lebanon, he states

> The main representatives of social science research during that time consisted of international bodies, such like the UNDP as well as the UN Economic and Social Commission for West Asia (ESCWA), in addition to the World Bank. ... In fact, too many social scientists as well as groups within some universities worked during the 1990s under the auspices and directives of these international bodies. Add to that the conceptual changes these bodies were able to introduce into the perception of the 'social' and society. According to the UNDP and the World Bank, society is no longer seen as a unique, cohesive body. Rather, it is taken as a composite one, in which every component is autonomous. To take an example, poverty, in their approach, is isolated from structural background. No explanation of its causes and effects should be searched beyond people who are affected by it.

So, according to Hanafi and Kabbanji, all these bodies seem to follow the same neo-liberal agenda. By their methodological and theoretical approaches, they 'remote-direct' (2010, pp. 227–229) their local employees.

These approaches leave many questions open: As El Amine (2009) remarks, it is mostly the state which fears the uncovering of social differences and conflicting interests as a potential source of unrest. Lamentable though it is that Lebanon did not fund the expertise for reconstruction after the civil war by itself, and that Egypt and other Arab states relied on international funding and consulting for their educational reforms, the mentioned donor institutions, such as ESCWA, UNESCO, UNDP, the *Arab League*, the EU, and the *World Bank*, adhere to very different philosophies in terms of social and economic development (Spring, 2009, pp. 72–82), not to mention donors from the Arab Gulf, Iran etc., even Sudan, which sponsor universities and research centers in Lebanon, too. There are examples of collectivist, culturalist (Bustani, 1997; UNDP, 2003), and anti-secular (Idabi, 2003) approaches to the social supported by international agencies like UNESCO and the UNDP. The German institutions *Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation* and *Orient-Institut Beirut*, e.g., organized a conference featuring high rank officials of several Islamist parties in the Levant in 2004. Even the *World Bank*'s reports on educational development in the Middle East (2008) and Egypt (2010), as I perceive of them, are not entirely grounded in economic liberalism.

While most authors who address the Arab SSH consider the identity issue as essential, Kawtharani (2010), Sayyid (2010), and Yassin (2010) view exactly this discussion as a major constraint. As a positive example for exploring the particular character of Arab SSH Yassin mentions a very industrious project that was accomplished at *Cairo*

University a few years ago: a comprehensive and annotated bibliography of sociological works published by Arab authors between 1924 and 2000. Whoever wants to give a comprehensive record of the state of the art of Arab social sciences should probably start there. According to Yassin's reading of the summaries in it, none of the listed authors does without Western epistemology. And so what, he concludes, theory and method "… do not have a nationality, for the criterion of any theory is the soundness (*salama*) of its fundaments, not the place of its emergence."

After all, what Abi Mershed (2010), Kabbanji (2010) and Hanafi (2010) expound are impressions they gained during events and projects they observed. Their contributions raise the important issue of the correlation between funding and academic independence and quality. The conclusions they come to, however, cannot count as empirically established. Is there any evidence that social research would be more sustainable, theoretically and methodologically more coherent, if only one or few local or regional donors – the state preferably – took care for it? Not in the writings regarded here. Usually, diversified funding, for which opportunities seem to improve, counts as an indicator for academic independence, not incoherence. Correlations between funding strategies, research approaches and output in the Arab World are still waiting to be explored. There is obviously a growing influence by regionally funded research institutions, such as the *Arab Thought Forum* in Amman, the *Center for Arab Unity Studies*, and the *Arab Thought Foundation* in Beirut, the *Ahram Center* in Cairo etc., and the numerous Islamic universities, which were accredited by Lebanon, Jordan, and the PA during the last three decades.

Neither Hanafi nor Kabbanji explain what the advantages of long term over short term funding, a structuralist over an individualist approach to poverty, cultural protectionism over foreign investment, or reconstruction by local over reconstruction by foreign agencies are, which they presuppose. To them, it seems, paradigms of social class and 'organic' internal processes do not feature as possible approaches among others, but as paradigms for good social research per se that do not require further explanation.

