

Construction of expertise and production of knowledge: the case of a Swiss Association's Inter-Lebanese Dialogue Initiative

Since the end of the cold war, and more importantly in the last decade, extensive research has focused on the multidimensional approaches to conflict resolution and peacebuilding. These needs for research spurred from a conscious awareness that conflicts –protracted, internal ones– are not unilaterally-caused and only involving institutions and entities, but rather multidimensional and a result of struggles between individuals motivated by several mobilizing factors that lead to organized and formal (or not) violence in conflict-affected countries since 1990. As a result, several schools of thought have burgeoned in the field of peacebuilding, with different influences, conceptual frameworks, and practices, with one same aim; to build peace. Heavily inspiring conflict resolution policies, this has induced the design of a set of conflict resolution, conflict transformation, and peacebuilding techniques geared towards resolving conflicts in the most efficient way with the objective of building sustainable peace (Azar, 1990; Kelman, 1992; Fisher, 1997), understood as positive and negative (Galtung, 1969). The burgeoning and rather young concept of reconciliation appeared within the framework of the conflict transformation school, understood at its roots as the re-building of broken social relationships after a period of violence (Lederach, 1997). Similarly and in continuity to the task of building peace, ensuring reconciliation in its absolute sense brought about the concept of ‘Dialogue’ as one of its pillars, since “successful reconciliation between alienated groups cannot take place without an adequate degree of genuine dialogue” (Fisher, 2001: 28), thereby placing dialogue on the spectrum of conflict-to-peace transitions.

The underlying logic to understand “the other” generated a process with related outcomes, objectives, and specific practices (Montville, 1993), making dialogue one of the *techniques* of conflict resolution. These techniques have become ‘owned’ by an emerging group holding authority and legitimacy in working towards building peace, identified as ‘experts’ (Holmes and Marcus, 2005; Mosse, 2007). This has transformed the techniques into an instrument of expertise and an area of knowledge production. Through transfer of skills and knowledge (King, 2008),

the scene becomes only accessible to a certain group of legitimate experts identified as mediators, negotiators, or facilitators of dialogue, and in which certain actors participate, leading to a game of inclusion and exclusion, both of the methods to achieve peace and of the tackled issues at stake. These areas of expertise necessarily become subject to struggles of legitimacy and authority over the production of knowledge in the field of peacebuilding¹. Within this context, it seems that a “holistic ethnographic approach of the field of the professionals of peace (...) who -in one way of the other- claim expert authority in peacemaking” is lacking (Kosmatopoulos, 2010: 4-5). It is hence relevant and meaningful to enquire into these processes of expert legitimization and positioning, as well as the knowledge produced by the expertise.

Within this “global expert consensus” (Mosse, 2007) on how to resolve conflicts, the Middle East stands out as a region more or less resilient to the practices and discourses implemented by the peace ‘experts’. It has become an area of debate over the meanings and subsequent processes that should be utilized to build peace, often resultant from an essentialization of the “Arabs”, the “Muslims”, the “Christians of the middle east”, or other types of categories. The long-lasting Arab-Israeli conflict, coupled with the authoritarian state structures of most of the countries of the region and the geo-political situation since 2001 make it a challenge for the Middle East to find its place on the peace spectrum. Within this context, Lebanon appears as the country where the exponential increase in conflict resolution, peacebuilding, and reconciliation initiatives seems to be met with a worsening of the situation on the political and social levels. Twenty years after the end of its war, the country has not yet embarked on a genuine reconciliation process (Abi Ezzi, 2002) and therefore not yet reached a healthy stage of dealing with its violent past, which reverberates with the on-going political crisis and the constant need to resort to external alliances and internal allegiances to manage and resolve conflict, almost as a continuation of the violence of the past, in another way, in the present. In this context, ‘dialogue’ has become a password for all the delicate issues needing a consensual agreement between the political players. This has come to the happiness of the ‘experts’ of peacebuilding, who have not hesitated to land in the country whenever parties are in conflict.

¹ The concepts of peacemaking and peacebuilding will be used interchangeably in the text, relating to the same aim of bringing peace to society.

The present paper is based on an ‘Inter-Lebanese Dialogue Initiative’ (ILDI) spurred by the Association Suisse pour le Dialogue Euro-Arabo-Musulman (ASDEAM) in the midst of a critical political crisis in Lebanon in the year 2007. By grouping ‘Track II’, or second-tier, leaders around dialogue rounds in Switzerland, the ILDI hoped to offer the political representatives a framework to understand one of the most serious political crisis since the end of the war. The paper starts with a swift description of the ASDEAM; the context of its creation, and the construction of its credibility and legitimacy. It is followed by a narrative of the ILDI and the practices and discourses that were put into place throughout the process, still on-going to date. The identification of the ILDI as a conflict resolution technique resonates with the discourse on the imposition of a ‘global knowledge’ by what will become an organization of experts, through the relation between the design of the dialogue process on one part and the construction of the association as a provider of expertise and knowledge of peacebuilding and conflict resolution on the other.

In this sense, through an ethnographic account of the ASDEAM’s mechanisms of expertise², the paper analyses the process of knowledge production and dissemination transferred from the

² The emergence of “Para ethnography” (Holmes and Marcus, 2005) as a complementary field of classical ethnography sparked the methodological analysis of the case. In such *expert* domains, the ethnographer deals with new forms of analysis that redefine the relationship between him/her and the inquired subjects. In these cases, the latter could be considered as “intellectual partners in inquiry” rather than “others” or “counterparts”. Para-ethnography essentially deals with expert domains that present contradictions, exceptions, or facts that are fugitive, which should not be ignored for the profit of other more traditional analysis (Holmes and Marcus, 2005); these facts of para-ethnography help to shape the understanding of the social construct. It is the explanation of the practices used to recast the social reality and make it what it is. In the words of the authors, “we frame the Para-ethnographic from the standpoint of the way it produces a series of distinctive substantive, methodological, and theoretical questions as a means to enter the expertise” (Holmes and Marcus, 2005:241).

