

"The frustrations and future of teaching qualitative methods to researchers in the Arab world" No. 50077.

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1. Introductory note

Multidisciplinary research in the fields of health and population has proven to be a viable and important avenue towards a better understanding of social life and customs. Ideally such research can provide both hard quantifiable data and explicate the social dynamics and cultural meaning that this data reflects by resorting to a rich mix of methods and methodologies. The urge to theorize and explain demographic behavior has led demographers and others working on population to reject methodological Puritanism and venture into new fields and associations with anthropologists, economists, sociologists and other disciplines and their disciples. While this route has been followed with success it has also had some unforeseen consequences. The ethos of mixed methods and the creative complementarities of research philosophies are commendable. But the practice of routinely espousing multidisciplinary research regardless of context, resources, and the abilities of researchers is not.

This paper locates the difficulties of applying multidisciplinary research in population research in Arab countries through a qualitative researcher's lens. Qualitative methods seem to be easy for locals who speak the language and know the culture. However after four years of teaching qualitative methods to qualified demographers, health and biomedical researchers, and to activists and policy makers the author would like to question that assumption. The paper concurs with others who have commended the importance of culture and context for the understanding of demographic behavior. However whereas others have focused on the cultural context of the field and subject, this paper addresses the situation of researchers themselves.

2. Some general observations

The problems of social research are puzzling and seemingly contradictory. On the one hand commentators have noted that the Arab countries are bereft of scientific and technological knowledge but secure when it comes to social and cultural awareness. On the other hand the situation of the social sciences and of local productions of social

knowledge is dismal¹. The study of cultures and the understanding of social dynamics remain outdated, under theorized and undervalued. Also worthy of note is the unexplained separation between social research and social knowledge. A glass ceiling prevents the observations and know-how of local/regional researchers with decades of field experience from translating this know-how into global knowledge! Moreover the social knowledge that is there is not circulated widely or evaluated critically and constructively.

There is little if any debate concerning social science education, social theories or research; in fact society and polity have been collapsed into one arena in which ideology and its variation are the predominant tools of analysis. Yet in this rush to reform and reformulate Arabs and their future, we cannot afford to sacrifice social knowledge and research for science and politics.

Meanwhile there has been a steady volume of ‘researching’ taking place continuously and consistently. The principles and processes of research are recognized as integral to development, policy making and any transfer of money from donors to recipients. Most programs, policies and projects in Arab countries and of course elsewhere include a research component. Research happens but that says little about its yield or utility.

This paper notes the contradictions that punctuate the story of social research in Arab countries, with particular emphasis on Egypt and asks why does the exaggerated sense of Arab cultural specificity ignore the importance of critical and theorized cultural studies? Why has social research not realized its full potential for informing social and demographic knowledge? Of more relevance to this meeting, the paper questions the acknowledgment of these knowledge deficits by proponents of qualitative demography who have focused on the marriage of methods but ignored the migration of methodologies across borders. Through a narrative that reflects on the teaching of qualitative methods to Arab demographers and health researchers, the paper argues for a critical consideration of the relations of knowledge production in the Arab world and

¹ Decades ago Lila Abu-Lughod was concerned with the lack of theory coming out of the social research undertaken in Arab and Middle Eastern countries. She noted that the French philosopher Pierre Bourdieu turned the tide by because he had done research on Algeria and had also become one of the foremost social thinkers of the twentieth century. Abu Lughod herself as well as Talal Asad, Saba Mahmood, and others have managed to theorize social life in the Middle East despite having roots there.

illustrates their effects on the viability of multidisciplinary research in the fields of health and population.

3. Organization and Objectives

The paper reviews the history of multidisciplinary thinking and its promotion in population studies so as to draw parallels between qualitative methods in demography and the difficulties of training demographers and other researchers in those methods. The second section describes the field experiences from which the paper draws its evidence and data. The field in this case is a three month training course on multidisciplinary research in the field of health and population offered by the Social Research Center at the American University in Cairo. The course has run for 4 years with participants from every Arab country. The experiences of teaching qualitative methods to this random sample of researchers, despite the accidental and opportunistic nature of the sample merits careful reflection.

