**Social sciences in NGOS and Research Centers in the Arab region
Background Paper for Third Arab Social Science Report**

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Abstract

Drawing from life history interviews conducted with eight social scientists (three men and five women) who currently work on research or research related topics in non-governmental and research organizations in the Arab region including (Arab Council for the Social Sciences [ACSS], the Center for Arab Unity Studies [CAUS], the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies [ACRPS], The Institute for Palestine Studies [IPS], a UN agency, Lebanon Support [LS[, and the Knowledge Workshop), this paper argues that in lieu of 'career', trajectory and commitment are more useful concepts to think with when exploring their lived professional experience. These social scientists have often straddled many worlds, both inside and outside the university and the professional path they've embarked on was characterized by structural transformations, guided by personal preferences or pecuniary and logistical conveniences and sometimes related to political commitments.

Executive Summary

This paper is written for the Third Arab Social Science Report, part of the Arab Council for the Social Sciences (ACSS) initiative to monitor, document and assess the landscape of social sciences in the Arab world, its infrastructures, institutions, knowledge production processes, as well as researchers and their research. More specifically, this paper looks into the professional lives and careers of social scientists who work in non-governmental organizations and research centers in the Arab region. This paper argues (1) that the division of working spheres for social scientists (within the university or outside of it) is not as rigid or compartmentalized and that professors have often straddled both worlds. (2) It also contends that instead of a career, social scientists' professional path in NGOs and research centers are more akin to a trajectory that is characterized by structural transformations, guided by personal preferences or pecuniary and logistical conveniences and sometimes related to political commitments.

The paper first starts by conceptualizing and attempting to define the fields within which social scientists in the Arab region work, do research, write, publish and disseminate their findings and analyses outside of the university. It designates those fields of research, falling outside of university campus walls across the Arab region, as non-state, private and secular. Researchers in those fields have different motivations which revolve around rethinking the disciplines within an Arab context or bridging the gap between social science research and social and political issues. They seek different objectives including the pursuit of a political commitment, upward social mobility and the bettering of a work-life balance. Their work, on the whole, is inscribed, with varying degrees, in global dynamics of knowledge production while being anchored in the Arab region in the same time.

Second, it moves into questioning the assumptions of a rigid and clustered separation between the higher education sphere and the 'outside' of the university, in other words, the world

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of NGOs and research centers where social scientists work. If sometimes researchers' positionality in the university (as professors, as faculty members, etc.) is autonomous, their relationality to the 'outside', and to other key stakeholders in knowledge production, is not. University professors often collaborate with NGOs and research centers. They are commissioned as experts or consultants to perform certain tasks, design studies, conduct research, give talks, etc. They also rely on similar funding networks and agencies as researchers who do not work in the academe. Research priorities also converge. Conversely, social scientists in NGOs and research centers sometimes take on teaching assignments or visiting positions in universities. They also collaborate to organize congresses, conferences and other scholarly events.

Third, it explores the role attributed to 'professionalization' and the pursuit of career-oriented achievements in the social sciences. It elaborates on the lived experiences of social scientists working in NGOs and research centers. Drawing from interviews conducted with eight PhD holders (three men and five women) who currently work in different organizations including the ACSS, CAUS, ACRPS, IPS, a UN agency and LS, this paper argues that in lieu of 'career', trajectory and commitment are more useful concepts to think with. Many social scientists working in NGOs and research centers, who have often straddled many professional worlds, have decided to play a role of facilitation in research, of bringing together actors from various spheres of knowledge production. Two aspects also characterize the professional path they've taken: Serendipity, to stumble upon opportunities one was not looking for (or was looking for something else); and politics, the commitment to enacting change by combining theory to praxis (or in certain cases policy). Personal connections and networks are also important and so is the 'historical event'. In narratives collected for this research: 2011, the year of the Arab Uprisings, features prominently. The organizations they work for were also created in specific circumstances such as responding to pressing nationalistic needs (CAUS and IPS), or accompanying change in civil society (Lebanon Support, smaller research initiatives such as the Knowledge Workshop).

Fourth, it suggests that social scientists working outside of the academe are presented with different and various opportunities. They're educated in universities of the Arab region (Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt), Europe (France, Belgium, UK) or North America (the United States mainly). They don't teach but in addition to research they acquire management skills and are exposed to multidisciplinary projects that pertain to various themes of research. They experiment more with different forms of writing to a variety of audiences and maintain relationships with interlocutors from different domains (journalists, activists, practitioners, and university-based academics). They are also provided with prospects of being exposed to tangible application of the theories they produce which in turn enriches their scholarly perspectives and intellectual acumen. In addition, in large organizations such as the UN, professional responsibilities tend to become more repetitive and less intellectually stimulating. Last but not least there are challenges to social scientists' job security both within the academy and outside of it as a result of a continuous transformation of the job market generally and the university more specifically.

Fifth, it concludes by comparing older research centers such as CAUS or IPS to newer ones like the ACSS and the ACRPS and argues that there's a sustained interest in research in the aftermath of the 2011 Arab Uprisings.

1. Introduction

In the Arab region, universities play a very important role in shaping and defining social sciences but most research continues to be produced in research centers[1] (Hanafi & Arvanitis 2015; Bamyeh 2015). These centers are both specialized research organizations that may or may not be affiliated with universities[2] (such as the Issam Fares Institute in Lebanon, or the Economic Research Forum in Egypt), or NGOs (both local or international) working on development projects or advocacy dossiers (Hanafi 2010; Majed 2015). Some of the most important research centers include the ACSS and CAUS in Lebanon, IPS in Lebanon and Palestine, the Economic Research Forum and the semipublic Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies in Egypt, ACRPS in Qatar and Lebanon, the Al Jazeera Centre for Studies in Qatar, the Arab Thought Forum, and the Center for Strategic Studies in Jordan. In addition, there we also have the Tunisian Institute for Strategic Studies, and the Centre des Etudes et Recherches en Sciences Sociales in Morocco. There are also centers which are affiliates of international organizations interested in producing social sciences research such as the Institut Français du Proche-Orient, the Carnegie Center and the Brookings Institute. In addition to these centers, there are NGOs (Oxfam, Amnesty, International Crisis Group, International Alert, etc.) and international agencies such as the UNDP, ESCWA, UNESCO, etc. which are also sites for local research production in the social sciences.

