**REMENA Working Group**

**Conveners: Rabab El Mahdi (AUC), Lila Abu-Lughod (Columbia U), Mayssoun Sukarieh (King’s College, London)**

**The Ethics and Politics of Research Questions**

Can we determine patterns in the research questions asked in Middle East social scientific work?

If so, can we reflect seriously on how and why certain research questions get to be asked more than others, and why some questions remain unasked.

Shedding light on the questions being asked (and not asked) is crucial for thinking about the ethics of social science research in the Middle East. We want to study not just how the contemporary Middle East is being framed but how and why the gaze of researchers is being directed in these particular ways, and with what effects. What factors influence this? The locations of those asking the questions? The disciplinary paradigms and trends? The national scholarly traditions and linguistic communities? The training in graduate programs? The organization of funding opportunities? Geopolitics and national political constraints? Are there shared patterns across the different disciplines despite the difference in paradigms and methodological training? Who are the addressees of the research and what are the stated purposes?

These are the sorts of questions that have been raised lately in a wide range of critiques of social science research in other regions or among other communities, especially in current debates about “decolonizing knowledge” or feminist methodology. Are these insights relevant to Middle East social science research?

The group will bring together knowledgeable MENA scholars from the fields of Sociology, Anthropology and Political Science to open up discussions in preliminary workshops. The broader purpose is to develop a comparative perspective on the contemporary politics of knowledge production on and in the region, with the goal of highlighting over-researched and under-researched questions and making recommendations for changing the forces that we identify as contributing to these patterns.

The initial invitees, who represent different study regions and disciplines, are: Sara Ababneh, Political Science, Sheffield University UK; Ali Ahmida, Professor of Political Science, University of New England- Maine; Zahra Ali, Assistant Professor of Sociology, Rutgers University—Newark; Nadia Fadil, Associate Professor at the IMMRC (Interculturalism, Migration and Minorities Research Centre) at the KU Leuven; Alaa el Azzeh, Assistant Professor of  Anthropology, Birzeit University; Zakia Salime, Associate Professor of Sociology, Rutgers University; Muzna Al-Masri, Ethnography as Knowledge Working Group at the Arab Council for the Social Sciences; Bobby Parks, Director of CEMA in Oran, Algeria