Knowledge Work and Expert Practices of an International Peacebuilding Organization in Lebanon: From Global Solutions to Local Ambiguities

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Introduction

Despite the fact that I hardly knew that [conflict resolution is a field in itself]...I had a lot of experience in Africa and other things, and lecturing, and training, and this and that.¹

“Africa guy’s” career trajectory is not unique among the cadre of international development and peacebuilding experts who move almost effortlessly between headquarter offices in Washington and London and field offices in the “developing” world. “Africa guy” is what Frans Jansen² called himself during his time in Lebanon between January and May 2009 – a three-month consultancy stint for the UK-based international peacebuilding organization, World Alarm.³ Jansen is an international conflict transformation and peacebuilding consultant from Holland who has built his expertise around over twenty years of work in the Portuguese-speaking parts of Africa.

This paper uses an in-depth portrayal of Jansen’s knowledge work and expert practices, combined with additional ethnographic evidence of his organization, to ask the following question: How is the production of global knowledge, analyses and diagnoses of the “problem” of “conflict” in Lebanon sustained? (Escobar 1988:434) The ethnography presented below shows that forms of repetition and borrowing, in addition to “para-ethnographic practices” are employed by most experts working in this field in order to generate knowledge that occupies a “transcendent realm” beyond particular contexts, and a “globalized contemporary now that compresses historical time.” (Mosse 2007:2)

I followed “Africa guy” closely during his consultancy in order to observe and understand exactly what his job entailed, along with the work of his peacebuilding organization. Since the end of the civil war, Lebanon has been flooded with peace-making, -building, -keeping initiatives, in addition to conflict resolution and management programs, launched and managed by international NGOs and UN agencies alike with the singular aim of bringing peace to society. While countless evaluations and studies have been undertaken to map, assess and improve the field,⁴ studies have rarely sought to

¹ Interview with Frans Jansen, Beirut, April 24, 2009.
² Individual names have been changed to ensure anonymity.
³ The organization’s name has also been changed to ensure anonymity.
observe and record who these actors are, where they come from, what they aim to do and what they actually do, on a day-to-day basis. In order to engage in an anthropology of the contemporary and of a globalizing world, anthropologists are now turning to experts who are “both subjects and intellectual partners in inquiry.” (Holmes and Marcus 2005:236)

The first section of this paper will present the research methodology, followed by a brief description of World Alarm. Next, it will analyze the organization’s program documents, context and rationale for coming to Lebanon. With this analysis in mind, it will then provide a detailed description and analysis of Jansen’s knowledge work and expert practices during his consultancy in Lebanon. Finally, the conclusion will reflect upon the organization’s current program with a view to identifying and tying together the threads of knowledge production and expert practices that have been running through its work in Lebanon.

**Methodology**

Studying expert subjects who are often diffuse, fragmented, and multi-sited, and who are already undertaking for their part sociological analysis and theorizing, requires careful exploration of complex institutional and social processes (Mosse 2007:2). The ethnography presented in this paper is based on in-depth interviews undertaken in Beirut with Alarm’s Lebanon consultant, Frans Jansen, his successor and permanent Senior Coordinator, in addition to interviews undertaken in London with the Secretary General and the Director of Programmes. Moreover, various programmatic documents were accessed and analyzed, including the original basic project idea, the fully developed program proposal, and a multitude of documents produced during Frans Jansen’s consultancy, including his final recommendations. Access to talking and engaging with the organization’s experts and staff and to the various programmatic documents the latter produced was facilitated by my previous involvement with the organization; I was involved in writing a scoping study for the organization in April 2008, one year prior to Jansen’s consultancy and long before the organization’s official “landing” in Lebanon. This led Alarm’s permanent Senior Coordinator in Lebanon to recently inform me that, “[I’d] been with [the organization] longer than [she had].”

