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Fighting Poverty: “Making Up” a New Society Around the Use of Human Development in Jordan.

Françoise De Bel–Air

Statistics are the “state’s science” (Desrosières 2000). Indeed, Foucault and his followers illustrated how, throughout history, defining, classifying, measuring, and counting served the purposes of political control, taxation, and “policing” for the regimes. Defining or “labeling is [thus] an aspect of public policy [...], [a] part of the process of creating social structure” (Wood, 1985: 347–349).

Poverty is a phenomenon of a subjective and controversial nature, rooted into a specific sociological, historical, and political context. Therefore, the processes of defining (constructing) poverty, measuring it, and alleviating it reach out to issues such as wealth distribution, social cohesion patterns, and power structure. Targeting deep into societies’ self–representation schemes and social project, they are intimately bound to politics. Consequently, the overwhelming involvement of international agencies in the field of poverty alleviation deserves attention: a consensual focus of intervention, poverty thus offers a vector for action, for creation of new types of citizenships and societies (Lautier, 2002).

After a short presentation of the history of the Human Development (HD) concept, its various dimensions, and its input for the study of poverty, this paper will focus on the case of Jordan. Specifically, it will explore the political outreaches of defining, measuring, and acting upon poverty through the use of the Human Development concept and indices. A 2004 Jordan Human Development Report (JHDR), subtitled “Building Sustainable Livelihoods,” clearly states the official aim of “challenging the dominant paradigm that development is exclusively about economic growth” by “promoting a people–centered approach to development” whereby “people are both the agents and the beneficiaries of development,” in order to alleviate poverty (HKJ *et. al.*, 2004: 15–16). The representations and measurement of poverty using the HD concept and tools, in the Jordanian case, will appear as a new “symbolic discourse” (Barrett / Tsui. 1999) reaching out to the fields of domestic politics and international relations. Conceived as a tool of solving social inequalities, it also appears as an instrument of institutional reform attempting at “making up people” (Hacking, 2000), paradoxically engineering the molding of a new society, globalised, and market–led.

The Concept of Human Development: General Approach

Human development and its conceptual framework were adopted as a development paradigm in UNDP's Human Development Reports from 1990 onwards.

Human development and poverty: conceptual framework

The conceptual framework of human development has been developed by economist and 1998 Nobel Prize winner Amartya Sen. Breaking with paradigms of development and ways to achieving human well-being solely focusing on economic performance, Sen addresses development challenges as multifaceted and requiring a multidimensional approach. Resting on the claim that "people are the true wealth of nations," accessing well-being is permitted by the materialization of a person's "functionings" (i.e., components of well-being, subjectively selected by each individual), in order for these "functionings" to be fulfilled and become "achievements." The "capabilities" are the means allowing the individual to materialize his/her "functionings" into "achievements" (see: Sen, 1992; 2000). Human development is "a process of expanding people's choices," or "capabilities" as well as "entitlements," "the people's basic *right* to these choices" (Fergany, 2002). The expansion of "capabilities" is, thus, the starting point towards development:

The purpose of development is to improve human lives by expanding the range of things a person can be or do, such as to be healthy and well nourished, to be knowledgeable, and to participate in the community life. Seen from this viewpoint, development is about removing the obstacles to what a person can do in life, obstacles such as illiteracy, ill health, lack of access to resources, or lack of civil and political freedoms" (Fukuda-Parr, 2003: 303).

The two central features of the people-development link are defined by Sen as its "evaluative" aspect and its "agency" aspect. The first "is concerned with evaluating improvements in human lives as an explicit development objective and using human achievements as key indicators of progress [...]. The second is concerned with what human beings can do to achieve such improvements, particularly through policy and political changes" (Fukuda-Parr, 2003: 303-304). This approach thus breaks with neoliberal ones, which neglect political factors such as rights and freedoms. Economic growth is only a means and not an end in itself; focus is put on what people can do instead on what they have.