Conclusions

Opportunities and constraints of institutional change

There is obviously a worldwide drift in academia from state financed research and the education of public elites to a machinery that has the task of training masses for a job market driven by diverse interests. Despite an increase in public spending on higher education – doubt if the SSH benefited from it – the state does not have the means to manage this change alone. The SSH, especially the ones in the Arab World, will have to look for ways to reduce their teaching load through sensible admission and promotion criteria in order to gain leeway for internationally compatible and competitive re-

search. Research becomes more and more dependent on external funding by private and philanthropic sponsors. The mushrooming of research centers away from the university departments of their disciplines is not a particular Arab phenomenon, too. In Germany, e.g., many such centers were founded during the last decades, partly at universities, such as the *Institute for Advanced Study of the Humanities* in Essen (1989, university affiliation since 2007), or the *Center for Conflict Studies* in Marburg (2001), and partly independent from universities, like the *Peace Research Institute Frankfurt* (1970), the *German Institute of Global and Area Studies* in Hamburg (1964), or the *Zentrum Moderner Orient* in Berlin (1996). For the outsider, it is difficult to distinguish the mission of one of them from the other, when two or more work on similar research fields. If, for instance, the two centers for conflict studies in Frankfurt and Marburg coordinate better among them than the *Ahram Center* and the *Ibn Khaldoun Center* in Cairo do, because they can count on more government funding, could be an issue for comparative research. Until then it remains an assumption. For investors such institutions are definitely advantageous in that they do not have a vast and poorly funded university in their background, were money can disappear in the abyss of a deep bureaucratic structure. They are also less in the focus of state security and political activism.

The often hasty business of quality assurance is likewise not specific of Arab academia. With its high attention for quality assurance, the Arab World is part of a worldwide trend, since the development of higher education from an ivory tower institution to a provider of mass education is a global one. Teaching and research increasingly becomes an issue of demand and offer by multiple providers, and has to address a variety of challenges related to quality. How it addresses these, any institution has to make transparent to its 'customers' in order to persist (Spring, 2009, pp. 55–57; Kreckel, 2008, pp. 36–39). The impression that quality is in danger with the fast expansion perceives only one side of the coin. When facilities are outdated or too scarce in order to meet the growing demand, this certainly poses a challenge to quality. On the other hand, when there are more academicians, chances are that the absolute number of excellent ones grows, too. That the job market did not expand by the same speed as the number of academics, and that higher education was diversified suggests that competition between institutions increases. Competition, however, can lead to quality improvement, if reasonable criteria for access to study programs and academic jobs can be found *and* applied. The whole situation thus holds potential for improvement, especially if taking into account that the non-academic job market provides alternatives. The practice at certain Egyptian private universities of attracting wealthy clientele at nearly all costs, however, seems to hamper consequent application of quality-oriented access criteria.

But what about the Humboldtian ideal of learning by doing research, and deepening research by teaching? Every university in the world, as well as society at large, ought

to define the measure of importance it attributes to this ideal. Should it become a peculiarity of few elite universities only and most universities become mere tertiary schools? Or should, to the contrary, the link between research and teaching become a basic principle of the whole of our knowledge societies, maybe even far beyond university into secondary education? How Arab educational planners and academics of the SSH view this question and how they act on it the research literature does not yet tell.

Untying the knot of quality, ideology and identity debates

While in the macro-sociological reports, quality is addressed merely in technical terms and ignores the question of specific quality parameters for the SSH, most contributions about the SSH in particular dedicate wide scope to questions of identity. Few authors (Kawtharani, Sayyid, Yassin) view the identity debate as an obstacle to a rational epistemology, while a majority of authors perceive of it as a core task of educational and research policies. The latter view 'good research' and relevant education as hampered by an overwhelming and monolithic influence of donor and consulting agencies from the international development business, who do not take into account the particularities of Arab or Muslim societies, or by the 'mimicry' (Faruqi, 1986) of Western concepts by Arab educators. The uniformity of these influences, however, appears questionable in the light of certain facts. The problem with many of the presented approaches (Faruqi, 1986; Hanafi, 2010; Kabbanji, 2010; Nasser & Abouchedid, 2007, Zaitūn, 2005) is that they blame socio-economic processes for a lack of quality or for a cultural misery, but do not succeed or not even care to establish a link between them. The comprehensive data compilations about education or higher education at large draw, in sum, a picture of modest progress, but hardly address the specific situation of the SSH. Most of the few articles that address the SSH, on the other hand, are impressionist works. They mainly consist of exemplary observations made by their authors in the course of their academic practice. Any generalizations on their grounds must therefore be regarded as preliminary. The socio-economic data, for their part, support that since 1990, i.e. the time of implementing measures of liberalization, human development in the Arab World made progress in the socio-economic field at a pace similar to the decades before, including the oil boom of the 1970s (Rivlin, 2001, pp. 95–134): Poverty was reduced, per capita income, life expectancy, literacy, enrollment rates and school life expectancy all increased (Galal, 2008, p. 13, 15, 16, 23, 26, 32, 45, 66, 68, 109, 314–318; see also Zaitūn, 2005, p. 195, 206, 215, 356). Moreover, UNESCO, 2010 provides evidence to the effect that the phase of accelerated globalization has diminished the predominance of the USA, Japan, and Western Europe in science, technology, and trade. The harmfulness or inhumanity of the much reviled 'market culture' to education and research is not substantiated so far. First of all, the term means that human beings, their talents, their knowledge, and their skills, are an asset that grows if