Rather than share trainee reflections as anecdotes, the paper constructs a theoretical framework which legitimates the frustrations of trainees and trainers and questions the possibility of transporting methodological wisdom regardless of context or history. The paper will not abandon the multidisciplinary project but attempts to further it through constructing an understanding of qualitative demography that is grounded in the present of research and knowledge in Arab countries.

4. Culture and Demography: A Review

Historical demographers were at the forefront of calls to add culture to the heady mix which determines demographic behavior. The Princeton project on the historical demography of Europe found that cultural resources such as language, ethnicity and religion play as an important role as determinants of fertility as do socio-economic factors (Knodel and van de Walle 1979, Makhoulf-Obermeyer 1997: 817). The eighties witnessed a demographic critique concerning the methodological limitations of demography itself. The field of anthropological demography was soon to be born. (cf. Basu & Aaby 1998, Szreter, Sholkamy & Dharmalingam 2004, Population and Development Review 23(4) 1997).

In a collection devoted to the topic edited by Basu and Aaby, two contributions are cited as the clearly significant ones engendered by this hybrid discipline. The first is open ended questions “whereby in this scheme categories such as ‘other’, ‘don’t know’ and non response become important responses. The authors explain that this ability to reconstruct facts in terms of how their significance and meaning are perceived by the subjects of research has greatly enriched demographic analysis. The example given is that of chronological age, which is difficult to ascertain in surveys, giving way to the concept of social age.

The second contribution is the greater field involvement of demographers which has enabled them to verify and explain data. (Basu & Aaby 1998: 2-6, cf . Caldwell 1998). The resources and capabilities that anthropology extended to demography are mainly methodological according to this volume. However some of the other contributors touched on issues of subject content and analysis as further anthropological contributions to demography (Carter 1998).

Basu and Aaby do caution that anthropological demography may have given itself a deceptive reputation for simplicity” by virtue of it viewing the borrowing of methods as a straightforward process. “Much current work is shoddy equating small sample size with anthropological demography” they explain. This is perhaps the most serious first problem that anthropologists and demographers have contemplated. The assumptions that anthropology is a license to survey small numbers, substitute numbers with words and consider utterances as concepts and anecdotes as cultural artifacts. The difference between the disciplines of demography and anthropology is more than the difference between words and numbers. Just as there is implicit judgment based on words involved in quantitative analysis such as grouping answers into one category, and ranking responses there is a possibility to quantify qualitative data and rely on statistics (Makhlouf-Obermeyer 1997: 814).

The disciplines of demography and anthropology contrast in other ways. The categories/units of analysis, the relationship with institutions and apparatuses of power and the ways that reality is defined in each are but a few items of a longer list of issues. For example, Anthropologists have developed a dislike for the concept of ‘the truth’

choosing to at least multiply it if they cannot subtract it from the discourse of social research i.e. “truths”. Whereas demographers are unhappy with the instability of motivations and perceptions, anthropologists are even less happy with their categorization or unified interpretations. As urgent are the disciplinary variations in deciding on the validity and significance of data. The debate on the various evaluative criteria that the two disciplines use to assess quality and construct truth is equal in importance to the consideration of methods and their currency.

Opinions differ on the success of this relationship. Just like any other relationship, the viability of the venture, and the future of the affair are meat for discussion. The discipline of demography, although often described as theory poor, located its own limitations and identified anthropology as “... the interlocutor of choice for demographers seeking better comprehension of population processes” (Makhlouf-Obermeyer 1997: 814). This clear direction and positive urge to improve is a result of the dynamism that is a feature of demographic inquiry.

The accepted wisdom now is that anthropological demography has little need of theoretical complications and is doing well using the methods it has borrowed.

Demographic anthropology on the other hand is another kettle altogether and is left to the anthropologists to incorporate in the on-going attempts to rejuvenate and make relevant the discipline of anthropology.

