

Developing Agriculture, Cultivating Sovereignty?

A cross-study of agricultural development and political mobilizations in the Arab Middle-East (1940–2014)

**Thursday 6 to Saturday 8 November 2014 –
University of Fribourg**

Hosted by the Dept. of Contemporary History
(Prof. Benoît Challand)

And Convened by Dr. Caroline Abu-Sada
and Benoît Challand

**LOCATION: Av. de l'Europe 20,
Miséricorde – Salle Jäggi (4112)
CH-1700 Fribourg**

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OVERVIEW / RATIONALE

Food security exists “when all people at all times have access to sufficient, safe, nutritious food to maintain a healthy and active life” (World Food Summit, 1996). Furthermore, food sovereignty has been defined as the right of people to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems (Via Campesina, 1996). The latter definition has been designed to involve a fundamental element of choice of the population with regard to their own agricultural policies (Ziegler et al. 2011, Wittman 2011).

Arab state policies, donors’ interventions and general neglect have brought the once "Fertile Crescent" and other Arab countries into a state of food-import dependency and weakness to food prices instability. While the food riots in 2010 have led to the Arab Spring (Zurayk 2011a, Haniyeh 2013), agriculture and political mobilization are intertwined at different times in the Arab Middle-East. Historically, the politics of agriculture production shows that Arab agrarian policies from the 1950s onwards carved the space for popular participation through large land reform programmes. These have been followed by a gradual deterioration of the share of agriculture in employment, in its GDP share and the governments’ capacity to respond to pikes in food prices and to food crises.

Recent years have witnessed the surge of a sundry campaign from academic, intellectuals and civil society organisations from the region pushing towards the establishment of a food sovereignty model that challenges state and donor policies (Mansour 2012, Abdelnour, Tartir & Zurayk 2012). A tension remains between what are considered as domestic issues (the term "sovereignty" in food sovereignty could not be more eloquent) and the possibly overbearing influence of external forces shaping agriculture and development (colonial legacies, commercial treaties, international and regional trade agreements, transnational networks of civil society organizations and international expertise for example) (Abu Sa'da, 2009, Zurayk 2011b) that this workshop wants to discuss from an interdisciplinary perspective.

**The conference is funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF)
and the Research Fund from the University of Fribourg**

PROGRAMME

Thursday 6th November, 1.30 pm to 6 pm - Introduction

Why a conference on "agricultural development and political mobilizations in the Arab Middle-East (1930-2014)"?

- Welcome, presentation of the project, participants and rationale for this conference (B. Challand)
- Discussing the terms of the debate: Are food security, food sovereignty relevant terms? Shall we rather talk about agrarian question and mobilization? (Caroline Abu Sa'da)

COFFEE BREAK: 15H30-16H

- A regional perspective: how to address these research questions in the current contexts? What transversal themes can we identify? General discussion with initial inputs from Riccardo Bocco and Sarah Sabry

Friday 7th November, 9am to 12.30pm - Historical perspectives and the Jordanian Case

Benoît Challand: The transformation of Near East Relief into the Near East Foundations (late 1920s--1945) and its work in agriculture in times of war and colonialism in the “Near East”.

Jackson Perry: History of the emergence of the FAO and of its Forestry division (1940s). An overview of the agrarian policies in late colonial period in Morocco

Sarah Pursley: History of Dujayla Land Settlement Project in Iraq (with a focus on the UNESCO mission 1952-1958 to Iraq)

COFFEE BREAK: 10H30-11H00

FIRST CASE-STUDY: Jordan

Riccardo Bocco: Policies and Politics of Agricultural Development in the Jordanian Badia, 1920-2000.

Mauro Van Aken: Agricultural modernization and the reinvention of water in the Middle East (with a focus on Jordan)

Myriam Ababsa: Jordan Food Dependency and Agriculture Sustainability. Main economic and social challenges.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

Lunch break 12.30-2pm

Friday, 2pm to 6 pm: The Syrian Case

SECOND CASE-STUDY: SYRIA

- Ella Wind and Omar Dahi: Drought, Baathist agricultural policies as the backdrop of the Syrian revolt in 2011:

Comments by Myriam Catusse (discussant/skype).

COFFEE BREAK: 15H30-16H

GENERAL DISCUSSIONS:

- Historical perspectives and current trends.

- Identify the main research gaps (possibly people likely to contribute, at PhD or post-doc level for larger research network)

Saturday 8th November 9.00 to 12.30 pm: Palestine & Next Steps

THIRD CASE-STUDY: PALESTINE

Emilie Combaz: Palestinian collective action for liberation since the end of the second Intifada

Alaa Tartir and Caroline Abu Sa'Da: From Food Security to Food sovereignty without a State, the case of Palestine.

Comments by Emmanuel Schäublin

COFFEE BREAK: 10H30-11H00

GENERAL DISCUSSIONS:

- Define the next steps (possibly with small working groups sketching research scenarios).
- Wrap up

PRACTICALIA:

LOCATION : Salle Jäggi – 4112 - Av. de l'Europe 20 (Building Miséricorde).

2nd floor. Use the main entrance, on the side Rue du Jura.

1700 Fribourg.

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SITE MISÉRICORDE (MIS)