In this approach, the *experts*, treated as “counterparts” rather than “others”, become the door to access the field; “They (...) share broadly the same world of representation with us, and the same curiosity and predicament about constituting the social in our affinities” (Holmes and Marcus, 2005:250). The relationship I, as the researcher, built with the *experts* was based on an assumption that they should not be treated as “collateral colleagues”, as “natives”, or as “others”. In fact, we shared the same academic interests in several fields; I shared native similarities with some; and mutual connections in the academic world with others. My “subjects” could not be treated with the full *epistemological distance* required in classical ethnography. This last point should be stressed on, as I joined the association’s Committee as a regular member, therefore blurring the distance between my primary role as an “ethnographer” and the secondary as an “ASDEAM committee member”. With this in mind, the *experts* were treated as counterparts, as full rational thinking subjects within the “multi-sited” field itself, where I also found myself, and where I sometimes got “lost” (Holmes and Marcus, 2005). The research object/subject got formulated in a way that rather than analyzing the experts as thinking individuals themselves, the goal was to understand where they stood in the *frame* they had built, assimilated through the collaboration of the ethnographer in the project at the global scale. To complete this technique, I have aligned the ethnographic thought with the methodological concept of *grounded theory*, by which field observations and interpretations formulate the theoretical standpoint expressed

global vision of peacebuilding expertise to the local dynamics on the ground by the constructed discourse of the experts responding to the grantors, or “customers” (Kosmatopoulos, 2010) of their legitimacy and authority without responding to local realities and therefore having a minimal –if not null- impact on the situation on the ground.

I- Construction of a peacemaking association

ASDEAM is a not-for-profit, apolitical and non-confessional association founded in Geneva in June 2006. Its mission is threefold: (1) to organize colloquiums and conferences on themes pertaining to Islamic and Western fields³, (2) to raise funds and create a Foundation whose activities focus on observation, research and training in the field of Euro-Arab dialogue, and (3) to build on the Foundation’s external relations and capital and create a Graduate Institute of Islamic Studies in Geneva (*Institut Suisse de Hautes Etudes sur le Monde Islamique*) (ASDEAM, 2006). The ASDEAM’s founding principle rests on the assumption that there exists a grey zone between the “West” and the “Muslim-Arab world” forming an area of miscomprehension of the “other”. According to the association’s founding body members, this needs to be worked on from within as it is at the root of a conflict-prone behavior leading to the unease of peace processes. Hence, the mission of the association is to open up the debates on subjects pertaining to social, cultural or political issues that could be obstructing the way to a healthier style of conflict management, an opportunity which the neutral institutions of Switzerland could provide through the technique of dialogue. The spacio-religious ground of work of the ASDEAM is the Muslim-Arab world, where, according to the association, divergence of political and socio-cultural attributes with the “West” (or rather with Europe) is the most acute. It is assumed that by

by the author, albeit without the formulation of a theory *per se* (La Perrière, 2000). The goal of grounded theory thought is to frame the structural design of an object/subject of inquiry, and thereby extract the most relevant understanding of the (para)ethnographic method that leaves many relevant and interesting questions unanswered, calling for a more in-depth study of the case.

³ In October 2006, in the context of the post-Israeli offensive on Lebanon, the ASDEAM convened its first conference at the former Graduate Institute of International Studies, during which some founders of the association and professors of Law of the institute discussed the Israeli offensive’s legal causes, violations, ramifications and consequences. A next step was the creation of a research centre, “one or two months after the conference” according to the president.

identifying the issues at the root of conflict, and by increasing shared knowledge of one another in a round of dialogue, a momentum is created on the verge of conflict resolution.

➤ ASDEAM's *experts*: the quest for legitimacy

The majority of the founding members of the ASDEAM are not from the Arab or Muslim world. In fact, only 2 out of 6 founding members and 3 out of the 6 members of the actual committee are from the region, namely from Lebanon. Most of the members hold professorship and research positions at Swiss or Lebanese universities, in addition to past or current diplomatic statutes for some. Members of the Committee, at the time of foundation, comprised of (1) a former Swiss diplomat in the Middle East and lecturer at Université de Fribourg, (2) an author and researcher, founder of Al Jazeera Centre of Studies and Research, (3) a professor of Theology at Université de Genève, (4) a Professor at American University of Beirut and Invited Professor of Mathematics at Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne, (5) a Former Lebanese Ambassador to Switzerland, and (6) the Former Editor in Chief of Journal de Genève and member of the *Constituante de Genève*.

This aspect of ASDEAM's constituency has given the association a stronghold on the legitimacy field, as it is assumed that no one else than academics, intellectuals, and former diplomats are better able to understand and manage the issues at stake. The members of the ASDEAM perceive that, according to their experience and their academic distance from the issues, they are legitimate in their field of activities both towards their funders (UN organizations or the Swiss Government) and towards the groups they cater to (the 'alienated' and conflict-affected groups). The Vice President's *persona* and experience in the Middle East is, in the words of the president, a pillar of ASDEAM's expertise. He asserts that the academic and intellectual potential of ASDEAM is the main basis of its legitimacy in the field of peacemaking⁴. It is needless to say that the members are offering their expertise as volunteers for the association's projects because they *believe* in what they are doing. The association becomes a concentration of philanthropic intellectual experts, working for the "global good" of building peace.

⁴ President of the ASDEAM. interview with the author.

The commitment to ASDEAM's independence towards governments, especially the Swiss Government (the association's main donor), was reiterated during its creation. It has been considered, until today, as a central component of credibility in its field of activity, and a pillar of its positioning in the field⁵. In parallel, ASDEAM uses its Swiss identity to strengthen its position as a neutral and legitimate body; not only has Switzerland served as a host country of "dialogue" throughout Lebanese contemporary history (Lausanne 1982, Geneva 1983, and a very recent -and failed- one in 2010), but the constructed representation of the country as one of the few European countries that does not have a colonial past or "hegemonic" ambitions, as well as a neutral identity, gives Switzerland the credit of authentic interest in sharing its experience of dealing with diversity without trying to impose it as a universal model (ASDEAM, 2008).

It is our assumption that the construction of the ASDEAM as an organization providing its expertise to 'locals' represents the latter as unknowledgeable actors of the process, who are not aware of their need for such an expertise on issues pertaining to their own problems or are not able to solve them in what becomes identified as a "correct" way. By opening up a space of "liberty and thought" for all the crisis which could benefit from Switzerland's institutions and intellectual environments (ASDEAM, 2006), understood as a potential way of dealing with issues to build peace, these organizations of experts come into the playground and set the rules through backed discourses of legitimacy, independence, and credibility.

