

## **Rethinking Politics of Private Higher Education in the Middle East and Central Asia**

### **Ethnographic and Social Sciences Perspectives**

15 November 2013

SG Society and Culture in Motion, Reichardtstraße 6, 06114 Halle (Saale)

Organizer: Daniele Cantini

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The link between state formation, development, and education (and higher education as well) has become quite an established field in anthropology as well as in other social sciences in the past decades, and it has proved to be an interesting approach for deepening our understanding of societies all over the world. Recently this link has become ubiquitous as many international agencies increasingly call for the need to “build a knowledge society” have become a key feature of present-day development discourses; the argument is that a knowledge society contributes to social and political development, and this finds its expression in publications, policies, and programs disseminated by the World Bank, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the United Nations, and other international developmental agencies.

In recent years there has been a growing interest in assessing and accounting for the quite astonishing boom of universities, and above all of private universities, in many regions of the world, and especially in countries where the state formation process is far from potentially being deemed as concluded. This process is largely still to be studied, for the intersections between ‘weak’ states, international agencies and capital, changing conceptions of the state and of what is knowledge are rather interesting, not to anthropologists alone but also to human geographers, philosophers, and other social scientists as well.

As pointed out by many influential thinkers, the role of education and especially of higher education in this process is far from being neutral or irrelevant, and this workshop aims at highlighting precisely the effects of these reforms in the different contexts. The result of this inherent contradiction is not merely to be seen on the political level, but more deeply also at the level of the role of knowledge and research. What is yet largely to be accounted for are the changes that are taking place in the understanding of what is valuable knowledge nowadays, of the processes of internationalization and of privatization in the context of neo-liberal policies worldwide and within states that are normally not that liberal themselves, and of how international and local actors are trying to impose this new vision, to adapt to or resist it.

## **Workshop program**

9.30 – 10.00 welcome address, opening remarks

Morning session

10.00 – 11.15

Manja Stephan (Free University Berlin)

“A healthy education for Tajikistan’s Muslims!”. State attempts to reform Tajikistan’s Islamic education sector

*Discussant: Fazil Moradi (Max Planck Institute)*

11.15 – 11.30 coffee break

11.30 – 12.45 Alexander Mitterle (Institut für Hochschulforschung Halle-Wittenberg)

Stratification of Higher Education in German private higher education

*Discussant: Daniel Pateisky (Graduate School “Society and Culture in Motion”)*

12.45 – 14.00 *lunch break (buffet at the Graduate School)*

Afternoon session

14.00 – 15.15 Abdelhakim al-Husban (Yarmouk University)

Neoliberalism and Higher Education: The Transition from Public to Private University in Jordan

*Discussant: Nasser Massadeh (Erfurt University)*

15.15 – 16.30 Annemarie Profanter (Free University Bozen)

The Awakening of an Arab Giant: Saudi Arabia

*Discussant: tba*

16.30 – 16.45 *coffee break*

16.45 – 18.00 Daniele Cantini (Graduate School “Society and Culture in Motion”)

Private Universities in Egypt facing social and political change

*Discussant: Ronn Müller (MLU Halle/Wittenberg)*

18.00 – 18.30 Concluding remarks, publication plans

*19.30 dinner at Haus & Hof*

## **Abstracts**

Ala Al-Hamarneh, Center for Research on the Arab World (CERAW) University of Mainz

### **Mapping the Educational Frontier: The Political Economy of Higher Education in the GCC**

The economic liberalization of public services (education, health care, water, electricity) in the GCC countries has been going on three tracks; privatization (outsourcing), internationalization and subsidizing these services only for the nationals (non-nationals are excluded from subsidization). The policies match the general global neo-liberal stance of opening the local markets for international trade and direct investments (GATS, WTO), cutting the public expenditures and developing social funds for the disadvantaged segments of the population (in the GCC cases for nationals). The exceptional regional element in comparison with global trends is that the economic liberalization is not accompanied with political liberalization, de-centralization and deregulation. In the contrary, steps towards political liberalization have been to great extent rejected in the name of social security for nationals and political stability.

Education stays one of the most state controlled fields in the GCC. Nevertheless, the higher educational sector was economically liberalized to match the demographic pressure, the technological demands, the financial constrains and the economic diversification strategies. The conflict between the free market policies and the state control has been to great extent resolved by implementing special plans of sector's liberalization and innovative models of cooperation between the state, the private investors and the international partners. Free economic zone of higher education (Dubai), state owned branches of international universities (Qatar, Abu Dhabi), restricted internationalization (Oman), locally registered "internationalized" universities (Saudi Arabia) and boom of national/local private universities in the whole region demonstrate the richness of the modes of global cooperation and economic liberalization of higher education in the GCC.