I followed Frans Jansen most closely during his consultancy, seeing him regularly to discuss his most recent meetings with other experts and “locals,” and his ideas for Alarm’s work in Lebanon. I observed around ten meetings between him and local

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5 Interview with Senior Coordinator, World Alarm, Beirut, November 2009.
interlocutors, including academics, heads of think tanks and civil society activists, and meetings between him and “internationals” ⁶ between January and May 2009. From the outset, Jansen agreed to share his diary and other reports prepared for World Alarm with me, including the final document he submitted to the organization, entitled “Conclusions of Lebanon consultancy.” Today, I continue to survey Alarm, and most recently, participated in a closed workshop entitled “Young Women in Political Parties: Promoting Women’s Political Engagement in Lebanon.”

The main challenge in approaching the study of expert subjects is their like-mindedness or affinity to the ethnographer. While ethnographers have traditionally sought to capture “the native point of view;” including the modes of thought, systems of belief, ritual performances, and myths of geographically-bound peoples and communities, they have not studied formal institutions such as banks, bureaucracies, corporations, and state agencies “with much confidence.” (Holmes and Marcus 2005:236) In their ethnography of central bank personnel, Holmes and Marcus find that the former are engaged in their own knowledge work and expert practice, which can be understood as para-ethnographic. Personnel working within central banks do not rely strictly on economic models and statistics, but equally on meetings and conversations with clients, customers and colleagues, in addition to keeping up with newspapers and magazines (Holmes and Marcus 2005:240). Peacebuilding experts in Lebanon, like Frans Jansen, similarly undertake para-ethnographic practices, such as listening to local counterparts and interlocutors, observing and recording social, cultural and economic facts, reading books and attending lectures. According to World Alarm’s Secretary General, “What distinguishes us is that we focus very much on analyzing the situation and trying to respond to that all the time.” ⁷ Effectively, the organization’s main headline emphasizes “Understanding conflict. Building peace.”

As will be described in detail below, Jansen’s diaries and conversations with interlocutors provide the anthropologist entry into expert domains that are often characterized by contradictions, ambiguities and “facts that are fugitive, and that suggest a social realm not in alignment with the representations generated by the application of the [prevailing]…mode of analysis.” (Holmes and Marcus 2005:240) They reveal forms of repetition and borrowing (Mitchell 2002: 124), and speak from an intimate, subjective sense of the situated practices and predicaments of expert subjects.

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About World Alarm

World Alarm is often portrayed by its staff as an “outgrowth” of a London-based international human rights’ organization, which has a long history in human rights protection and wide name recognition. A well-known British human rights advocate, who also served as the Secretary General of this organization, was a founding member of Alarm and its first Secretary General from 1986 to 1990. According to Alarm’s website, the activist “was the source of [its] early energy, inspiration and development.” 8

World Alarm was founded in the mid-eighties in London and eventually merged with another US organization in 1986; its first programme focused on Sri Lanka. Today, World Alarm works in over 20 countries and territories worldwide, a fact repeated in every workshop and meeting involving Alarm staff, and emphasized in every program document. Its thematic work ranges from the role of business, humanitarian aid and development, and gender, to security and post-conflict reconstruction in the context of building peace. 9 Alarm’s work is funded by a multitude of aid agencies and foreign ministries, mostly in North America and Europe, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Norway and the United States Aid Agency for International Development (USAID), to name a few.

Context and Rationale

Although World Alarm has been working in “countries affected or threatened by conflict” in the Great Lakes region of Africa, West Africa, the Caucasus and Central Asia, and Asia for over twenty years, up until 2009 it did not operate in the Middle East region, to the great chagrin of the organization’s Secretary General, who is himself “a Middle East person, if not expert” and author of the best-seller, The State of the Middle East: An Atlas of Conflict and Resolution. 10 During an interview with the Secretary General, the former recounts his apprehension about Alarm’s lack of presence in the region:

“When I started here at Alarm, we didn’t have, and had never had any programs on the Middle East. I was very struck by that…if we don’t take ourselves seriously, why should they take us seriously? Whether they’re governments or individuals…such an organization I thought should have ambitions to at least think about this major epicenter of conflict in the world.” 11