The whole debate is sadly lacking in culture and context. There is little if any reflection on how this project travels and what happens to it when crossing cultural and geographical boundaries! Basu and Aaby mention the ‘local’ in their promotion of anthropological demography.

“One possibility that has been insufficiently explored is that of training local demographers better to use their own implicit cultural knowledge to improve both context and interpretation of findings. This is not to denigrate the importance of formal anthropological training: it is only to suggest that simple information on matters such as potentially harmful health behavior ... can be identified better through the knowledge of the local culture than by the trial and error available to the foreign

demographer. Information on such constraints by local demographers can have great value. P. 5)

They are certainly right in pointing to the insufficiency of the exploration that connects the native to the new paradigm. I would add the native anthropologist to their contemplations of the local demographer. But can this exploration yield results if the meanings of cultured knowledge, local, and context are undefined?! Locals are differentiated by that very same culture that they are supposed to share. Moreover cultural contexts are also political ones whereby the significance and implications of knowledge are subject to the determinations of politics and power.

It is these locals who more than any other group need to contemplate the complexities of anthropology rather than the simplicities of anthropological demography. Basu and Aaby gave some wonderful examples of how the culturally literate local can better analyze demographic data by referencing her/his implicit knowledge. However it is difficult to generalize this to productive use of cultural knowledge. Locals can also assume knowledge that they do not have or insert biases, prejudices, hierarchy and interest into the process of cultural reference and translation.

Perhaps this is where and how 'anthropology' can deliver us. The debates of anthropology can bring about the inclusion of the others culture, context and experience in research. They can also illustrate the need for the theoretical complementarities of disciplines and so overcome the confusions that result from simply mixing tools and methods.

5. The Successes of Multidisciplinary Research and the Frustrations of Training

It is precisely in response to the suggestion by Basu and Aaby that I have been involved in training non-anthropologists in qualitative methods for the past four years. I have undertaken to teach a version of anthropology to people primarily interested in health and demography. I have had the challenge of instructing nationals of 14 different Arab countries. Participants vary in age, profession, and vocation. Activists, academics, and administrators and even some professional researchers have participated in these courses with varying degree of success, satisfaction, frustration and disinterest.

This is the experience upon which I would like to reflect and use to comment on the muddle of mixing methods, vs. the potential and difficulties of multidisciplinary research. There are three types of training activity that I have participated in. The bulk of this training activity was undertaken under the auspices of a course offered by the Social Research Center at the American University in Cairo called Research Methods for Guiding Policy and Evaluation (with special application to Population and Health Concerns in the Arab Countries). The course has been run 4 times over the past five years. It provides training in qualitative and quantitative skills with a bias towards the later.

The other two activities were training for NGO's in Egypt and for master's students in the Arab Gulf University of Bahrain (Which is a medical school).

The SRC course has been widely acknowledged to be of good caliber and in great demand. Trainees are supported by fellowships from their own organizations or by the Wellcome Trust. Organizations that have seen fit to support attendees include the Government of Oman, the UNFPA, the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Planning, The international population Council (MENA region) and USAID-Egypt.

My responsibility has been mainly to coordinate the module on qualitative data collection and analysis, to teach large parts of the module, and to assemble a syllabus of content and suitable readings².

The objectives of this module are to introduce participants to methods of data collection and analysis in population and health research. This is easier said than done. This seemingly simple objective is a road riddled with pit-falls, hurdles, and insurmountable difficulties. The culprit is me. ***In my course I try to supply the needs of demographers by creating a demand for anthropology.***

This is not a result of confusion but is a consequence of an undeclared ambition and a fair amount of experience. Permit me to explain!

Participants as are most people are good, smart and have a keen desire to learn. The question is learn what and why?

² Annex 1 is a schedule of the course as taught in June 2004.

Many want to learn ‘focus groups’ because this is a methodological proficiency that has a large market. This is a demand that myself and colleagues have desisted from supplying. There are facts we must face and within which we need to place the appetite for methods.

