

AUB professor becomes first Arab member of International Sociological Association

Tuesday, August 03, 2010

Sari Hanafi, associate professor of sociology at AUB, was elected in July as the first Arab member of the Executive Committee of the International Sociological Association since its foundation in 1948.

Prior to his election, attention was drawn to Hanafi's work by the president of the association, Michael Burawoy, when he cited at the World Sociology Congress an article by Hanafi entitled "University Systems in the Arab East: Publish Globally and Perish Locally Vs. Publish Locally and Perish Globally."



"I think that played in my favor," said Hanafi of the votes he received from members of the association.

After switching from a civil-engineering degree to sociology "because you can't change the world with civil engineering", Hanafi began his mission to make a difference in society. "Through sociology, we can better understand the world and maybe change it," he said.

From a young age, he has been committed to his community. Born into refugee status as the son of a Palestinian, Hanafi has been working tirelessly on issues of political and economic sociology relative to the Palestinian diaspora and refugees, the sociology of migration, transnationalism, the politics of scientific research, elite formation and transitional justice.

He holds a PhD in sociology from the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales in Paris and has served as a visiting professor at the University of Poitiers and Migrintern in France and the University of Bologna and Ravenna in Italy and has been a visiting fellow at the Chr. Michelsen Institute in Norway.

His election to the International Sociological Association comes with mixed feelings. "I'm glad to have a way of mixing between professional and public research that allows me to do something good for my discipline, not only for my community; but there's also a sadness that the Arab world is really absent from this association," he said, attributing Arab professors' absence from the association to money matters since national universities don't always pay faculties to attend international conferences.

"It's sad that Arab countries are absent from such events. We are very local, and need to become more communicative with our colleagues globally," he said.

This makes Hanafi's election to the association even more of feat, as his votes were received from delegates outside of the Arab states.

Hanafi sees Lebanon as an open society that offers a conducive environment in which to reflect on social issues, carry out research, and be critical of mainstream discourse without ending up in prison, but he feels that too many people here are terribly localized.

"It's not just about Palestineology or Lebanonology. Our knowledge should serve humanity -- not

just our community," he said.

Hanafi has been teaching at AUB since 2005. In 2008 he began offering a minor that he had created especially for the University: human rights and transitional justice, which is specifically compelling for the conflict-ridden region to address how society should confront the legacies of past human rights abuse or atrocities.

Hanafi has served as a consultant to the United Nations and the World Bank and is a member of the Executive Bureau of the Arab Association of Sociology and a former director of the Palestinian Refugee and Diaspora Center (Ramallah). He is the author/editor of *State of Exception and Resistance in The Arab World. ; The Emergence of A Palestinian Globalized Elite: Donors, International Organizations and Local NGOs*; and *Pouvoir et Associations dans le Monde Arabe*, as well as other books and articles.