In recent years, institutions of higher education have been undergoing major changes of internationalization, privatization and globalization (Hanafi & Arvanitis 2015). This has also been accompanied by a transformation of the research landscape[3] where since 2011, long standing organizations like CAUS have been trying to restructure the scope and priorities of their work to adapt to the region's changing environments; and where several new organizations working within the social sciences have been established such as the ACSS or the Doha Institute (ACRPS). What kinds of knowledge are thus produced within these spheres and to what effects? How is knowledge ordered, legitimized, authorized in the university or outside of it? What tensions thus exist between the academe and those spheres and between local and global knowledge? To understand the trends, dynamics and inner workings of knowledge production in the Arab region, it is thus crucial to look into the loci of social scientific work that falls outside of the campus walls and to unravel the experience of those who perform these tasks. This paper explores the professional lives and careers of socials scientists working in NGOs and research centers, a sphere which could be characterized as falling outside of 'campus walls'.

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[1] There are 436 social science research centers in the Arab region (the majority of which are not in universities). Hanafi and Arvanitis (2015) note that even though universities' contributions are substantial in the Maghreb, Syria, Libya and Lebanon, more than 80 percent of social science research is produced in research centers or consultative agencies outside of universities.

[2] There are exceptions: In Lebanon and Syria most research is produced from and within the university (Hanafi & Arvanitis 2015) and in Egypt there is a strong emphasis on public research in the social sciences.

[3] Hanafi and Arvanitis provide a comprehensive overview of the state of social science knowledge production in the Arab region. Equally compelling are the ACSS's Arab Social Science Monitor Reports (Bamyeh 2015; Azzi 2018; Hammoudi 2018).

More specifically, we ask: How do we conceptualize and define careers of social scientists in the Arab region outside of the academe? How do individual trajectories overlap with, influence and are influenced by broader structural conjunctures? What are the political, economic and epistemological contexts within which social scientists have found themselves involved in (1) pursuing and completing social sciences degrees and (2) conducting research in research organizations outside of higher education institutions and within NGOs and research centers in Arab-majority societies? What kind of intellectual labor do they perform and in such forms of labor, what tensions exist between the technical and the political, the expert and the militant, and last but not least the professional and the public intellectual?

Instead of career, this paper proposes the notion of trajectory to think with. It first argues that the division of working spheres for social scientists (within the university or outside of it) is not as rigid or compartmentalized as many professors have often straddled both worlds. Second, it also contends that social scientists' professional path in NGOs and research centers are characterized by structural transformations, guided by personal preferences or pecuniary and logistical conveniences and sometimes related to political commitments. In what follows, I present the methodological framework adopted for this research, the findings of interviews conducted with social scientists working with the ACSS, ACRPS, CAUS, IPS, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and LS, and the analysis and interpretation of data collected. Analysis is divided along two main threads: A comparison of the university with the 'outside' and a conceptualization of social science professionalization in the Arab region.

2. Methods

Research for this paper was three-tiered and included a desk review, interviews and triangulation with secondary sources whenever possible. I first started with a succinct literature review on the work and careers of social scientist[4] researchers (Burawoy 2005; Schuster et al. 2006; Hanafi & Arvanitis 2015; Bamyeh 2015; Azzi 2018; Hammoudi 2018) in order to identify the different spheres within which social scientists in the Arab region operate. I complemented this literature review with a research overview of different NGOs, research centers and other non-higher education institutions in which social scientists work. The purpose was to establish a set of criteria that would allow to identify those institutions that are relevant to the scope of this paper. Along these lines, this paper considers that NGOs and research centers which are relevant to the scope and research questions of this paper are organizations:
- Which employ social scientists (who are PhD holders) and/or conduct social sciences relevant research; and/or publish and disseminate social science related content in various forms;
- With research priorities that pertain to Arab majority societies including or not programs of implementation (advocacy, funding, building of capacity, etc.);

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[4] This paper adopts the ACSS broad definition for social science: Political science, anthropology, sociology, economics, history, and psychology in addition to interdisciplinary fields that employ social sciences, such as gender studies, urban studies, and cultural studies.

- where Arabic is one of the working languages (of knowledge production and/or dissemination);
- That were founded in the Arab region by residents of the Arab region and/or have an affiliate and substantial and sustainable presence in the Arab region (for major international organizations).

Interviews

Second, and on the basis of this wide list of criteria, this paper looked into the trajectories and career paths of individual social scientists in local and international organizations whose main activity is research but also in organizations and centers that also deal with development issues (such as UN agencies). In that respect, I identified organizations from which I could interview people. Those retained included: The ACSS, CAUS, ACRPS, IPS, LS, UNDP, and the Knowledge Workshop. I turned to professional life histories as method. I explained the scope of my research to interviewees and framed it as related to the professional lives of social scientists working outside of the university. The interview included one central question ("*what brought you here*?") that would be complemented by follow-up questions when and if needed. In using the term professional life history, I refer to a method of interview interested in exploring narratives (Hatch & Wiśniewski 2002) -- which in this particular case are professional narratives related to work or employment, characterized by ordered sequences of events or plots related to the interviewee's professional life as a social scientist. As the interview entailed one central question ("*what brought you here*?"), it made way for a plethora of answers all of which revealed the researcher's general connection to the institutions she's worked with, current or past. The interviews included stories of education or training, intellectual pursuits, epistemological inquiries, promotions, lateral moves, lay-off or cancellations of programs, recruitment, specific incidents at work relating to one's understanding of their professional identity, etc. In selecting professional life histories as method of interviewing, I attempted to capture narratives that escape the documentation (Riles 2006) of one's professional trajectory usually captured in the curriculum vitae. Through narrative analysis, I was able to interpret stories shared by the interviewees. Third, I attempted to triangulate whenever possible facts and anecdotes shared during interviews.