In many Arab countries social science education is weak and the institutions of education are ruled by an outdated pedagogy that is hierarchical and classicist. In these countries population and health research is dominated by the positivistic mentalities of biomedical research and classical demography. The research market itself is over regulated by the state and dominated by donors. Research institutions may be independent in name but may still have to prove their worth legitimacy, and vision by complying with an agenda. Moreover, research in general is discredited as an honorable project and harnessed to the practical needs of policy, and programs. In one recent celebration of distinguished scientist who had been honored for their achievements by the government of Egypt, the minister for higher education and scientific research while giving the key note speech made a scathing critique of “research for the sake of knowledge” and lauded technology instead!

Social science is in dire straits when compared to other brands of inquiry (economic, policy, markets, polling). But the fields of health and population are relatively well researched and creatively so. This may be due to the acknowledgement of population as a problematic shared by both those who have money and those who set policy. Researchers in the Arab world have been happy to oblige. No opportunism is hinted here, rather an appreciation of the flexibility with which researchers face the drying up of opportunities to innovate and research other fields of social life. More over since population and health studies witnessed there own transition from the narrowly defined field of family planning and fertility control to the much more abundant and interesting one of Reproductive Health, researchers have found plenty of topics with which they can engage creatively and productively. Reproductive health as a paradigm facilitated the inclusion of gender empowerment, sexuality, poverty, politics and human rights as areas that are relevant to population (even if at times obliquely so), in demand, and able to attract institutional support and funding (Sholkamy 2003). The results have been studies such as Giza and groups such as RHWG.

The success of these and other projects have made institutions and individuals aware of the benefits of multidisciplinary methods but not an understanding of mixing methodologies and theories of knowledge.

Participants in the course therefore had a vague notion of what they want but not of what it would entail to get it. As the coordinator I had to choose between making the course more skills based (giving people what they want) or knowledge based and oriented towards critical theory and supplying what ethically I think they should have so as to be able to acquire these same skills.

For how can people learn methods without an idea of the theoretical baggage that comes with them? How can researchers establish rapport when they are un-critical of their own biases? How can they ask people to respond freely or openly in societies that lack freedom? How can they write without knowing the theory of knowledge that can validate their analysis? How can they contribute to knowledge when they see their role as researchers in societies that do not read or value research? Finally how can this course ignore the debates about mixing methods and yet claim to be of some caliber and relevance?

The answers to these questions favor the path of critical, theoretically informed introductions to various methods over that of pedantically teaching methods excised from their disciplinary contexts and cultures. The experiences of teaching have validated this choice but not without a fair amount of complaints and grumbles.

On the whole participants have appreciated the approach but have found it baffling at times and challenging at others. They have been perplexed by the claims that in qualitative research the researcher is the tool. What does that mean? They have wondered at how 'scientific' these methods are and if qualitative data is representative or not? They have also found it strange that research and intervention are different things and not to be mixed.

"If I get to know people and enter their homes I must change what I find wrong" this and similar statements were made by tens of participants over the past five years.

The Qualitative Module

The module is designed to familiarize non-specialist with the basics of qualitative research as to complement the emphasis on quantitative research with a comparative and contrasting perspective. The 8 days of learning introduce basic concepts and skills focusing on research experiences in the Arab world.

This module does NOT qualify participants to become qualitative researchers but can enhance their capability to read, handle and critique qualitative material.

Each day builds on the one preceding it. Attendance of the whole module is therefore required. A mix of teaching methods is used every day including lecturing as well as participatory exercises to address basic research issues. An illustration of a major study that is multidisciplinary in its design is used for illustrative purposes and when possible by a guest speaker to convey an appreciation of the qualitative research community. Studies have addressed reproductive morbidity and normal obstetric care in Egypt, drug uses among youth in Cairo, utilization of health services in Liverpool, UK, Participatory planning and evaluation in Yemen, Political anthropology in Sudan and women's rights and domestic violence in rural Egypt.

