

CERMOC  
ELIZABETH PICARD

The Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches sur le Moyen-Orient Contemporain (CERMOC) is among the youngest of several French research centres devoted to the Middle East and the Arab world, from Teheran to Rabat. It is based in Beirut with a research unit in Amman. First founded in 1977, CERMOC was closed in 1985 following the kidnapping of its researcher Michel Seurat in Beirut and was reopened after the Lebanese war in 1990.

CERMOC is dedicated to conducting social sciences research (from urban studies to anthropology, including sociology, political science, geography, economy and even contemporary history) on five Mashrek countries: Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine and Syria.

#### Production of a thorough knowledge

With a rather light set up – a team of about a dozen permanent researchers, a library of 20,000 volumes and an editor working with a local printing house – CERMOC has published since its reopening in 1990 some thirty books, while its researchers and associate researchers have published four to five times more articles. The Centre thus consistently contributes to the scientific knowledge of the Middle East, particularly of the three countries where its researchers are based – Lebanon, Jordan and Palestine.

In Lebanon, in spite of the Arabization and Anglicization processes, CERMOC has succeeded in being present on the editorial stage. In 1999 only, four new books presented four types of research developed by the Centre:

- The proceedings of the Euro-Arab conference held at CERMOC in June 1997 under the direction of Jean Hannoyer: *Guerres civiles. Economies de la violence, dimensions de la civilité*, Karthala – CERMOC;
- A thorough study of urbanist questions in post-war Beirut by a CERMOC researcher, Elie El-Achkar: *Réglementation et formes urbaines. Le cas de Beyrouth*;
- The translation of a German geography classic written by Helmut Ruppert under the title, *Beyrouth, une ville d'Orient marquée par l'Occident*; and
- The results of collective research conducted by CERMOC in 1997-1998 within the framework of a French-German programme financed by the European Union: *Reconstruction et Réconciliation au Liban. Négociations, lieux publics et renouvellement du lien social*.

In Jordan, before the opening of CERMOC's research unit, French publication on this country within the social sciences was hardly developed. The book *Amman, ville et société* directed by Jean Hannoyer and Seteney Shami (1996) came as a momentous event.

In 1999, three new books have been published (or are forthcoming):

- Issue 5-6 of the journal *Jordanies*, dedicated to the Jordanian election of 1997;
- The proceedings of a conference held at the Institut du Monde Arabe (Paris) in June 1997, edited by Tareq Tell, *State and Politics in Jordan, 1946-1996*; and
- A book directed by Riccardo Bocco, *Le Royaume hachémite de Jordanie: identités sociales, politiques de développement et construction étatique, 1946-1996*, based on seminars held at the CERMOC.

In Palestine, the editorial production of CERMOC's team hosted by the Law Institute of Bir Zeit University confirms the new role of the Centre:

# Social Sciences Research on the Arab Mashrek

– *Maghreb-Machrek* #162 (Paris), edited by Bernard Botiveau, which contains a dozen articles by Palestinian and European scholars who studied at Bir Zeit and is entirely dedicated to Palestine;

– The book written by Bernard Botiveau himself, *L'Etat palestinien*, Paris: Sciences Po; and

– The *Cahier du CERMOC* #22, by Jean-François Legrain: *Les Palestines du quotidien*, which deals with the Palestinian legislative elections of 1996.

With the participation of CERMOC researchers in workshops and conferences abroad and the output of documentary notes (about 10 in the past three years) and expertise reports, the Centre has become a legitimate member of the local scientific community. Through public conferences, it is known to a broader public – as evidenced by various briefs in the local press as well as by the results of the poll carried out in Beirut in 1998.

#### Training for research

CERMOC carries out specific functions in relation with other French teaching and research institutions devoted to the Middle East such as the Groupe de Recherches et d'Etudes sur le Moyen-Orient Contemporain (GREM-MO) in Lyon, the Institut de Recherches et d'Etudes sur le Monde Arabe et Musulman in Aix-en-Provence, and URBAMA in Tours.

Social science training in the field of Middle East studies requires a long-term stay in the region and the learning of Arabic – add to this the difficulties related to the international situation and the nature of several political systems in the region.

CERMOC's role is to offer an opportunity to make this intellectual investment in a productive manner, thanks to contacts with local research, research seminars and the supervision of senior researchers. CERMOC provides a few research allocations, and supports applications which fall within its collective programmes. In 1998, many scholarships were granted: 5 Lavoisier, 1 from the city of Lyon, 1 Michel Seurat scholarship, 1 from the Florence European Institute and 4 scholarships from the French Ministry of National Education. Also, in Beirut, Amman and Bir Zeit, dozens of European and Arab students receive each year accommodation and academic support from the Centre.

In October 1998, CERMOC organized, together with the Maison Méditerranéenne des Sciences de l'Homme in Aix-en-Provence, a doctorate school in Beirut for 18 PhD students from Europe and the Arab world. The Centre is planning another session in cooperation with the Lebanese University.

When investigating the ensuing careers of CERMOC researchers, one finds a majority holding responsibilities in the Middle East or in institutions related to the region: research, diplomacy, and civil service.

#### Cooperation amongst French, European, and Arab researchers

CERMOC is not just a stimulating institution for students; the list of scholars who have been hosted by the Centre shows that

beyond the use of equipment and lodging (3 rooms in Amman, 5 in Beirut) academics rightfully consider CERMOC as a support and a mediator on behalf of the local scientific community. It is a place where scholars from various universities and disciplines converge for seminars and conferences as well as library research, as affiliation to the CERMOC is considered a pledge of scientific requirement and freedom.

Two formulas have been privileged by CERMOC in order to institutionalize and promote cooperation between French and European researchers and local researchers: cooperation agreements, on the one hand, and bilateral or multilateral research projects, on the other.

#### Cooperation agreements

This policy came into being with the signature of a cooperation convention with the University of Provence (France). It includes the hosting of Aix-en-Provence students at CERMOC and of Arab students in Aix, the organization of the 1998 joint doctorate school and of a conference on 'Les représentations de la Méditerranée' in Beirut, and other future projects.

A general convention with the University of Bir Zeit, acting on behalf of the Law Institute, was signed in October 1998. As part of this convention, a senior researcher belonging to the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (CNRS, France) heads a research seminar in French and Arabic and supervises several French speaking PhD students in Bir Zeit. There will be exchange students from and at both institutions. A first round of negotiation with the President of Aleppo University showed willingness to cooperate with CERMOC in the near future.

#### Bilateral and multilateral research projects

Being a French academic institution based in the Middle East, CERMOC plays a central part in several cooperation projects between scientists from both sides of the Mediterranean. Various formulas are adopted to meet administrative and legal requirements.

– CERMOC may cooperate with a local research unit. That is the case with the Centre de Recherches en Sciences Sociales at the Lebanese University, in the framework of CERMOC's project on 'Municipalités et pouvoirs locaux au Liban'; or it may cooperate with the Institute for Palestine Studies in the framework of its research project 'L'UNRWA, une histoire dans l'Histoire'.

– CERMOC has developed a joint research project with the GREM-MO in Lyon, the Institut des Sciences Sociales at the Lebanese University, and Cairo University on 'Nouveaux médias et le marché de l'image dans l'Orient arabe'.

– CERMOC is coordinator of a project prepared with professors from the University of Balamand and the Lebanese University on 'Usages et méthodes de l'Histoire orale au Liban' with a final conference planned in fall 2000.

#### A regional dimension

Most of the current research at CERMOC is devoted to local or domestic questions and conducted by highly specialized scholars. However, scientific concerns as well as social and political realities require a broader view. The understanding of societies, lands and powers must be sought at the regional level according to a pervasive cultural and historical heritage: Lebanon is not a self-contained, detached land, but rather the 'laboratory' of the Mediterranean Near East. Jordan stands as the witness of regional changes and Palestine is at the heart of regional recompositions. Thus, in view of CERMOC's limited means, the Centre works constantly under tension between local specific and regional thematic research.

To keep the coherence of the team, the research programme 'UNRWA, une histoire dans l'Histoire' has been confined to Jordan and Palestine, which means that a comparative work on Syria and Lebanon as well as a regional synthesis remain to be done. In the programme 'Municipalités et pouvoirs locaux', the CERMOC elected to start research on the case of Lebanon. A comparative dimension is introduced by a case study on Palestinian municipalities. Nevertheless, this programme is conceived on the regional scale, research in Syria and in Jordan both being possible and desirable in order to produce a documented study on local politics in the four countries of the Arab Eastern Mediterranean. The multilateral research project 'Nouveaux médias et marché de l'image dans l'Orient arabe' has been conceived with the participation of international partners, and has been devised in a regional perspective from the very start, for the project is to attempt to grasp the material and immaterial flows which permeate the region and link it to the rest of the world. ◆

Current information about CERMOC facilities, collective and individual research programmes, and publications can be found at:  
[www.lb.refer.org/cermoc](http://www.lb.refer.org/cermoc)

Elizabeth Picard is director of CERMOC.  
E-mail: [cermocd@lb.refer.org](mailto:cermocd@lb.refer.org)