The capability approach is one of the main theoretical frameworks used in the study of poverty, along with the income perspective and the basic needs perspective.¹ Poverty being

¹ Income perspective: a person is poor if her income level is below the defined poverty line. The basic needs perspective sees poverty as the deprivation of minimally acceptable fulfillment of human needs,

one of the major symptoms of underdevelopment, it started being seen in terms of a lack of human development, thus defined as a low level of capability, that is, “The failure of basic capabilities to reach certain minimally acceptable levels” (Sen, 1992). “If human development is about enlarging choices, poverty means that opportunities and choices most basic to human development are denied—to lead a long, healthy, creative life, and to enjoy a decent standard of living, freedom, dignity, self-respect, and the respect of others” (UNDP, 1997: 15). The application of the Human development concept to poverty by UNDP acknowledged the recognition that poverty is intrinsically multidimensional in nature and stems from the failure of several kinds of basic capabilities.

However, this qualitative change in the understanding of poverty at the most global agency level raised the controversial issue of the phenomenon’s measurement (i.e., the assessment of its magnitude and incidence), which seems in total contradiction with the essentially subjective nature of the concept of human development as developed by Sen.

HDI and HPI: measuring human development and poverty

The Human Development Reports introduced a composite indicator of achievements in human development: the Human Development Index (HDI). The HDI has three components: life expectancy at birth, educational attainment, and income. Moreover, “The HDI reduces all three basic indicators to a common measuring rod by measuring achievement in each indicator as the relative distance from a desirable goal. The maximum and minimum values for each variable are reduced to a scale between 0 and 1, with each country at some point on this scale. [...]. The HDI value for each country indicates how far that country has got to attain certain defined goals². (UNDP, 1995: 18).

In order to assess various disparities in the distribution of achievements, HDI was disaggregated, for instance by subnational regions and gender (GEM; GDI). Moreover, “While human development focuses on progress in a community as a whole, human poverty focuses on the situation and progress of the most deprived people in the community” (UNDP, 1997: 20). The Human Poverty Index (HPI) is thus introduced in 1997’ HDR. HPI concentrates on the deprivation in three elements of human life already reflected in the HDI:

including food, but also basic health and education, protection from the community, employment, participation, etc. (UNDP, 1997: 16, box 1.1).

² Goal posts were fixed for each indicator, in order to allow analysis over time: the fixed minimum and maximum values established for each of the indicators composing the HDI were: life expectancy at birth: 25 and 85 years; adult literacy: 0 % and 100 %; combined enrolment ratio: 0 and 100 %; real GDP per capita (PPP\$): PPP\$100 and PPP\$40’000 (UNDP, 1995: 19; 134)

longevity, knowledge, and decent living standard.³ The declared aim of the index is to “complement income measures of poverty,” and “serve as a strong reminder that eradicating poverty will always require more than increasing the income of the poorest” (UNDP, 1995: 18).

From measuring to alleviating poverty

As regards the policies advocated for, UNDP puts forward the idea that public institutions and their functioning is the key to poverty reduction. UNDP’s indicators used to evaluate poverty do not “isolate statistically a category of poor” (Destremau, 1998). They rather point at discriminations (e.g., gender, ethnic, rural–urban), and at shortages within a given specific context (e.g., geographic, political). Governance and the distribution of public resources and infrastructures being main elements of the process of poverty alleviation, “[p]olitics, not just economics, determines what we do—or do not do—to address human poverty. And what is lacking is not the resources or the economic solutions—but the political momentum to tackle poverty head on” (UNDP, 1997: 94 and chapter 5).

Yet, in order to overcome poverty and implement human development, UNDP Reports recommend liberalizing economy, decentralizing the decision making process, and guaranteeing popular participation.⁴ The individual is called upon to indulge in collective action, through community mobilization, trade unions, and NGOs. The State is merely a facilitator, an “activist state,” “enabling” rather than “disabling,” as “much will depend on the environment created by government action” (UNDP, 1997: 95).

Human development, poverty, and politics

HDI and its followers received a load of critics on various grounds, on technical grounds as well as on the issue of the indices’ demonstrative and empirical value.⁵ Regarding

³ Measured respectively by the percentage of people expected to die before age 40 (P1); the percentage of illiterate adults (P2) and the average (P3) of three variables: the percentage of people with access to health services, safe water, percentage of malnourished children under five) and expressed as a percentage, $HPI = [(P1 \text{ power } 3 + P2 \text{ power } 3 + P3 \text{ power } 3) - 3] \text{ power } 1/3$ (UNDP 1997: 125).