Limitations

There are several limits to the research I undertook in order to write this paper. There's a particular Lebanese, or rather *Mashreq* (Levantine), inflexion to it. Research captures the experience of lived realities of social scientists in Lebanon, Jordan, Syria and Palestine. Because it includes the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies (otherwise known as the Doha Institute), it offers a non-representative glimpse at research dynamics in the Gulf. However, the interviews did not include any social scientist working in research organizations in the Maghreb or Egypt. The sample comes closer to one of convenience. As a researcher based in Beirut while I was conducting the interviews, I thought to probe the rich Beiruti research landscape as part

and parcel of that of the Arab region: As early as the 1960s, Lebanon's capital was a liberal hub that enabled and allowed research in social and political theory to flourish (Dot-Pouillard 2013; Favier 2004)[5]. The organizations I sought to engage with are secular. As Bamyeh (2015) notes, during the 1980s, there was a trend of Islamization of knowledge (particularly in Morocco and Algeria) of very limited influence. In recent decades however, social sciences have made their way into religious educational programs such as in some Hawzas in Lebanon (Kassem 2018). The research I conducted also did not take into account research centers affiliated with political parties where religion features prominently. An example of such centers for instance would be the Consultative Center for Studies and Documentation – a Hezbollah affiliated think tank.

Another limitation relates to working with social scientists as interviewees. It is difficult to subject social science researchers to social science research. As Mosse (2011) notes, their expertise (premised on their own research or on the dominant technical discourses of their own disciplinary approaches) colors their accounts. A way to address this limitation is to work collaboratively and incorporate interviewees' readings and analyses in that matter. Even more so, it becomes in this case crucial to look for marginal, more peripheral voices which can shed light on pressing issues that would go unnoticed otherwise (hence my choice of interviewing social scientists from newer and younger organizations such as LS or the Knowledge Workshop). This collaborative approach also entailed familiarizing oneself with the work and publications of the social scientists that I interviewed. While I conducted a brief research and read overviews of their work, at times, it seemed like a more thorough exploration of the researchers' epistemological commitments would have been important. Last but not least, my positionality as researcher has of course permeated my research. As a pharmacist trained in sociology and who's currently completing her PhD in anthropology, I inhabit multiple worlds and personally relate to the importance of professional versatility in a social scientist's career. I too have also experienced the relevance of management and administrative soft skills one acquires working outside the academe.

3. Findings

Research is a social activity (Hanafi & Arvanitis 2015) where social scientists work within political, economic and epistemological contexts that directly affect the professional paths they embark on. Drawing from the interviews I conducted with social scientists working in NGOs or research centers, I present, in this section, general aspects of their professional lives. I then showcase findings which highlight the blurred boundaries between working in a university as opposed to an external research center. I also elaborate on how social scientists in these research centers conceptualize and perceive their careers.

3.1. The social scientist and the institution

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[5] I discuss this in further detail in the analysis section of the paper.

I showcase in this section a succinct description of social scientists' profiles, some characteristics of their working environment and their responsibilities and job descriptions.

The social scientists I interviewed have straddled multiple worlds. They worked at local institutions while also being affiliated with regional or international centers or organizations. For all but one, they completed their PhDs in Europe or North America and belonged to different generations from the 1960s to the 2000s. Throughout their professional trajectories, and besides research, their working responsibilities have also included coordinating funding and supervising reporting on funded research projects, managing research and fellowship programs, designing and supervising trainings, following up and managing office and administrative tasks, and fundraising. In their work, they managed to build personal networks and sharpen their own epistemological commitments.

The recent graduate with a PhD from the Lebanese University whom I met had also worked as a journalist and a freelance researcher. She emphasized the difficulty of finding an academic position she would want to pursue and accept, as she's frequently been offered internships or short-term employment because longer term employment was only possible depending on funding opportunities. As a graduate of the Lebanese University, she said it was almost impossible for her to join the ranks of Lebanon's private universities (like the American University of Beirut). In her opinion, she thinks it is very unlikely that she could be hired by the Lebanese University as well knowing that recruitments there abide by a particular sectarian and clientelist logic. At her present job, her tasks revolve around the editing of books and applying to research grants.

A senior researcher I interviewed had also worked in the research and publication departments of other centers in the Arab region. Now in his late 70s, he holds two PhDs in two social science disciplines, one from a university in Europe and the other from a private university in Lebanon. His professional trajectory as a social scientist has been very varied: as faculty member at the Lebanese University and as researcher working with several centers from the Libyan-supported, Beirut-based institute for Arab development in the 1970s (معهد الإنماء العربي بيروت) to the ACRPS from 2011-2019 where politics, as the initial impetus for research, would later become subsumed by methodological and theoretical concerns in the pursuit of knowledge.

While one social scientist I interviewed gained significant experience working in a national university in the Arab region before deciding to move to working with international organizations and then contribute to the establishment of a regional center, another had worked almost only with research centers and international organizations as a consultant and as a full time staff. I also met with a former political science professor who, after fifteen years in academia, decided to move to one of the UN agencies to work on governance projects for Lebanon and later on the Arab region.

Working with the oldest: The Institute for Palestine Studies

The IPS is one of the oldest, still standing, research institutes in the Arab region where, according to a social scientist at IPS, research is shaped and informed by pressing political

commitments. It was founded during the 1960s (1963) with the objective to accompany the Palestinian national struggle for liberation. It has three offices, two of which are based in the Arab region in Ramallah and Beirut and the third one in the United States (Washington, D.C.). Although IPS Beirut and Ramallah work with a plethora of researchers on the basis of different agreements and projects, they employ a much smaller number of full time researchers in the social sciences. In the Beirut office, there are currently three researchers who are PhD holders in the following disciplines: Anthropology (from a UK based university), Political Sociology (from a university in Brussels), and History (from the Paris Sorbonne). The Institute also hosts post-doctoral researchers on an ad-hoc basis and is looking to expand its boards to include researchers from the younger generation. In addition to research and their presence on the editorial board of the Journal for Palestine Studies, their responsibilities revolve primarily around editing, working on specific scholarly projects and adapting them to a wider audience, and organizing interdisciplinary events which address several interlocutors.