The paper aims to explore the various strategies and models of privatization and globalization of higher education in the GCC and wishes to explain the political-economic background of the on-going processes and declared strategies. The paper is based partially on field research carried out in Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman and UAE in the years 2008-2012. The author is currently visiting professor at the University of Sharjah, UAE, where certain update of information is taking place.

Ayça Alemdaroglu, Department of Anthropology, Stanford University

### **Selling Futures Across Borders: The Global Trade of Higher Education and 'For-profitization' in Turkey**

The conception and organization of higher education are changing all around the world. This change is tied to on the one hand a greater demand for university education, and on the other hand the increasing emphasis on efficiency, accountability and raising revenue. For-profit higher education has emerged as an epitome of this dual-change and has become one of the fastest growing sectors in the U.S. economy. While its benefits and drawbacks are being intensively debated in the U.S., little is

known about the operations of US-based higher education corporations abroad. This paper aims to explore the emergence of higher education as a global space of capital accumulation and transnational governance with a focus on the operations of a US-based multinational corporation and the concomitant effort to change the higher education law in Turkey.

Daniele Cantini, Graduate School "Society and Culture in Motion"

### **Private Universities in Egypt facing social and political change**

In 2008, Egypt celebrated the centenary of its first modern university, what is nowadays known as Cairo University; the relevance this institution has in the Egyptian public imaginary is hardly underestimated, for the university campus with its magnificent architecture constitutes, in national historiography as in cinema, in novels and autobiographies, a veritable "place of memory", and it is usually seen as an actor in – or at least a witness to – the country's historical events. The relevance of universities in the national landscape of Egypt, as well as in the ones of other countries in the region and beyond, cannot thus be neglected, and it requires further attention.

Perhaps needless to say, this relevance has been accrued by the events that led to the resignation of former President Hosny Mubarak at the beginning of February 2011. Many commentators pointed to the fact that most protesters were rather young – not surprisingly in a context in which people below 30 years of age represent up to 70% of the whole society – and quite educated, at the very least in using new media and in organizing spectacular forms of demonstration.

In this paper I will try to introduce the discussion on the role that institutions of learning play in Egypt, a discussion that aims at presenting a critical approach to the understanding of the mutual relation between institutions of learning and social and political change. I will begin by trying to put the object of analysis in its context, by introducing the history of higher education in Egypt and its political relevance, before giving some quick figure to show its absolute relevance in the Egyptian society. I will then turn into a discussion of the main reforms that have been taking place in the last decades, dominated by the ideology of neoliberalism, before introducing two case studies – both belonging to the ranks of private universities, but that nonetheless could be taken as representative of some of the major changes that universities underwent. I will conclude by mentioning some of the main changes that are happening after the regime collapsed, and by trying to indicate some of the possible future developments.

Abdelhakim al-Husban, Yarmouk University

### **Neoliberalism and Higher Education: The Transition from Public to Private University in Jordan**

The classical conception of university tends implicitly or explicitly to perceive university as a symbol of modernity and modernization for many considerations. University has been seen as the most effective tool for educating and socializing people.. Due to the crucial role the university is playing in providing individuals with the system of skills, knowledge and practices that the nation has accumulated university is treated as the machine or the factory that can transform the new born subjects into citizens and to move them from the realm of nature to that of culture.

Since the beginning of the 1990s Jordan started to suffer from deep economic crisis which coincided with the first Gulf war and the return of hundreds of thousands of Jordanian men with their families from Gulf States, the four public universities started to feel incapable to meet the growing need for higher education. Since that time Jordan started to adopt a new model for university. The first so called university was established to cope with the growing numbers of students seeking for higher education in Jordan. During the 1990s many private universities have been established but with the coming of King Abdallah II a wave of neoliberal policies have been applied in Jordan including in the field of higher education.

Since that time the number of universities is growing up and more than 32 universities either public or private have been established. The number of private universities in Jordan is currently exceeding that of public universities. Private universities have been considered by the Jordanian discursive practices as the best response for meeting the growing needs for education in the context of a deep crisis that is hitting the Jordanian state which makes it incapable to invest in Education. With the neoliberal policies adopted by the new Jordanian regime the Jordanian state is withdrawing from providing services to Jordanians.