Furthermore, containing the association's work to the Muslim-Arab world defines, frames, and limits its reach to a specific geographical zone. The sole name, let alone the personal trajectories of the experts, calls for an ethnocentric critic; it seems that the definitions of what 'Europe', 'Arab', and 'Muslim' is, are missing according to their typology. Classical essentialization is hard to avoid with such categorizations. ASDEAM is a Swiss association focusing on the 'Arab' and/or 'Muslim' world in what could be called a 'European' standpoint. This ambiguity would not have been striking had the ASDEAM's first project been different than one focusing on Lebanon, an Arab but not Muslim country, leaving behind all 'Europeanness' of the approach by having a Swiss-backed inter-Lebanese dialogue on Swiss grounds as a first peacemaking

⁵ President of the ASDEAM, interview with the author.

initiative as a response to global needs of creating such institutions to comply with the discourses of peacebuilding.

➤ Methodological underpinnings of ASDEAM's activities

ASDEAM's knowledge production and dissemination method is three-fold: firstly, the committee gathers to identify the issues at hand and the pertinence of their tackling. In an informal setting, the members brainstorm and confront their views on issues like their involvement in the Arab-Israeli conflict, or most recently the effect of the Minaret referendum on Switzerland's relations with the Middle East. Discussions are shaped by the members' experience in the field, so as much as the way the issues are tackled⁶.

After having identified potential projects, a second step of knowledge production shapes the ideas into proposals for funding sharing the same form of problematization; they start with a 'preliminary finding' that raises several issues worthy of analysis, followed by a conceptualization of the 'problem' and the best appropriate 'methodology' to tackle it. Results planned to trickle down from the approach include the planning of what is generally referred to as "expert seminars" or "colloquiums gathering experts of international standing" (ASDEAM, 2008) during which "workshops with international experts" (ASDEAM, 2008) identify and confront political and social viewpoints with conceptual frameworks drawn from the participants' knowledge bases.

The last step of the approach is the publication of results in a 'white book', which retraces the findings of the activities and outlines recommendations for efficient tackling of the issues (ASDEAM, 2008). In this last step, ASDEAM shifts knowledge ownership to the relevant parties. As mentioned earlier, the vested knowledge is shaped by personal trajectories of the actors in the process of production; they have definite control over typologies of project propositions and over the articulation of knowledge. The dynamic the experts create in the production phase is subject to struggles of authority and legitimacy as much as the ongoing process of dissemination and reception of knowledge is added to the already existing social networks on the local level.

⁶ Based on personal observations during committee meetings and general assembly

The strategies outlined are part of the ASDEAM's techniques to assert its authority in the field. The methodology used to undertake activities and the claims backing up the construction of the reiterated legitimacy, credibility and independence of the association are considered the most appropriate for the type of work to be done. Opening up a space for tackling issues – a way to solve conflict in their perspective- becomes a participatory research/understanding issue that ends in a set of policy-relevant recommendations “to consolidate and disseminate the experience” (ASDEAM, 2009), which should ideally lay the ground for their implementation by local representatives. In the process of initiating and mediating the Inter-Lebanese Dialogue Initiative, ASDEAM has constructed a system of representations of both Switzerland and Lebanon and backed it up with a recourse to legitimizing discourses such as those of the *neutrality* of Switzerland, the *expertise* of the mediators and conference guests, and the *pertinence* of their methodology.

2- The Inter-Lebanese Dialogue Initiative; ethnographic narrative of dialogue for peace.

The dialogue initiative led by ASDEAM is one of the few to have been initiated in a context of crisis when state institutions were blocked, the presidency vacant, and no communication between political opponents. The Inter-Lebanese Dialogue Initiative (ILDI) is noteworthy to be analyzed in the framework of such dialogue projects. Although dialogue rounds are not a new instrument of Lebanon's contemporary post-war politics, the initiative stands out as a relatively new phenomenon, since its inception spurred from the initiative of the 'outsider' institution, and not the opposite.

At the time of the creation of the Dialogue project, in 2007, the 2006 Israeli offensive's consequences were the main characteristics of the context, making the internal political situation in Lebanon unstable; the political scene was divided in two rival camps (the Government-led “14 March” movement and the Hezbollah-led “8 March” movement). In late November 2006, the resignation of six ministers from the cabinet raised a controversy about the failing representativity and legitimacy of the government, leading the opposition to require the resignation of the Prime Minister and subsequent formation of a Government of National Unity.

As the government did not comply with the opposition's demands, the latter organized a major protest in downtown Beirut on December 1st 2006. This political move was organized in the form of an open-ended permanent sit-in in the heart of the city facing the Government's chamber. At the time of the formulation of the Lebanese Initiative by ASDEAM, the sit-in had begun and the two rival camps were engaged in a war of discourse and allegations.

The Initiative aspired to promote peace in a time of political turmoil⁷. The project's mission and objectives got approved in January 2007 by both Swiss and Lebanese governments. It was a matter of weeks before the project received most of the funding from the Swiss Department of Foreign Affairs. Private Lebanese banks provided the rest of the funds since the ASDEAM refused to be identified as funded by the Lebanese government. In the words of its president, ASDEAM's role was confined to generating knowledge of the situation by confronting the root causes of the conflict, in an effort to understand them, through genuine dialogue representative of the Lebanese political, religious and social spheres. Being at the root of all approaches to sustainable peace, a round of dialogue between different parties was needed, and the term "Inter-Lebanese Dialogue Initiative" (*L'Initiative de Dialogue Inter-Libanais*) was coined to start the project.

Far from promoting reconciliation or the signature of a peace agreement, the ILDI sought to translate the political divergences prevailing into debates fueled by a deep and critical analysis of the principal issues at stake. In comparison to most dialogue initiatives held on the conflict in Lebanon, this one focused on the issues at the roots of the current crisis in the country, namely the forms of power-sharing, the type of democracy, and a discussion of the Lebanese social contract rather than the reasons why the Government and the opposition were not complying each other's demands and causing an open-ended crisis met with a freezing of the state institutions. It did not claim to solve the crisis but rather to understand it. It was assumed that by understanding the issues and generating knowledge about them, it would help tackle them efficiently. ASDEAM was offering the protagonists a platform to discuss their grievances through 'joint brainstorming sessions', in which it positioned itself as an 'active facilitator'. In

⁷ The following narrative of the Inter-Lebanese Dialogue Initiative as presented is based on ASDEAM's president's perspective.

line with the general legitimization techniques of the ASDEAM, the underlying assumption of the relevance of the project was based on the fact that it was taking place on Swiss grounds, that the principle of neutrality was thus granted and therefore decisive in the legitimization of ASDEAM's role in the Lebanese Initiative (ASDEAM, 2008).