⁴ For example: “The main task is to invest in people, liberating their initiative. Another is to open global opportunities—to increase the productivity and competitiveness of developing countries [...],” “Most countries could use existing resources more efficiently—by adopting more decentralized, participatory approaches to development, [...], by charging many users for the benefits they receive and by encouraging private initiative in both the financing and delivery of social services” (UNDP, *Financing Human Development*, 1991: 1–11).

⁵ For a comprehensive review of the various types of critiques addressed to UNDP’s concepts and indexes, see: Stanton (2007).

their use for effectively setting up poverty alleviation campaigns and measures, the bottom–line criticism is the impossibility of translating such a subjective approach to poverty as Sen’s into operative measurement tools. This issue, however, is reflected in any attempt at standardizing perceptions of a reality such as poverty, which is the subject of a diversity of outlooks.⁶ Yet, beyond this “technical” issue lies the political outreach of social constructions implied in the various representations of poverty.

The political outlook of the capability approach used by UNDP puts forwards a holistic conception of society, the individual being part of a web of socio–political bonds, of structural and institutional factors which enhance or constraint his freedom. This leads to the construction of the phenomenon of poverty as a set of contextual and institutional factors affecting the individual’s access to capacities. But this definition of poverty also rests on a general presupposed “‘universalist’ paradigm of development: [T]he literature on human development is addressed to actual and potential human beings wherever—irrespective of culture or nation or social group—they are. Inevitably, this means that the human development paradigm does not take cultural differences into account. Rather it looks for a level which is culturally invariant” (Qizilbash, 2002: 13).

In the same line, poverty thus appears as a symptom of dysfunctional societies, as opposed to a model ideal–type of functioning society (i.e., generating the best human development, which should be attained through reform).

This ultimately normative view on societies is reflected and amplified by the design of the HDI and its followers which are normalized indices: “HDI comparisons give us a picture of the levels of achievement of different countries, and of differences in levels of achievement” (Qizilbash, 2002: 11). By classifying the distances between each country’s performance and the level of perfection materialised by the “1” score, it anchors into science and rationality a vision of the “good” politics and functioning social structure, designs normative trends of the individual’ behaviour, and good governance. Moreover, by using the same scale for every country and by ranking them, thus universalizing a mere representation, it builds, creates, invents a (future, virtual) space of common values based on respect for human rights, smooth and fair social interaction, harmonious and egalitarian access to the global economy: the world as a whole. This ideal, positively globalised space is to be distinguished from the (actual) scattered world where various types of poverties act as

⁶ A social problem involving social injustice or disorder; rooted in “natural” inequalities in assets’ distribution, in moral features, or in deficient socialisation or education; an effect of economic or political causes, for instance.

symptoms of dysfunction. What is at stake in targeting poverty in a meaning as broad as UNDP's and using the various human development indices it developed is, thus, a drastic reform of socio-political bonds throughout world societies. The question explored now is that of the stakes of the use of such a paradigm in the context of Jordan.

The 2004' Jordan Human Development Report

Poverty alleviation is one of the two "central pillars in Jordan's development process" (Awadallah, 2004). The 2004 Jordan Human Development Report is the first attempt to apply the human development concept to the question of poverty in Jordan, previously tackled through economic (i.e., poverty line-based) indicators.

JHDR and poverty

Explicitly focusing on "the poor and marginalized people in Jordan" (JHDR, 2004: p. xiii), the Report aims at providing solutions for them to "achieve positive and sustainable livelihood outcomes". The first chapter uses HD-related indicators to provide overviews of the poverty situation in each of the Kingdom's regions (governorates). The remaining seven chapters are based on interviews conducted in several poor communities throughout the country, using the analytical framework of Sustainable Livelihood Approach (SLA) that "places the poor at the centre of the analysis and seeks to understand poverty from their perspective" (JHDR, 2004: p. 3).