The module begins with the administration of a pretest and end with another short test. The purpose of this design is to gage the familiarity of participants with the basics of qualitative methods and to assess the immediate impact of the learning experience on the final day (completely futile!!)

A thick folder of handouts including a syllabus and the learning objectives of each day along with a schedule is given to each participant. The folder is thick because it also contains readings. An effort was made to use readings that are simple, of high quality and concise if in English. Articles and chapters in Arabic are also included. The readings are divided into three categories:

The first are ***Required Readings***: They are the key texts that address the main subject matter of the whole day. Participants are advised to attempt to read them during the module to be able to discuss their content with instructors.

The Second are ***Suggested Readings***: These are readings that summarize and illustrate the content of lectures and which participants may find useful to recollect and better understand lectures.

The third are ***Additional Readings***: These are readings that inform participants about specific studies and research experiences and can be used to enrich their knowledge in the field of health and population sciences.

Finally the stated objectives of the module are many:

1. Get to know each other
2. Understand the theoretical premises of qualitative research
3. Acquire the basics of hypothesis building and design in qualitative research
4. Understand ethics of research and fieldwork
5. Understand basic points of difference between qualitative and quantitative
6. Review basic mix of techniques in qualitative research
7. To understand observation and structured observation checklists
8. Understand Interviewing
9. To use two existing studies: The study on " Patterns of Marriage and Family Formation among Youth in Egypt", and the study on " The Impact of Family on the Lives of Egyptian Women" to learn how to conduct and analyze focus group discussions
10. Learn the moral foundations of rapid techniques
11. Introduce principles of data Management and analysis
12. Acquainting participants with NVIVO software for qualitative data analysis
13. Acquainting participants with principles of coding
14. Acquainting participants with advantages and limitations of computer-assisted data analysis
15. Introducing the concept of grounded theory and qualitative data analysis approaches
16. Acquainting participants with conceptualization and writing-up

17. To become acquainted with how research is used for policy formulation and monitoring

The course s evaluated left right and center in the true spirit of modern pedagogy. Each session is evaluated using narratives, lichert scale of smiley faces, and then each day is evaluated and then the whole module is evaluated. Participants can express and do their irritations, frustrations, likes, dislikes, fantasies and knowledge. For example, people have complained of ennui, simplicity, difficulty, lack of scientific content, novelty, daring, gender bias (I am a female telling them what to do), religious ignorance (not enough citing of the Koran, too many instructors, too few instructors, not enough Arabic, not enough English, and of the module being too long and too short. These are I should say the comments that have been repeated over the years not one offs.

This last time a participant complained that he wanted to learn the tools of the Delphi panel not the focus group. Another said that I showed favoritism by asking a Sudanese colleague to facilitate a participatory exercise, and a third suggested that we cover the 7 highly effective traits of successful people. I do not trivialize on the contrary these are very important bits of qualitative data!

On the positive side the majority agreed that the module was different from the approach of qualitative methods, that they had never come across the ethical and theoretical foundations of qualitative work and that they felt this methodology to be more urgent and relevant for their work.

However the complaints are serious and challenging. There is a possibility to overcome them by making the module skills based in its objectives and wholly participatory in its methodology. I should add that people like participatory teaching when it's in class but seem to have distaste for what you should do, even if in groups, on your own time!

There are 5 examples of reasons why I shall argue that the allure of popularity and convention should be avoided.

4. To put the matter anthropologically, which is to say to perceive great things in little ones (Sahlins 1999: 1)

I believe that the same reasons that discourage the skills based approach are the ones which complicate the option of importing anthropological demography. In so arguing I am illustrating Sahlins quote about great things and little ones!

Why do we want those methods again?! It is to gain an understanding of the role of culture in demographic behavior and glean quality insights that can serve to construct descriptive, analytical, and even (if we mimic the economist) predictive models of behavior.