ASDEAM identified the project as a 'Track II diplomacy', as it gathered, in the most representative way, academics, lawyers and advisors to politicians who had an influence on 'Track I' leaders, but no direct power of decision making⁸. The methodology of dialogue and the choice of the actors were assumed to be appropriate for the type of discussions to be held. Four rounds of dialogue were planned to take place over the course of a year in a rather luxurious setting of the Montreux area in Switzerland; the Mont Pèlerin⁹. In line with the goal of the initiative, which sought to understand the crisis by looking at its core issues rather than resolving it, the objectives of the meetings were to delve into the structures of the political situation obstructing the efficient and sustainable resolution of the current political issues. Several key points of discussion were structured around the Lebanese political system; these were namely looking at the implementation of the Taëf accords and the renewal of the *Pact of Living Together* to be able to discuss the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, the relations with Syria, the consequences of the 2006 war, and the issue of Lebanon's strategy of Defense.

Three meetings took place in Switzerland; during the first "ice breaking" meeting in April 2007, the participants agreed that the present political deadlock resulted from a number of issues which had to be discussed. Typically, during that meeting, members of parties loyal to the government met with their counterparts from the opposition. In an informal setting, discussions were carried

⁸ These included :

Ali Fayyad, Professor of Sociology at the Lebanese University and Director of the Centre for Strategic Studies and Documentation; Ali Hamdan, Advisor for International Affairs to Mr. Nabih Berri (Speaker of Parliament and Head of Amal Party); Aref el Abed, Advisor to Prime Minister Fouad Siniora; Rola Noureddine, Advisor to Prime Minister Fouad Siniora; Farid ElKhazen, Professor of Political Science at American University of Beirut, member of the Free Patriotic Movement headed by Mr Aoun; Ghassan Mokhaiber; Lawyer and Member of Parliament, President of the Human Rights Commission and member of the Free Patriotic Movement headed by Mr Aoun; Raghid el Solh, Political Scientist and Director of the Research Centre on Democracies in Oxford; Ghaleb Mahmasani, Lawyer and Member of the Commission for the Reform of the Electoral Law; Antoine Messarrah, Professor at Saint Joseph University, President of the Lebanese Political Science Association, and Director of the Observatory for Permanent Civil Peace; Abbas al Halabi, former Judge and Professor at Saint Joseph University; Joseph Nehme, Lawyer and Chief of External Relations within the Lebanese Forces Party.

⁹ An interesting point to note is that they all stayed in the hotel and had further informal encounters beyond the official dialogue sessions, most certainly unaccounted for in the official results of the ILDI.

out, albeit superficially. The sole fact that they addressed each other was sufficient enough for ASDEAM to call it a success as both parties were in an open political confrontation at the time in the country. They agreed to the idea that sensitive issues were resulting in the present political deadlock, and that they had to be discussed. A principal defining characteristic of the meetings was their discretion; no media or journalists were allowed and no public statement was made after the rounds, in order, as ASDEAM put it, to insure authentic exchange of viewpoints. Albeit the discretion during the meetings, the organizers of the rounds (notably the Vice President of the ASDEAM (and former diplomat)) were interviewed by the Swiss media, and highlighted the urgency of the initiative, the importance of holding it in the bucolic cadre of Swiss mountains, and the good spirit exhibited by the participants. In the articles, the main highlighted result of the first meeting was the success in agreeing on a future Lebanon, on the importance of rethinking the social pact and the ways to manage the confessional diversity in a non-violent manner. Moreover, a point of agreement was also the need to reinforce, or build, strong state institutions in the framework of a statebuilding initiative¹⁰. In parallel to such articles, and without naming the participants, one of founders of the ASDEAM and hosts of the ILDI wrote an article in *La Tribune de Genève* entitled “The New Lebanon is taking form in Switzerland” on May 10th 2007.

The second meeting held in June 2007 revolved around the Taef Agreement, the *Pact of Living Together*, and Lebanon’s external relations. It resulted in a joint final report covered by both the Swiss and Lebanese media in which participants’ views and findings were summarized, albeit without retracing them to the ones concerned. ASDEAM stressed the fact that the report was a joint product stemming from all participants’ viewpoints and paving the way for a third meeting which took place in Konolfingen –on the outskirts of Bern- on August 17th to 19th. During this meeting, discussions consisted of the Lebanese-Syrian Relations after Syrian withdrawal in April 2005, as well as the concept of Consensual Democracy on which rests the Lebanese system with an inspiring look at Switzerland’s model of managing differences in a peaceful manner. Following the same methodology of dialogue than the two preceding rounds, the third meeting was concluded with, again, a joint text, which identified the points of agreement and disagreement between parties. Swissinfo’s journalists interviewed the organizers of the rounds

¹⁰ Swissinfo, “Les partis Libanais dialoguent en Suisse”.
<http://www.humanrights-geneva.info/spip.php?article1556> (last consulted 07.06.2010)

who did not hide their satisfaction; one of them asserted that it was indeed a success compared to the failed dialogue proposals of France, Saudi Arabia, and the Arab League, insisting on the fact that “it really is something that Lebanese agreed on a unified text”¹¹. All participants agreed that it had to be followed by a fourth meeting during which the Defense Strategy would be discussed; panels were planned to tackle the political principles and objectives of Defense, the roles of the army and the resistance, the question of the Palestinian refugee camps, and the strategy for integrating Hezbollah’s forces into the army. In addition, ASDEAM planned to enlarge the spectrum of participants by including representatives from the army. Mirroring the seriousness of the political deadlock, this fourth meeting was hard to put into being. Following the third formal dialogue round, three ‘informal’ meetings took place in Beirut during which efforts were gathered by ASDEAM’s members to put the fourth dialogue round in place. Unfortunately the latter never took place; ASDEAM mentions the refusal of one of the parties to tackle the question. During that same year, still hoping the round would sometime get back on track, the events of May 2008 (the most violent since the end of the war) and the subsequent Doha Agreement changed the course of events on the political scene and signaled the limitations of dialogue and the power of high-level political pacts in Lebanese politics.

