

The World Humanities Report

# Critical Humanities in the Arab Region: Trends and Futures

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Arab Council for the Social Sciences



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The World Humanities Report gratefully acknowledges the financial support of the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

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This publication is available online at <https://worldhumanitiesreport.org>.

Suggested citation:

Arab Council for the Social Sciences. *Critical Humanities in the Arab Region: Trends and Futures*. World Humanities Report, CHCI, 2023.

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# Critical Humanities in the Arab Region: Trends and Futures

Arab Council for the Social Sciences

After participating in the 2017 World Humanities Conference in Liege, Belgium, the Arab Council for the Social Sciences (ACSS) was invited to contribute to the World Humanities Report (WHR) and to produce the Arab region component of the Report.<sup>1</sup> The WHR is designed to increase understanding of and reflection on the contributions the humanities make to knowledge and society across the globe and to make recommendations for the humanities in the twenty-first century. The project has several audiences, including scholars and academics; university leadership and administration; state-based policymakers; nonstate agencies and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs); funders, including granting agencies and philanthropists; and the general public. We present this contribution from the Arab region in support of these global goals.

During 2020 and 2021, the ACSS mobilized scholars across the region and beyond to critically and creatively examine the themes, research methods, pedagogies, people, modes, and institutions involved in shaping and reshaping humanities knowledge in and about the region. The Arab Region Report aims at critically understanding the landscape and effect of humanities knowledge creation on institutions, researchers, and publics. It describes and analyzes the institutions and infrastructures of knowledge production, the definition and reformulations of humanities fields, the intersections of research with society, the idea of humanities for the public good, and the ways innovative collaborations and new disciplines are emerging. Finally, given the realities of the region, the report also speaks to crisis, urgency, and emergency and how they affect both academic and public knowledge production.

The Arab Region Report consists of twenty-eight rigorous, forward-thinking essays or thought pieces commissioned specifically for this report and twenty-five case studies of organizations, collectives, platforms, and institutions working in the critical humanities in the Arab region. The case studies are drawn from a survey the ACSS conducted in 2021. Neither the essays nor the case studies exhaust the themes or actors engaged in reformulating the humanities and related fields in the Arab region. The amount of energy and creativity

<sup>1</sup> For information about the conference, see <https://en.unesco.org/news/world-humanities-conference-challenges-and-responsibilities-planet-transition-liege-belgium-6?>

expended toward more democratic and inclusive polities in the face of persistent obstruction from above cannot be overstated. This energy links research, activism, mobilization, and protest in significant ways. We hope that this report serves as a tribute, however modest, to these efforts and the people behind them. We also intend for the report to serve as a launching pad for various other projects, to be curated by the ACSS, with the goal of capitalizing on the critical connections made between the work of individuals and organizations shaping the social sciences and humanities landscape in the region.

## 1. The Shaping of the Arab Region Report

The ACSS led the work of this report from its offices in Beirut, Lebanon.<sup>2</sup> Like everyone, we worked in the extraordinary circumstances of the global COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, starting in 2019, the region was rocked by mass protests calling for democratization and rights, even while its institutions had yet to absorb the lessons and ramifications of the 2010–11 uprisings (the Arab Spring). At its home base in Lebanon, the ACSS contends with the effects of a severe economic and banking crisis, the October 2019 revolution, and the August 2020 explosion at the Beirut port, in addition to the pandemic. These dynamics influenced the organization and themes of this report, the kinds of questions researchers asked, and even their capacity to contribute. Although the report ideally would have covered more themes, geographies, and perspectives, it is a strong testament to the commitment of the participating authors and institutions to produce knowledge despite (or perhaps because of) the everyday and long-term challenges they face.

The editorial team began work by determining a set of themes considered representative of the dominant intellectual discussions in the critical humanities in the Arab region. It then chose to explore these five themes through commissioned essays and thought pieces (these themes are described in section 3.1). The team also discussed the overall scope of the project and how best to survey or map the humanities to give a sense of the landscape in which discussions of these themes are taking place.

The need for mapping arose out of the fact that no state or regional institutions in the Arab region gather such information in a comprehensive and reliable

<sup>2</sup> We gratefully acknowledge funding support from the University of Wisconsin–Madison (grant no. 0000001074), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) regional office in Beirut (grant no. 4500420491-A1), UNESCO Cairo office (grant no. 4500442441), and the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation grant to the ACSS (grant no. 1905–06799).

way and make it publicly available. Accordingly, there is little sense of how well disciplines and fields are represented in universities and research centers and how to identify the characteristics of scholarly communities regionally or in different countries. Knowledge of how and where new generations of scholars are introduced to research and careers in the humanities is therefore obscured as well.<sup>3</sup>

The Arab Social Science Monitor (ASSM),<sup>4</sup> an ongoing project at the ACSS, had already been mapping the social sciences. Databases were developed on universities (year of establishment, public/private, disciplines taught, degrees offered, etc.), research centers (on-campus/independent, disciplines covered, themes researched, etc.), professional associations (disciplines covered, geographical scope, etc.), and journals (place of publication, disciplines, themes, etc.). For the World Humanities Report, we expanded the ASSM databases to include humanities disciplines and fields previously not covered (see section 2).

Established and formal academic institutions are an obviously important part of the landscape of humanities work in the region, but the editorial team also wanted to recognize and explore the rich and critical knowledge work produced in informal, para-institutional, and sometimes ad hoc settings. For this reason, a research team was formed to survey and write profiles of organizations, platforms, collectives, and groups working outside of universities and large research centers. These “interstitial” organizations are presented in the twenty-five case studies discussed in sections 2.2 and 3.2. By highlighting the pertinence of work that academic or professional approaches to human inquiry often sideline, we intend the case studies to complement the critical and forward-looking quality of the essays.

Through the different modalities of presenting information and analysis (the mapping, the survey, and the essays), the focus of this report is consistently on criticality. Because there are multiple theoretical understandings of criticality, our working definition revolved around whether the text or activity helped clarify how particular realities shape and are shaped by relations of power, including those between the researcher and the issues studied. We sought texts, activities, and institutions with emancipatory aims. In other words, the essays and case studies included here present knowledge or ways of knowing that challenge dominant understandings of people’s realities and reveal the materialities, relations, and ideas that help create these realities.

For each overarching theme, the editorial team commissioned six to eight

<sup>3</sup> See Mohammed Bamyeh, *Social Sciences in the Arab World: Forms of Presence* (Beirut: ACSS, 2015), <http://www.theacss.org/uploads/English-ASSR-2016.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> See <https://www.theacss.org/pages/arab-social-science-monitor>.

essays. The solicited thought pieces or essays were expected to be rigorous and based on research and reflection but not written as a research paper or journal article. They could be written in Arabic, English, or French; they are all presented here in English.<sup>5</sup> The editorial team reviewed each draft essay, and a few ended up not quite fitting the goals of this project.

Section 2 presents an overview of the landscape of the humanities in the Arab region through the mapping exercise of the ASSM, as well as the survey conducted for the WHR. Section 3 presents the five main themes explored through the essays and thought pieces, as well as the major ideas emerging from the survey of interstitial endeavors.

## 2. Topographies of the Humanities in the Arab Region

Since 2013, the ACSS has been mapping the social sciences in universities, journals, professional associations, and other infrastructures of knowledge production through a flagship project, the ASSM. In addition to developing and populating the databases described already, the ASSM produces periodic reports on the state of the social sciences in the region,<sup>6</sup> has developed the first ever Arab Dataverse,<sup>7</sup> and holds trainings on data management and sharing. Although the ACSS in general and the ASSM in particular have always had a broad definition of the social sciences and included various humanities fields, for the purposes of this project, the ASSM expanded the fields and disciplines that it maps to encompass new fields such as literature and philosophy. These data give us a fair idea of the infrastructures through which knowledge is produced, disseminated, and reproduced and raise important questions about the topography of the humanities in the Arab region. Along with the survey of critical humanities initiatives undertaken specifically for this project, we now have two main sources that provide a robust overview of the infrastructures through which humanities research is conducted and knowledge produced in the Arab region. The main findings from the ASSM mapping and the WHR survey are presented in the following.

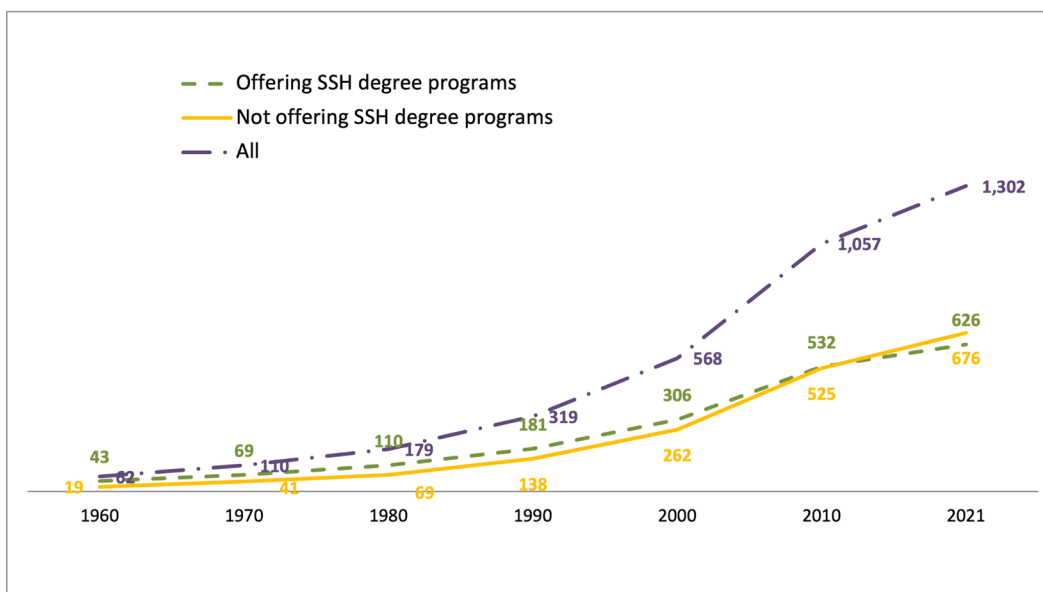
<sup>5</sup> A separate ACSS publication in Arabic stemming from this project will serve as volume 2 of the new ACSS publication series *Qiraat: ACSS Reviews in the Social Sciences and Humanities*. The ACSS is also designing a multilingual, multimodal platform to house the continuing work and outputs.

<sup>6</sup> See Bamyeh, *Social Sciences in the Arab World*; and Abdallah Hammoudi, *Approaches to Arabic-Language Productions 2000–2016* [in Arabic] (Beirut: ACSS, 2018), <http://www.theacss.org/pages/arab-social-science-report-2017>.

<sup>7</sup> See <https://dataverse.theacss.org/>.

## 2.1. ASSM Mapping

The Arab region has seen an immense growth in universities since the 1990s, and this growth has important implications.<sup>8</sup> The most recent data show the number of universities quadrupling over a thirty-year period from 319 in 1990 to 1,377 in 2021 (see figure 1). This indicates increasing state investment in higher education but is also the result of opening up to private (including for-profit) universities. While the number of universities is increasing, we also see an increasing gap between those that offer degrees in the social sciences and humanities (SSH) programs and those that do not. Thus in 1980, 63 percent of universities granted degrees in SSH, falling to 50 percent of universities by 1999 and down to 44 percent of universities established after 2000. This indicates that most of the new universities are oriented toward science, technology, engineering, and mathematics degrees, as well as finance and management. In those universities, even elective courses in SSH are rarely offered.

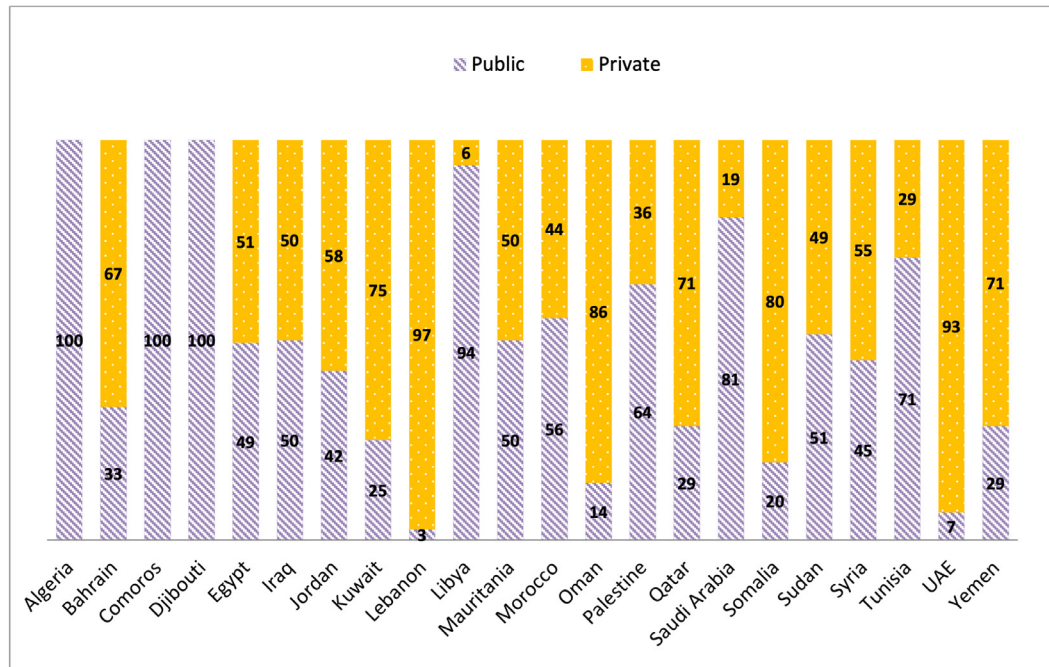


**Figure 1.** Cumulative number of higher education institutions offering social sciences / humanities degree programs in the Arab region based on date of establishment (total = 1,302; date of establishment available for 1,302 out of 1,377 universities) (Arab Social Science Monitor Database, 2021).

When examining the distribution of universities that offer SSH by country and by public versus private universities, we see a varied landscape, showing

<sup>8</sup> See Bamyeh, *Social Sciences in the Arab World*.