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8 According to the organization’s website.
9 Ibid.
10 Meeting between Frans Jansen and Piers Cazalet, Deputy Head of Mission, British Embassy, Beirut, April 14, 2009.
11 Interview with Secretary General.
Engaging in the Middle East is not only about earning credibility and legitimacy, it is also a natural and obvious matter-of-fact for “peacebuilders”:

But it’s not that we suddenly realized that now is the time to work in Lebanon, that we must work in Lebanon. It wasn’t like that. It was more, well, we should really be looking at the Middle East as a region where there is a lot of conflict...And there is an expectation I think that people and NGOs should be, if not working in the Middle East, at least thinking about it.12

Effectively, Alarm sees Lebanon as a “doorway to the region” (World Alarm 2007:1). While the first place the organization “looked up” was Israel and the West Bank, a fact-finding trip proved that firstly, the field there is “crowded,” and secondly, “issues would need to move at a much higher level in order for us to be able to do our work, even if the field were not crowded.”13 The Secretary General spoke at length about the political and security impediments to working there. There was a clear recognition of the political situation and specifically occupation, and the requisite need for a political solution. Moreover, “Iraq was not likely to be a possibility.”14 With the options of Israel/West Bank and Iraq abandoned, Alarm finally turned to Lebanon where the Secretary General has an “old friend,” who is a well-known Lebanese conflict resolution trainer and think tank director, “with 19 years of worldwide experience spanning four continents,”15

I don’t think he was the reason why we went. But, I knew that if we went to Lebanon, I had a contact there who’d expressed his interest in us going and working there.16

Upon identifying a local partner and deciding on an entry point, the Secretary General himself approached the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs with a proposal to fund its Lebanon program, knowing “that there was a person who was in a very senior position who was very very interested in Lebanon.”17 In fact, the current Director

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12 Interview with Director of Programmes, World Alarm, Beirut, April 30, 2009.
13 Interview with Secretary General.
14 Ibid.
15 The latter also boasts an international profile and expertise. He recently served as moderator in Alarm’s workshop on “Young Women in Political Parties: Promoting Women’s Political Engagement in Lebanon.” His biographical “sketch,” which was distributed at the workshop, states that he is an “expert mediator and facilitator with 19 years of worldwide experience spanning four continents.”
16 Interview of Secretary General.
17 Ibid. Alarm’s Secretary General formerly headed PRIO, the International Peace Research Institute, based in Oslo, and knows the current Director General for the Department for UN, Peace and Humanitarian Affairs in the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Geir Pedersen.
General of the Norway Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Geir Pederson, served as the Personal Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Lebanon.\textsuperscript{18}

For an international organization with no regional experience, but with “experience over two decades in conflicts in over 20 countries and territories worldwide,” (WA 2007:1) the rationale for Alarm’s involvement in Lebanon is one of knowledge-sharing. This rationale is sustained by an urgent contemporary “now” that compresses the history of the Middle East and Lebanon into one entity. In its Lebanon program proposal, Alarm insists that,

\begin{quote}
Although the Middle East has been at times flooded with peace initiatives, there is surprisingly little knowledge on peacebuilding and the substance of peace processes...Expert knowledge of other peace processes, successes and lessons learned from other conflict contexts will be of benefit to leaders, experts and civil society activists in the region...Our planned dialogue programme in Lebanon aims to reframe issues and shift discourses by drawing on experience elsewhere. (WA 2008:3)
\end{quote}

Alarm’s program documents address Lebanon and the Middle East as one entity, whose problems are one and the same, especially with regards to the lack of knowledge on peacebuilding and the substance of processes. This fact is not historically sound in the face of the various peace processes that have inundated the region since the Six Day War, and the peace agreements conducted between Egypt and Israel on the one hand, and Jordan and Israel on the other. Since that time, and according to political scientist William Qandt, the term “peace process” has been used to describe American-led efforts to bring about a negotiated peace between Israel and its neighbors and “has been little more than a slogan used to mask the marking of time.” (Qandt 2005:1) In Lebanon particularly, the May 17, 1983 US-brokered peace agreement collapsed due to widespread opposition within the country.