Full time researchers are thus involved in various activities of the IPS. They select, edit and publish research pertinent to Palestine from authors across disciplines and in various formats including website entries, books, monographs, or articles in the two journals of IPS: The Journal for Palestine Studies in English (JPS English) based in Washington, D.C., and the Journal for Palestine Studies Arabic (JPS Arabic) based in Beirut. As the IPS publications are in both print and online formats, a substantial responsibility includes editing the website and developing the Palestine Timeline, a chronology that aims to trace the major events in Palestinian history and the continuing Nakba[6]. This project is produced in collaboration with the Palestinian Museum in Ramallah and highlights the interdisciplinary nature of the work that full time researchers do. Translation activities also feature prominently as social scientists in IPS contribute to the selection and curation of relevant books and articles (usually from English to Arabic or vice versa). Another aspect of their work is that they organize yearly scholarly activities such as congresses, book launches (like with the Beirut Book Fair), conferences, and closed workshops that explore specific themes (the latest being a workshop held in Cyprus that addressed the Palestine National Plan). Moreover, full time IPS researchers help define the research priorities of IPS. They liaise with an overarching research committee which includes social scientist researchers that may or may not be affiliated with IPS but who on the whole maintain strong ties to the Palestinian Cause. This committee meets twice a year and sets the research agenda and objectives of IPS. Full time researchers at IPS offices are then in charge of implementing, executing and following up on the decisions made by the research committee.

Last but not least, the IPS's targeted audience is broad. It includes Palestinian society at large and seeks to engage with communities living in refugee camps. It also aims at creating a dialogue centered around Palestinian culture and its relationship to politics with scholars, journalists, and artists (an example is IPS's fundraising exhibition organized in 2018 on works of Palestinian artists or a conference with four Palestinian artists organized earlier in 2019, both in collaboration with Dar el Nimer). On the whole, IPS's created content focuses heavily on Palestinian cultural production and cultural history prior to 1948.

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[6] Accessible at https://www.paljourneys.org/en/timeline/overallchronology

Nationalist ideology: Social science at the Center for Arab Unity Studies

CAUS is another research institution, which at its inception in 1975, sought to accompany Arab societies in their endeavor towards Arab nationalism. The CAUS today is a 44-year-old institution that continues to conduct academic research and is now positioning itself as part and parcel of the Arab knowledge society -- in other words, in line with the principles of a development project which considers the knowledge infrastructure as indispensable to ensure development in Arab societies.

Its present objective, according to its director whom I interviewed, is to accompany an Arab unity in development, collaboration and independence (and not unity in the Arab nationalism sense). In her view, the story of CAUS and its evolution is a reflection of the region's history. Arab political polarization have impacted the center positively and negatively. During the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, for example, the CAUS rallied against Gulf countries and lost its funding as a result. Furthermore, since 2011, the Arab uprisings constituted an impetus for the revival of the center and its activities but also quickly produced an unprecedented polarization at all levels, in the knowledge sphere included.

Like with IPS, the number of social science PhD holders who are employed or contracted on a full time basis with the CAUS are very few. There are 22 full time staff, three of which are PhD holders and occupy the position of researchers. While the CAUS used to have a think tank function in the 1970s, over the years, it has turned into a platform for publishing books. According to L.B.S. the director of the center, CAUS in the coming future aims to write policy papers and position papers with the objective to become a serious intellectual interlocutor and to influence politics. Throughout its long history, and according to the CAUS's former head of research and publication (who now works for another research center), there has always been a struggle around ensuring continuity in the direction and management of CAUS, and in keeping the center's output relevant and abreast of Arab societies' transformations. The center's former general director, Kheireddine Hassib (who holds a PhD in public finance from Cambridge University), had held his position as head of the center from 1975 to 2017. The center's output had kept a strong nationalist ideological bent but there was also room to include more sociologically inflected work where the relevance of methods and theoretical framing prevailed over the work's relationship to Arab nationalism.

A renewed impetus: Research at the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies

2011 also helped propel the ACRPS (based in Doha with an office in Beirut) which had been established a year earlier (in 2010) by Azmi Bechara, politician and academic (PhD in philosophy from Humboldt University in Berlin). Among other things, the ACRPS plays the role of facilitation of research, publishing house, and coordination of events and conferences.

According to the senior researcher I interviewed who worked with ACRPS, the think tank function of any center is very difficult to envisage given the current socioeconomic and political landscape of the Arab region today (monarchies, authoritarian regimes and the plethora of actors working with Arab states on questions of development and governance). Equally difficult to sustain, in his view, is any center's research output even if said center hosts visiting researchers and provides them with a stipend and the logistical and academic support they need in order to work on their own projects.

The Arab Council for the Social Sciences: Building networks of researchers

The ACSS is one of the region's prominent and up and coming research centers. Established recently (in 2010 - though conversations start earlier), it aims to create a platform and support researchers in the Arab region, to rethink social sciences within an Arab context, and to produce knowledge pertaining to the state of social science across disciplines in the Arab region. According to a social scientist and PhD holder I interviewed at ACSS, working outside the university enables researched to acquire skills concerning fundraising, management, knowledge of the region and its changing contexts, and a better understanding of the infrastructures of knowledge production especially if and when their job positions entailed facilitating research and scholarly projects. It also changes perspective on the relevance and meanings associated with work opportunities outside of the campus walls: while internal university politics become more difficult to deal with when one realizes there are other professional dimensions to the social sciences, it also becomes more apparent how working outside of a university also means no opportunities for teaching and little time for research and publication.

At times, social scientists working in research centers have to face the consequences of a changing funding agenda (changing thematic priorities or budget cuts and programs coming to an end) which affect job security. At the ACSS however, there's a concerted effort directed towards establishing one day an endowment in order to ensure sustainability for the future.

Working with the UN: Job security and better benefits

Social scientists in the UN system can hold different positions with incremental responsibilities. In the view of the social scientists I interviewed who worked as a senior director in the UN system, the advantages of not working within the university were better salaries and job security, higher public exposure and social influence and capital, the acquiring of management skills as well as a better work-life balance. The disadvantages included the repetitiveness of tasks and the lack of intellectual challenges or motivations.

Working within the UN system for a social scientist could entail several tasks: researching, preparing and writing project documents, supervising the implementation of projects and their evaluation. Project portfolios of social scientists could include anything between 10 to 20 projects at any given time and could be either punctual intervention or longer term collaborations. For those in managerial positions, work also entails management and human

resources responsibilities, allowing researchers to acquire skills they wouldn't have learned had they stayed in academia. In the view of the social scientist I interviewed, a UN job also meant reorganizing their time and compartmentalizing it between what counted as work versus what counted as 'life', a segregation that had been unthinkable in academia. According to this researcher, having more time also meant that social scientists could write about issues that were of utmost concern to them and that did not need to be subjected to the rules and trends of professional academic publishing and the requirements of global journals.