While some discursive practices are perceiving private universities in Jordan as a very effective and efficient tool for providing high quality education indispensable for development and modernization process in the country other discursive practices are perceiving private universities as a very negative tool to undermine social cohesion, social justice and equitable and just development in the country. The policies of recruitment of teaching staffs in private universities, the policies of students admission, the quality of graduated students, the compatibility between the academic programs in these universities and the market demands in Jordan, the marginality of scientific research and innovation in these universities and many other problems are all mentioned to accuse private universities as part of the problem not the solution for Jordan's seek for modernization and development.

In addition to these phenomena, state manipulation of the university, nepotism, tribalism and regionalism usually encouraged and motivated by the regime can be considered as very widespread and widely generalized inside the Jordanian academic world. During the last 3 years most universities have witnessed continuous waves of violence. Many students have been killed in many universities in the north and south of Jordan. The general feeling is that universities in Jordan are no longer playing a modernizing role. On the contrary universities are getting more and more very effective tools to reproduce primordial ties in the Jordanian society. The role the Jordanian universities are playing in terms of producing citizenship and or reproducing primordial ties will be one of the focusing point I am going to deal with during my presentation.

Alexander Mitterle, Institut für Hochschulforschung Halle-Wittenberg

### **Stratification of Higher Education in German private higher education**

Whereas the higher education sector in several European countries is vertically differentiated with a small number of elite institutions at the top, such a ranking is just beginning to emerge in Germany.

So far, studies that address stratification in German higher education have either addressed questions of social stratification, meaning the construction of habitus and selection processes with regard to

the chosen few, or they have predominantly focused on differentiation within the realm of research. In contrast, here the focus is set on stratificatory efforts by universities with regard to education and student formation.

Private higher education in Germany works as an ideal starting point for such an inquiry. Even so the leading group indeed performs research, they are mostly known for their focus on practice. Thus the leading group predominantly align themselves to forms of professional schools (most of them in economics). Yet they indeed proclaim to educate for leadership positions, have set up visibly selective admission procedures and are able – as opposed to most state universities – to regulate their intake numbers. As a large part of their finance is based on tuition fees they openly court students. Moreover they are smaller than public university faculties, more coherent in their organizational structure and employ a professional administration including marketing and career services. For my research I have singled out three leading private higher education institutions from the field classification “economics, law and social sciences”.

In using ethnographic methods (mostly interviews with teachers, students and administration and event/course observation) I aim to inquire into different ways in which rank differentiation is institutionalized on organisational level and provide exemplary results on specific attributes that are mobilized to introduce stratifications (e.g. internationality). Stratification hereby is not understood as a mono-scale framework of rank-differentiation but as a rather contingent plurality of vertical differentiations that can potentially develop along any attribute, form various relations and trajectories. Such relations and trajectories are not homogenous but indeed can lead to self-contradictory effects. From a theoretical point of view I use socio-materialistic approaches (e.g. after-Actor-Network-Theory) and discourse analysis to understand the specific topography of stratificatory organisations. Additionally, I will discuss problems of accessing such organisations with regard to both method and what I call the ‘banality of education’ – the search for difference and singularity in a field to which the researcher is highly acquainted.

Annemarie Profanter, Free University Bozen

### **The Awakening of an Arab Giant: Saudi Arabia**

The sleeping giant of the Middle East has awakened and is moving with foresight to the development of its people. Rather than squandering the large revenues from its natural resources, under the leadership of King Abdullah, the decision has been made to move in the direction of a Knowledge Economy bringing along with it the ever expanding population of males and females. There is a broad expansion of opportunities for indigenous Saudis to broaden their education as private colleges and universities are mushrooming in the Kingdom. While social and religious constraints still hold, females are included prominently in the expansion of these education opportunities. Following an overview of the history of higher education in Saudi Arabia, the role and expansion of private enterprises is analyzed with reference to the Development Plan. Following this general overview the focus shifts to the rise of selected private universities such as 1) King Abdullah University of Science and Technology near Jeddah along with 2) Princess Noor University in Riyadh, and the establishment of 3) Prince Mohammad Bin Fahd University in the Eastern Province. Data were collected at institution number three through semistructured interviews with key management leaders and complemented by an analysis of study plans, enrollment and staff training. The results show that opportunities for the education of women are greatly enhanced along with encouragement for women to assume a greater role in research. More than 12% of the national budget has been earmarked for education in an effort to promote the concept of Saudization with greater employment of Saudis thus leading to a lesser

reliance on expatriates. Cultural norms are constantly being examined and re-aligned with the changes taking place ever keeping in mind that this is a strictly Saudi venture carved out of Western experience.