Effectively, in Alarm’s diagnosis of Lebanon’s problem, foreign and specifically Western countries and Israel are nearly absent. The diagnosis found in the program proposal overlaps exactly with that found in the Secretary General’s best-selling \textit{The State of the Middle East}, both attribute Lebanon’s problems firstly to its “neighbours,” and secondly to its political and religious divisions (Smith 2006:62) Alarm ultimately looks towards a national “political leadership…capable of resolving these issues.” (WA 2008:1) In fact, with the repetitive use of the term “peace process,” it is unclear whether Alarm

\textsuperscript{18} Pederson held several UN-related posts, including Special Coordinator for Lebanon (February 2007-February 2008), Secretary-General’s Personal Representative for Lebanon (May 2005-February 2007) and Secretary-General’s Personal Representative for Southern Lebanon (April-May 2005).
intends to work towards an internal, national peace, or an external, regional peace with Israel. The term is misleading in that it implicitly refers to a peace process with a particular “neighbour” that is outwardly rejected in Lebanon. Will knowledge of the Arab-Israeli peace processes, or the Northern Ireland peace process contribute to “reframing Lebanon’s political discourse?”

For its part, Lebanon counts dozens of initiatives and NGOs that have been working alongside the Lebanese state and in coordination with foreign aid agencies on formal/informal education, the memory of war, Muslim-Christian dialogue, the teaching of conflict resolution techniques and the returning of the displaced, among others (Abi-Ezzi 2002:15). Moreover, at the time of Jansen’s consultancy, at least three dialogue processes were underway: the national dialogue presided by the country’s president, dialogue sessions led by the Delegation of the European Union in Lebanon among member of parliaments19, and the Inter-Lebanese Dialogue Initiative (ILDI) launched by the Association Suisse pour le Dialogue Euro-Arabo-Musulman (ASDEAM), track II dialogue rounds based out of Geneva (Comaty 2010:3). Jansen himself admitted that the perceived “lack of knowledge of peace processes” is an exaggeration since the Lebanese are highly educated and have a developed civil society, in addition to a cosmopolitan outlook on the world.20

Based on a diagnosis that is largely regional and borrowed from the research and analysis of Alarm’s own Secretary General, and reinforced by global links that span from Norway’s Foreign Ministry to Lebanon’s think tanks, Alarm is participating in institutional and social processes that promote the production of expert knowledge. The following section will seek to explain how this production of global knowledge, analyses and diagnoses of the “problem” of “conflict” in Lebanon is sustained, through a detailed portrayal of one of World Alarm’s expert staff and consultant, Frans Jansen.

From Global Knowledge Production to Local Knowledge Production: Para-Ethnographic Practices of Expert Subjects

“Just go and see.” This is how Jansen explained his mission, “be open-minded and take it where it will lead you.”21 Jansen is among dozens of experts and consultants who come regularly to Lebanon to see “what is needed” in the country from the part of international and foreign aid agencies and organizations. Jansen was recruited by World

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19 Meeting between Frans Jansen and Michael Miller, Head of the Politics, Trade, Economy, Press and Information Section at the European Commission's Delegation in Lebanon, Beirut, April 14, 2009.
20 Interview with Frans Jansen.
21 Ibid.
Alarm in order to network, build relationships, and identify working themes and participants for the organization’s upcoming work. He was also responsible for registering the organization with the Lebanese Ministry of Interior, in addition to soliciting a baseline study upon which to evaluate its future work.