Salaries are much more compelling in the UN system, which are between 30 percent to more than 100 percent higher than an academic's salary with the same number of years of experience (depending on the position). This constitutes a major advantage over working in a university as there's no job security in academia in the Arab region, no guarantee of pension and no benefits after retirement. Most professors take on additional work and projects to make more money. While salaries in national universities can be different, working there also presents social scientists with other challenges, there such as authoritarian restrictions, political considerations, budget cuts and sectarian mobilizations. Conversely, the repetitiveness of tasks and bureaucratic hurdles are challenges faced working with the UNDP. "After the first couple of project documents you write, it is no longer challenging or intellectually rewarding", the social scientist asserted. Supervising project implementation however also enriched scholarly perspectives by bringing practice closer to theory. The social scientist's experience with UNDP exposed them to tangible applications of the theories they read and wrote about as an academic and they consider this a very important asset.

Last but not least, another challenge posed by working in the UN system was the restriction around the freedom to express political opinions or give interviews to the media, all of which needed special permission. In spite of these restrictions, the social scientist I interviewed reflects on their experience with academia as something that did not provide them with more exposure. They contended that the social capital or prestige associated with working in universities in the Arab region has significantly declined given for example that in Lebanon alone there are more than 47 universities.

The younger generation: A social scientist with Lebanon Support

As I mentioned in the methods section on limitations, it is difficult to subject social science researchers to social science research. A way to address this limitation is to look for marginal, more peripheral case studies which can shed light on pressing issues that would go unnoticed otherwise. This approach is the reason why I selected to interview a researcher from LS, another recent yet growing center based in Beirut.

LS was created during the 2006 Israeli war on Lebanon by a group of students in the social sciences and activists, with the purpose of facilitating access to information in the context of aid frenzy. While the war was the trigger, the initiative, which had been very well received at the time, continued to expand and became more institutionalized. It grew into an organization, which in its present form today, upholds a commitment to action-based research that addresses academics, practitioners, journalists and activists.

At LS, the center's commitments (and also that of its social scientists) is to facilitate exchange among people who do research across various spheres (universities, international agencies, NGOs, etc.) and to enable practitioners' access to knowledge. In the view of the social scientist I interviewed at LS, these commitments have shaped LS's willingness to experiment with different formats of publishing: newsletters, infographics, long reports, academic articles, structured specialized reports. LS researchers sometimes share information in the form of raw data to academics and have more recently set up a peer reviewed journal published in both Arabic and English called 'The Civil Society Review Journal' which includes a Review Board and a group of external referees.

Although LS includes a core team composed of long term staff, the majority of social scientists work with LS in varying ways: through fellowships, affiliations or contractual consulting agreements. Last but not least, LS is also committed to sustainability, mainly through income generating activities such as the monetizing of their well-known Daleel Madani website or the subscriptions to the CVSR journal.

In this section, I have attempted to sketch a brief overview of social scientists and the institutions they work with. I have shown that these fields of research, falling outside of university campus walls across the Arab region, are non-state, private and secular organizations with varying goals and objectives. Researchers occupy different positions and are responsible for different tasks that are as varied as rethinking the disciplines within an Arab context or bridging the gap between social science research and social and political issues. In the following section, I turn to comparing the university and the 'outside'.

3.2. The university and the 'outside'

Findings from the interviews allowed me to question the existence of a clear-cut division between what counts as academia inside the university on one hand, and social science work conducted outside the campus walls, on the other. In what follows, I compare the university to the outside and present findings that blur those boundaries: The continued presence of institutional and personal interactions between the university and the outside; shared challenges related to the role and situated relevance of the social sciences in the Arab region; and last but not least, motivations in both the university and outside research organizations to take part in the global conversation and dynamics of social science knowledge production.

Relational interactions with the university

If at the level of affiliation and positionality there's a clear distinction between a social scientist working in a university and another working at a research center, the cloistering becomes less evident when we look at institutional level (through partnerships) and personal level (through consultancies) interactions. University professors often collaborate with NGOs and research

centers. They are commissioned as experts or consultants to perform certain tasks, design studies, conduct research, give talks, etc. They also rely on similar funding networks and agencies as researchers who do not work in the academe and as a result research priorities also converge. Conversely, social scientists in NGOs and research centers sometimes take on teaching assignments or visiting positions in universities. They also collaborate to organize congresses, conferences and other scholarly events.

In Ramallah for instance, the IPS maintains strong collaborative ties with Birzeit University, with many researchers from Birzeit working with the Institute on a part-time basis[7]. Other collaborations have included partnerships with the Qattan Foundation and other various Amman-based or Ramallah-based cultural organizations. In Beirut, the IPS also has many interlocutors such as the Issam Fares Institute (IFI) at the American University of Beirut (AUB). This collaboration exists first and foremost as the two institutes share common research interests but is also strengthened because the (now former) IFI director, Dr. Tarek Mitri, is the chairman of the board of trustees of the IPS. Conversely though, there is limited cooperation with the Lebanese University and USJ although the IPS has a plan to reach out. Language here is not a barrier since many researchers at the IPS have studied, conducted research and published in several languages including for example French or English. Researchers working with IPS have long maintained relationships with institutions such as the Institut Français du Proche Orient in Beirut – IFPO, Birzeit University, the Ecole des Hautes Etudes En Sciences Sociales (EHESS) in Paris, USJ, AUB and LU.

Professors at the aforementioned universities also experience working for NGOs and research centers while faculty members. One social scientist I interviewed was involved in projects with civil society organizations (such as the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections - LADE), research organizations (Lebanese Center for Policy Studies, Association for the Study of Democracy in the Arab World), cultural organizations (Cultural Association of the South) and UN agencies (ESCWA, UNDP) to name a few. In his view, these contracts enabled him (and his work) to receive media and public attention. It also enabled him to participate in policy and governance roles, providing him with the opportunity to put knowledge from the university into application in what he called "the real world". Moreover, and because he considered that teaching and the educational role of a professor in academia were of utmost importance, he managed to keep teaching assignments even after leaving academia.

While working outside the university, he continued teaching classes over a period of fifteen years. The social scientist I interviewed at LS had a similar, albeit shorter, experience working with UN agencies, academia, and NGOs. In her opinion, it is this plurality that allowed her to bring together, at LS, actors working in multiple spheres of knowledge production. Likewise, the social scientist I interviewed at ACSS also worked in a national university for 12 years (with intermittent sabbaticals which were mostly spent in US based institutions), after which she realized that such a working environment was not suitable for or conducive to a flourishing academic career and that the pursuit of knowledge and academic goals was not necessarily confined to the campus walls. Throughout her career, she continued to hold several visiting professorships.