The conclusions of the Report emphasize the good performances Jordan achieved at the macro-level, the country's HDI having risen from 0.715 to 0.747 between 1997 and 2002 (tab. 1.2, p. 20), "largely attributable to its high values for life expectancy and education indices" of the index (p. 16). The HPI also dropped from 9.8% to 7.4% (p. 22), a great achievement given the considerable political and economic constraints facing the country: the two Gulf Wars, the US-led occupation of Iraq, and their multifaceted consequences; the repercussions of 9/11; scarce natural resources; and high demographic growth rates which imply continuous investments in education, health, and as job creation (p. 18). Rural areas are pointed out as particularly affected by poverty, due to climate changes, economic long-term mutations and reform processes that made cattle-raising and related skills no longer a viable strategy of survival.

Drawing on these results, suggested alleviation policies are directed at poor communities and especially at "pockets of poverty" (i.e., communities where poor people are disproportionately represented). They include notably: establishing a Family Income Support

model providing the poor with incentives to “work themselves out of poverty,” to be extended to the “working poor” as supplement to low wages; developing vocational training; promoting Micro– and Small Enterprise (MSE) to raise household incomes, reduce dependency, and create employment opportunities; favoring access to credit to be provided through Micro–Finance Institutions; encouraging the poor to pool resources, act collectively and share risks; and helping poor people catch up with the employment opportunities. Indeed, “The government is urging the poor to become self–reliant and to solve some of the problems of poverty through more efficient use of local resources and opportunities” (JHDR, 2004: p. 8), promotes a “culture of self–reliance,” and “attempts to stimulate entrepreneurialism through small and micro–enterprises and large–scale community–owned enterprise schemes (co–ops),” and calls on seizing opportunities opened up by the “re–orientation of the economy towards further integration with globalised markets,” especially in Qualifying Industrial Zones (QIZs) (chapter 5). Also, the public sector reform “proposes a new approach to service delivery, with an emphasis on citizen–centered, results–focused and transparent government” while “[c]ivil service institutions have been established to respond to the needs of citizens and investors [...]” (p. 81). The decentralization process is also a concrete move towards enhancing local decision making process and participation, towards solving some of the problems of poverty through more efficient use of local resources and opportunities (chapter 7). In order to act on the general context of poverty and to fight discriminations in access to resources (for instance, overcome the “gender gap”), the Report advocates for the activation of existing bodies, campaigns, and civil society institutions (National Center for Human Rights, Jordanian National Commission for Women, the “Jordan First” campaign).

Shapes and stakes of poverty in the JHDR: self–representation and ideological stances

The Report clearly emphasizes poverty as a phenomenon affecting rural communities. However, Zarqa governorate (overtly urban and sheltering the highest proportion of refugees and persons displaced from Palestine), displayed bad HD–related indices. Yet no poor communities from the governorate were interviewed for the JHDR, suggesting that the purposive sampling itself projected a representation of poverty in Jordan as overtly rural. Moreover, the weight of refugee communities within the consultation process was undermined, as only Al–Natheef and South Shooneh comprises a sizable proportion of refugees originating from Palestine within their population.

More generally, it is noteworthy that political dimensions of poverty are not investigated, even if, again, the peculiar fate of Zarqa is a source of concern: “the situation in

Zarqa, where educational enrolment rates are slipping below national averages provides an early warning to policy-makers. [...]. In a context of poverty, falling enrolment rates may reflect a loss of confidence by poor parents that investment in education will lead to improved employment opportunities for their children” (p. 21). Yet, this hint of a political interpretation of poverty is not further elaborated upon.

Rural poverty being emphasized, the improvements in these regions’ situation, due to “targeted poverty alleviation investment over recent years” (p. 21) is at the same time pointed out. Indeed, in JHDR the original context of poverty is depicted as given, out of the actors’ reach within a national context (regional conflicts, globalization, and Structural Adjustment Plans) that “aggravate” poverty, implicitly meaning that poverty was anterior to the shocks. In contrary to the dynamic view of poverty developed within the HD concept that constructs the phenomenon as a set of global contextual factors affecting the individual’s access to capacities, JHDR represents the poor as a category distinct from the rest of the society, whose members display common features hindering them to access available opportunities: “cultural barriers” such as female oppression (p. 91; chapter 7) or “cultural traditions” (“In Jordan, social capital is linked to the extended family and the tribe,” p. 62). The poor being a somehow essentialized category, poverty appears as a fact, and neither as a process (its genesis is disconnected from the global domestic context), nor as a legitimate, though subjective, feeling.⁷ Poverty, in the Report, thus appears as an economic, cultural, and social hardship, but also as a-historical and a-political phenomenon. Moreover, its rights-based approach is reduced to spotting the functional inability of the “poor” to seize the opportunities made available in terms of infrastructures and administrative reforms. The holist perception of societies characterizing the HD’ concept indeed differs from that displayed in the JHDR.