### ***“A healthy education for Tajikistan’s Muslims!” State attempts to reform Tajikistan’s Islamic education sector***

*Manja Stephan, Humboldt University of Berlin, Institute for Asian and African Studies*

As pronounced in the national education strategy paper for the years 2005-2015, an embrative reform of Tajikistan’s education sector shall pave the way for more economic progress, prosperity and social stability in the poor and structurally weak ex-Soviet and post-civil war Central Asian country. Following that modernist reading of education, the political elite’s vision is to adjust higher education to the requirements of a neo-liberal and global market. As a consequence, the number of universities and colleges in the country increased, and a gentle integration of private and international actors as well as of civil society stimulated a diverse market of higher education in the country.

If it comes to the realm of Islamic education, however, ‘reform’ has taken an obviously contradictory path. Recent amplifications of the ‘law on religion’, as well as the transformation of the former private *Islamic University al-Termizi* into the only one and state controlled *Islamic Institute Abu Hanifa*, that today offers a religious-secular curricula, illustrate, how state reforms lead to more centralization, limitation and a stricter control of Islamic education.

Taking the example of the only one Islamic Institute in Tajikistan’s capital Dushanbe as a starting point, my paper aims at tracing the state’s powerful position to produce, sustain and legitimate Islamic knowledge. The notion of ‘healthy’ here embraces a ‘valuable’ knowledge that serves to enshrine the official idea of a homegrown, authentic and state-supportive Tajik Islam in the predominantly Sunni Muslim population and, at the same time, to ‘illegalize’ and ‘criminalize’ Islamic knowledge that is taught or gained outside state controlled institutions.

In order to contribute to the anthropology of higher education in neo-liberal and global times, as well as to shed more light on the question of what exactly marks ‘the state’ within Tajikistan’s Islamic education, the paper gives some insights into everyday educational practices and politics as observed during fieldwork in the *Islamic Institute Abu Hanifa*. With regard to a) the difficulties that politicians are faced with in their efforts to standardize and fix ‘right’ knowledge about Islam, b) the professional self-conceptions of the teaching personal and their practiced ‘hidden curricula’, and c) the motivations of students to decide for an Islamic study at home or abroad, I will argue that institutions of higher Islamic learning in Tajikistan are social spaces where different actors (secular and religious, local and global) compete for the power to reform Islam ‘properly’. Furthermore, the personal perspectives of teachers, students and parents explain that the knowledge as it is produced and sustained in state controlled Islamic institutions is valued in highly diverse and sometimes conflicting ways when it comes to individual future careers (secular and religious), matters of morality, credibility and quality of education.

Dilyara Suleimanova, Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Zurich

### **Higher education and contested notions of citizenship in the Republic of Tatarstan**

During post-Soviet years, higher education in Russia has went through the series of liberalization reforms that led to the rise of private education (which was non-existent during the Soviet rule), diversification of educational practices, movement towards adoption of the European educational standards such as Bologna system. This however has not been accompanied by the wide-scale liberalization and diversification in the spheres of knowledge production or in the notions of citizenship. Higher educational institution as widely acknowledged play an important role in the formulation, articulation and transmission of particular notions or models of citizenship. While state-sponsored universities might uphold the dominant representations about citizenship, others, for example private universities, can have alternative models of citizenship. In Tatarstan, an autonomous republic in the Russian Federation, my research site, the idea of Tatar ethno-national citizenship (based on the loyalty to an ethnic group of Tatars as well as to the republic of Tatarstan) represents an alternative to the Russian, centralized, state-focused idea. Transmission of the forms of Tatar ethno-national knowledge (language, literature, history) that form an important basis for the Tatar political project were historically (since Soviet times) placed within the state educational institutions and remain there until today (the faculties of Tatar philology and history within the state universities in Tatarstan). They play an important role in the Tatar ethno-national project as they substantiate Tatar claims to have “high” culture (in Gellner terms: literary language, literature, theater) valuable enough to be transmitted on the university level. The recent neo-liberal reforms in the spheres of higher education that have affected universities in Tatarstan as well (especially reorganization of university structure for “effective management” purposes, commercialization of education) have effectively dismissed these claims since the “Tatar” faculties have lost any organizational autonomy as well as attractiveness for the students. Religious education, that was traditionally strong among Tatars (who are predominantly Sunni Muslims), especially the established in 1998 Russian Islamic University (RIU), has a potential to become new locus for the alternative articulations of non-state citizenship model. However RIU is on the one hand under strict purview of the state that controls that religious knowledge transmitted there does not undermine the loyalty to the state and its values, on the other hand, religious conceptions of citizenship actually undermine Tatar ethno-political project by refocusing loyalties towards Muslim “umma” rather than towards ethnic Tatar nation.