Jansen has a background in socio-linguistics, and worked during the 1970s and 1980s as a lecturer at universities in linguistics in the Netherlands and Mozambique. While in Mozambique he became involved in educational reform and development, and from there began take on various consultancies on reintegration of the demobilized, democratization, gender issues and election observation in Angola and Mozambique.22 His first job in peacebuilding in the early nineties was actually with World Alarm as a training officer. Upon receiving his master’s degree in development studies from the Institute of Social Studies (ISS) in the Hague, and applying for the job with World Alarm, he was asked by one of his supervisors, “Do you know that conflict resolution is a field in itself?”23 Jansen’s answer was effectively, “Well no, not really.”24

Jansen’s admission that he did not know that conflict resolution is a field in itself points to the kind of illicit, marginal social thought within practices dominated by technocratic ethos. (Holmes and Marcus 2005:237) Similar thoughts and an intimate, subjective sense of his situated practices and predicaments emerged during conversations Jansen held with local and international interlocutors alike. During a meeting with the British Deputy Head of Mission in Lebanon, for instance, Jansen revealed, “One of the attractions of [his] job is to talk to people and get ideas, but not do anything concretely.”25

While Jansen usually only conducts consultancies in Portuguese-speaking countries of Africa, he made an exception with the Lebanon mission for two main reasons; firstly, he previously worked in Lebanon as “training officer” with World Alarm in the early nineties, and secondly, he liked the “openness of the assignment…a very slow, cautious, open approach.”26 According to Jansen, the nature of his consultancy was largely exploratory and did not include pre-determined planned outcomes, timelines and

22 Frans Jansen, Curriculum Vitae.
23 Interview with Frans Jansen.
24 Ibid.
25 Meeting between Frans Jansen and Piers Cazalet, Deputy Head of Mission, British Embassy, Beirut, April 14, 2009.
26 Ibid.
logframes. His successor and Alarm’s permanent Senior Coordinator in Lebanon similarly insists that the organization “moves slowly.”27

Jansen’s knowledge work and expert practices relied heavily on forms of repetition and borrowing from conversations with local counterparts, along with listening to both local and international interlocutors alike, observing and recording social, cultural and economic facts, reading books and attending lectures, held at the American University of Beirut (AUB) or at the Orient-Institut Beirut (OIB). Jansen also kept a diary, detailing accounts of his daily meetings and activities. Such practices by expert subjects can be understood as para-ethographic, since they are engaged in sociological analysis and theorizing. (Mosse 2007; Holme and Marcus 2005; Miyazaki and Riles 2005) Jansen’s knowledge work and expert practices, however, shifted between Alarm’s own analysis and theorizing put together in London, and those of his local counterparts in Beirut.

While Jansen initially approached local counterparts with Alarm’s program documents, mandate and diagnosis of Lebanon, he usually incorporated the locals’ analyses and recommendations in his own exploratory work. At the outset of his consultancy, Jansen met with the Member of Parliament Ghassan Mukhaiber, who insisted, “politics is a closed box,” and suggested that Alarm focus on university elections.28 One week later, during his meeting at AUB with leading sociologist Dr. Samir Khalaf, Jansen asked the former, “Why don’t we start with student elections?” From meeting to meeting, Jansen incorporated the different analyses and diagnoses of various interlocutors. He often brought up the question of university elections, and almost always quoted a newspaper article entitled “A Truly National Dialogue,” where a well-known Lebanese think tank director states, “We can learn from the experience of countries such as South Africa, Northern Ireland and other places around the world.”29 This article supports Alarm’s view that comparative knowledge and expert input are beneficial to the country’s leadership. Similarly, a discussion around the Lebanese business class took place with program staff at the Heinrich Böll Foundation. Jansen incorporated this discussion into his diary and soon after asked me what I thought about focusing on Lebanese business people.