As a matter of fact, the view on poverty and the poor in JHDR sustains a specific vision of Jordanian society. To start with, the isolation of poor within a category does not spot the Jordanian society as dysfunctional as a whole, in contrary to the view put forth by HDRs. This legitimates, first, the existing power structure within society; second, the global set of values and behaviors encompassed in modernity presented as a model in poverty eradication measures, and third, the reformist view on society by the modern elite as well as the “targeted” policies, institutions and processes set up to fight poverty. The poor’s eviction

⁷ In the event of challenging opinions, the poor’s voice can be even discredited as stemming from “misconceptions” or “exaggerations”, see p. 53 for instance.

from the web of global social relations implicitly puts on the victims of poverty themselves the responsibility of not being able to make profit of the achievements aiming at enhancing access to livelihood strategies. This category of led-backs thus oppose that of the “elite,” westernized, and prone to modernity.

Another noticeable outlook on society in the Report is the weakness of the individual, as opposed to the community. Among the example provided, family members, depicted as obstacles, helped no individual be they victims of hardships or men (brothers, fathers) exerting male chauvinism over their daughters or sisters. As a matter of fact, the JHDR displays an image of Jordanian society within which women attempt at entrepreneurship more than men; the latter, quite systematically, are depicted as trouble makers (p. 62) or as impotent victims of lack of market-valued education, of erosion of traditional social networks and economic opportunities relying on agricultural know-how. The image of the traditional father and more generally, male domination and patriarchy, are associated with difficulties to cope, and lack of flexibility and adaptability to circumstances (i.e., with poverty).

Conversely, JHDR’s outlook on Jordanian society also emphasizes the primordial ties as positive for the poor: “communities” (of which geographic scale and social patterns remain undefined) are depicted as the most promising social unit to empower and build on for efficient local development and poverty alleviation. Indeed, social capital for the poor is to be drawn from belonging to a community, as promoting “a culture of self-reliance,” “stimulat[ing] entrepreneurialism through small and micro-enterprise and large-scale community-owned enterprise schemes” (p.87) is seen as necessary to overcome the “culture of ‘dependence on the State’ that is now widely perceived as an obstacle to poverty alleviation in Jordan” (p. 37). Indeed, JHDR displays a vision of the State as external to the society, and not emanating from its structures and patterns. It acts as a facilitator, an arbiter between communities put in competition within the global flows of economy and culture.

Even though JHDR and HDRs agree over the model of Human Development, its understanding according to JHDR projects the ideal image of a community-based society, prone to entrepreneurship, clearly a liberal ideal in politico-economic terms. JHDR widely acknowledges “poor people are constrained by their limited asset base.” However, it continues, “...but often use available resources with a remarkable degree of resilience and flexibility” in order to achieve sustainable livelihoods (p. 64). Flexibility, the ability to cope: these assets actually characterize a globalised, market-led society, which paradoxically

constitutes the model underlying the economic and political reform conducted in Jordan since the late 1980's.

Label, Measure, and Act: Human Development, a New Political Instrument?

Contributors to the JHDR are Jordanian scientific, policy-making, and decisional personalities and bodies, which in this way display their specific representation of Jordanian society. JHDR thus constitutes a comprehensive and far-reaching “symbolic discourse” (Barrett / Tsui, 1999) on Jordan's global society, addressed to the various sectors of the Jordanian population, as well as to the international actors (potential foreign donors and international agencies). As such, JHDR reaches out to the fields of domestic politics and international relations, granting the phenomenon of poverty with a specific “political functionality.” Moreover, even though conceived and displayed as a tool of solving social inequalities, JHDR also appears as an instrument of institutional reform attempting at “making up people” (Hacking, 2000), at engineering the top-down molding of a new society, globalised and market-led.