In line with ASDEAM’s dissemination methods, one main objective of the rounds of dialogue was to produce a ‘white book’ detailing a framework of action in light of the reforms of the political system needed to build a sustainable peace in Lebanon. The United Nations Development Programme has expressed its interest in ASDEAM’s initiative and has been funding the publication project. This ‘white book’, stemming from the main actors of the process, backed by a *neutral* country, and facilitated by *legitimate experts*, is considered by ASDEAM, until today, as the last step of the project and an important stepping-stone for future dialogue to be held. According to the experts, it would constitute a basis of understanding between the Lebanese protagonists, resulting from a process of identification of zones of agreement and zones of disagreement on which to build an efficient negotiation or broker a “just” accord in light of future events¹². Unfortunately today, in June 2010, the ‘white book’ has

¹¹ Swissinfo, “Les efforts pour pacifier le Liban se concrétisent”.
http://www.swissinfo.ch/fre/index/Les_efforts_pour_pacifier_le_Liban_se_concretisent.html?cid=6075634 (last consulted 07.06.2010)

¹² President of the ASDEAM, interview with the author.

yet to overcome its production phase that is encountering much resistance from the participants' allegiance networks. Furthermore, with the changing political conditions since 2007, the dynamics of the political landscape are changing so rapidly that certain issues are too sensitive to tackle while others are still part of the 'discourse' on the Lebanese impediment to peace. A commonality is, nevertheless, the recurring patterns of repetitions of certain discourses overly heard, such as the *Pact of Living Together*, the need for *Consensual Democracy*, the need to *strengthen the state*, and to *build efficient institutions*.

3- Dialogue as a knowledge production technique; dialogue for peacemaking or for the peacemakers?

The technique of engaging belligerents in dialogue is not recent, since high-level negotiations have historically been the principal source of conflict settlement. However, the need for inclusive and genuine dialogue with the objective of long-term conflict resolution is rather new. It is seen as the creation of a space for letting go of political pressures, thereby permitting a resolution of issues through authentic exchange and solutions building. In this sense, a principal outcome of dialogue becomes the increased *understanding* between members belonging to conflicting groups; "The emphasis in dialogue is on increasing shared knowledge and building trust among the participants, as opposed to developing options to influence public opinion or affect policymaking" (Fisher, 2001: 30).

Most scholars of peacebuilding agree on the fact that engaging in genuine dialogue is a pillar of reconciliation, where genuine dialogue is reached "when parties to the conflict come together to engage in conversation with the intent of reaching agreement" (Abu Nimer et al., 2006: 341). Dialogue rounds are being associated with the necessary *tools* to achieve objectives of peace and reconciliation. By bringing together different actors around negotiation tables, it has become a process of identification of zones of agreement and of disagreement, followed by their classification into categories according to frameworks of reference to identify potentialities of resolution of the issues - such as, for example, Switzerland's model of consensual democracy as a potential model in discussions on the Lebanese system during the ILDI. Building on the studies of Montville (1993), Lederach (1997), and Kelman (1992), Ronald Fisher (1997) thoroughly

developed the concept of Interactive Conflict Resolution as a technique involving conflict analysis and dialogue with the aim of promoting peace and reconciliation between past belligerents. Other studies outline the characteristics of such dialogue processes, sometimes referred to as “workshops” or “negotiations tables” (Azar, 1990; Fisher, 1997; Kelman, 1992). The overarching similarity shared by these techniques is their potential effect of conciliation, but most importantly the required *expertise* to enter the game; these mechanisms of conflict resolution are mastered by a specific group of people. They have produced, within the “knowledge society” (Hernandez, 2006), a sphere of expertise only accessible to a certain group of legitimate experts identified as mediators, negotiators, or facilitators of dialogue, and in which certain actors participate, leading to a game of inclusion and exclusion, both of the actors and of the issues at stake, illustrated with the case of the ASDEAM’s only dialogue project to date.

In fact, the characteristics of the ASDEAM’s dialogue initiative astonishingly resemble those of the *Interactive Conflict Resolution* processes described by Ronald Fisher in *Justice, Reconciliation and Coexistence* edited by Mohammed Abu Nimer (2001). As a model of third-party consultation, these so-called “Conflict analysis and problem solving workshops” are designed by expert mediators with the objective of reuniting representatives of the political spectrum of a society, coming “with the knowledge and blessing of their respective leadership”, around a table of dialogue, in the spirit of the ILDI’s participants. The ultimate goal of the analysis, in the words of Fisher (2001: 29), is the “increased understanding, mutual realizations, and a broadening of thinking which will allow for joint problem solving directed toward peacebuilding activities or alternative ways of dealing with the conflict”. These events apply a flexible agenda, and are mediated and moderated, if necessary, by the third-party team, whose members are “chosen for their knowledge of conflict processes and their ability to facilitate small-group interaction”; in our case they choose themselves, and furthermore, they build authority and legitimacy around their position so that the choice becomes the only possible one. These meetings usually occur in a “private (quiet but not secret) manner, free from the glare of publicity or official scrutiny”, and most importantly “strict confidentiality is required, specifically that no statements made in the workshop will be attributed afterward to particular individuals” (2001: 30).

In the spirit of the Interactive Conflict Resolution dialogue processes, ASDEAM's 'white book' carries the task to put on paper and institutionalize the results of the dialogue rounds; namely those "changes in the thinking, feelings, and behavior of participants" (Fisher, 2001: 31). Through the dissemination of such an output detailing the post-dialogue action framework, "it is generally hoped that misperceptions will be corrected, attitudes will be improved, positive emotions toward the other side will be rekindled or developed, and that a cooperative orientation will begin to re-emerge or be established" (2001: 31).