Is it because we agree that people are the keepers of a knowledge that is potent and separate from their expertise? We know that gender, class, ethnicity, cognition, emotions, and agency are not what people do for a living and that to understand how these components of identity interplay to create a dynamic that we call perceptions, motivations, and aspirations we need to tools that go beyond formal inquiry. Social research in general and qualitative research in particular I believe relies on this assumption that people have knowledge even when they do not know it.

I would like to draw some conclusions based on the course and other experiences to answer.

1. The Researcher is the tool: This is the mantra of qualitative methods. To use the semi-structured tools of qualitative data collection effectively, researchers realize that they are highly dependent on the researcher using them in the field. Rapport is the avenue to success and it is a highly under-theorized concept which is deceptive to convey. It does not mean just being nice. It does not mean fake modesty. It does not mean a short-cut to intimacy. Rapport (the cognitive and ethical basis of qualitative knowledge) means structuring a realistic relationship built on trust, mutual respect, and equal power. Since these are values largely absent from the daily interactions between social groups (educated/non educated, rich/poor, professionals/lay people) their realization needs researchers who are professional and well trained in the ethical principles of research.
2. Methods and theory: Makhlof Obermyer has stressed that methods come with some theoretical baggage. In Egypt theory is a dirty word. We are trained to think that theory and knowledge are separate entities, indeed enemies. The impossibility

of human cognition in the absence of theoretical thinking is an undiscovered principle in our educational systems. The quality of data derived from qualitative data collection tools is contingent on some appreciation of the theoretical principles that are investigating. This requires a concept of theoretical thinking even if researchers are just out to navigate a few focus groups. Do they know why they are doing them or what they are supposed to find, or how to evaluate if the process of proceeding well. I find it difficult to believe that all focus groups work! Makhoul Obermeyer explains that “The qualitative methodologies now advocated to study demographic behavior can escape the limitations of quantification in terms of both analytic strategy and interpretation. But the extent to which this true will depend less on the methods themselves than on the ability of researchers to formulate questions and define the right blend of methods to address them” P. 815

“the issue involves more than the validity of measurements, and reflects the implicit models of social action that are brought to bear in explaining connections between actions norms and representation (Holy and Stuchlik in Makhoul)” p. 815. Any method implies a theoretical stance. (816) and researchers who use them need to be comfortable in the understanding of concepts and theories so as to be effective in using these methods.

3. The relationship between methods and their analysis: Most commentators have warned about the simplistic usages of qualitative methods. Frick talks to the attractions of using them and the difficulty they can pose to analysis.

I have a sense , for example, that the focus group has become the qualitative method de jour in research proposals on demographic issues. Its attractions are compelling, not least because it provides a glimmer of what the unscripted human voice sounds like; in a desert of dry prose, even those of us who like statistical tables are delighted to hear a human being. And it is gratifying when that voice illustrates a correlation or two or leads to a new regression. But can we seriously argue that the use of focus groups amounts to a cultural analysis? 826-7.

Can words become their own analysis? To avoid this tautological trap researchers should be aware of analytical thinking and the grounding of theory. To avoid having words cut and pasted together into series of “from the horse’s mouth, from the native’s lips, in their own words” paragraphs that reference little bit their own content, researchers would benefit from an acquaintance with social theory, the structures of society and the dynamics of change. Moving from anecdotes to generalized dogma is a feature of bad anthropology and pernicious qualitative research. Good research follows clear protocols to enable researchers to move from the details to bigger pictures and to theorize from the ground up. This requires analytical skills, flexibility, reflection and an ability to write.

4. Is Culture and its determinations: But what is culture? Is it el-mawrouth el-thaqafi or el-thaqafa meaning tradition as we used in Arabic it?