Poverty alleviation as a tool of political transition

As the popular representation of poverty is concerned, the context of Jordan bears some peculiarities. Several authors have described the process by which rural regions in the south and, to a lesser extent, the east of Jordan have been tied to the Hashemite regime by a “social contract,” in which, since the 1930's, allegiance is negotiated in return for protection.⁸ However, the collapse of the Jordanian rentier welfare State after the mid-1980's⁹ pushed Jordan to enter a drastic reform process of its economy requiring, amongst other measures, a decrease in the public expenditures. Consequently, those regions most dependent on state assistance were hit most severely. Poverty, as a sign of a failure in the redistribution process, thus took at the time a deep political meaning: riots erupted in these regions in April 1989 after the first measures of the SAP were announced, and in 1996 when the government announced a decision to lift subsidies on bread and animal fodder.

⁸ For example, Tell (1993); (1994).

⁹ After a decrease of oil prices, Arab aid and remittances of Jordanian expatriates in the Gulf States started declining in the early 1980's. Jordan resorted to borrowing. Its increasing debt service led it to open negotiations with the IMF to implement Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP). Agreements with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank were signed in 1989, 1992, 1995, and 1999.

JHDR's representation of poverty as a rural phenomenon, yet a given, apolitical process can further be explained by the sensitivity of the topic on the Jordanian ground, as most of the communities suffering from poverty and interviewed in the Report actually reside in rural and semi-arid areas of the Kingdom. JHDR contributes to representing the highly political issue of poverty in cultural and social more than in purely economic terms (i.e., disconnected from the political outreach of economy typical of Jordan as a post-rentier State, a pre-condition for implementing poverty alleviation measures in these regions).

Also, JHDR displays to its readers a representation of state-society relationships marked by more than a decade of structural adjustment, characterized by an effective disengagement of the State from the redistribution process, provision of employment, subsidies on products, etc. This leads to the economic reform process becoming an undisputable fact that makes it politically viable to assert. For example, "The government is urging the poor to become self-reliant and to solve some of the problems of poverty through more efficient use of local resources and opportunities" (p. 8).

The State is external to the supply of livelihoods, being replaced by self-enterprise and private employment, but after it has created and improved the institutional framework prone to build a context favorable to poverty alleviation (see: Chapter 4). The state here appears as a facilitator, a provider of infrastructures; yet, as it is not intertwined with the social fabric, it cannot really be held accountable for the failure of some sectors of the population to achieve sustainable livelihoods.

However, though external to the society, the state can paradoxically also appear as a donor. It is indeed worth noting that, by designating/labeling "the poor" and by defining the phenomenon, the state not only stigmatizes a share of the population. It also grants it with an asset, that of receiving assistance. It is thus sub-categorizing the citizens needing assistance between the "deserving poor" and the others. This seems to contradict the above-mentioned trend towards implementing state's disengagement and, ultimately, liberalization of the economy, ongoing since 1989 and, mostly, since 1999. However, it rather complements it: indeed, one of the conditions of legitimacy of the state after the drying out of its welfare resources is its efficiency in implementing reform but also its skills in maintaining a minimum of equity in access to livelihoods. By spotting a category of "poor" as first benefactors of the state's investments, as well as collective mobilization under the latter's initiative, it counterbalances the effects of structural adjustment and contributes to smoothing the economic-political transition process.

Poverty alleviation as a tool in international relations.

Also, the symbolic discourse carried by JHDR reaches out to international relations, as the Report stems from UNDP, but also addresses other international development agents and donors. The use of the comparative indexes and scores are used as a performance board, allowing Jordan to measure its performances up to the other Arab countries,' emphasizing its good position within the region. As a matter of fact, the first Arab Human Development Report published in 2002 sheds a light on the low levels of human development in the Arab countries, as compared to other regions in the world. Thus, Jordan has much to gain in emphasizing its improvements and its good HD performances as compared to the other countries in the region. Moreover, JHDR's symbolic discourse shows the country abides by the socio-cultural values associated with modernity and by the neoliberal reforms. The country also fronts a good image, and appears as a credible, solid economic and political ally to Western countries and international investors.