In this sense, ASDEAM's strategy of creating a dialogue initiative concurs with contemporary approaches to peacebuilding in Western conflict resolution mechanisms. As an aggregation of individual thoughts, values, and beliefs, the leading institution and the process it has brought about have touched on sensitive issues historically and socio-politically rooted in a dialogue framework, one of the "regimes of truth" of the contemporary "global expert consensus" on the methods needed to achieve lasting peace (Mosse, 2007). The issues at stake are played on the local level in a 'globalized' view of how they *should* be dealt with (through the dialogue round) to result in the way they *should* be (a peaceful society) (Gupta and Ferguson, 2002). Our discussion in this sense is centered on this specific part of the technique dictated by the global discourse on conflict resolution. If the ILDI is a replication of a conceptual framework, there is reasonable evidence to assert that the ILDI's representation does not get appropriated by the actors of the process, and therefore not owned as a local initiative or a knowledge production initiative. Rather, the ILDI serves as the institutionalization of discourses and practices overly seen on the Lebanese scene.

➤ Knowledge, power and the experts

A very authoritative and expertise-oriented "knowledge discourse" has been qualifying the new mechanisms of development aid and strategies for the past decade, to the point that in 1996, the president of the World Bank "declared the aspiration to 'become the Knowledge Bank'" (King, 2008: 118). With this new discourse emerged the need to actively engage actors in the South in their own development, illustrated in the World Bank 1998 report that states that "For know-how that remains tacit, active participation by developing countries is needed in all phases of knowledge creation- for example, in project design and in building new knowledge bases" (World Bank, 1998: 140). In an analysis of the knowledge for development/knowledge for

developers nexus and the processes of knowledge sharing, Kenneth King (1998: 122) argues that a perverse effect of this discourse is the lack of genuine participation by local actors; the part of “knowledge sharing” that the Northern and global aid agencies eventually comes to mean “accessing the knowledge that the agency has already synthesized and sorted”. Thus, the *knowledge of developers* comes at the expense of the *knowledge for development*, in a larger political frame of struggles for expertise, power and legitimacy.

An analogy might thus be drawn between the knowledge for development and the knowledge for peacebuilding, both powerful discourses containing the concept of assistance to a local entity by a set of actors embodied into people with the name of *experts* (Ferguson, 1990; Escobar, 1995). Located in a struggle between *knowledge for peacemaking* and *knowledge of peacemakers*, the knowledge that should be transferred to the locals on the ground is lost in the processes of legitimization and positioning of the experts through their production and dissemination of ‘expert-specific knowledge’ neither relevant to the needs on the ground, nor authentically participatory. This knowledge is created, produced, found, and processed during the entire duration of the ‘making of peace’ brought about by the dialogue round.

The Oxford Dictionary (1978: 748) defines knowledge as a) “expertise, intellectual acquaintance with, (...) fact or truth, or condition of understanding”, b) what is known in a particular field, “the fact of recognizing as something known, or known about”, and c) “The fact of knowing a thing; (...) familiarity gained by experience of a fact or a situation”. Regardless of the method used to reach the agreement during the dialogue, the leeway accorded to the component of claims that become those zones of agreement or disagreement between the proponents is in itself one of the forms of knowledge that is of our interest. Therefore, in the case of the ILDI, knowledge is created when certain understandings produce claims which become asserted as valid through a set of practices and techniques, and consequently knowledge becomes the meaning of the claims produced on the crisis and the Lebanese system throughout the process of the ILDI with the specific aim of opening up the space for debate and enabling an understanding through the identification of issues. The claims produced construct and frame *the way things are*. It is therefore the establishment of a *truth* about the Lebanese case that serves as a zone of knowledge production, in parallel to the framework in which this knowledge is created and carried out,

which constitutes in itself a form of knowledge about the specific techniques necessary to reach peace.

A more global view of ASDEAM's project brings to light two types of knowledge: the first one is the *global* knowledge on the *process* discussed earlier, namely the one that asserts that the technique of dialogue will help understand the issues and tackle them efficiently, and eventually insures the transition from "conflict" to "peace". This knowledge shapes the structure of the expert-related project. The second one is the *local* knowledge on the *content* emerging from the process, precisely those rigid and affirmative claims that are produced with regard to the problem at stake. These two categories are illustrated in a Habermasian-inspired analysis of Valeria Hernandez (2006: 277) who contends that, within the Development (or peacebuilding, in our case) apparatus, there is no transfer or transmission of knowledge in a proper "knowledge of the self". Rather, this knowledge becomes both "an ideology" (the way to achieve peace is through this type of dialogue) and "a motor of production" (the discourses and claims produced about the Lebanese impediments to peace). The voice of the local population not only goes unheard, but is represented by a restricted and restrictive elite, which integrates both the ideology and the motor of production discourses for its own power interests.

In the eyes of the experts, the ILDI's process departed from the assumption that Lebanon is "profoundly divided on confessional lines", and that if Lebanese representative 'Track II' leaders met on peaceful Swiss soil, "away from the Beirut cauldron and identity-related passions"¹³

¹³ The translation is personal. It is based on a passage of "Le Liban nouveau prend forme en Suisse", an article written in may 2007 by Antoine Maurice, one of the founding members of the ASDEAM and organizers of the ILDI ;

L'intuition directrice de cette rencontre était que les interlocuteurs libanais, retirés pour quelques heures du chaudron beyrouthin et des passions identitaires, s'essayeraient, sans autre mandat que leur bonne volonté, à dresser l'inventaire des questions aiguës en se tournant vers le long terme. Ce pas de retrait permettrait d'atténuer les divergences immédiates et d'en faciliter la résolution. Le pari s'est révélé fécond. Les invités ont réussi à se parler pendant deux jours et à parcourir les sujets délicats sans tabou ni éclats. Une question centrale est celle de la relation avec la Syrie qui exerce depuis des années une tutelle sur le Liban et arbitre entre les factions politiques. La communauté internationale la soupçonne d'avoir commandité l'assassinat de Rafic Hariri, ancien premier ministre libanais. La tutelle de Damas oppose frontalement le gouvernement en place et le Hezbollah chiite, allié de la Syrie et principal combattant contre l'invasion israélienne. L'idée, soutenue par la plupart des invités — y compris l'interlocuteur du Hezbollah — étant que ce rôle de tutelle devrait pouvoir être remplacé par les institutions élues et légitimes du Liban.