Is it a residual category anything that is not something else). Is it a predilection or a stance that determines how we interact with ideas of change, modernity and identity?(Makhlouf-Obermeyer 1997: 817). Our understanding of ‘our’ culture is sadly static and stereotypical. Qualitative methods are the tools to get at culture and Frick suggest we do so by studying communities. Locals are supposed to know their culture and so be better able to use these methods. This may be true for some and in parts of the world but I would argue it is not a possibility now in Egypt and perhaps elsewhere. What is culture? What is a community? How do they change, how do they continue, who has the authority to define them? Is there a discourse about these concepts with which demographers can engage or even refer to? I answer in the negative and feel that for the time being we need to take, and convey through training, a tentative reflexive stance on the meanings of culture and community rather than give researchers a false recipe for how to reconstitute them in demographic studies.

5. Evaluating the quality of data: Many have asked is qualitative data scientific? The answer is yes if it is collected and analyzed in accordance with conceptual and ethical guidelines. In another words the difference between a conversation with a taxi driver, or even ten conversations with different taxi drives, and the data

collected from an in-depth interview is that the first is not subject to research protocols and guidelines and the second is. Data is only valid if it is methodologically sound. Trainees in Egypt have no access to evaluative criteria by which to read and judge researched knowledge. Thus the urge to use the quantitative language of representation, neutrality, generalization, and objectivity. All criteria to which qualitatively derived data cannot conform. To replace them with principles of possibility, coherence, transferability, balance, accuracy, transparency and meaningfulness, and then add the researchers as a lens can be hard work.

These are five aspects of the challenge that we face in trying to do methods with no methodology.

5. Consequences

At the practical level, the implications of the discussion so far are simple. Not everyone can effectively or ethically employ qualitative methods and not every research project should do so. The judgment needs to consider the nature of the research project but more importantly the intellectual and national landscape in which research is taking place merit consideration. Collaborative projects that espouse multidisciplinary must consider their epistemological and ethical foundations in order to succeed (816). Projects are more than mixes of methods they are the outcome of a creative bargaining process that constructs realities in accordance with ethical and epistemological principles.

Of equal importance is the research and knowledge environment of any given setting. What is the quality of training and education that people have? What are the hierarchies that may affect the research encounter? Do people think conceptually about social life and behavior?

Concerning the course I believe that qualitative methods are neither difficult nor should they be elitist. They are not for everyone, everywhere, at any time. These methods are simple but they are not simply skills. They are part of a discourse without which they make no sense. They are impossible to use, analyze or evaluate if not placed in this context.

As for anthropological demography I believe it does need a vibrant companion called demographic anthropology to support its projects. Anthropological demography will be relieved of its qualitative dilemmas if there is no pressure for it to conform to anthropological ideals. (Anthropology is still in a crisis!). As urgent are the disciplinary variations in deciding on the validity and significance of data. The debate on the various evaluative criteria that the two disciplines use to assess quality and construct truth is equal in importance to the consideration of methods and their currency.

But qualitative demography needs above all to consider the intellectual climate of its project to assess the viability of mixed methods approaches and the validity of its own knowledge. This varied and ever changing knowledge context which is political and historical determines the ability, possibility, and reliability of methodological choices. Of course demographers can use some qualitative methods to complete the cultural interpretation (Basu and Aaby) or verify their data (Caldwell). But this assumes that the demographers are trained in social and analytical thinking and challenged by colleagues from the fields of anthropology and sociology with whom they can engage in creative and rigorous exchanges. Local demographers may not have the same experiences and do not come from similar intellectual landscapes. Collaborative projects that espouse multidisciplinary should consider their epistemological and ethical foundations in order to succeed (Makhlouf-Obermeyer 1997: 816). Projects are more than mixes of methods they are the outcome of a creative bargaining process that constructs realities in accordance with ethical and epistemological principles.

Finally I believe there are some concrete recommendations to be made to help create capacity and to enrich our understanding of demographic processes through mixed methods and interdisciplinary hybrid thinking and research. These apply specifically but not exclusively to the context of Arab demography.

Recommendations

1. Evolve evaluative criterion that are accessible and pertinent
2. Make training theoretical to account for deficiencies in educational content and pedagogic methods

3. Arabize the theory not just the language. Meaning bring in realities of cognitive and intellectual climate
4. Professionalize the environment but popularize the methodology.

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