However, emphasizing the resilience of poverty in the Kingdom and creating a distinction between the poor and the rest of the population also addresses the international community with a representation of Jordan's society as characterized by a social gap. An "elite" emerges and displays itself, locates itself geographically and socially by contrast with its opposite (the "poor"). Consequently, it appears as a legitimate interlocutor on the international stage due to its "modernity," and its familiarity with internationally-acknowledged standards of social behaviors and consumption patterns. By contrast, the persistence in Jordan of human rights violations such as the so-called "honor crimes" can be explained by cultural and social backwardness ("social attitudes," p.116), which implicitly absolves decision-makers for their failure in implementing past reforms.

Lastly, emphasizing and explaining bad scores paradoxically sustains claims for development aid or for provision of infrastructures made to the international community. Aid to development, indeed, plays an important politico-economic role in the sense that it has been compensating for, as mentioned above, the former rentier funds of direct Arab aid which dried out after the first Gulf War. The self-representation displayed by Jordan through JHDR also takes the very crucial stake of a rent-seeking operation, in the shape of loans, grants, or infrastructural assistance.

“Making up people” and societies

Not only does JHDR forward a “symbolic discourse,” it also gives way to effective action on people and societies: a consensual focus of intervention, poverty offers a vector for action, and for creation of new types of citizenship and societies (Lautier, 2002).

Poverty alleviation is a vector of international agencies’ and donor countries’ intervention in the politics and politics of aid-seeking countries. On the Jordanian ground, development aid in general has been acknowledged for its clear “political overtones.” As described in the case of USAID, Jordan’s main donor the US based its assistance on “political rather than economic considerations” (i.e., safeguard its ally Jordan’s political stability within a politically-volatile region; monitor the Israeli–Palestinian peace process). Jordan’s “endemic financial vulnerability” and “dire need for financial and technical assistance,” thus allowed the US to “dictate its terms” by granting “tied aid” (Amawi, 1996: 77).

As JHDR is concerned, we described in the previous chapter how the Report’s representation scheme of Jordan’s society, patterns of social cohesion and power structure was embodying the reconciliation of the reform demands towards implementing economic liberalism and privatization with, at the same time, an involvement of the state as infrastructure provider, and as domestic and international political actor. In our view, the “poor” was serving as a bench mark, allowing for emphasizing the model of the emerging new Jordanian citizen. Consequently, general reform measures contribute to molding, to “shaping up” this new citizen: the governmental promotion of a “culture of self-reliance” leaves no choice to the job seeker but to abide by the “attempts to stimulate entrepreneurialism through small and micro-enterprises and large-scale community-owned enterprise schemes (co-ops),” or by salaried employment, but in private manufacturing companies settled in QIZs (chap. 5). Also, the in-depth reform undergone by the public sector, which “proposes a new approach to service delivery, with an emphasis on citizen-centered, results-focused and transparent government” while “[c]ivil service institutions have been established to respond to the needs of citizens and investors” (p. 81) gives a concrete expression to a new type of citizenship: this view of the citizen as a client, and not as a subject, develops a citizenship based on participation and rights claiming, as well as liberal concurrence between service providers (as is claimed in the Report). However, through the implementation of these policies, as the citizens are themselves involved in the process of service providing, along with the shaping up of the citizen as client goes the shaping up of the person as a utility, itself put in competition with its fellow citizens. In the mean time, a radical change in the nature of the “social contract,” and in the nature of elites can indeed be

already observed in Jordan, as non-business oriented prominent families loose prominence on the political stage since the beginning of the economic reform process (Wils, 2003). The instrumentalisation of HD concept to sustain the socio-economic reform process in Jordan consequently gives way to an “institutional shaping” which favors the ones able to capitalize on the outcomes of the reform process and, more specifically, on infrastructural (education, transportation, etc.) setup. Paradoxically, HD concept (as used in JHDR) becomes an instrument contributing to social fracture; alleviating poverty in Jordan’s context can be linked to a process of transforming citizenship.

Indeed, the role assigned to communities sustains this idea (though the concept remains undefined, be it tribes, extended families, or village for example); yet, it raises many questions: not only is the word widely used throughout the Report as the social unit of reference, but its empowerment is also seen as the solution to overcome the “culture of ‘dependence on the state’ that is now widely perceived as an obstacle to poverty alleviation in Jordan” (p. 37). However, the potential existence of communities and social links between its members seems to be a wishful thinking, and even an essentialist view on the region’s societies, given the ultimately constructed nature of social entities such as tribes, communities, or ethnic groups. Moreover, the question remains, of the solidity and sustainability of such “communities” on the long run, and of the equity of capital distribution within them.