The brief description above shows that Jansen acted as a facilitator and a carrier of both global and local expert knowledge. He borrowed and repeated the analyses and

27 Interview with Senior Coordinator.
28 Meeting between Frans Jansen and Zina Sawaf, Beirut, February 2, 2009.
recommendations of local interlocutors, however, with the aim of legitimizing Alarm’s global mandate and diagnosis of the “problem” of “conflict” in Lebanon. This is evident in his final recommendations, which he presented in a document entitled, “Conclusions of Lebanon consultancy.” His main diagnosis in this document remains generic and broad, borrowing heavily from a book he regularly cited during his consultancy, Chabal and Daloz’s *Africa Works: Disorder as Political Instrument*. The book argues that informal practices and patrimonialism prevail in most African states. (Chabal and Daloz 1999:xix)

In a similar vein, his diagnosis of the Lebanese situation, or conflict, maintains that “the solidity of the current political system (or ‘non-system’, i.e. informalized practices) and its huge and entrenched interests and benefits for those ‘within’…constitute the real stumbling block for any kind of reform towards a more transparent, fair and equitable polity and society.”30 Taken alone, this diagnosis applies to any one of the African states covered by the aforementioned book. At the same time, the recommendations Jansen presented to Alarm draw exclusively from the conversations he held with Lebanese interlocutors. In the document, he lists “the most pressing issues that are not being solved or even addressed:” electoral reform, sectarianism, constitutional reform, judicial reform, administrative reform, security sector reform, Palestinian refugees, inequality and corruption.31

*In effect, during a long interview with Jansen, the latter admits that*

*The more you know, the less you understand…You know a lot more facts, you know a lot more people, you have a lot more insights and potential explanations. But it also means that you see more of the complexities and the contradictions and the ambiguities and all the uncertainties.*32

The para-ethnographic practices of Jansen as expert-subject give rise to such complexities and contradictions; however, these are subsumed under a diagnosis that is ultimately beyond any particular context and that belongs to an urgent contemporary now. Jansen continuously moves between knowledge production that is put together at a global level, between London and Oslo, and one that is more localized and specific. His own diagnosis of Lebanon’s “real stumbling block” belongs to many if not all “developing” countries. Moreover, similar to Alarm’s construction of the “problem” of “conflict” in Lebanon, there is something missing. Jansen’s conversations, diaries and analyses elide the presence not only of the international organization and its cohorts, but

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30 Frans Jansen,
32 Interview with Frans Jansen.
of Western interests in general. His accounts ignore the country’s dependence on foreign aid in general and on the peacebuilding industry in particular, as a source employment and foreign earnings.

“Youth leaders of Lebanese Parties Hold Talks in London”

The title of a press release issued by World Alarm in January 2010 is written in the third person and belies the involvement of the international peacebuilding organization in convening dialogue talks between the youth and student wings of the 17 main Lebanese political parties in the city of London. While the press release insists that it was the first time these parties meet, it does not reveal that the meeting and trip to London were fully sponsored and coordinated by Alarm.

Following Jansen’s consultancy, what Alarm finally saw “as being needed” in Lebanon was “the idea of trying to develop dialogue in a way that would reframe the issues for decision-makers; not necessarily at the very top party leader level, but the second level, or the coming generation…” This “need” was conceived in London and not by Jansen who listed “youth and/or student wings of political parties” between parentheses in his final recommendations. Shortly after Jansen’s consultancy, the organization recruited a permanent Senior Coordinator to Lebanon, a Canadian PhD candidate whose research focuses on “Youth Politics and Communal Conflict in Lebanon.” In effect, Lebanese youth political leaders formed the main object of the Senior Coordinator’s pre-Alarm doctoral work, which included extensive interviews with, analysis and writing on these youth leaders.

In fact, youth leaders had previously met in the framework of other projects in order to “discuss issues pertaining to the well-being of their country.” A few months prior to the London meeting, in September 2009, the youth wing of the Lebanese Progressive Socialist Party convened its annual summer camp around the question of the Lebanese University (including questions of reform, curricula, the new credit system etc.). All youth representatives were invited and most participated in the three-day meeting. Alarm’s local partner itself, the aforementioned Beirut-based think tank, launched a youth initiative in August 2008 entitled the “Young Lebanese National Accord” with the aim to develop a future reform vision of the Lebanese political system.