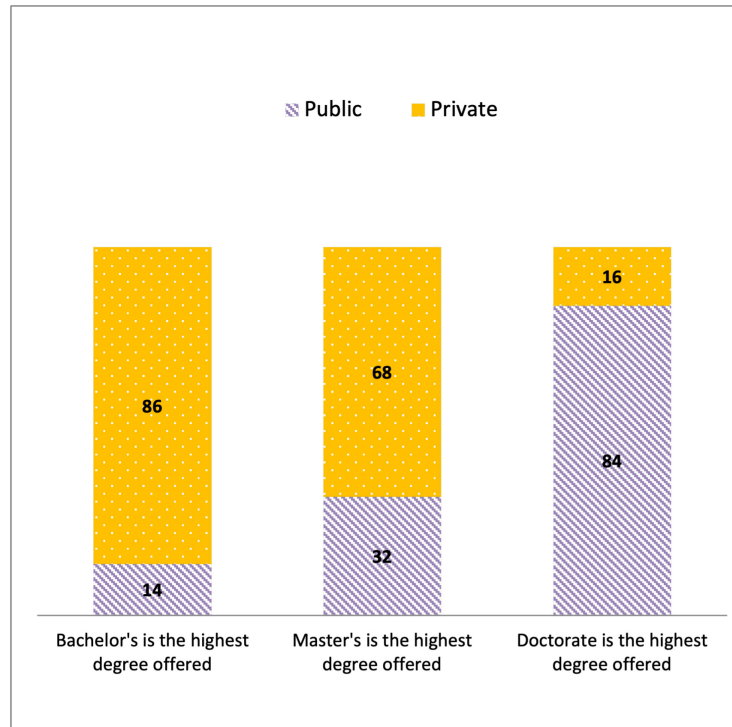
differing policies. The public sector is largely predominant in Algeria, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, and Palestine, with Algeria only having public universities. Whereas the public sector is 33 percent or less in Lebanon, Somalia, and most Gulf countries, other countries are more evenly split between public and private institutions (see figure 2).



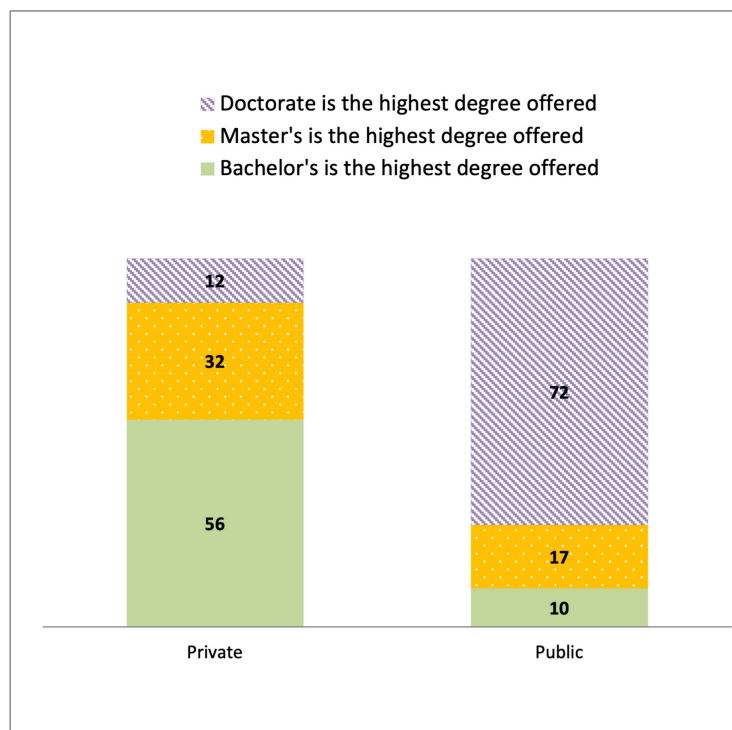
**Figure 2.** Public/private distribution of higher education institutions in the Arab region offering social sciences / humanities degree programs by country (%) (Arab Social Science Monitor Database, 2021).

Interestingly, public universities are much more likely to offer advanced degrees and doctoral programs in SSH, whereas most private ones only offer bachelor’s or master’s degrees (see figures 3 and 4). This is extremely important because public institutions are generally underresourced and suffer from massification and lack of research facilities. It also implies that most graduates in SSH from private universities will tend to seek doctoral studies abroad rather than in the region.



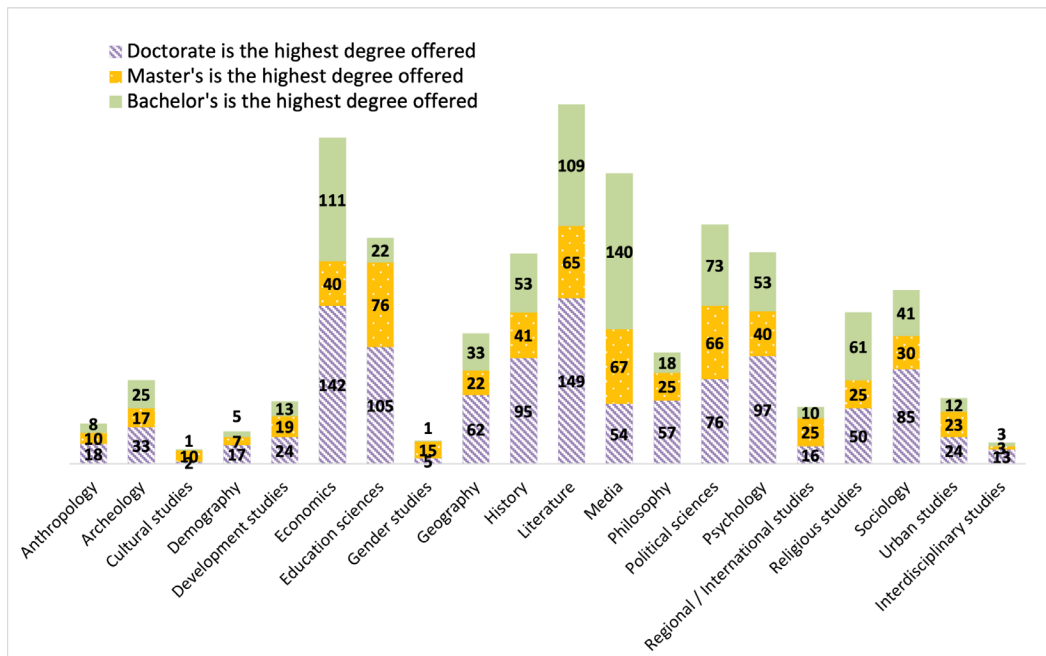


**Figure 3.** Distribution of sectors by highest social sciences / humanities degrees (%) (Arab Social Science Monitor Database, 2021).



**Figure 4.** Distribution of highest social sciences / humanities degrees per sector (%) (Arab Social Science Monitor Database, 2021).

When looking at the disciplines and their distributions over degrees offered, we see interesting patterns. The SSH fields in which degree programs are most commonly offered are literature (26 percent), economics (23 percent), and media studies (21 percent), followed by political science (17 percent), education sciences and history (16 percent each), psychology (15 percent), and sociology (13 percent). Philosophy is only at 9 percent, and religious studies (excluding Shari'a studies) is at 11 percent. Barely showing a presence are anthropology, demography, development studies, regional/international studies, gender studies, and cultural studies. Although some level of graduate studies seems to be offered in almost all fields, the amount varies quite a bit by discipline (see figure 5).

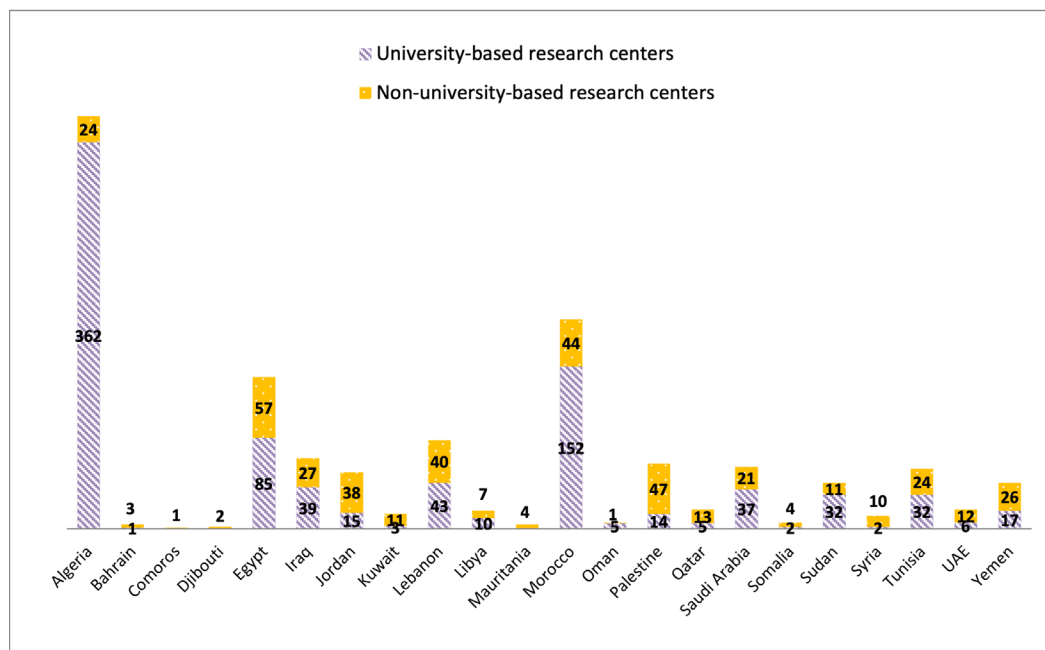


**Figure 5.** Number of higher education institutions in the Arab region offering degree programs in social sciences / humanities by field and highest degree level (institutions for which the highest degree level in a particular field could not be determined were excluded from this chart) (Arab Social Science Monitor Database, 2021).

In addition to university departments and teaching, the reproduction of fields and disciplines requires important ancillary institutions, most notably research centers, periodicals, and professional associations. These structures enable researchers to convene, engage in collaborative research, and disseminate findings to specialized and general publics.

In terms of research centers, we see that Algeria, Morocco, Egypt, Lebanon,

and Iraq currently host about two-thirds of SSH research centers in the region (see figures 6 and 7). Two-thirds are university-based research centers (UBRCs), and these are concentrated in Algeria, Morocco, and Egypt (50 percent), while Egypt, Palestine, and Morocco are the top countries for non-university-based research centers (NUBRCs) (together hosting 35 percent).

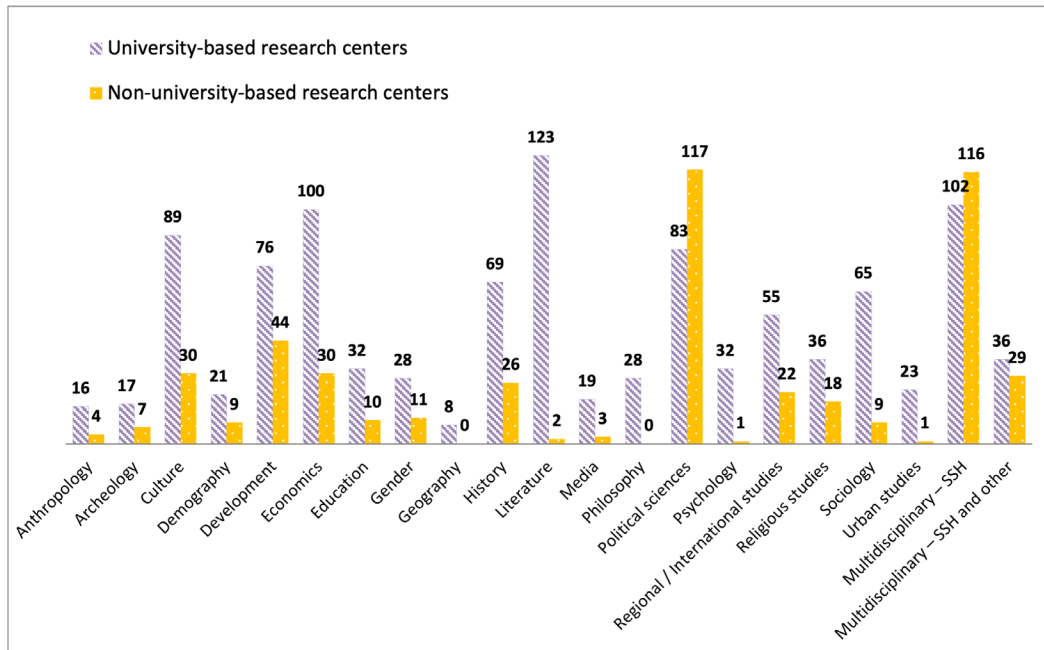


**Figure 6.** Number of research centers working on social sciences / humanities in the Arab region by country and affiliation (Arab Social Science Monitor Database, 2021).

Multidisciplinary research centers account for 22 percent of all SSH research centers in the Arab region. Excluding them, the fields that SSH research centers mostly target are political science (16 percent) and economics and literature (10 percent each). The fields of demography, philosophy, archaeology, media, anthropology, and geography have a poor presence (less than 2 percent each).

With the exception of political science research centers and those with a multidisciplinary scope, the number of UBRCs largely exceeds that of NUBRCs in all fields (from two-thirds in development and religious studies to more than 95 percent in psychology, literature, philosophy, and geography).

The distribution of fields of interest differs significantly between UBRCs and NUBRCs. Compared with UBRCs, NUBRCs are more likely to be multidisciplinary (34 percent versus 16 percent) or to focus on political sciences (27 percent versus 10 percent), mostly at the expense of literature (0 percent versus



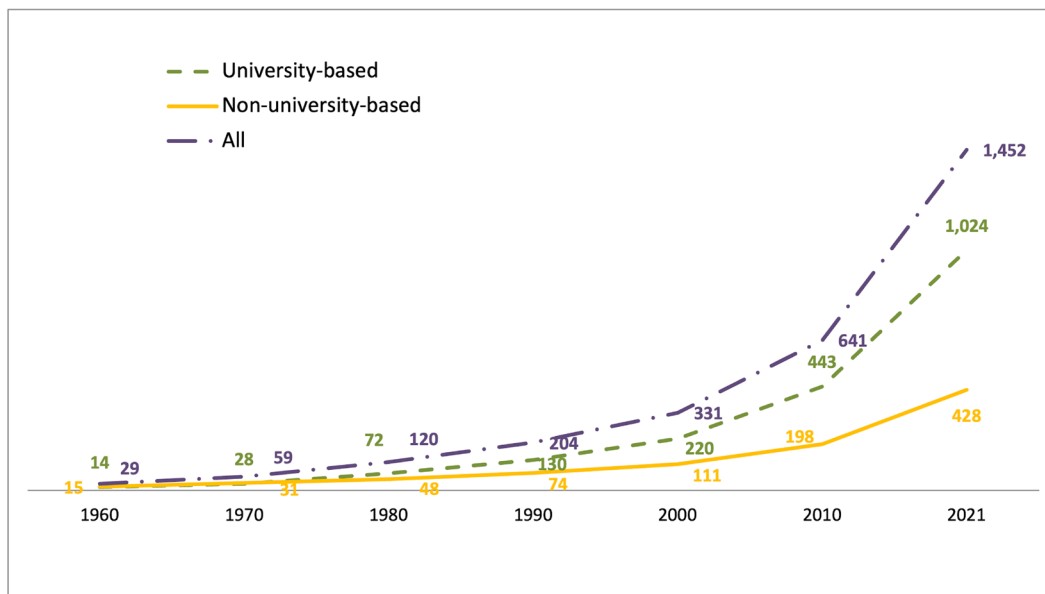
**Figure 7.** Number of social sciences / humanities research centers in the Arab region by field and affiliation (Arab Social Science Monitor Database, 2021).