(Maurice, 2007), they could then engage in authentic dialogue about the present state of their nation. During such a process, built on such heavy and consequent claims, several authoritative conclusions were reached, namely that Lebanon needs to rethink the *Pact of Living Together*, that consensual democracy models shall be presented to Lebanon (such as that of Switzerland, or drawing on examples of Northern Ireland and South Africa), that the Taef agreement shall be fully implemented, that the relations with Syria should be reflected on, and that the issue of Hezbollah's armament was the most pressing one and the most challenging to tackle. Most importantly, a principal conclusion of the ILDI rested, in the words of one of the organizers, in the belief that firstly, "Lebanon can and should exist without falling back into a new civil war" (Maurice, 2007), and that secondly, an institutional body –responding to the need to strengthen the state institutions' capacities to manage conflicts- namely a Constitutional Council, should be properly founded and strengthened.

In consequence, the Lebanese predicament to peace becomes 'normalized' within what was called the 'Inter-Lebanese Dialogue Initiative', referring to Foucault's theoretical neologism of knowledge/power that, when identifying, qualifying, and classifying issues, they become 'normalized' in the 'order of things', eventually becoming a method of *governmentality*. In "The Archaeology of Knowledge" (1972), Foucault enquires into the organization of societies through the processes of identification, mastering, classification and rationalization of 'things' into established 'orders' through 'statements'. He follows this with a subsequent analysis of the institutions and practices that are built on this specific knowledge. With a desire to understand the notion of relations of power, the scholar developed a theory of power highlighting the practices, techniques and procedures that make power apparent. This led him to define power as not something that is acquired but something that becomes visible when exercised (Foucault, 1982), because of its presence in all types of relationships. Through the understanding of power as something that is exercised and omnipresent appeared the knowledge/power dialectic and the concept of *Governmentality*, a neologism understood as the government of rationalities (Gordon et al., 1991), more precisely as the techniques that serve to conduct the conduct of mentalities: "It is the acknowledgement that government is intrinsically dependent upon particular ways of

knowing (...) Governmentality, therefore, is a reference to those processes through which objects are rendered amenable to intervention and regulation by being formulated in a particular conceptual way” (Townley, 1993: 520). Once an idea is conceptualized and formulated into a claim, knowledge about it is created and translated into conduct through powerful structural means, mainly through discourse. Both power and knowledge exist in a diachronic relationship. Once knowledge is created, it provides a space for the operationalization of power. Similarly, power produces knowledge, as Foucault (1977: 194) asserts: “In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production”, where, according to the scholar, “‘Truth’ is to be understood as a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation and operation of statements” (Gordon, 1980: 133).

4- ASDEAM as a product and producer of *governmentality*

The state, regime, and country that are created through the process belong to the production of knowledge, just as much as the same knowledge then reinforces the process of production. The previous discussion on knowledge production and the knowledge/power relationship leads us to enquire into the role of the expert in such a case, and the role of the ASDEAM as the expert organization. The expert is not only characterized by his name and his position in the process, but by the power he has over knowledge production, which is to categorize, divide, identify, and solve problems insolvable or unidentifiable were it not for his presence. He has the power to name, and, through his authority and expertise, to actually create the object he is talking about, in an almost undisputable framework of action since his ultimate goal is to build peace. Going one step further, Kosmatopoulos (2010: 7) draws a parallel between the peace mediator and priests who both exert “nothing more than a promise to bring about earthly peace to the consumers or guide them towards divine peace respectively”. Contending the double-governmentality in place within ASDEAM’s mediation, the experts exert an influential impact on both the processes of construction of the structure of the dialogue in itself and the conceptualization of the problem, with a subsequent solutions building.

➤ The choice of dialogue as a transition from conflict to peace

One important aspect of the ILDI is that it was not the principal objective of ASDEAM upon its creation. In fact, ASDEAM's initial motivations were to spur a general debate in Switzerland about the Islamic-European divergence, which got refused by the funders due to the "lack of focus and precision of the subject"¹⁴. The ILDI became a "secondary" option constructed to fill the gap of the DFAD's refusal of their initial project – thereby becoming a response to the funders' requirements. Consequently, in the context of the Lebanese crisis and the presence of Lebanese and "Lebanon-familiar" experts within the ASDEAM, and drawing on the needs of the moment, the opportunity to engage in Dialogue was seen as the best solution to invest their expertise in Lebanon in a secure, strong, and relevant way. The underlying reflection was that it would benefit all actors; Switzerland for its role in neutral conflict resolution atmospheres, the locals for the pressing need for mediation, and the experts themselves for self-realization and further embedding of their authority. This need to cater to both the needs of its funders and the needs of its expertise receivers constitute a point of disillusion and, ironically, dis-legitimacy of both the organization and the process.

The knowledge produced within these mechanisms is therefore inherently tied to the funder's requirements, but also and more importantly to the "consumers' interests" (Kosmatopoulos, 2010) who, indirectly, voice their interests in such mediations, or to the least accept their organization without resistance. It seems that these same experts producing knowledge on the situation are actually catering to their local 'non experts' participants, pleasing some and obeying to others in order to secure their authoritative productions; leading us to assert that "The need of the (...) experts for access to all parties involved in order to produce authoritative analysis and realistic recommendations for all is a decisive blow to its independence from the consumers" (Kosmatopoulos, 2010: 19).

➤ The identification of 'relevant' issues for knowledge transfer

The main issues the initiative planned to look at were crucial and highly political ones focusing on the root understanding of the Lebanese social contract and the Lebanese state. The underlying

¹⁴ President of the ASDEAM, interview with the author.

representation behind the concepts of the state is a model of Weberian state as the solution to the issues, in conjunction with the discourses on authentic dialogue as a peace instrument. Regardless of the fact that these issues must be addressed such as the burgeoning of a new social pact (Beydoun, 2007), constitutional reform (Salam, 2007), or a new power-sharing formulae (Kerr, 2007), it is central to note that, in continuity with all the “National Dialogue” projects having taken place since the end of the war, there is no mention of the reasons at the root of those specific issues, born out of a very ambiguous silence on the country’s past. Neither ASDEAM’s proposal for dialogue and ILDI’s summary tackles these subjects, nor past external mediations or internal negotiations. Those are namely the historicity of the civil war, the unresolved question of the disappeared, the question of intra-Lebanese reconciliation, and the unhealthy politics of amnesia chosen by the government in 1990. In short, the principal and fundamental issues constituting a mismanagement of the country’s violent past, which stand at the root of the need for dialogue, and constitute the principal reason of the reproduction of conflictual dynamics in the country according to scholars (Makdisi, 2006; Chrabieh, 2008). This lightens (sometimes even discredits) all the ‘Lebanese national dialogue’ projects, making them zones of repetition of claims, reproduction of knowledge, and, most importantly, reproduction of silence around crucial issues at the roots of all political impediments to peace in the country. In effect, contested pasts and memories can easily lead to heavy silences in uncontested frameworks of dealing with conflict such as dialogue processes. It is believed that only through going further than the policy of amnesia forced upon society will be able to generate opportunities for authentic, inclusive and relevant dialogue. Thus, an important epistemological questioning of the “specific” issues that make up the Lebanese crisis was lost in translation between catering to some needs and asserting legitimacy and authority. The evidence shows that the production of discourses by the experts serves as categories for the implementation of global practices and does not induce a dynamic of change, let alone respond to local realities.

After the May 2008 events, the subsequent signing of the Doha Agreement and the election of President Michel Suleiman signaled the strength of high-level political pacts in the Lebanese system. It has led ASDEAM to informally “pass on” the legacy of the three dialogue rounds to the presidency, as the newly elected president was seen as a neutral arbitrary political figure. Unfortunately, almost two years later, the same issues have not been resolved; the president has initiated a National Dialogue initiative only three months ago, in March 2010, during which the

same issues are tackled, and the same will be ignored. It only reproduces certain schemes that have been overly seen during Lebanese dialogue rounds. Lebanese ‘experts’ call for a different approach to National Dialogue, one that focuses on issues more fundamental than those carried during the ILDI (Salem, 2008). Lebanese peace activists at a peace conference in Cyprus in 2009 have reiterated the need to change the outlook of dialogue processes and carry a “more efficient and straightforward dialogue”; one that “shows a more practical, inclusive, and pragmatic approach, that integrates social and economic matters and reduces pressure and alienation on mediators and participants” (Lebanese Foundation for Permanent Civil Peace, 2009). Furthermore, they reiterate that “Lebanon needs to provide remedy to the ‘ills’ of its memory by facing its own history (...), that no civil peace is possible without trying to tackle traumas in order to deal with them from within (...)”, and that “by rereading Lebanese dialogue papers, it is clear that there is repetition as though some things were ‘chewed’ and the researcher is bored” (Lebanese Foundation for Permanent Civil Peace, 2009).

The Intra-Lebanese dialogue initiative has possibly contributed to keeping a level of interaction between rival camps during deadlocks – and maybe avoided a resurgence of the internal conflict – nevertheless, ASDEAM has reproduced the same dynamic as past dialogue rounds, and failed to add value through an innovative project. Although well-thought and timely, and while the initiative might have a peacebuilding potential, the knowledge produced by the institution did not induce a dynamic of change and did not operate on the ground because it essentially lagged with the pace of the local scene’s dynamics and addressed issues that were not at the root of the need for dialogue.

Conclusion

The paper has outlined the case of a peacebuilding project put in place in 2007 by the Association Suisse pour le Dialogue Euro-Arabo-Musulman (ASDEAM) in the form of an Inter-Lebanese Dialogue Initiative (ILDI). It has presented the mechanisms of construction of a peacemaking association and its positioning as an organization of experts, notably through the experience and professionalism of its constituency, the commitment of the association to independence from government coupled with its Swiss identity, and the relevance of its methodological approach to peace.

In fact, the ASDEAM was constructed on a discourse of expertise responding to both the institutional requirements of funders and the perceived needs local populations for such initiatives. Coupled with the conceptual underpinnings of the field of conflict resolution, ASDEAM has rendered its account authoritative by backing its methodology and network of expertise with discourses of neutrality, legitimacy, independence and relevance. This has induced the construction of the ILDI within a regime of truth specific to conflict resolution mechanisms and thereby concurrent with relations of power within this framework. In this context, the ILDI was born out of a first strand of knowledge belonging to the discipline of conflict resolution and peacebuilding governing the truth around the way to build peace. The latter asserts that dialogue is one of the techniques leading to peace, and several models developed around this subject touch upon the ways to secure legitimacy, to build expertise, and render accounts authoritative with the aim of building peace.

The Inter-Lebanese Dialogue Initiative, pride project of the ASDEAM, was initiated as a second-tier dialogue initiative assembling representatives of the Lebanese political landscape in a bucolic setting of the Swiss mountains during time of political crisis. The main aim of the ILDI was to initiate dialogue between opponents with the hope of increasing understanding and generating knowledge on issues at the root of the political crisis. Through discussion on ‘root issues’ of the Lebanese systems, three rounds of dialogue were axed around the social pact of *Living Together*, the power sharing system and the concept of *Consensual democracy*, the country’s exterior relations and notably those ambiguous Lebanese-Syrian relations, and the estoppel by silence issue of the defense strategy and Hezbollah’s armament. Although no tangible results were seen after the rounds (worse, the May 2008 events signaled their end), the organizers applauded the sole fact that the dialogue was able to take action in the form of a joint document, one more proof that the Lebanese are able to go beyond confessional identities and coexist. Such statements, coming from experts, do not go without consequence.

In effect, the ASDEAM’s expertise produced a sort of ILDI-specific “local” knowledge, which, through the nods of expertise, was born out of the claims produced by the experts and their chosen participants. The relations of expertise, coupled with the needs of the local ‘customers’ for their expertise, produced claims in continuity with the discipline forming the framework of action. Although local-specific, these claims were far from being localized since, by definition,

they were the result of an exclusionary debate. Instead of responding to local realities, the claims normalized the crisis, and failed to resonate in the local landscape. This in turn did not induce any further step towards a more healthy conflict management system.

Such initiatives in Lebanon have been reproducing the same pattern through the construction of institutions responding to a global demand and a burgeoning need to apply western-type conflict resolution mechanisms. They legitimize the processes through the recourse to strong discourses and a conceptual construction of problems and solutions, without considering the local specificities of the contexts requiring a certain degree of ownership of both the structure of the process utilized to increase understanding of issues and the claims produced with regard to these issues, as well as the modes of production and transmission of the knowledge produced. Future successful mediation in the country will need to manage the processes with less “expertise” and insist on a more historic, psychological, and memory-centered perspective.

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