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34 Interview with Secretary General.
“based on youth ideas and perceptions.” The initiative’s description greatly resounds with Alarm’s program proposal,

Young participants will benefit from lessons learned and best practices of other countries that undergone similar experiences to Lebanon including Northern Ireland, Bosnia and others.37

The initiative included a series of youth forums and roundtables with various Lebanese and international experts, members of parliament, and politicians, over a two-year span in Lebanon. The initiative was similarly funded by the Norwegians, and in particular, the Norwegian embassy in Beirut. One of the stark contrasts between this latter initiative and Alarm’s ongoing youth work, however, is the location of the youth talks. Alarm’s first youth dialogue took place in London, with future meetings also scheduled to take place abroad.

The heads of regional UN bodies recently gathered in Beirut and agreed that the priority for regional development is youth.38 Social scientists from the region, however, have found that youth “empowerment” programs aim to “de-politicize” youth and prepare them for the withdrawal and absence of the welfare state (Succarie 2009:4). Ferguson and Gupta echo this view in their work on transnational governmentality, which traces the emergence of a system where key functions of the state are outsourced to NGOs, and other non-state entities, “to bring about governmental results through the devolution of risk onto…the individual…and the ‘responsibilization’ of subjects who are increasingly ‘empowered’ to discipline themselves.” (Ferguson and Gupta 2002:115) Ethnographic studies point to the “delegation upwards” of rule making and policy framing to the international stage, to international agencies, private organisations, NGOs and networks of experts, and the “delegation downwards” to “responsibilized” communities (Craig and Porter 2006:120). Is “Understanding conflict. Building peace.” now the sole responsibility of the young Lebanese generation?

Conclusion

In an original collection of ethnographic studies, Paul Richards (2005) insists that in order to understand war and peace as aspects of social processes, more emphasis should be placed on how people make war and peace. While anthropological studies on development interventions, its discourses and practices, have been undertaken by Arturo

37 Internal document.
38 Internal document, Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, American University of Beirut, December 2009.
Escobar (1991), James Ferguson (1990) and others, the existing anthropological literature on conflict resolution and peacebuilding interventions is almost negligible.

To examine peacebuilding is to examine practices about specific problems that emerge from existing theories, social and institutional processes, and expertise. While Alarm’s notion of the lack of knowledge of other peace processes in Lebanon, and its rationale for its program, “ought to be fragile in the face of historical reality, local politics and the reality of incentives,” (Mosse 2007:5) they are resilient and sustained by forms of repetition and borrowing and the para-ethnographic practices employed by its expert staff. The knowledge work and expert practices of Alarm’s Secretary General, its consultant Frans Jansen, and Permanent Coordinator, maintain a diagnosis of the situation in Lebanon that actively excludes the role of Westerners and Israel in state-making, war-making and peace-making in the region. The diagnosis is broad and generic and borrows from the globally disseminated expert knowledge on peacemaking (Kosmatopoulos 2009:1), effectively relegating responsibility towards a “national leadership,” and now lately to its “youth.” This knowledge travels from Africa to Lebanon through expert knowledge facilitators and carriers like Frans Jansen, and occupies a realm beyond particular contexts. Whether Alarm wants to contribute to an external peace with Lebanon’s neighbours, or an internal peace among its leaders is unclear and tenuous. Furthermore, while local analyses and jargon are incorporated into Alarm’s knowledge work, the main aim is to define the problem in such a way that the program has to be accepted as a legitimate solution (Escobar 1991: 66).

Since NGOs have become integral parts of a transnational apparatus of governmentality, it is important to study them and other transnational non-state organizations because they do not challenge the state from below, but operate on the same level, and in the same global space (Ferguson and Gupta 2002:121). Moreover, expert subjects working within such organizations employ para-ethnographic practices and thereby provide ethnographers a basis of exchange. The above ethnography demonstrates that most experts are engaged in knowledge production that is diffuse, fragmented, and multi-sited, continuously shifting between global contexts and “developing” contexts, but that is ultimately characterized by fugitive social facts, complexities and ambiguities.
Bibliography