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[7] Interview with social scientist at IPS

Challenges facing social science in the Arab region

In citing the challenges they've faced and continue to face as social scientists, interviewers noted structural difficulties related to their disciplines and not necessarily confined to their positionality as researchers working outside of the university. Among those challenges, I present below the bureaucratic hurdles posed to social sciences, funding concerns, and the general lack of interest or societal importance attributed to the social sciences.

For a social scientist working with a UN agency, bureaucratic hurdles were a challenge he constantly faced. Another social scientist working underscored how she had noticed, throughout her experience of working in a national university in the Arab region, the overwhelming presence of bureaucratic processes mixed with censorship and conservatism. On another note, a social scientists based in one of Lebanon's more recently established centers contended that research in the social sciences is not as established as it could or should be. She cited as an example the lack of qualified researchers and the difficulty of hiring good consultants. She also noted the lack (or minimal support) of social science research whether by public/state institutions such as the Lebanese Center for National Scientific Research (CNRS) or by universities. Likewise, a senior researcher notes that as early as the 1970s, there was already a struggle to get tenured in the social sciences and that the lack of resources at the Lebanese University where he worked was not conducive to scholarly research. Social research in most universities today operates on the logic of commissioned work and available grants[8].

Most social scientists expressed similar concerns in relation to funding of social science research. While CAUS for example used to receive substantial donations in the past, this is no longer the case. According to the head of the CAUS, the center has no endowment besides owning the building where its offices in Hamra, Beirut are located and the CAUS team is now looking into fundraising and maximizing income-generating activities (such as the sales of books). One of the immediate consequences of this lack of funding attributed to the social sciences is the challenge it poses to social scientists' job security both within the academy and outside of it. Securing a grant for example would help with the creation of longer term contracts at research centers. One social scientist I interviewed notes how she left her job at one organization after 13 years because the funds for the program she had been involved with had run out and the program was thus coming to an end. Moreover, as I mentioned earlier in this paper, some agencies, such as the UN, offer better salaries and work compensation to social scientists. One social scientist who works at the UNDP notes that his salary and benefits package exceed what he used to receive while still an academic at AUB. Last but not least, social scientists interviewed drew a comparison between the public reception that the discipline of social sciences enjoys in the Arab region compared to other parts of the world. A senior researcher who attended CLACSO (The Latin American Council of Social Sciences) congress organized in Argentina notes a significant difference concerning the status of social sciences in the Arab region. She highlights how there were more than 40,000 people in attendance at the CLASCO conference including politicians, journalists, academics, artists and activists. There were also posters of the conference adorning the streets of Buenos Aires. She also contended that a similar interest surrounding the social sciences in an Arab context would be unthinkable.

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[8] Hanafi & Arvanitis corroborate this claim and contend that this situation is comparable for most Arab countries.

The hierarchies of knowledge and the global conversation

In comparing the university to the outside, a stark difference emerges in relation to the different types of knowledge produced, disseminated and acquired. One social scientist drew from her experience to note how she was drawn into a hierarchy of knowledge – where applied knowledge or the acquirement of administration and management skills are not regarded to be as important as scholarly theoretical or abstracted knowledge. Another social scientist working at a Beirut based research center confirmed those same claims and contended that social science research outside of the university has sometimes been denigrated to a secondary rank especially in matters pertaining to the authorization of knowledge. She emphasized that, in her view, "knowledge produced outside of the academe is not non-academic". In her experience, the national university where she started her career was an interesting place at first with students who were very curious about the social sciences but that her motivation and willingness to rethink the social sciences in the context of an Arab region would eventually lead her to leave the university. Faculty members had little time for research and did not manage to publish much, let alone thinking about the discipline, exploring its historiography, reassessing disciplinary narratives and allowing for reflexivity to emerge. These epistemological interventions can now however take place in platforms such as the ones that centers like the ACSS facilitates. Along these lines and reflecting on his work with the centers he's worked with, a senior social scientist highlighted a different kind of epistemological commitment, one that includes a strong national ideological bent. He also noted that he frequently strived to have the centers he worked with publish work that is more rigorous in its methods, theoretical framings and fieldwork components but that he sometimes faced managerial objections. The management's interventions in editorial processes were not rare and were motivated by political concerns, ideological considerations or an uninformed approach to researchers' thematic and methodological choices.

In addition to these epistemological considerations, research centers also actively strive to become part of the global conversation and global dynamics of the social science knowledge production. Not unlike the university (Hanafi 2010; 2011; 2012; Hanafi & Arvanitis 2015), the entry into the global world of social sciences usually happens at three interconnected levels: Funding, publishing (namely the choice of language and publishing outlet) and the setting of research priorities. In the Arab region, researchers in the social sciences are often motivated to bridge the gap between what they conceive of as the stagnant and disconnected state of social science research and the issue they study. This is not an easily achievable task as in the context of a globalized research landscape, the boundaries between local activities and international priorities often become blurred (Hanafi & Arvanitis). CAUS, for instance, is thinking of tapping into funding opportunities supported by regional institutions such as the Arab Fund for Socio-economic Development or the Shuman Arab Fund, but also mostly international agencies in the Global North that already fund several social science research projects in universities or research centers. Examples include: The Canadian International Research Development Center (IDRC), the Swedish Agency for International Development (SIDA), UNESCO and ESCWA. In addition to funding, CAUS already participates in the global conversation on the region with the Journal of Contemporary Arab Affairs that they publish. It is a priority for the center to address an English-speaking audience. The Journal for Palestine Studies published by the IPS's

Washington, D.C. office is also already taking part in this conversation. This is not without reminding us of the double bind 'publish locally, perish globally' or 'publish globally, perish locally' which researchers in universities have to confront. This situation reveals a double contradiction for both universities and research centers. On one hand, it is a reflection of the challenges social scientists face in the Arab region in trying to showcase the relevance and pertinence of their work. On the other hand, it is another indication of the way through which integrating a global research agenda risks further alienating the social sciences in the Arab context. In that respect, global agendas could sometimes help meet local priorities. Social scientists who worked with international organizations give several examples from their experience where research priorities were "fashionably morphed into topics and themes that resembled more the global agenda"and where projects on themes such as population and development were subsumed under the umbrella of reproductive health especially where they considered that starting a conversation around reproductive health was a much needed initiative. These social scientists consider that the work of these organizations, in spite of or perhaps because of their globalized agendas had really made a difference and a significant impact at large on people's health and lives.