Within the process of transforming citizenships, disengaging the state also has implications at the micro-sociological level of the family, due to the neopatrimonial¹⁰ dimension of state-society links in the specific context of Jordan as a post-rentier state. We pointed out JHDR’s representation of inter-gender dynamics within the family, which overwhelmingly emphasized males’ behaviors as ill-adapted to family support and paralyzing to females’ economic initiatives. The almighty patriarch is then to be replaced by a gender- and generations- egalitarian system allowing for individual initiative to supply for personal and community-members’ needs. Women and youth empowerment thus takes a political dimension, as an essential element for implementing the parallel process of dismantling the almighty welfare-state, limited to granting equality of capacities to every community, in order for them to catch up with the common values of human development

¹⁰The patrimonial system reproduces patriarchal-like relationships at the level of the population as a whole. The Patriarch/leader/patron dispenses resources, social control, and security, in return to his children’s/subjects’/clients’ allegiance. “Neopatrimonialism differs from patrimonialism in that it variously combines and overlays the informal structures of patrimonialism with the formal and legal structures of the state [...]” (Brynen, 1995: 24–25).

and access sustainable livelihoods in connection to the international markets. And this, ultimately raises the question of which are to be the patterns for founding a feeling of national belonging, within societies organized around “communities”.

Conclusion:

Beyond the “simple” issue of alleviating poverty emerges the bottom–line issue of reforming citizenship, from dependency on the state for redistribution in return for allegiance, to a so–called grassroots communities–based system resting on individual rights, democracy, and liberal concurrence. Therefore, the question of the accuracy and efficiency of HD–related indexes for measuring the phenomenon is not to be discussed, as what matters here is the “political function” (Lautier, 2002) of poverty, as constructed through the lens of the concept, on the one hand; as bound to be alleviated through the comprehensive framework of Human Development, on the other hand. This function is thus twofold: first, the decontextualization and depoliticization of the phenomenon gives legitimacy to the state as a protector and grantor of capital to the victims of globalization. It also allows for the creation of a “distinction” within the society, between the “poor”, and the elite, which is already caught up with the common values of human development and keeps connections to the international markets. Second, alleviating poverty proved a powerful tool of sustaining the economic reform process, as well as defining and materializing a new type of citizenship. Defining, measuring, and alleviating poverty within the realm of the HD concept can thus be taken as an extremely powerful tool for “making up” people and society in Jordan.

Interestingly, as this article goes to press, Jordan releases its third Human Development Report. It examines the role of Micro, Small, and Medium–Sized Enterprises (MSMEs) in human development in the Kingdom, or “the premises MSMEs, as agents of economic growth, are also agents of human development. The Report analyses the impact of MSMEs on economic growth, equity, the rights of the politically and economically disadvantaged groups, the environment, the rights of women and other rights and capabilities noted, and explores whether MSMEs can enhance the role of the free market in poverty alleviation in Jordan” (p. 35). Conclusions drawn from the 2004’ JHDR, consequently, seem to be confirmed by this 2011’ Report, which displays Jordanian policy–makers’ persistent faith in liberal economy for spurring (their own vision of) global development.

Indeed, more generally, this approach of societies in terms of human development has been tackling the Arab region as a whole since 2002 only, which confirms the reluctance of

Arab regimes to engage in the global political and institutional reform process encompassed in the human development concept. The last Arab Human Development Report (released in 2009) tackles the *human security* factor in the region, “the kind of material and moral foundation that secures lives, livelihoods and an acceptable quality of life for the majority” (AHDR, 2009: 1–2). As witnessed in the revolts ongoing in every Arab country since December 2010, this endeavor to address underlying political causes of underdevelopment in the region did not meet its goals. Rather, as may be seen through the lens of Foucauldian approach to such domestically–monitored global social policies, human development concept and measurement tools remain powerful instruments of “self–representation,” yet also of economic reform deepening socio–political inequalities when at the hands of Arab regimes.

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