14 percent), economics (7 percent versus 12 percent), and sociology (2 percent versus 8 percent) that occupy a larger place among UBRCs. It is also noteworthy that literature, psychology, philosophy, and geography are nearly or completely absent in NUBRCs. This landscape reflects important factors shaping knowledge production, which include funding sources and availability and the sensitivities surrounding some research topics (e.g., research on politics and public opinion).

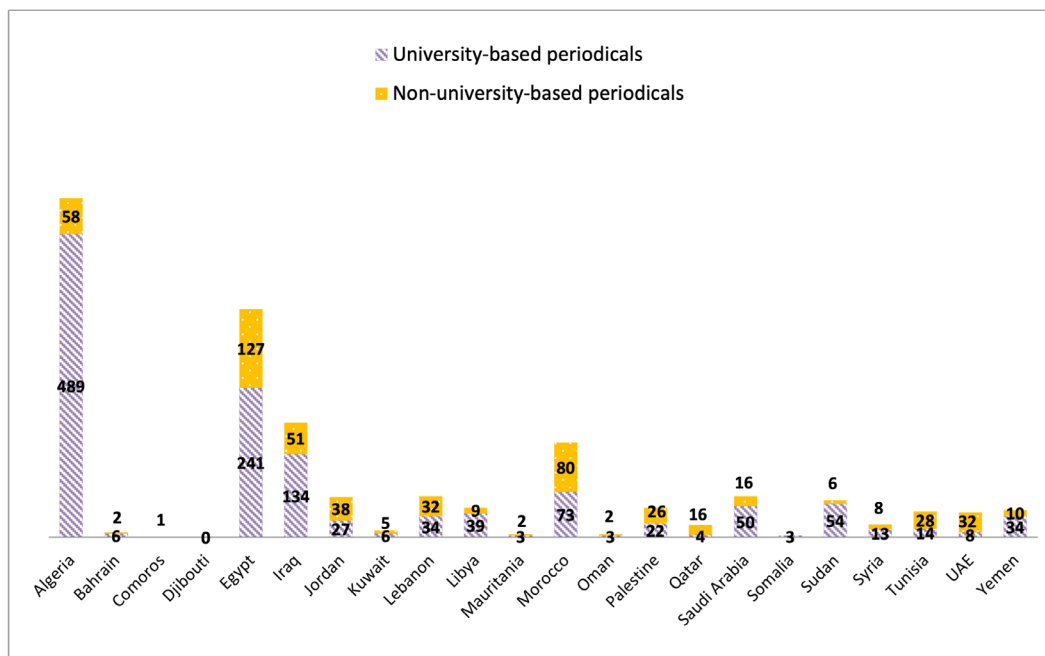
In terms of periodicals, we see a huge increase in numbers in recent decades, with 1990 being the watershed moment (see figure 8). The majority of periodicals are currently based at universities. This is interesting because historically, many important and influential SSH periodicals were in fact associated with research centers outside universities (e.g., the several journals issued or sponsored by the Beirut-based Center for Arab Unity Studies<sup>9</sup> and the Institute for Palestine Studies<sup>10</sup>), many of which had clear political affiliations and ideological orientations. Before 1980, only one-quarter of periodicals were university based compared with three-quarters at the present time. Many of these earlier journals continue to exist, although they have come to represent a smaller percentage of the periodicals available in the region.

<sup>9</sup> See <https://caus.org.lb/en/homepage/>.

<sup>10</sup> See <https://www.palestine-studies.org/>.



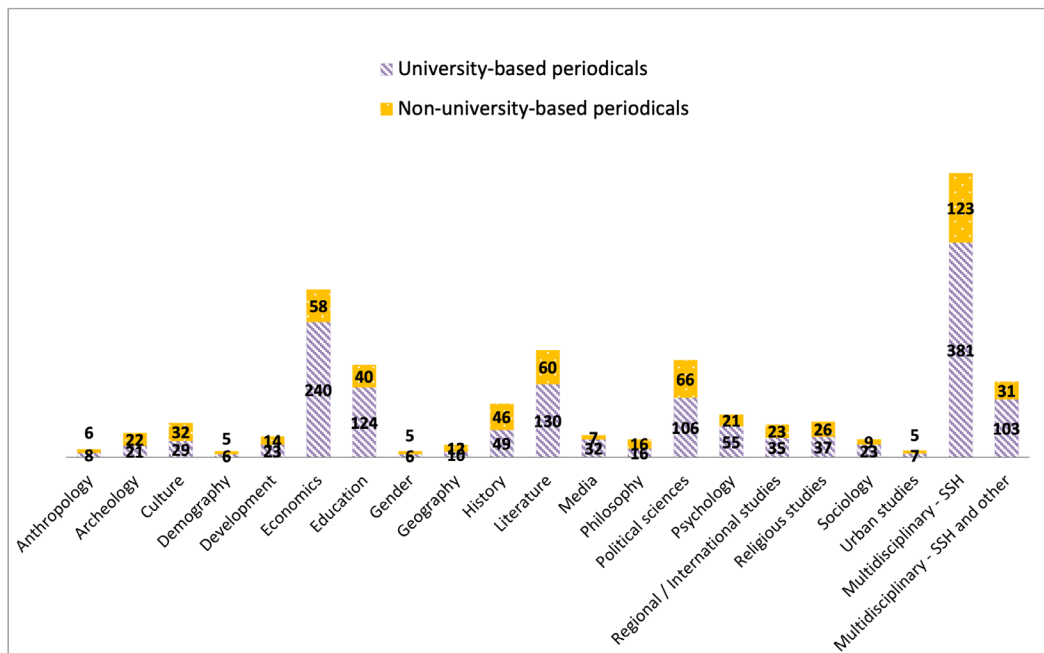
**Figure 8.** Cumulative number of social sciences / humanities periodicals in the Arab region based on their date of first publication (Arab Social Science Monitor Database, 2021).



**Figure 9.** Number of periodicals in the Arab region publishing in social sciences / humanities by country of publishing institution (Arab Social Science Monitor Database, 2021).

In terms of distribution over countries, we see that Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, and Morocco are the top producers of SSH periodicals, publishing around 75 percent of them (see figure 9).

In terms of disciplines and fields, we find that the highest number of periodicals are multidisciplinary, including some that cover disciplines beyond the SSH (see figure 10). This is important because these are mostly journals that are not focused on developing particular kinds of multi- or interdisciplinarity or challenging disciplinary boundaries. Most of these are university-based journals and act as convenient outlets for publications by professors seeking promotion. They do not speak to a particular readership or give rise to broad discussion and debate as the more specialized journals do. As for specialized journals, we see the highest numbers in economics (17 percent), literature (11 percent), political science (10 percent), and education (9 percent), with history trailing (5 percent).



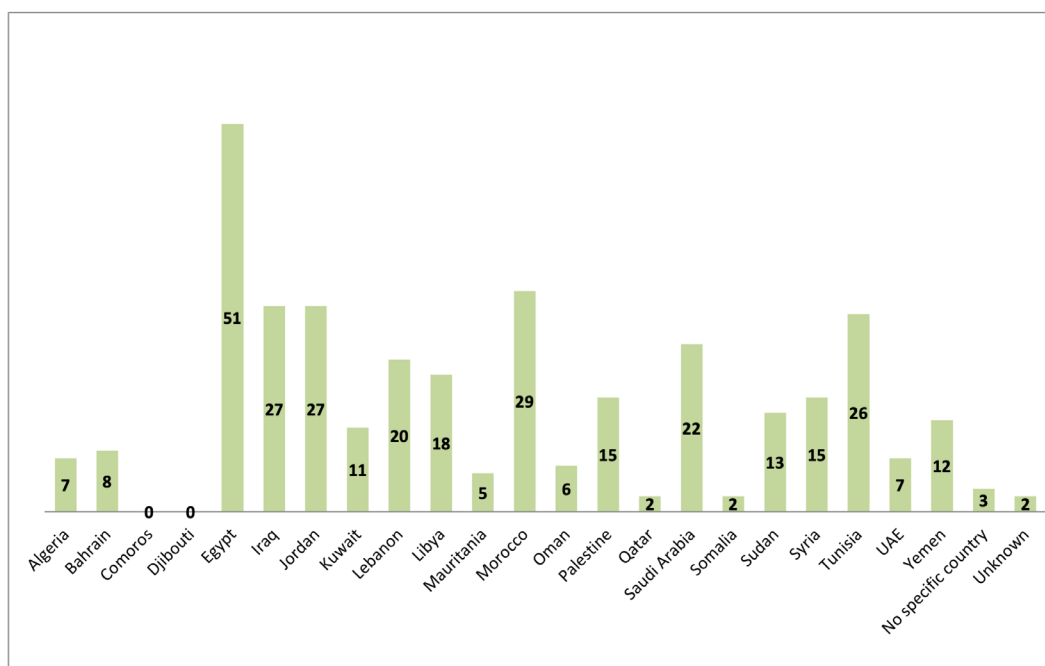
**Figure 10.** Number of social sciences / humanities periodicals in the Arab region by field (Arab Social Science Monitor Database, 2021).

It should be noted that as with book publishing, the distribution of periodicals is extremely unreliable in the Arab region, and most journals do not have an online presence. Therefore, the impact of these publications on the circulation

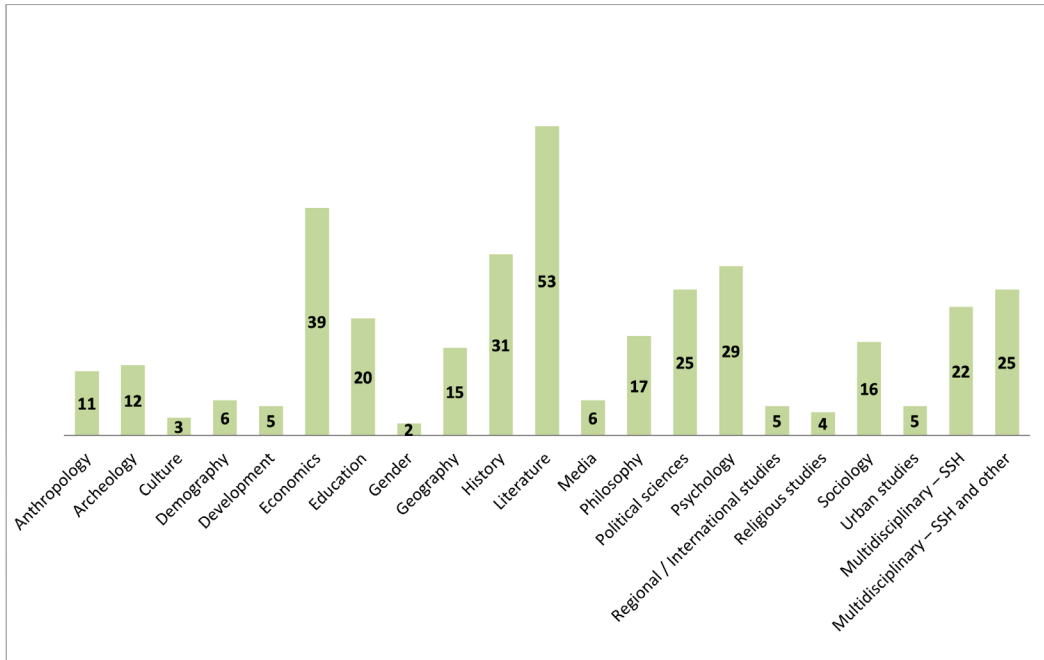
of knowledge, teaching, scholarly debate, and discussion may not be as significant as the data suggest. Gaining in significance are e-zines, blogs, and websites that reach much broader audiences, especially since about 2010.

In terms of associations, literature is the field that has the largest proportion of SSH professional societies in the Arab region (16 percent), followed by economics (12 percent), history and psychology (9 percent each), and political science and multidisciplinary scope (8 percent each) (see figures 11 and 12). Egypt houses the largest number of SSH associations, followed by Morocco, Iraq, Jordan, and Tunisia. These five countries account for 50 percent of all SSH professional associations in the region.

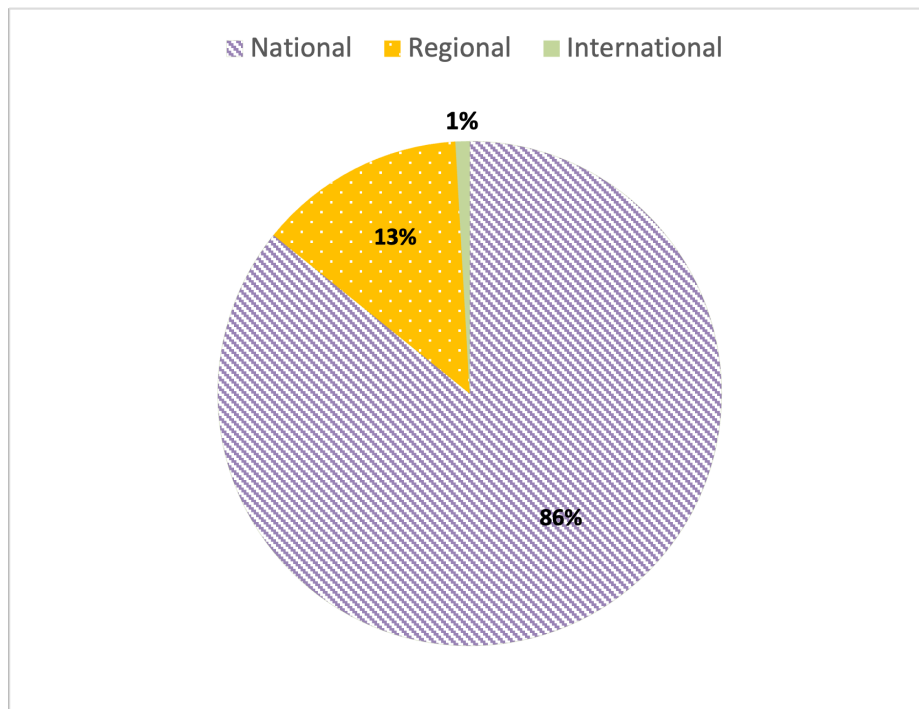
Many of these associations, while existing formally, are moribund, rarely gathering their members together in conferences, mostly because of a lack of resources. In addition, very few associations are regional or even subregional, thus rarely bringing people together across countries (see figure 13).



**Figure 11.** Number of social sciences / humanities professional societies in the Arab region by country (Arab Social Science Monitor Database, 2021).



**Figure 12.** Number of social sciences / humanities professional societies in the Arab region by field (Arab Social Science Monitor Database, 2021).



**Figure 13.** Social sciences / humanities professional/scientific societies in the Arab region by geographic scope (%; as implied by the name of the professional society) (Arab Social Science Monitor Database, 2021).



## 2.2. WHR Survey and Case Studies

The survey of organizations, collectivities, and projects undertaken specifically for the WHR pursued a more in-depth understanding of the humanities than publicly available data can provide. The purpose of the survey was to hear from organizations themselves, in their own words, about how they understand their work to be critical and how they determine its relevance to the humanities, however they understand the “humanities.” At the same time, the survey posed questions about the factors that hinder and help critical humanities work. The case study profiles included in this report build on the responses to the survey, on the research team’s interpretations of these responses, and on a dialogue that resulted in the final texts presented on the WHR website.

The research team began by compiling a master list of organizations and refined it in conversation with the editorial team. The list of organizations was compiled through several approaches, such as looking for those affiliated with universities and educational institutions; identifying civil society organizations and NGOs active in the respective countries; seeking lists of grantees from donor websites in the region; tracking media coverage and social media platforms that address related themes, which then led to a snowball effect as the social media algorithms showed similar pages; searching for government-sponsored initiatives and projects that engaged relevant activities or partnered with suitable organizations; looking up organizations mentioned in the essay contributions to this report; using websites and resources that function as directories for organizations; asking friends and colleagues; and last but not least, using the ACSS as a resource by looking at its collaborations, grantees, and so on.

The list was eventually narrowed down to just over one hundred organizations, which were invited to participate. However, because some organizations work informally, lack the resources or capacity to be visible, or produce work of a sensitive nature (i.e., activism and rights-based work), they were difficult to know about or reach. The team fully acknowledges the difficulty of achieving representation, despite its attempts to be as inclusive as possible.

The survey, prepared in French, Arabic, and English, contained seven sections and sixty-six questions (see appendix). More than thirty groups responded positively, and ultimately twenty-five organizations filled out the survey. Responses to those questions alone were not sufficient to gain a comprehensive understanding of the landscape in which these organizations operate. Supplementary research was needed to interpret and make sense of survey responses and to better understand trends and correlations. In the final stage, the survey data were collated, and the case study profiles of the responding organizations were produced.

Of the one hundred or so organizations that were initially selected to participate in the survey, Palestine, Lebanon, Morocco, and Syria were the most heavily represented countries. This was not intentional; rather, the organizations from these countries had the most visible online presence or were easier to contact. The initial list included online news outlets, arts and culture foundations, as well as open knowledge platforms and collectives that operate within and across the Arab region and, in some cases, globally. Most of the organizations operated outside the purview of higher education institutions, demonstrating that critical humanistic knowledge production is not limited to academic circles. In addition, many operated exclusively online.

The twenty-five organizations that responded had the following distribution: Lebanon (seven), Arab region (five), Egypt (four), Palestine (two), Qatar (two), Syria (two), Saudi Arabia (one), Jordan (one), Morocco (one), and Sudan (one). The specified country refers to either the focus of the organization's work or where their offices are headquartered, but these geographical designations do not neatly fit each organization. The work of the ACSS, for example, is based in Lebanon but is regional in scope. Although the Nubian Geographic is categorized under Egypt, their work attempts to challenge official geographical demarcations. The organizations/platforms were mostly small- to medium-sized enterprises, comprising six to ten core staff members on average, with many of them hiring four to six consultants on an annual basis. The majority of the organizations/platforms had one location for their headquarters, with some exceptions, such as the Arab Studies Institute and Legal Agenda, which have two (the former between Beirut, Lebanon, and Virginia, United States; and the latter between Beirut and Tunis). Last, the organizations mostly relied on international donors for their funding, with the majority applying for funds ranging between US\$100,000 and US\$300,000. Donor organizations such as the Ford Foundation, United Nations Development Programme, the Open Society Foundations, and the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture appeared on several surveys. Some organizations chose not to disclose their funding sources.

Whether institutionalized or working at a small or informal scale, the organizations displayed formidable energy toward producing, redefining, and redrawing the boundaries of criticality in the region. This energy raises the important questions: How do we strengthen the links between formal institutions and informal collectives/platforms/organizations, self-funded organizations and government-backed initiatives, donor-dependent and self-funded groups (though the latter appear to be scarce)? Do we identify when such links would be necessary and why? More importantly, the energy displayed by informal

humanities organizations signals the potential of pedagogical, socioeconomic, and cultural transformation in the region, especially when we consider the afterlives of the critical knowledge they produce (online and offline), as well as the compounded effect of these separate yet complementary initiatives. What are the conditions that can sustain critical humanistic inquiry, and how can we foster them? Even though it remains difficult to address the significance of these processes and dynamics, the synergy between the different organizations points to a shift in the critical humanities in the region. The ACSS wants to focus on this issue in the future and develop a database of critical humanities organizations in the region, as well as set up a multimodal, interactive, and accessible platform that archives the critical humanistic knowledge they produce.

The two sets of mappings—the ASSM database mapping and the survey of organizations—provide an overview of the structures and modalities through which research is undertaken and knowledge produced and reproduced in the Arab region. Many of the essays commissioned for the WHR and discussed here refer to these institutions and organizations and critically examine the modalities by which they operate.

### 3. Criticality in the Humanities: Trends and Futures

The Arab region labors under a number of burdens, including the knowledge that is produced about it and the knowledge it produces about itself. We explain the framing of this report through the lens of the “Arab region.” From among the many designations for this tranche of world geography, such as the Middle East and North Africa, the Mediterranean, West Asia, the Levant, among others, we chose to frame our work as that of the “Arab region” to emphasize certain historical, cultural, and social genealogies and as a designation that emphasizes the Arabic language, unlike the others. The choice of “Arab region” is not an argument for authenticity, organicity, or seamlessness, much less for coherence across the twenty-two countries that are members of the League of Arab States.<sup>11</sup> Nor can this report engage fully with issues and histories of Arab nationalism, pan-Arabism, and interstate conflict and cooperation. Indeed, as several of the essays explain, other solidarities and linkages are crucial for our understandings of the construction and reconstruction of the region, its societies, and peoples.

<sup>11</sup> The League of Arab States includes Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. As of 2011, Syria’s participation in the LAS has been suspended.

This includes third worldism, Afro-Asianism, nonalignment, and other modes of South-South and global connections and comparisons that cross and break up the “Arab” region and suggest new geographies. The case studies focus on projects and institutions that seek to amplify voices and identities that are often marginalized or erased in hegemonic Arab narratives. Like any category, the “Arab region” occludes as well as reveals. The essays and case studies in this report show the shortcomings and jeopardies of the political project of pan-Arab nationalism, while recognizing the intellectual, linguistic, discursive, and emotional ties that bind people and places across this geography, without recourse to misplaced notions of monolithic regions and simulated teleologies.

### 3.1. The Essays

We have grouped the twenty-eight essays into five thematic sections and discuss the topics and issues that arise in each. Word clouds, which were pulled from the section’s essays, accompany each theme. The word clouds not only suggest important themes and ideas to consider but also offer visual representations of an evolving discourse that captures a particular moment of the state of humanistic knowledge production. Emerging from across the essays, these word clouds highlight central issues concerning the role of critical humanities and invite intellectual afterlives beyond the essays. They lead us to ask several questions: How might we complicate relationships between Global North and Global South or “centers” and “peripheries” of knowledge production? How do research positionalities affect research, particularly in crisis contexts? How does feminist labor—whether visible or invisible—challenge or dismantle existing patriarchal structures? How does ideology travel through and across linguistic borders and across urban landscapes, and what is the role of the Arab diaspora in opening up alternative narrative possibilities?

#### 3.1.1. Layered Hegemonies, Academic Imaginaries

The Arab region, as well as knowledge about it, is the outcome of complex and rich interactions and interconnections that are political, economic, and intellectual. This thematic section aims to reveal the multiple layers of hegemonic epistemologies, paradigms, discourses, and institutional arrangements that shape knowledge production about and in the region. These influences represent the evolving effects and interplay of historical intellectual traditions, colonial dominations, modernist projects, and neoliberal forces. The systems, structures, and processes play out differently in various contexts and shape academic imaginaries in terms of what is to be researched, how, and to what ends.

Taken together, the essays under this theme explore the lenses through which the Arab region is studied, understood, developed, and contested over time. They describe entangled and connected histories as well as possibilities for alternative frames and trajectories.<sup>12</sup> This includes recognizing and interrogating the racialized dynamics that affected possibilities for transregional and South-South collaborations and dialogue, past and present.<sup>13</sup> The complexities of location and identity show the reductionism often implied by even emancipatory frameworks such as postcolonial, decolonial, and deimperialist scholarship.<sup>14</sup> The essays describe and engage in the search for the cracks, margins, and spaces that may point to justice, accountability, and alternative futures and celebrate those who carry this out against many odds. As Kristine Khouri writes in her essay, “People do this work because they must.”<sup>15</sup>

Closely related to these matters is the important issue of research resources and data sources, including access to archives, maps, art, and other artifacts. The topography of these resources and how they are generated but also destroyed, dispersed, and relocated are as important as their content and are part and parcel of the knowledges these resources enable or occlude, all of which changes over time. The essays also examine different settings of knowledge production: the archive and library,<sup>16</sup> the classroom and the campus,<sup>17</sup> the conference,<sup>18</sup> research institutions,<sup>19</sup> and cyberspace.<sup>20</sup>

As the word cloud illustrates, geographies and resources continue to be part of the ways race, gender, colonialism, and current global hierarchies structure centers and peripheries. This includes conditions for the possibility and impos-

<sup>12</sup> See Hosam Aboul-Ela, *Deimperialization and Arab Thought* (World Humanities Report, CHCI, 2023); Esmat Elhalaby, *Arab Archives and Asian Histories* (World Humanities Report, CHCI, 2023); Wangui Kimari, *Troubling South-South Solidarity* (World Humanities Report, CHCI, 2023).

<sup>13</sup> Elhalaby, *Arab Archives and Asian Histories*; Kimari, *Troubling South-South Solidarity*.

<sup>14</sup> Aboul-Ela, *Deimperialization and Arab Thought*; May Al-Dabbagh, *Self Tracing* (World Humanities Report, CHCI, 2023).

<sup>15</sup> Kristine Khouri, *Alternative Archival Initiatives as Sites of Resistance* (World Humanities Report, CHCI, 2023), 6.

<sup>16</sup> Elhalaby, *Arab Archives and Asian Histories*; Khouri, *Alternative Archival Initiatives*.

<sup>17</sup> Al-Dabbagh, *Self Tracing*; Danya Al-Saleh and Neha Vora, *US Branch Campuses in the Gulf as Sites of Imperial and Decolonial Knowledge Production* (World Humanities Report, CHCI, 2023); Fadi A. Bardawil, *Border Crossings: Arab Humanities at Home and Abroad* (World Humanities Report, CHCI, 2023); Samer Ghamroun, *Law and the Humanities: Academic Impossibilities, Activist Necessities?* (World Humanities Report, CHCI, 2023).

<sup>18</sup> Kimari, *Troubling South-South Solidarity*.

<sup>19</sup> Elhalaby, *Arab Archives and Asian Histories*.

<sup>20</sup> Khouri, *Alternative Archival Initiatives*.

sibility of research in different settings,<sup>21</sup> as well as pedagogies and how new generations are inducted into frameworks of knowledge and self-knowledge.<sup>22</sup> These politics of location are complicated by transnational and diasporic circulations and solidarities.<sup>23</sup> Do prevailing disciplinary prejudices (even imperialisms) and how they are institutionalized at universities, NGOs, and other settings further complicate the ability to carry out research and train new generations?<sup>24</sup>



**Figure 14.** The word cloud highlights the main themes that emerge in different essays of this section, emphasizing the ways in which histories, identities, and modes of knowledge production—whether marginalized or dominant—are connected.

### 3.1.2. Urgency and Temporality

This thematic section highlights the profound importance of doing humanities in what can only be described as inhumane times. The Arab region, its societies, and peoples are rocked by conflict, rupture, and shock, materially and emotionally. Six essays explain the tragedies unfolding at different levels in Palestine and Lebanon and the moral, emotional, and scholarly impulses to address issues of the moment and try to “help” and “find solutions.” Urgent problems create a

<sup>21</sup> Al-Saleh and Vora, *US Branch Campuses*; Bardawil, *Border Crossings*; Kimari, *Troubling South-South Solidarity*.

<sup>22</sup> Al-Dabbagh, *Self Tracing*; Al-Saleh and Vora, *US Branch Campuses*; Bardawil, *Border Crossings*; Ghamroun, *Law and the Humanities*.

<sup>23</sup> Aboul-Ela, *Deimperialization and Arab Thought*; Bardawil, *Border Crossings*; Elhalaby, *Arab Archives and Asian Histories*; Kimari, *Troubling South-South Solidarity*.

<sup>24</sup> Ghamroun, *Law and the Humanities*.

conflict between reflection and discussion (which needs time and space) on one hand and the demand for immediate responses by different publics, in writing if not action, on the other. These problems reflect not only present-day “emergencies” but also cases of protracted conflict where past and present precarities produce competing priorities. A different reaction is the dismissal of reflection, discussion, and writing in favor of action, especially what is seen as pragmatic and effective action. These clashes of temporalities represent a crisis in their own right.

Some essays consider what it is like to do research during crises that seem to demand urgent action and research.<sup>25</sup> Do scholars succumb to the pressure to “be pragmatic,” and if so, what kinds of thinking and research are sidelined because of it? In such contexts, how do scholars remain critical and useful? What kinds of research communities and institutions need to be created? Which actions count as emancipatory and effective in creating change? On the other hand, how is the researcher and activist to avoid the paralytic effects arising out of the anxiety to act,<sup>26</sup> and what happens when one is not just an “engaged” researcher but one whose life and future are implicated directly, who is themselves a colonized body.<sup>27</sup> The counterpart of the research versus action conundrum is technicality versus criticality.<sup>28</sup> The authors show how projects and events are often planned through apolitical, technical assumptions about what the subjects (e.g., refugees) want and need in contexts of deprivation and fragility.<sup>29</sup> The questions are many, the answers complex, the moment obscure, and futures clouded.

“Crisis” refers not only to dramatic events (an explosion, crossfire, uprising) but also to extended periods of continuous tension and ongoing structural, endemic violence that can become “normalized”<sup>30</sup> or made “historical.”<sup>31</sup> How are past and present imbricated in settings (military checkpoints) and objects (letters, photographs)? If the researcher comes down on the side of knowledge production over action, what kind of knowledge is needed? How is “reading”

<sup>25</sup> Muzna Al-Masri, *Witnessing the Emergence of Future Worlds: Ethnographic Research in Turbulent Times* (World Humanities Report, CHCI, 2023); Sophie Chamas, *Researching Activism in “Dead Time”: Counter-politics and the Temporality of Failure in Lebanon* (World Humanities Report, CHCI, 2023).

<sup>26</sup> Chamas, *Researching Activism in “Dead Time.”*

<sup>27</sup> Al-Masri, *Witnessing the Emergence of Future Worlds*; Rami Salameh, *A Critical Autoethnography of Teaching and Writing from Palestine* (World Humanities Report, CHCI, 2023).

<sup>28</sup> Chamas, *Researching Activism in “Dead Time.”*

<sup>29</sup> Mai Abu Moghli, *A Contested Terrain: Education in Emergencies Research* (World Humanities Report, CHCI, 2023).

<sup>30</sup> Salameh, *Critical Autoethnography of Teaching and Writing.*

<sup>31</sup> Sherene Seikaly, *Reading in Time* (World Humanities Report, CHCI, 2023).

a form of action?<sup>32</sup> What new conversations be engendered in the field<sup>33</sup> and in the archive?<sup>34</sup> When the present is experienced as a protracted moment of crisis and precarity, how are affect, nostalgia, and impasse materially expressed, and how might materiality itself be rethought in the context of personal/familial objects<sup>35</sup> and social media archives?<sup>36</sup>

The word cloud generated by this theme's essays highlights interesting binaries that connect and contrast: community and crisis, nostalgic and alternative archives, violence and solidarity. This underscores the ways crisis and temporal dissonances affect past, present, and future imaginaries. Pedagogy also appears, and this is related to the various kinds of knowledge enterprises, even industries, that emerge in response to what is happening on the ground. This includes widescale efforts such as education in emergencies initiatives and "expert" convenings,<sup>37</sup> as well as documentation efforts.<sup>38</sup> In this way, the attempts to understand crises might be unified in their aim, but the approaches are fraught. Perhaps due to this fraught and uncertain quality of such knowledge, many of the essays in this report focus on the pedagogical moment as crucial.<sup>39</sup> Here, not only the content of what is being transmitted but the format is also important (webinars, social media archives, blog posts, etc.). Contrasting debate and discussion "in the square"<sup>40</sup> or in expert meetings<sup>41</sup> with online discussions<sup>42</sup> brings up the issue of audiences and the ability to question and contest. Do new voices produce new silences?

Finally, the essays in this thematic grouping bring up the ethics of such endeavors and the hierarchies (including North/South inequalities) between project managers, "local" researchers, and data gatherers that may be reinforced rather than upended by crisis.<sup>43</sup> The authors think about how these moments might open new horizons and present possibilities to shape a different future. They ask us to look for new imaginaries and reflect on the kinds of research

<sup>32</sup> Seikaly, *Reading in Time*.

<sup>33</sup> Al-Masri, *Witnessing the Emergence of Future Worlds*.

<sup>34</sup> Seikaly, *Reading in Time*.

<sup>35</sup> Seikaly, *Reading in Time*.

<sup>36</sup> Reem Joudi, *Affect, Archives, and Afterlives of the State: Reimagining National Belongings in Lebanon on Instagram* (World Humanities Report, CHCI, 2023).

<sup>37</sup> Abu Moghli, *Contested Terrain*.

<sup>38</sup> Joudi, *Affect, Archives, and Afterlives*.

<sup>39</sup> In this section, Abu Moghli, *Contested Terrain*; Salameh, *Critical Autoethnography of Teaching and Writing*.

<sup>40</sup> Al-Masri, *Witnessing the Emergence of Future Worlds*.

<sup>41</sup> Abu Moghli, *Contested Terrain*.

<sup>42</sup> Joudi, *Affect, Archives, and Afterlives*.

<sup>43</sup> Abu Moghli, *Contested Terrain*; Al-Masri, *Witnessing the Emergence of Future Worlds*.



communities we want to nurture, the participatory ethical standards we need to create, and the equitable relationships and institutions we need to forge.



**Figure 15.** The word cloud highlights the main themes that emerge in different essays of this section, underscoring the ways in which crisis and temporal dissonances impact past, present, and future imaginaries.

### 3.1.3. Feminist Platforms

Feminist movements and gender research have transformed the political, economic, intellectual, and cultural practices and institutions in the Arab region. The essays in this section examine the institutional and interstitial sites of feminist knowledge production, whether in universities, research institutes, archives, or alternative media platforms.

Varying academic, political, and cultural contexts have influenced the development and institutionalization of feminist research and the history of women and gender studies programs in universities of the area. Knowledge production oscillates between universities and independent research organizations and NGOs.<sup>44</sup> This fluctuation influences the politics of the knowledge produced and reproduced, plus its independence, impact, and circulation. As state pressure and neoliberal agendas cause certain types of institutionalized knowledge

<sup>44</sup> Hoda Elsadda, *Gender Studies in the Arab World: An NGO Phenomenon* (World Humanities Report, CHCI, 2023).

to become increasingly depoliticized, a new politics arises through informal collectives and digital platforms and challenges the dichotomy between formal and informal forms of knowledge production and circulation.<sup>45</sup>

Islamic feminists have produced another set of dynamics, oppositions, and intersections with their own institutional infrastructures. Revisiting religious texts from a gender-sensitive perspective and using this production to claim rights in public and political arenas show that there is more than one way of being a feminist or an Islamic feminist.<sup>46</sup> Whatever the ideological motivations, the genealogies of feminism cannot be easily contained in a simple chronological scheme.<sup>47</sup> The frames and mediums of discussion and debate evolve constantly and develop transnational, transcontinental thought communities,<sup>48</sup> cinematic representations,<sup>49</sup> and activism.<sup>50</sup> Finally, an important intergenerational discussion has begun around learning about the nature of women's subalternity.<sup>51</sup>

The word cloud for this section illustrates how scholarly and creative feminist efforts challenge patriarchy, colonialism, nationalism, state surveillance, heteronormativity, and sexual violence. These efforts enrich the Arabic-language library by operating in a variety of languages, dialects, and vernaculars.<sup>52</sup> They demonstrate the importance and critical urgency of women's creative production in the Arab region, a production that reveals the various ways gender intersects with labor, social, class, and political dissent.<sup>53</sup> Together, the essays provide a gendered lens that nuances women's roles and positionalities, unpacking how they can occupy public space and discourse and how they tell their stories and for which audiences. This lens is not just a way of seeing the world but also a way of being. Dissemination takes on new and varied forms beyond the conference and the journal to encompass digital

<sup>45</sup> Elsadda, *Gender Studies in the Arab World*; Deema Kaedbey, *On Feminist Platforms in the MENA Region: Experiments with New Terms and New Terms of Engagement* (World Humanities Report, CHCI, 2023).

<sup>46</sup> Amel Grami, *The Contribution of Islamic Feminists to the Production of Knowledge* (World Humanities Report, CHCI, 2023).

<sup>47</sup> Kaedbey, *Feminist Platforms in the MENA*.

<sup>48</sup> Grami, *Contribution of Islamic Feminists*; Kaedbey, *Feminist Platforms in the MENA*.

<sup>49</sup> Hoda El Shakry, *Revolutionary Gazes: Gender Politics in Contemporary Tunisian Film* (World Humanities Report, CHCI, 2023).

<sup>50</sup> Hana Shaltout, *Comix as Artivism: The Intersection between Art and Critique* (World Humanities Report, CHCI, 2023).

<sup>51</sup> El Shakry, *Revolutionary Gazes*; Kaedbey, *Feminist Platforms in the MENA*.

<sup>52</sup> Grami, *Contribution of Islamic Feminists*; Shaltout, *Comix as Artivism*.

<sup>53</sup> El Shakry, *Revolutionary Gazes*.

spaces,<sup>54</sup> performance spaces, festivals, and other forums.<sup>55</sup> Robust and yet still precarious and politically vulnerable, “the struggle continues.”<sup>56</sup>



**Figure 16.** The word cloud highlights the main themes that emerge in different essays of this section, highlighting the ways in which feminist activism, knowledge production, and labor can challenge and/or dismantle patriarchal structures.

### 3.1.4. Translating and Traveling Genres

How are the humanities shaped, transformed, and given new meanings? Why are such new meanings increasingly important at this particular moment? The essays gathered under this rubric explore circulations and translations between languages, disciplines, genres, and platforms.

Humanistic knowledge often emerges from the encounter between different knowledge traditions across both time and space. Once, the dominant, colonial encounter involved conceptual translation between Europe and the Arab region, producing new Arabic dictionaries, glossaries, and lexicons.<sup>57</sup> In more recent times, multiple encounters have led to the creation of new forms of arts, comics,

<sup>54</sup> Shaltout, *Comix as Artivism*; Kaedbey, *Feminist Platforms in the MENA*.

<sup>55</sup> Shaltout, *Comix as Artivism*.

<sup>56</sup> Elsadda, *Gender Studies in the Arab World*.

<sup>57</sup> Omnia El Shakry, *The Humanities in Translation in the Arab World* (World Humanities Report, CHCI, 2023).

graffiti and performance.<sup>58</sup> Arab disciplinary knowledge is not simply derivative of European intellectual formations but formative, creative, and productive of new genres.<sup>59</sup>

In all situations, encounters, translations, and circulations lead to theoretical and creative innovations.<sup>60</sup> The essays in this section demonstrate how translation can be a process of “cultural mediation and political agency”—one where concepts and ideas are characterized and transformed by their journeys across sociocultural and political contexts.<sup>61</sup>

With a focus on the digital age and the political realities in the region after 2011, these six essays examine how innovations are reborn in the crucible of political and pandemic crises. The retrenchment of authoritarianism produces new forms of an old genre of prison literature, which crosses gender and ideological lines,<sup>62</sup> and activism emerges amid fraught conditions, injustices, and the relentless violation of human rights.<sup>63</sup> Notions of resistance, heroism, and renewal are reimagined, often in unconventional formats.<sup>64</sup>

The word cloud for this section shows dynamic processes at play, including rethinking old categories and inventing new theories and genres. Ideas and ideologies travel through and across linguistic borders, offering up space for alternative narrative possibilities. The digital age emerges as offering new possibilities for the decentralization, democratization, and increased inclusivity of the humanities. Art practices intersect with scholarly research, operate between North and South, and benefit from diasporic connections.<sup>65</sup> Transnational spaces and connections are created and open up new possibilities for reconstructing the regional and the global. These can be uncoupled from the nation and explore diasporic imaginations.<sup>66</sup> Does this experimentation create new heroes and leaders, or is there a turn to leaderless action and everyday heroism?<sup>67</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Mounira Soliman, *Heroism Revisited: The Superhero Genre in Modern Arabic Culture* (World Humanities Report, CHCI, 2023); Shaltout, *Comix as Activism*.

<sup>59</sup> El Shakry, *The Humanities in Translation*; Zeina G. Halabi, *The Contemporary in Arabic Literature* (World Humanities Report, CHCI, 2023).

<sup>60</sup> Tarek El-Ariss, *The Humanities in the Arab Digital Age* (World Humanities Report, CHCI, 2023).

<sup>61</sup> Hala Kamal, *Traveling Theory in Translation: An Arab “Travelogue” of Feminism and Gender* (World Humanities Report, CHCI, 2023), 8.

<sup>62</sup> Faten Morsy, *So Vast the Prison: Contextualizing Prison Writings after 2011* (World Humanities Report, CHCI, 2023).

<sup>63</sup> Morsy, *So Vast the Prison*; Soliman, *Heroism Revisited*.

<sup>64</sup> Halabi, *The Contemporary in Arabic Literature*; Soliman, *Heroism Revisited*.

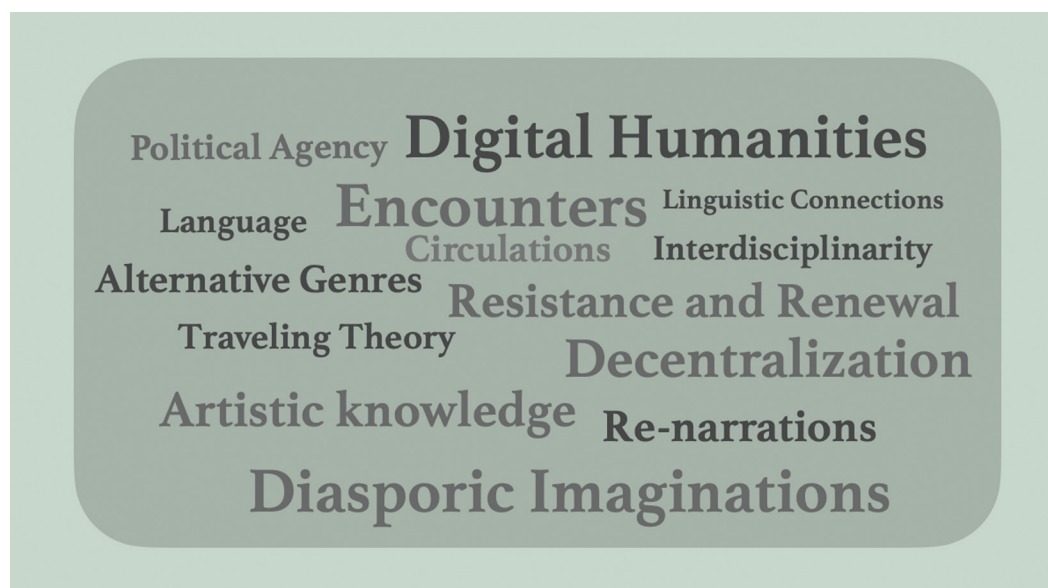
<sup>65</sup> El-Ariss, *Humanities in the Arab Digital Age*.

<sup>66</sup> Halabi, *The Contemporary in Arabic Literature*.

<sup>67</sup> Soliman, *Heroism Revisited*.

New sensibilities may renarrate sociopolitical change, abandon modernist worldviews,<sup>68</sup> and create powerful female protagonists.<sup>69</sup>

Although much of this work is driven by a sense of loss,<sup>70</sup> there is also a spirit of joy, humor, performativity, and play.<sup>71</sup> Everyday humanity renarrates the stakes of activist- and artist-activists who seek to participate simultaneously in sociopolitical change and critical humanities knowledge production.



**Figure 17.** The word cloud highlights the main themes that emerge in different essays of this section, looking at how ideology can travel through and across linguistic borders, offering up space for alternative narrative possibilities.

### 3.1.5. Urban Imaginaries and Landscapes

The essays in this section explore the multifaceted ways Arab cities are imagined and reimagined during historical moments, questioning how the technologies of power organize urban life and social relations. The Arab Spring uprisings were a critical moment in the region's modern history, placing renewed emphasis on the relationship between urban lifeworlds and modes of political dissent. Which areas in the cities become central sites of contestation, and which areas remain unseen? How do histories of war and violence leave material or intangible traces

<sup>68</sup> Halabi, *The Contemporary in Arabic Literature*.

<sup>69</sup> Soliman, *Heroism Revisited*.

<sup>70</sup> Halabi, *The Contemporary in Arabic Literature*.

<sup>71</sup> El-Ariss, *Humanities in the Arab Digital Age*; Soliman, *Heroism Revisited*.

on the city?<sup>72</sup> How do the ways in which collectives form, organize, and dissipate / are dispersed in city spaces foreclose or constrain possible futures?<sup>73</sup>

The Arab region's cityscapes emerge from and represent a multitude of historical and contemporary forces. The area hosts some of the oldest continually inhabited cities in the world and some of the newest. Some are megacities, and others are decaying and neglected historical conglomerations of the past. Some lie largely in ruins due to recent and ongoing military conflicts, and in other spaces neoliberal projects give rise to futuristic, sterile, dystopic built environments. The essays tackle the sedimented histories of these spaces, as in Sara Salem's essay, which explores how material traces of an anticolonial past haunt the postcolonial present in Egypt. These traces include how the ghost of Gamal Abdel Nasser<sup>74</sup> persists in street names, photographs, and political posters in Egypt and across other African nations, echoing an earlier time of connectiveness across Africa.

A different way the intersections of history, memory, and visual culture are linked is through new media technologies and their infrastructures. Hatim El-Hibri's essay looks at how these technologies affectively produce city spaces, creating complex mediated landscapes "defined by making and fashioning political and social subjects by cultivating and policing public and private interaction at the level of sight, sound, smell, touch, and embodied encounter."<sup>75</sup> How can a nuanced understanding of urban life, its productions, and its imaginaries help us think of alternative futures—ones that are more equitable and sustainable?

Sintia Issa contends with this question in her contribution, looking at how waste (mis)management in Lebanon is conditioned by sociopolitical power structures that produce unsustainable ecological and urban lifeworlds. As climate change becomes an increasingly urgent global concern and capitalist exploitation depletes existing resources, how can we start imagining a world otherwise? Where and when do the cracks appear in the system, and how do we build networks of solidarity and care that make life possible?

These essays present new ways of thinking about the material ways contemporary city spaces are entangled with neoliberalism and decolonization. This

<sup>72</sup> Sintia Issa, *Beyond the Garbage Politics of Emergency: The Paradox of Infrastructural Failure in Beirut's Peripheries* (World Humanities Report, CHCI, 2023); Sara Salem, *The City in Creative (Anticolonial) Imagination* (World Humanities Report, CHCI, 2023).

<sup>73</sup> Hatim El-Hibri, *The Urban Condition and Its Imaginaries: Perspectives from the Arab World* (World Humanities Report, CHCI, 2023); Issa, *Beyond the Garbage Politics*.

<sup>74</sup> Gamal Abdel Nasser was the president of Egypt from 1954 to 1970, a pan-Arab leader active in the nonaligned movement.

<sup>75</sup> El-Hibri, *Urban Condition and Its Imaginaries*, 7–8.

marks urban landscapes with ghosts,<sup>76</sup> decay, environmental violence, and “failure”<sup>77</sup> on one hand and new (often shiny) topographies of inclusion and exclusion on the other.<sup>78</sup>

These are issues that are shared unevenly across cities of the Arab region and beyond. The word cloud for this section highlights how contemporary Arab city spaces are organized, contested, and imagined otherwise. It centers the affective pulls, material traces, and power dynamics that persistently shape our understandings and experiences of cities.



**Figure 18.** The word cloud highlights the main themes that emerge in different essays of this section, looking at how city spaces are contested, shaped, mediated, and remembered amid moments of protracted and/or historical crises.

### 3.2. Case Studies: Platforms, Collectives, and Institutions

The survey of projects and institutions in the critical humanities shows an active, energetic, and innovative landscape that is often not reflected in the formal institutions of knowledge production in the region. After collecting the survey responses from the organizations, we identified common themes that relate to each of the five essay sections. This approach allowed us to understand the nuances and heterogeneity that shapes the critical humanities landscape in the region; in that sense, our approach and the case studies are critique in practice.

<sup>76</sup> Salem, *The City in Creative (Anticolonial) Imagination*.

<sup>77</sup> Issa, *Beyond the Garbage Politics*.

<sup>78</sup> El-Hibri, *Urban Condition and Its Imaginaries*.

We adopted a critical approach that values self-reflexivity and situated perspectives, attempts to grapple with our preconceptions and relationships to power, and understands data as constructed in particular spatial and temporal contexts. As women researchers from the Arab region working in the region and the diaspora, we have personal histories and positionalities that are undoubtedly intertwined with our critical pursuits. Thus, this approach can help us “unveil what we take for granted as well as what our participants take for granted,” which are necessary for any critical inquiry.<sup>79</sup>

The research team undertook the work of surveying these critical humanities organizations in the Arab region. They developed a questionnaire and drew up a list of selected organizations to receive it based on the following criteria: which disciplines they engaged; how their activities and productions address humanistic issues in various contexts in the region; how and whether their work could be considered critical; and whether their work includes the past, present, and future. The final criterion was that their work related to the overall themes identified by the editorial team by supplementing them, offering different perspectives, or presenting marginalized voices. The survey results are by no means exhaustive. The research team exercised flexibility to modify and adapt ideas and methodologies as the project progressed. The case studies were shared with the respondents, and their feedback/modifications were integrated into the final versions. In some cases, additional follow-up interviews were carried out with the respondents to gain clearer insight about particular methods, situations, or practices they mentioned. This flexibility helped us avoid reductionist categorizations or identifications that failed to capture the breadth of an organization’s work or explain the host of complex factors that influence its work, such as its relationship to state structures, knowledge production, and power relations.

The research team used the survey results to create case study profiles for each organization (see figure 19), using the following questions to guide their data analysis and synthesis processes: What does this organization/platform/collective do? Why is their work important or relevant to the Arab region? How does their work fit into the broader discussions surrounding critical humanistic knowledge production? When creating the case studies, we tried to draw on the works of mostly Arab and Global South scholars to rethink the centers of knowledge production and find avenues and networks of solidarity. The five themes that categorize the WHR essays were also conceptual signposts that helped the research team ground the survey findings in broader conversations

<sup>79</sup> Kathy Charmaz, “Special Invited Paper: Continuities, Contradictions, and Critical Inquiry in Grounded Theory,” *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 16 (2017): 6.



happening across and about the Arab region; hence, the case studies reference and engage with the commissioned essays.

The survey and case studies sought to clarify how terms such as “criticality” and the “humanities” are variously understood, incorporating quotes from the survey responses. How imaginations of the future and conceptualizations of the past guide these organizations’ work also informed the analyses. The answers to these questions needed to be co-constituted, rather than imposed, because research on the Arab region must contend with multiple definitions and iterations and varying viewpoints about what a better future can look like. It must contend with a spectrum of practices, methodologies, genres, terminologies, outputs, and imaginaries. Consequently, the focus was on synthesis, exploration, and questioning preconceived categories and notions. In the end, we cultivated a self-reflexive ethos that allowed for multiple experiments and adaptations.

Importantly, while the survey responses reflect the organizations’ viewpoints, the case study profiles reflect the research team’s interpretation of the survey results. This approach ensures that the responses are contextualized in broader trends and processes in the Arab region, rather than analyzed as standalone documents. Importantly, we shared drafts of the case study profiles with the organizations and have integrated their comments and feedback.

Afro-Asian Futures Past	Anti-Racism Movement	Arab Council for the Social Sciences (ACSS)	Arab Image Foundation	Arab Media Lab
Arab Studies Institute	Beit Najmeddine	Cairo Institute for Liberal Arts and Sciences (CILAS)	Creative Memory of the Syrian Revolution	Doha Historical Dictionary of Arabic
Institute for Palestine Studies	Khazaaen	Knowledge Workshop	<i>Kohl: A Journal for Body and Gender Research</i>	Legal Agenda
MADAR	Mathqaf	Mauzoun	Nubian Geographic	Other Maps of Egypt
<i>Rehla</i>	Studio Urban	Syria Untold	Transat	Women and Memory Forum

Figure 19. Case studies.

Seven shared themes/concerns emerged during the data analysis phase. Although not exhaustive, the areas discussed below are entry points through which to better grasp the landscape's heterogeneity.

### **3.2.1. Collaboration**

All of the humanities organizations that we surveyed agreed on the importance of interorganizational collaboration in the region, but some voiced concerns about collaborating with international organizations. According to the participants, collaboration at the regional and international levels pools expertise and resources, including access to databases and archives. It likewise increases their reach through increased access to different publics and platforms and allows for cross-border support in the face of legal, financial, and research restrictions. Organizations share strategies or models that have helped them get funding, and they learn from each other's failed and successful attempts to circumvent regimes of censorship and protect against threats to digital or physical archives. Working together, they find they can better think through technical, practical, ethical, or political dilemmas. Such collaboration is also a strategy for survival; in cases of increased state surveillance, explicit prohibition, the banning or shut-down of spaces for work and critical knowledge production, organizations need collaborators and allies in different countries—whether on regional or international fronts—to continue their work.

Collaborating with international organizations, however, posed two difficulties that some organizations saw as potentially outweighing the benefits. First, organizations working primarily in Arabic and speaking to the Arab region need to spend more resources on translating and reframing the research to make it relevant to the nonregional organization and its audiences. Second, organizations raised the issue of power relations between international and regional organizations. Organizations from North America and Western Europe in particular have a history of imposing their own research agendas and approaches to knowledge production, which end up controlling or limiting the kinds of research or activities organizations produce and the perspectives they employ. Avoiding international collaboration is seen as one strategy of resistance against this form of control or what people might call “soft power.”

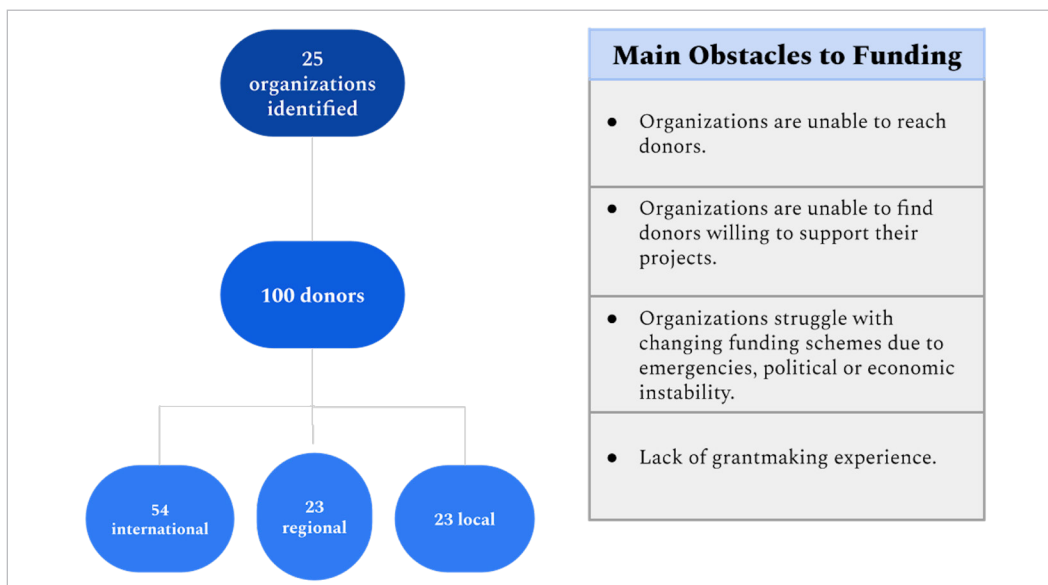
### **3.2.2. Funding**

We asked the surveyed organizations a series of questions about their funding sources and the main challenges they face in seeking funding. This question was aimed at understanding whether critical humanities organizations had a

system in place to sustain their activities or whether they depended on donor funds to continue their work. Some organizations, however, did not wish to disclose their funding sources or the amounts they received.

Most of the surveyed organizations/platforms/collectives relied on regional and international donors, which included institutions like the Ford Foundation, the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture, Al Mawred Al Thaqafi, the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, United Nations Development Programme, and the A. M. Qattan Foundation. Some organizations like the Doha Dictionary rely on government funding, while others like CILAS rely on crowdfunding campaigns, private donations, and progressive tuition schemes.

The funding amounts the organizations applied for ranged between US\$100,000–\$300,000 and US\$8,000–\$30,000; these were the two distinct categories that appeared frequently in the survey responses. Most organizations noted that they apply for two to five grants per year, with some exceptions like the Anti-Racism Movement applying for fifteen grants a year. Overall, the survey highlighted that the organizations/platforms/collectives were unable to secure enough funds to sustain them for multiple years. The main obstacles to securing funding are highlighted in figure 20.



**Figure 20.** On the left is a diagram demonstrating the scale of operation for the donors identified by the surveyed organizations. “International” refers to donor organizations that were founded outside the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and that operate on an international scale; “regional” refers to donor organizations founded in the MENA region and operating across the region; “local” refers to donor organizations founded in the MENA region and operating within one country of the region. On the right is a list of obstacles to receiving funding, as mentioned by the surveyed organizations.

### 3.2.3. Navigating State Relations

The organizations described varying relationships with their respective governments. While some noted the importance of liaising with state officials and ministries (notably ministries of culture) to facilitate events, others identified state censorship as a significant challenge that hinders their critical pursuits. Legislation that limits organizations' scope of work, their ability to network with other groups in the region, or their ability to receive funding are all legitimate concerns that affect the critical humanities landscape in the Arab region. That said, organizations often find ways to circumvent these obstacles, working within various constraints to produce critical content that either nuances or challenges dominant ways of knowing and different ways of thinking. The constraints are varied: For some groups, such as Nubian Geographic, the main challenge is the marginalization of Nubian knowledge production from dominant academic discourse. For other organizations, such as the Women and Memory Forum, the constraints lie in the patriarchal structures that shape society and knowledge production. For Creative Memory of the Syrian Revolution, the constraints are related to the state, although they did not expressly mention state pressure in their survey response. Their main headquarters are located in Beirut, but many team members emigrated or moved to Europe, and their presence abroad helps them produce content about Syria and the Syrian Revolution in a freer and less challenging environment. Digital attacks were mentioned as a main threat, especially when releasing new projects, forcing them to find new ways to adapt (backing up their online content on a weekly basis). They acknowledge the importance of creating and preserving the Syrian people's collective memory for fear it may be erased or forgotten, and they note that this work is emotionally difficult and heavy. Last, the Anti-Racism Movement noted how they have to work against the gendered and racial legal constraints of the sponsorship system<sup>80</sup> in Lebanon and how that infrastructure hinders their work. Organizations resist constraining structures through a variety of means. They select words carefully, avoiding certain words known to trigger a state response; they ensure that data servers (often located outside the Arab region) are backed up; and they undertake projects that work directly with the concerned communities and focus on their needs, rather than opt for formal institutional channels.

When we speak of “the state,” we are not suggesting that all countries in the Arab region are similar or that “the state” has neat boundaries. Discussions of

<sup>80</sup> Under Lebanese labor law, migrant domestic work falls under the *kafala*, or sponsorship, system, where a Lebanese citizen can sponsor a worker from abroad (usually from Southeast Asia and Africa) and has almost total control over the worker's economic and legal status.

the state are in fact often discussions of regimes, particular cults of personalities, and various elite and public-private alliances. Each country offers a different landscape with unique challenges that critical humanities organizations must negotiate. Organizations increasingly play a dual role as arbitrators and critical knowledge producers, negotiating between their own goals and the sociopolitical contexts that surround them.

### 3.2.4. Language and Translation

A majority of the organizations described the difficulty of operating between Arabic and European languages, especially in translating words and concepts into Arabic. Most operate in English, with some using both English and Arabic, and a smaller percentage using Arabic and French or all three. Most of the participating organizations rely on social media to disseminate their work and organize events, and because English is the dominant language on social media platforms, the groups perceive it as the most “accessible” language, that is, the one that will have the greatest reach across a global audience.

Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge the challenges of localizing Arabic, whether this is translating from classical Arabic to colloquial dialects or between regional spoken dialects. These issues highlight the importance of acknowledging context and how it affects the meaning and uses of words. For example, the word حرية (*hurriya*) in Arabic literally translates to “freedom”; however, when graffitied on a wall in Idlib, Syria (as one image from the Creative Memory of the Syrian Revolution archive depicts), *hurriya* becomes affectively charged with other meanings, such as “dignity” and “justice.”

Beit Najmeddine, for example, noted that it works primarily in Arabic, as this is the main language of its primary target audience (in Jordan) and the Arab region more broadly. The Arab Image Foundation, on the other hand, reported that they struggle to find the appropriate lexicon for their work in Arabic and online platforms do not offer sufficient features to support the Arabic language. They emphasized that “translation requires dedicated resources and linguists who are also adept in specialized practices such as archives, photography and visual arts,” hinting at difficulty in finding or compensating people with the needed skills.

The different organizations, platforms, and projects in this report raise important questions about how language is at the center of critical knowledge production in the Arab region. First, how can we create critical epistemologies of our own when English remains the more widely used language for scholarly endeavors? Is producing knowledge in Arabic sufficient, or do we also need

to reassess methodologies, positionalities, and ways of thinking in order for Arabic-language knowledge production to flourish?

### 3.2.5. Criticality as Practice

The various representations and discussions of criticality across the case studies and surveyed organizations highlight the term's dynamic nature. It is a word conceptualized through the practices of the different critical humanities organizations. Some groups highlighted their research-based methodological approach as the practice of criticality. The Afro-Asian Futures Past program, for example, revisits a moment of Afro-Asian decolonization through the “social and political theory cultures” that emerged around it, highlighting how this exploration in humanistic social sciences revealed South-South connections and articulated future sociopolitical and cultural imaginaries.

Other organizations defined criticality as a deliberate response to existing socioeconomic or cultural structures that goes against dominant discourses. The Women and Memory Forum, for example, highlight their gender-based focus as a critical lens, which “always intersects with the question of power (in relation to knowledge production, society, and politics.” They note that their approach examines discourses associated with modernity, Orientalism, and patriarchy.

Several organizations highlighted the critical edge offered in rethinking repeated periodizations and temporal orientations, whether their work was historical or dealt with the present. The Other Maps of Egypt, for example, is an ongoing project that produces critical rereadings of maps of Cairo, “scrutinizing the context/methods of its productions, representations, and its means of circulation.” In several workshops with experts, activists, and local participants, they created alternative collective maps of two Egyptian locations (Port Said and Alexandria) that rethink the cities' pasts and presents and redefine traditional understandings of how maps are produced.

Yet other organizations viewed criticality as responding to a particular gap in knowledge production. Mathqaf, an online platform for arts in the Arab region, noted that their organization “directly responds to a lack of art historical and museological narratives,” positioning their work as a critique on the dearth “of sources and resources on modern and contemporary art and institutional histories from West Asia and North Africa.”

### 3.2.6. Digitization and Accessibility

The organizations grapple with digitization, directly and indirectly. All of them rely heavily on social media platforms to disseminate content, network with

other institutions, and reach audiences. On one hand, digital platforms offer the opportunity to share work with a broader audience; on the other hand, the platforms have raised questions regarding access, data inequities, and the power relations determining who produces versus who consumes knowledge (in the Arab region versus the diaspora, for example).

The process of making something available online is multilayered—while it carries the promise of reaching a broader audience, it also raises questions on what the afterlives of digital content could be. Many of the organizations ensure that their work is made accessible to the public in hopes of fostering public engagement and discourse beyond the confines of elite institutions and networks; however, their target audiences may not have stable access to the internet and thus may not be able to engage in the discourse.

The desire for accessibility also raises important questions about what availability means for subsequent use. For example, if a photographic image from an archive is made available online, who has the right to use it and to what ends? What are the digital traces that it leaves, and do they have any material repercussions? Will copyright laws or ethical guidelines be complied with? These are ethical considerations that some of the case studies contend with. The promise of accessibility is not inherently good or bad; rather, it is a concept that must be negotiated in particular contexts and for particular purposes.

### **3.2.7. Crisis and Transformation**

The different organizations note important turning points that transformed the nature of their work, including historical moments such as the 1948 Palestinian Nakba; the 1975–90 Lebanese Civil War; the 2011 Arab Spring uprisings; the COVID-19 pandemic; and, for Lebanon in particular, the 2020 Beirut port explosion. These crises affected how organizations approach projects. In some cases, events forced teams to operate remotely; some groups were forced into exile; others had to rely on regional and international networks to deal with material and intangible losses of data or collections. In a region that has witnessed many crises and constantly grapples with instability, what kinds of spaces of hope and opportunity can be carved out? More importantly, what role do critical humanities organizations play in this process?

The case studies gathered here demonstrate the importance of attending to arts and culture organizations in the Arab region that, alongside scholars and universities, are shaping how knowledge is produced and circulated. Their work, whether it is produced online or offline and circulated in small or large circles, offers valuable pathways to understanding the Arab region's past and present, as well as ways to shape its future(s).

## 4. How to Support the Humanities

The Arab Region Report suggests that the critical humanities require commitments on the part of individual researchers, institutions, policymakers, and the general public. We have summarized the most pressing of these imperatives below. We are not so naïve as to imagine that such a wish list will compel national or international policies and practices in any direct or straightforward manner. However, this series of principles, priorities, and engagements could help frame the work of individual and institutional actors, casting their direct objectives in more general aims and themes and finding areas of collaboration and common ground with others nationally, regionally, and globally. In turn, this may shape and produce a new era for the humanities in the Arab region.

- **Defend the humanities as essential to understanding and society.** Commit to maintaining the humanities in colleges and universities and ensure that they remain accessible to students.
- **Invest in humanities research.** Develop and support institutional strategies for advancing research in the humanities, including fellowships, institutes and centers, scholarly networks, journals, and university presses.
- **Protect freedom of inquiry as a right.** Protect academic freedom and freedom of speech and promote policies that ensure the privacy of users, especially in countries where political interference and censorship are concerns. Try to create secure and free (from surveillance) libraries, meeting, and work spaces for researchers.
- **Address inequality.** Ensure that heterogeneous voices are heard in all areas of research and teaching in the humanities; question gaps in knowledge, limits to access, ongoing racism and gender exclusions, and inequalities in value to establish and sustain inclusive practices.
- **Advance the public humanities.** Acknowledge that the humanities are part of the public good and advance both the scholarly and the applied (public) humanities. Organize and promote public dialogue and debate around the role of the public/intellectual, especially in contexts of crisis.
- **Acknowledge the global humanities.** Value a global approach to the humanities, one that recognizes global entanglements, shows the multiple histories and origins of the humanities, and provides fuller and more inclusive understandings of human experience.
- **Foster the open publication and circulation of scholarship.** Invest in the design and implementation of equitable digital infrastructure for research and teaching; support open access and freely available scholarly resources; ensure freedom from political, algorithmic, and corporate media censor-



ship. Support publishing initiatives of different types and events, such as book fairs, that ensure robust circulation.

- **Facilitate collaboration, especially South–South.** Recognize interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary collaboration as a condition for improving our understanding of the human condition and addressing large challenges. Identify and mitigate structural obstacles that make it easier for researchers in the Arab region to collaborate, publish, and converse with Western Europeans and North Americans than with their neighboring countries (in the region and cross-regionally).
- **Thicken diasporic networks.** Offer financial and logistical support to ensure continued collaboration and contact between diasporic communities and home countries. Mitigate the effects of forced migration due to socioeconomic and political instability in home countries on research communities.
- **Rethink pedagogy.** Critically evaluate disciplinary boundaries and forge more interdisciplinary programs as well as dialogue and collaborations between cultural producers, critical humanities organizations, and researchers to create popular content and promote local decision making and agenda setting for research priorities grounded in context. Support the creation of innovative teaching resources and practices that engage students and the broader community in linking humanities research to everyday concerns.
- **Develop archives, both physical and virtual.** Acknowledge that archives are essential resources for understanding human experience past, present, and future and ensure the creation and protection of accessible physical and virtual archives, including libraries, museums, and collections. Provide technical and epistemological training for archivists.
- **Preserve languages and language study.** Defend language as a unique window into human understanding, connectivity, and experience. Identify at-risk Indigenous languages and implement strategies to ensure their preservation. Support multilingualism and invest in translation to ensure that languages remain viable and local knowledge circulates globally. Provide alternative media platforms that make it easier for Arabic, Armenian, Amazigh, Kurdish, and other language users to find content and communicate online.
- **Amplify Arabic.** Arabic historically has been, and continues to be, a language of scholarship, connection, and emotion regionally and globally. Yet it is an underresourced language online. Fund translation technologies that bridge language divides on communication platforms.

- **Recognize race.** Interrogate the racialized dynamics that affect possibilities for South–South collaborations and dialogue and create racial hierarchies that diasporic scholars face in West European and North American institutions. Prioritize face-to-face interaction between South–South scholars.
- **Educate on ethics.** Promote the participatory creation of ethical standards grounded in context, especially in crisis situations. Devise and promote research, publications, and promotion protocols at universities and research institutions that suit the priorities and values of researchers in their home countries.
- **Anticipate research in conflict.** Provide technical, logistical, and financial support to scholars in contexts of protracted violence, prioritizing time and space to reflect and conduct the slow, critical research working in the humanities demand. Provide locally relevant mental and physical health services to researchers and cultural producers facing contexts of protracted violence, as well as technical, logistical, and financial support to students and researchers dealing with daily struggles, such as electricity outages, increased labor, and expensive equipment.
- **Develop public humanities messaging.** Engage in dissemination and discussion that raises awareness about and prestige of the value of the humanities for society and personal development. Encourage employers to value and hire humanities graduates.

## Appendix

The ACSS Humanities Initiative: Questionnaire for the  
Survey of Organizations That Work in the Arts and  
Humanities in the Arab Region – 2021 Survey



## ACSS Humanities Initiative – Organizations That Work in the Arts and Humanities in the Arab Region

### **Informed Consent: To Participate in the Online Survey**

The Arab Council for the Social Sciences (ACSS) invites you to participate in this survey aimed at mapping the humanities landscape and examining the impact of humanities centers on critical humanistic inquiry and knowledge formation, whether through research, art, pedagogy, or advocacy. This survey will supplement ongoing in-house efforts to collect information on participating organizations.

The first phase of this study covered 27 organizations and will be featured as part of the Arab region's chapter in the World Humanities Report (WHR). The WHR is an outcome of the 2017 World Humanities Conference in Liège. The aim of this global report is to briefly identify the conditions under which the humanities can flourish in the next decade. It is also an opportunity to understand the contributions of the humanities to knowledge and society more generally.

The second phase and longer-term objective of the initiative is to continuously update and populate an archive / electronic platform with case studies on related organizations and their work. Your organization will be one of the first 50 to be spotlighted in this evolving interactive archive.

#### **How to participate**

You can consent to the terms of the survey by clicking on "Next." Your participation is of course entirely voluntary. We would greatly appreciate it if you would kindly consent to fill in all questions. You are at liberty, however, to skip any question by continuing to the next question. You can also withdraw from the study altogether at anytime; if you decide to quit before you have clicked on the "Submit and finish" button just close the page or leave the survey.

Filling out the questionnaire should not take more than 90 minutes. Your participation represents an important contribution to documenting and amplifying the impact of the humanities in the region.

#### **Confidentiality**

Information gathered in this survey about the respondent is anonymous and will be kept strictly confidential at all times. Only ACSS researchers have exclusive access to the survey responses for the purpose of analysis and dissemination. The online survey allows us to track completers by email address so that we may send a reminder to those who have not responded or to those that have not completed the survey.

The data and records about the organization, however, will not be anonymous and results will be reported for each individual organization as well as in aggregate form. This data will be published on our online platform. By participating in this survey, you are consenting to the citation and dissemination of your answers as linked to, or associated with, your platform, collective, or institution. Information on the respondents themselves (the individuals answering the survey) will be kept confidential and only reported in aggregate analyses. However, the organization will be identified and the data about the organization will be accessible to the general public. Please take

**that into account when deciding whether to fill out the survey and when formulating your answers.**

**Disclaimer**

**By clicking on “Next,” you acknowledge that you have read and understood this information and agree to participate in this survey.**

**Contact information**

**For more information, please contact the ACSS at [surveys@theacss.org](mailto:surveys@theacss.org).**

**Thank you in advance for your time. We highly value your contribution.**



ACSS Humanities Initiative – Organizations That Work in the Arts and Humanities in the  
Arab Region

**Basic Information**

1. Organization Email:

2. Organization Phone Number:

3. Year of Establishment:

4. Website for Online Platform:

If there is more than one, please number them.

(E.g., 1. websitename.com; 2. websitename2.com)

5. Office Headquarters [City/Town]

(if the office is virtual, please note that and explain where you understand the organization to be based, e.g., "Virtual, majority of founders live in Tunis.")