In this section, I have questioned the assumptions of a rigid and clustered separation between the higher education sphere and the 'outside' of the university, in other words, the world of NGOs and research centers where the social scientists that I interviewed work. I have emphasized some of the similarities and differences (bureaucratic hurdles, censorship, job security, globalization of research) and highlighted the ways through which social scientists sometimes straddle both worlds. In the following section, I focus on social scientists' conceptualization of and reflection on their own careers.

3.3. The notion of career explains (un)fortunate events

In their reflection on the professional paths they've taken, all of the social scientists I've interviewed agreed that it was more of a trajectory than a calculated, well thought of, rational sequence of career moves. There were of course personal considerations for researchers in choosing to accept an offer or not. One social scientist for instance cites having accepted a job offer by a major social science research institute based in New York because she wanted to relocate to the US for personal reasons. Another included financial family responsibilities as one of the reasons for taking on a job. A third noted his personal preferences in working with a particular person as a reason to move from one center to the other. Personal networks also played a substantial role. Some social scientists were offered jobs because of professional connections they had built over time – such as former faculty members who had already done consulting work for UN agencies or major philanthropic foundations prior to joining them full time).

This section further emphasizes other aspects of social scientists' relation to their professional trajectories. The findings I present below highlight the role of structural transformations, sociopolitical events and gender in the way these social scientists have understood and explained how they've seen their professions evolve.

Theory and praxis: Research as politics

The first aspect of social scientists' understanding of their career path is political. This rings true for the older generation of researchers who are now in their 60s and 70s but also for the younger generation albeit differently. One social scientist explained that his initial interest in the social sciences stemmed from his political commitment to the Palestinian nationalist cause and was very much structured by the Marxist paradigm that links theory with praxis. In the 1970s, Palestinian political upheavals as well as consecutive Arab-Israeli conflicts led him to pursue a PhD on the topic of nationalist politics in Palestine. As a result, he spent more than 12 years working on his first major research project. In his words, he was not career driven or oriented. "No university would take me having spent 12 years finishing my first project!" he said. The imperatives of his committed research even led him to unexpected places for instance to conduct further research. His scholarly activities continue to be intimately related to his involvement with the Palestinian Cause. His scholarly concerns, from exploring debates of the Arab Nahda or the concept of Jihad, cannot be separated from that.

A senior social scientists working with one of the most well-known research centers in the Arab region also expressed similar viewpoints. In the 1970s, he described belonging to the Arab New Left which was rejecting older schools of thought and advocating the need for new critical tools to understand third worldist aspirations and upheavals. In order to connect theory with praxis, nationalism with Marxism, one needed to pursue higher degrees in the social sciences. After he moved to Europe for his PhD, his interests quickly shifted and he developed an intellectual curiosity for the critical use of social theory and historical methods as science. In addition to his own political beginnings, this social scientist highlighted the way politics shaped the very creation of research centers. Upon completing his PhD and returning to Lebanon and struggling to make ends meet while waiting for tenure at the Lebanese University, he started working with the Beirut-based Institute for Arab Development (معهد الإنماء العربي)[9]. Funded by the Libyan government, this institute was providing social scientists with the support they needed to conduct research: A monthly stipend for researchers, a library, documents, microfilms, funding for data collection, and launching of research projects in thought, history, philosophy, sociology, education, and technological sciences. This social scientist main reflections in that regard were also the Lebanese University's reaction toward his (and his colleagues') involvement with the institute: the president of the university had accused all teachers who had been working with the institute of infringing on university rules.

A social scientist who now works with the UN system, shares similar beginnings in the social sciences. However, he explained how in the context of post-war Lebanon, he was quickly disillusioned with the Marxist theory-praxis paradigm. He also explained how thinking about academia as an alternative to doing work in politics was no longer a viable option. For PhD holders like him who had experienced the political effervescence of intellectual milieus during the 1970s, the 1990s provided little to no platforms to do meaningful work in politics. He elaborated further by showing how, in his view, academia within the university also proved disappointing because its promise of intellectual freedom turned out to be illusory. "Knowledge

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[9] This institute was founded in 1976, was short lived and included several social science researchers many of whom were part of Socialist Lebanon.

production in the university was intimately tied to metrics and articles were being written for promotion and not for social change," he contended. He also underscored how he thought that, with a few exceptions, important social science books that did enact change were not written from within the confines of academia.

It is worth noting here that other socio-political transformations and events emerged in the interviews I conducted as structuring moments. I mentioned earlier how LS was created during the 2006 Israeli war on Lebanon by a group of committed students and activists. In its present form today, as the social scientist I interviewed notes, the center continues to uphold a commitment to action-based research and to bridging the gap between pressing societal concerns, necessary social, political and economic interventions, and academic research. Last but not least, and beyond specific political commitments, many social scientists interviewed noted an affective attachment to the Arab region. A senior social scientist noted how during the 1980s, and as she was looking to leave a university based in the Arab region, she had been in advanced negotiations with two universities that had just been established in Turkey. Despite her having a personal connection to Turkey, she stated that "something kept her in the Arab region."

A gendered reading of careers

In addition to the roles played by socio-political transformations and events in shaping the professional paths of social scientists who have been working in research centers, it is important to note the role of gender. As one female social scientist highlighted for instance, she didn't really choose the social sciences but opted for it as it was the field of study a young woman in Egypt would select. All of these structural arrangements combined created different opportunities for social science researchers. While some of the male researchers I have interviewed actively described their involvements as political decisions in their own time, female researchers expressed the relationship of structure to their own agency otherwise, in a way that takes into account the effects of broader constraints on their personal lives. A mid-career female social scientist for instance defined the notion of career as "a series of fortunate accidents or the chance of finding yourself at the right place at the right time and being presented with an opportunity you take." A more senior female social scientist expressed similar views. When she had just completed her PhD, she did not receive much guidance or support in her reflection on what to do next. She had not applied for a postdoctoral position. (Many anthropology students at the North American institution where she completed her PhD were not really encouraged to do so.) Prior to enrolling at that university, she had studied at AUB. Although she might have wanted to go back to AUB after completing her PhD, she couldn't do so because the year was 1982 and Lebanon, engulfed in civil war, had also just been invaded by Israel.