active, and decreases if inactive. The diversification of donor agencies, regionally and internationally, promises opportunities for more independence and makes it seem worth considering how universities, maybe by reducing their bureaucracy and increasing their transparency, could absorb a larger slice of this cake compared to the non-university research institutions.

The impression arises that the Egyptian state since the 1970s, and Lebanon since the civil war, did, indeed, abandon any purpose to shape national identity positively. In Egypt, Islamists were conceded their will with reference to Art. 10 of the constitution,[18] as long as they did not put into question the NDP's monopoly of power. Apart from that, publishing was free in Egypt under the Mubarak regime. In Lebanon, academic freedom is only restricted by pressure groups with external allies powerful enough to enforce their claims. The integration of an armed politico-religious group, *Hizbollah*, into the political fabric since 1992 in Lebanon and the revolution in Egypt resulting in a new parliament with over 70 % Islamist participation make it seem unlikely that religious constraints will soon be removed.

What concerns the epistemological critique on the part of Islamists, Faruqi's pamphlet of 1986 is by no means grounded in any empirical evidence, such as curriculum analysis or stocktaking of research designs. Also in the secondary literature about the advocates of Islamic epistemology (Edipoğlu, 2006; Abaza, 2002; Stenberg, 1996), there is no hint that any of them followed up later with an empirical examination. Neither do they seem to occupy themselves with considerations about the fact that accelerated scientific progress in Europe just coincided with the successive emancipation of the sciences from paradigms of revelation and religious dogma. Conversely, religious dogma has never been removed from the list of epistemological premises to the Arab SSH. It is therefore hardly comprehensible why, of all problems Arab SSH have to confront, a lack of commitment to Islamic paradigms should be an obstacle for progress.

At the core of the identity debate I view a lack of relevance in the Arab SSH, which is due to authoritarianism and religious and political sensitivities – not market culture. After all, power structures in human relationships – love, hatred, abuse, empathy, sex, boredom, intrigue etc. – everything that one can hardly talk about in Arab classes, is what moves human beings to take interest in the SSH, the sciences about themselves. These human basics are indigenous to any human community, even though the strategies and institutions of dealing with them differ among nations, tribes and families. By advocating indigenous knowledge, Nasser and Abouchedid (2007), Zaitūn (2005) etc. boost the lack of relevance into something inseparably tied to culture. Thereby they contribute to the atmosphere of political correctness and self-constraint, which is rampant already.

The path ahead: Comparative micro-research

The distribution of agency between diverse provider and funding institutions, state authorities and various local, regional and international pressure groups, as well as the question how institutions and individuals translate these into their specific approaches of research and teaching through funding and cooperation strategies are issues still waiting to be examined by systematic micro-sociological research. From conversations with Egyptian and Lebanese SSH academics it occurs to me that, in Arab countries, opportunities and constraints differ considerably among institutions and individuals conducting SSH research and education under different configurations of local, regional and international influences from the state, the market and the civil society. In spite of the ostensible publish-or-perish policies at American Universities (Kabbanji, 2010; Abdul-Reda Abourjeily, 2003, p. 35), some professors at the AUB hold well remunerated positions, although they publish little to nothing, or overwhelmingly in Arabic (Bashshur, 2011). Professors at the LU find time and acquire money to do research, although their academic environment is allegedly little conducive to do so (Sinno, 2011; Hoteit, 2011). Library services at Egyptian public universities differ a lot in extent and quality of their offer, although they are funded and administered by the same system and provide a similar range of disciplines and subjects (Mougheeth, 2011). Hence the questions: What enables certain individuals and institutions to create more scope for their activity in the midst of local, regional and international influences than others? How can it be explained that institutions of the same kind, public or private, generate services that differ significantly in approaches, extent and quality? Why can e.g. libraries of the same public system become well equipped and nationally cross-linked while others have poor supplies and stay isolated? Why do post-graduates and professors find time for research and publish about sensitive topics, while others in the same country, sometimes even in the same institution, struggle with a teaching overload or restrict themselves to irrelevant research? Is institutional and/or individual autonomy of administration, teaching and research due to clear internal regulations or rather to the creativity of some? And finally: Do, and how do the political changes of these last years affect the institutional and the epistemological design of the Arab SSH?

Notes

1. This article results from the author's work as an assistant researcher at the German *Orient-Institut Beirut* in 2010/11.
2. The *American University of Beirut* was founded in 1866, the *Université Saint Joseph* in Lebanon in 1875, *Cairo University* 1906, the *American University in Cairo* 1919. Egypt became independent in 1936, Lebanon in 1943.
3. IMF – *International Monetary Fund*, UNDP – *United Nations Development Program*, USAID – *United States Agency for International Development*.
4. See Galal, 2008, p. 15, 318; El Amine, 2010, pp. 13–20. The average in North American and Western European countries is 70 %, in Latin America 34 %, and the world average is 25 % (Arab Regional Conference on Higher Education, 2010, p. 60).

5. In the USA, which, like the Arab World, count slightly more than 300 million inhabitants, there are 3,500 universities.
6. In the frame of this program, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia received loans from the IMF and were waived part of their debts by creditor countries on the condition of far reaching reforms that included a reduction of subsidies and government spending and a liberalization of markets. Egypt received over 800 million US$ loans from the *World Bank*, the IMF and the *African Development Bank*, and was released of over 10 billion US$ debt by the so called *Paris Club*. The *Higher Education Reform Strategy* was funded with loans from the *World Bank*, 10 million US$ from the Egyptian government, and further funds from the EU, the *Ford Foundation*, USAID, and the *British Council* (Said, 2010).
7. See El Amine, 2009; Hanafi, 2010. Kabbanji, 2010 reports that the Lebanese *National Center for Scientific Research*, a public agency founded after the civil war for the promotion of research, allocated only 2.9 % of its funds to social research between 2000 and 2006. Compared to that, the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft*, the association of German universities for the funding and coordination of research, allotted over 14 % of its funds to SSH projects in 2007 to 2010 (see Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, 2010, p. 162).
8. *Cairo University* was founded in 1906 as a private institution, too, but was nationalized in 1925.
9. *American University of Beirut, Lebanese American University, Notre Dame University Louaize*.
10. Licence (i.e. B. A. or a comparable degree) – M. A. – Doctor.
11. Scientific publications increased from 2,729 to 5,559, and from 203 to 1,070 respectively.
12. Measured by entries in international catalogues and databanks, this topic does not attract much attention worldwide. For some contributions see Lack and Markschies, 2008; Bauerlein, 2008; Blockmans, 2007.
13. European professors of Arabic and Semitic studies, like Joseph Schacht and Paul Kraus, were replaced by Egyptians during the 1930s and 1940s, and a fierce debate went on about their role and value for the Arabic philology and history (see Reid, 2002, pp. 53–55).
14. Meaning monotheism, and, in its consequence, also the oneness of God's creation.
15. For more examples of 'indigenizers' see Lange, 2005.
16. See Zaitūn, 2005, pp. 33–34. Until 2007, the only state among the Arab subscribers to the *General Agreement on Trades and Services* (GATS) that had signed the protocols affecting education was Bahrain. It was not public then, however, if it had signed the protocols affecting higher education (see Bubtana, 2007).
17. Although the Bank's reports (Galal, 2008; OECD & World Bank, 2010) exactly aim at efficiency for local markets.
18. Included under the presidency of Anwar Sadat in 1981 it establishes the Islamic sharia as a source of legislation.

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