6. Office HQ Country:

7. Do you have more than one office?

Yes

No

8. If so, how many?

9. Where are these offices? Please list the city or town

1

2

3



ACSS Humanities Initiative – Organizations That Work in the Arts and Humanities in the  
Arab Region

**Respondent – Basic Information**

10. Name:

(First Name - Last Name)

11. Email:

12. How many years have you worked with the organization?

13. Phone Number:

(will not be made public)

14. Role in the Organization:

(e.g., Program Manager of XYZ)





ACSS Humanities Initiative – Organizations That Work in the Arts and Humanities in the  
Arab Region

**Organizational Structure**

15. Organization Type:

16. Legal Designation:

(legal structure, e.g., nonprofit organization)

17. What is the size of your organization? How many people do you consider part of your core staff?

- 1-5
- 6-10
- 11-15
- 16-20
- 21-30
- 31-40
- 41+

18. How many people did you consider part of your core staff when the organization was at its largest?

- 1-5
- 6-10
- 11-15
- 16-20
- 21-30
- 31-40
- 41+

19. How many people do you expect to hire in the next 5 years?

- 0
- 1-5
- 6-10
- 11-20
- 21+
- Unsure
- We may have to let some people go

20. How many people do you hire as consultants per year?

- 0
- 1-3
- 4-10
- 11-15
- 16-20
- 21-30
- 31-40
- 41+

21. Please list up to ten primary sources of revenue or funding. If listing donors and the information is public, please name them and indicate if they are regional, subregional, local, or international.

1	<input type="text"/>
2	<input type="text"/>
3	<input type="text"/>
4	<input type="text"/>
5	<input type="text"/>
6	<input type="text"/>
7	<input type="text"/>
8	<input type="text"/>
9	<input type="text"/>
10	<input type="text"/>

22. How many grants does your organization apply for in a year?

23. On average, what is the size of the grants you apply for in USD?

- Less than \$8,000
- \$8,000-\$10,000
- \$15,000- \$30,000
- \$50,000-\$80,000
- \$100,000-\$250,000
- Over \$300,000

24. Does your organization have a board?

- Yes
- No

25. If yes, please select from the options below.

- Board of Directors
- Advisory Board
- Board of Trustees
- Other

26. If you chose "other" in the previous question, please describe the alternative structure and why it was selected here.

(Include how many people are on the board, how they are s/elected)



ACSS Humanities Initiative – Organizations That Work in the Arts and Humanities in the  
Arab Region

**Organizational Strategy: Overview**

27. What is the mission of your organization and its main goals? Please feel free to copy and paste from your website or other literature you've produced.

28. Does your organization work in the field of the Arts and Humanities?

Yes

No

Other (please specify)

29. How is the organization's work related to the Arts and Humanities? How are the Arts and Humanities important (or not) to your work?



ACSS Humanities Initiative – Organizations That Work in the Arts and Humanities in the Arab Region

**Organizational Strategy: Critically Engaging with the Arts and Humanities**

30. Would you consider the work your organization does to be critical?

Yes

No

Other (please specify)

31. A. If you answered yes to the previous question, how would your organization be considered critical?

B. How might you distinguish between “critical” and “non-critical” work?

C. What does your work generally critique?

D. What/who is your critique aimed at?

(E.g., patriarchal structures, Orientalist narratives, a lack or absence of something, a misrepresentation, etc.)

32. Please upload two typical examples of the kind of work you do that might be related to the critical humanities.

Please note that only one file is supported per question, which is why this question is duplicated.

Choose File

Choose File

No file chosen

33. Please upload two typical examples of the kind of work you do that might be related to the critical humanities. You can also add links below.

Please note that only one file is supported per question, which is why this question is duplicated.

Choose File

Choose File

No file chosen

34. If you prefer, you can alternatively include links to two typical examples of the kind of work you do that might be related to the “critical humanities.”

35. What Humanities or Social Sciences does the organization's work critically engage with? Please select all that apply.

- |   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Anthropology     | <input type="checkbox"/> Gender studies  | <input type="checkbox"/> Performance arts |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Archaeology      | <input type="checkbox"/> History         | <input type="checkbox"/> Philosophy       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture     | <input type="checkbox"/> Human geography | <input type="checkbox"/> Politics         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Audiovisual arts | <input type="checkbox"/> Language        | <input type="checkbox"/> Psychology       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Critical theory  | <input type="checkbox"/> Law             | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cultural studies | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature      | <input type="checkbox"/> Sociology        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Economics        | <input type="checkbox"/> Media studies   |   |

Other (please specify)

36. What themes does the organization's work critically engage with?

- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Academic publishing                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Formal pedagogy (university)                         | <input type="checkbox"/> Photography                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Access to resources                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Formal pedagogy (primary schools)                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Policy research              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Advocacy (social, political, economic) | <input type="checkbox"/> Future of the humanities                             | <input type="checkbox"/> Political economy            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aesthetics                             | <input type="checkbox"/> Gender   | <input type="checkbox"/> Popular culture              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Alternative publishing                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Geography  | <input type="checkbox"/> Public pedagogy              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Alternative storytelling               | <input type="checkbox"/> Globalization  | <input type="checkbox"/> Race                         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Archiving                              | <input type="checkbox"/> History  | <input type="checkbox"/> Reading against the grain    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Arts                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Heritage (includes cultural heritage)                | <input type="checkbox"/> Refugees and migrants        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Audio-visual production                | <input type="checkbox"/> Human rights   | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Children                               | <input type="checkbox"/> In/security  | <input type="checkbox"/> Reparative relations         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cities                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> International relations                              | <input type="checkbox"/> Resistance against the state |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Civil war                              | <input type="checkbox"/> Law  | <input type="checkbox"/> Rural & agrarian communities |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Class                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature   | <input type="checkbox"/> Social justice               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Collaboration                          | <input type="checkbox"/> Maps/mapping   | <input type="checkbox"/> Storytelling                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Collection                             | <input type="checkbox"/> Marginalized knowledge                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Symbolism                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Consumption                            | <input type="checkbox"/> Media analysis                                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Theory                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Culture                                | <input type="checkbox"/> Mediation  | <input type="checkbox"/> Transitional justice         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Curricula                              | <input type="checkbox"/> Modernity  | <input type="checkbox"/> Translation                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Decolonization                         | <input type="checkbox"/> New modes of inquiry                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> University                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Digital humanities                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Nonacademic publishing                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Uprisings                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Domesticity                            | <input type="checkbox"/> Open source (includes open access work and advocacy) | <input type="checkbox"/> Violence                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Education                              | <input type="checkbox"/> Oral history   | <input type="checkbox"/> Youth                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Environment                            | <input type="checkbox"/> Performing arts                                      |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Feminism                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Philosophy   |   |

Other (please specify)

37. Do you translate your work (research, publications, etc.) into different languages?

- Yes
- No

38. If yes, please specify which languages.

39. What are some of the main challenges or roadblocks you face (if any) when you translate critical concepts/ideas/theories into another language?

40. A. What are the challenges that hinder your ability to produce critical work? What are the opportunities?

B. What methods do you adopt to ensure the critical outcome of your projects (from idea to research to execution)?

C. Did these methods work in the past? If they did not, what would you do differently next time?

41. A. How would you describe any changes in your role as an organization in the last ten years?

B. Have recent events changed the nature of your work? How has the structure of the organization changed over this period?

C. What factors or events triggered these changes?

(e.g., which "crises" have you responded to in the last ten years? How have these crises shaped your agendas? For example, is there a difference between you pre-2011 and post-2011 work?)





ACSS Humanities Initiative – Organizations That Work in the Arts and Humanities in the  
Arab Region

**Organizational Strategy: Opportunities and Obstacles**

42. Do you believe that networking with organizations **within the region** is important?

Yes

No

43. If "Yes," please specify why it's important for your work and how you would carry it out:

44. If "No," please specify why not:

45. If you have any current **regional collaborations**, please list the most significant ones here:

46. Do you believe it is important for your organization to work with organizations **outside the region**?

Yes

No

47. If "Yes," please tell us how **international collaborations** will help your work

48. If "No," please tell us why you think they're not important

49. If you have any **ongoing international collaborations**, please list the most significant ones here:

50. How do you measure impact or success as an organization? Give at least two concrete examples to explain. How might your measure of success differ from a donor's measure of success, if at all?

51. A. If you are an organization that doesn't have its primary HQ in the Arab region, how does that impact your work?

B. Please explain how projects about the region differ from the international ones you work on.

C. Have you noticed any trends that shape either type of project?

D. If this doesn't apply to you, please put NA.

52. Name three organizations that do work similar to yours **in the region**.

1

2

3

53. Does your organization work with universities and higher education institutions?

Yes

No

54. If "Yes," please list which universities here:

55. Kindly check all the relevant boxes that describe the nature of the relationship between your organization and universities:

- Work with students directly (we offer summer schools, mentorship programs and/or capacity building workshops)
- We see our work as a supplement to university education
- Work with professors on specific courses
- Use knowledge produced at universities in own research/work
- Not relevant to our work

Other (please specify)

56. If "No," please select all the options that explain why not:

- Difficult to contact universities locally, regionally, or internationally
- The research they produce isn't accessible (paywalls, not available online)
- Universities are not open to work with us
- We would like to but don't know how to approach universities
- We prefer to work with students in nonacademic settings

Other (please specify)



ACSS Humanities Initiative – Organizations That Work in the Arts and Humanities in the  
Arab Region

**Digital Engagement**

57. To what extent does your success/impact rely on:

	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Not at all
People visiting your site	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Social media engagement	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

58. Over the past 12 months, has your organization undertaken any digital or technological transformation initiatives? Bullet points should suffice.

(e.g., new website, software, back-end data collection training, etc.)

59. What role does your media site play for your organization? Please select all that apply.

- Repository for organization's publications
- Archive
- Audiovisual productions for academic audiences
- Audiovisual productions for nonacademic audiences
- Pedagogical tools including online courses and syllabi
- Databases for researchers (of works we collected)
- Introduction to our work and our organization
- Provision of translation of work

Other (please specify)



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**Media Site Audiences**

60. Does your organization have a clear communication strategy?

Yes

No, we post things as we go

Other (please specify)

61. Please list the main people/groups/organizations that your different media platforms target (e.g., donors, students, researchers, women, LGBTQI+ community in the Arab region etc.). If one or more of the options isn't relevant to you, please type NA:

Website

Twitter

Facebook Page

Instagram

YouTube/ Vimeo

Other

62. What are the main demographic groups & countries that your online platforms reach? (list the top 3 in each category):

(demographic groups)

a

b

c

63. What are the main demographic groups & countries that your online platforms reach? (list the top 3 in each category):

(countries)

a

b

c

64. List your 3 main target beneficiaries /the people that you're producing work for. Try to be as specific as possible in relation to their age, gender (man/woman/gender nonconforming/transgender man or woman), and education level (e.g., women between the ages of 30 and 60 living in rural communities; youth between the ages of 18 and 30 who have achieved higher education degrees).

Target Beneficiary 1

Target Beneficiary 2

Target Beneficiary 3

65. What are the main challenges you face in reaching your target beneficiaries? Select all that apply.

- We do not have any problems in reaching our target beneficiaries
- Our target beneficiaries may not have access to Internet
- Our platforms are censored/blocked often
- Language is a barrier (we don't produce content in Arabic)
- NA
- Other (please specify)

66. For organizations whose main HQs are outside the Arab region or whose scope of work is not restricted to the Arab region, how do you ensure your content reaches beneficiaries and audiences who are either living in the region or concerned with it? Please select all that apply. If this doesn't apply to you, kindly note NA.

- We post content in Arabic/French
- We discuss themes/topics that are relevant to the region in a consistent manner
- We collaborate with platforms based in the Arabic-speaking region on a regular basis
- We have team members from the region / with a background or experience in the region who help us set our communication goals and strategies
- NA
- Other (please specify)

## Arab Council for the Social Sciences Editorial Team

**Hoda Elsadda** is a feminist activist, professor of English and comparative literature at Cairo University, and Chair of the Board of the Women and Memory Forum. Her research interests are in the areas of gender studies, comparative literature, and oral history. She is the author of *Gender, Nation, and the Arabic Novel: Egypt, 1892–2008* (2012) and coeditor of a special issue of the journal *Cairo Papers in Social Science* on “Oral History in Times of Change: Gender, Documentation, and the Making of Archives” (2018).

**Muneira Hoballah** is a PhD candidate in sociocultural anthropology, with a designated emphasis in critical theory, at the University of California, Irvine. Her research interests in the so-called Arab region engage critical and philosophical questions around communicative practices. She holds an MA in critical media and cultural studies from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) University of London and a BA from the American University of Beirut. Before pursuing her PhD, she worked in journalism, publishing, and public policy. In addition to managing transdisciplinary, regional research programs, she also held the position of lecturer at the American University of Beirut.

**Deema Kaedbey** is the cofounder and current director of the Knowledge Workshop, a feminist organization in Beirut. She was also a member of the feminist collective Sawt al Niswa, where she served as a coeditor of its webspace. She has a PhD in women’s, gender, and sexuality studies from Ohio State University.

**Seteney Shami** is the founding director of the ACSS. She is an anthropologist from Jordan who earned her bachelor’s degree from the American University of Beirut and her master’s degree and doctorate from the University of California, Berkeley. After teaching and setting up a graduate department of anthropology at Yarmouk University in Jordan, in 1996 she moved to the regional office of the Population Council in Cairo as the Director of the Middle East Awards in Population and the Social Sciences. From 1999 to 2010, she was a program director at the Social Science Research Council in New York responsible for the Middle East, North Africa, and Eurasia programs.

## Arab Council for the Social Sciences Research Team

**Reem Joudi** is a media researcher and writer based in Lebanon, currently working as a researcher and project coordinator at the Arab Council for the Social Sciences. She earned her MA in media studies from the American University of Beirut and her BSFS in international economics from Georgetown University. Her research interests lie at the intersection of visual culture, digital technologies, and affect theory, with a particular focus on Lebanon and the Southwest Asia and North Africa region.

**Hana Shaltout** graduated from the American University in Cairo in 2014 with a BA from the Political Science Honours Programme with a specialization in international relations. She completed her MSc in gender, media, and culture at the London School of Economics in 2015. After being a researcher at the Arab Council for Social Sciences working on the World Humanities Report, she is currently doing her PhD in cultural studies at the University of Sussex, on feminist activism in Egypt post-2011. Her research interests include alternative knowledge production, gender studies, cultural studies, and women's participation in the political arena.

**Tamara Sleiman** is an instructor of linguistics at the American University of Beirut and a research and operations team member at afkra. Sleiman had been a researcher at the Arab Council for the Social Sciences and a research consultant at Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship at the American University of Beirut. Her research interests include sociolinguistics, sociophonetics, politics of language, and language policy and planning. Her master's thesis was titled "Dialect Identifiability, Language Attitudes, and Perception of Employability in Lebanon."