In this section, I have highlighted how social scientists have understood and conceptualized their own professional trajectories, emphasizing mainly the roles of sociopolitical transformations and the relationships of structure to agency.

4. Analysis and Conclusion

In this paper, I have tried to showcase findings from interviews I conducted with eight social scientists working in NGOs, research centers and international agencies, outside of the university. In doing so, I have attempted to convey some features and aspects of their professional lives, experiences and trajectories. As we have seen, their work is characterized by versatility. Outside of the academe, social science researchers acquire a multitude of skills allowing them to run, manage and supervise different projects – research, administrative or otherwise – and to adapt them to different audiences. We have also seen that while certain jobs (such as in the UN system ensure better salaries for social scientists), the job market and employment opportunities remain as fraught in the university as outside of it. Higher positions are more secure than entry level jobs and many researchers have had to work several years as consultants before being able to secure more permanent jobs. Moreover, as most research organizations do not hire many full-time researchers, contractual, short-term or punctual consultancy agreements abound. As I mentioned, in CAUS for example there are 22 full time staff, three of which are PhD holders and researchers. There are also only three full-time researchers and PhD holders at IPS. Many university professors are consultants with these organizations themselves, taking on additional work sometimes in order to improve their income. Job security is further complicated by the fact that not all research centers have ensured their sustainability. Different organizations have sought to create endowments (such as IPS) or to enhance income generating methods such as monetizing websites (Daleel Madani for LS), maximizing subscriptions to journals (IPS, LS, CAUS, etc.) and fundraising (from both regional and global stakeholders and funders). Last but not least, I note here that all of the researchers I interviewed, with the exception of one who holds a PhD from the Lebanese University, are graduates of institutions of higher education in North America or Western Europe. In the present circumstances, it is still much more difficult for holders of PhDs from the Arab world to land similar job opportunities in well reputed research centers.

Social scientists I interviewed have reflexively understood and conceptualized their career path as a trajectory, underscoring the roles of socio-political transformations (such as the Palestinian Liberation struggle or the July 2006 war) and the relationships of structure to agency (such as the gendered feature of social science study in Egypt). Their professional undertakings were subjected to much 'serendipity'[10]: To stumble upon and seize opportunities one was not looking for (or when one was looking for something else). It is along those lines that an anthropologist from Berkeley helps start a critical conversation around the state of social science in the Arab region with the ACSS; or that a former Marxist political scientist starts working on governance with the UNDP. What structures these serendipitous encounters and how the opportunities that arise are defined exceeds the scope of this paper and we can only offer some insights here.

The oldest centers were founded in the heydays of leftist political effervescence, what Fadi Bardawil (2010) calls "Times of Intellectual Ferment". These include IPS, CAUS but also the short lived Institute for Arab Development I mentioned earlier. A second phase seems to emerge

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[10] Researchers I interviewed did not suggest the word 'serendipity', it was rather my own proposition. However, and in line with my commitment to a participatory methodological approach (as outlined in the methods section), I shared it with some of them and they found it quite an expressive concept.

in the early 2000s, at the height of what S.S. referred to as "the height of NGO funding into the region". The Arab uprisings constitute the third impetus and since 2011 we have been witnessing a resurgence of interest for centers where social scientists can work and conduct research. I suggest here that there may be several reasons for this resurgence. In the aftermath of the 2011 uprisings, there's a growing need to accompany social transformations and changes with relevant social science knowledge production. In that respect, research centers are striving to carve for themselves (and for the social science researchers working with them) a space of autonomy that would make them locally relevant and would also define their relationship to universities, especially national universities[11]. However, and because of the globalized trends of knowledge production that we have briefly indicated in this paper, research centers are also seeking to shape and influence global conversations. Their challenge remains, of course, to do so in a way that is not just about rendering the unfamiliar Arab region familiar to global funders, or accompanying epistemological transformation and deprovincializing knowledge in academic centers in the West.

2011, with the unexpected uprisings it brought, was a pivotal year in many ways. It has prompted a global conversation around the necessity to map and understand infrastructures of knowledge in the Arab region and to redraw epistemological contours[12]. Locally, it has meant, among other things, the necessity to come to terms with the 1967-2011 period. The long-standing centers such as IPS for instance are actively participating in that conversation through the scholarly exploration of a pre-1948 Palestine. Another example is the CAUS's active involvement in the publishing of former militants' memoirs. Several other initiatives such as the ACSS, the ACRPS or the CAUS's attempt to rejuvenate itself can also be understood as an effort to create a conversation within the Arab region itself, notwithstanding unavoidable and often crucial global links. These reflexive moves help rethink the social sciences as a set of entangled disciplines which are constantly shaping and being reshaped by the material reality of the Arab contexts. Every day, radical socio-political, cultural and economic transformations continue to radically shape this material reality.

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[11] Interview with social scientist at ACSS

[12] See for example Dabashi, Hamid. *The Arab Spring: the end of postcolonialism*. Zed Books Ltd., 2012.

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ANNEX 1

List of interviews conducted chronologically with social scientists working with:

- Lebanon Support
- Institute for Palestine Studies
- Arab Council for the Social Sciences
- Center for Arab Unity Studies
- Knowledge Workshop
- United Nations Development Project
- Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies

ANNEX 2

List of Acronyms

ACRPS: Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies
ACSS: Arab Council for the Social Sciences
AUB: American University of Beirut
CAUS: Center for Arab Unity Studies
CLACSO: The Latin American Council of Social Sciences
CSO: Civil Society Organization
CVSR: Civil Society Review Journal
EHESS: Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales
ESCWA: Economic and Social Commission for West Asia
IDRC: International Research Development Center
IFI: Issam Fares Institute
IFPO: Institut Francais du Proche Orient
IPS: Institute for Palestine Studies
LADE: Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections
LCPS: Lebanese Center for Policy Studies
LS: Lebanon Support
NGO: Non-Governmental Organization
SIDA: Swedish Agency for International Development
UNDP: United Nations Development Project
UNESCO: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization