المجلس العربي
للعلوم الاجتماعية

Arab Council
for the Social Sciences
Conseil Arabe
pour les Sciences Sociales

ANNUAL REPORT

2020

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I. GENERAL INFORMATION

- Organization Name: Arab Council for the Social Sciences (ACSS)
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- Some acronyms used in the report:
  - ACSS: Arab Council for the Social Sciences
  - A&F: BoT Administration and Finance Sub-committee
  - ASSM: Arab Social Science Monitor
  - ASSR: Arab Social Science Report
  - BoT: Board of Trustees
  - CCNY: Carnegie Corporation of New York
  - CLG: Company Limited by Guarantee
  - CoP: Critiques of Power
  - CSS: Critical Security Studies
  - ECFP: Early Career Fellows Program
  - EKWG: Ethnography and Knowledge Working Group
  - F&A: Finance and Administration
  - FPOS: Foundation to Promote Open Society (a member of Open Society Foundations – OSF)
  - IDRC: International Development Research Centre
  - LoA: Letter of Agreement
  - MoU: Memorandum of Understanding
  - MPK: Mapping the Production of Knowledge
  - NewGen: New Generation of Social Scientists in the Arab Region
  - NPF: New Paradigms Factory
  - OSF: Open Society Foundations
  - PC: Program Coordinator
  - PD: Professional Development
  - RBM: Results Based Management
  - RGP : Research Grants Program)
  - RAP: Research on the Arts Program
  - Sida: Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
  - SGP: Small Grants Program
  - BSCSS: Beirut School for Critical Security Studies
  - ToC: Table of Contents
  - ToR: Terms of Reference
  - WHR: World Humanities Report

II. PROJECT ENVIRONMENT AND INSTITUTIONAL STRATEGY:

The year 2020 has by all means been an eventful and challenging year, not only for Lebanon where the ACSS is based, but also for the entire world. The spread of Covid-19, the casualties and loss of life it has caused and the threats it entailed to the health, wellbeing and livelihoods of millions of people around the globe has been devastating. In Lebanon, in addition to the pandemic, the country has faced many disruptions since the October 2019 uprisings followed by an ongoing banking and economic crisis and then the massive explosion of the Beirut Port in August 2020. All of these demonstrate the persistent inability of the Lebanese government to take action in the face of successive crises. Regionally, as well, governments are largely failing their societies which has led to a significant crisis of trust in public institutions and increasing stresses on civil society.

While these ongoing crises reinforce the importance the continued production of data, analyses and visions for a better future, they also pose challenges and have direct implications on ACSS plans and activities as well as for our affiliated researchers and constituents. These include restrictions on in-office work due to lockdowns and social distancing, difficulties in holding face-to-face meetings and convenings, and delays in transferring funds to researchers due to the continuing banking crisis. In addition, the Beirut Port explosion caused significant damage to the office, especially the windows and doors, and the repairs took time and effort due to shortages of materials and labor given the massive reconstruction needs in the city. On their part, grantees and researchers have also experienced delays and difficulties with fieldwork due to the pandemic.

Notwithstanding, the ACSS stayed the course in 2020. We have worked within the restrictions of the banking systems and, by early 2020, were able to resume issuing payments regularly. We have sought alternative ways to pursue our activities and deliver programs. We organized events and workshops online, demonstrated support and understanding to our grantees and started to think of ways to celebrate ten years of active and vibrant presence in the Arab region's social science scene. As the longer-term effects of the pandemic reveal themselves in 2021, it is clear that we have to think long and hard about how to achieve our mission and goals through alternate modalities. For this purpose, as will be detailed below, the ACSS is working on a 2-year interim strategy (2021-2022) that will act as a framework and compass for these uncertain times.

In the following sections we review the progress we made on the institutional and programmatic fronts in 2020, address the challenges we faced in each program as well as the measures we adopted in the face of surrounding events and changes.

A. The Institutional Impact of the Context in Lebanon

In response to the adverse political, economic and banking situation in Lebanon – mainly persistent controls on foreign currency - which reflected, among other things, on the difficulty of paying staff salaries and sending wire transfers to grantees and fellows, the Board of Trustees (BoT) and the Administration and Finance (A+F) Committee met in January 2020 and discussed the following issues:

- The impossibility of establishing a new bank account in a Lebanese bank that has branches outside Lebanon, or a new bank account in a non-Lebanese bank that has branches in and outside Lebanon, or a new bank account in a Jordanian bank. After lengthy attempts, these were all met with refusals, possibly because the ACSS is an NGO and not a company.

- Relief appeared through a new system in Lebanese banks whereby a "mirror" or "transfer" account could be established. NGOs which receive "new" or "fresh" foreign funding could use 85% of those funds and those would not be subject to currency controls. Also, staff could be paid in cash. While this option seemed to solve the current problems, it was still not clear if the banks would honor this arrangement on the long-term.
- The need to ask donors to put delays on pending payments until we have created an alternative solution/banking arrangement.

The BoT agreed that the longer-term solution would be to establish other entities in other countries, which would facilitate the opening of a bank account. After much exploration, three possibilities were decided upon:

- Opening a branch of the ACSS in Jordan
- Establishing a company limited by guarantee (CLG) where ACSS is the sole shareholder in the Abu Dhabi Free Zone.
- Establishing a company limited by guarantee (CLG) where ACSS is the sole shareholder, in Cyprus. This entity could then apply for tax exemption as a charitable trust.

The BoT judged that it was important for the ACSS to work on all three fronts in order to expand options and ensure that all our financial obligations in different countries of the region are met. At the same time, setting up more than one entity would spread the risk and give different options for dealing with different situations. To give an example, the branch in Jordan may be a convenient solution for the ACSS to transfer funds easily to Palestine, however state controls on receiving foreign funding may be cumbersome and time consuming to navigate and thus the existence of other alternatives would be helpful.

The ACSS solicited the assistance of law firms in all three countries. In Cyprus, the lawyers worked for months trying to get a provisional approval from any bank that if the ACSS established a CLG in Cyprus, it would open an account for the company, but there has been no success. In Jordan, lawyers have proceeded with steps to open a branch office in Amman and papers are ready for submission to the Ministry of Social Development. Finding a bank that would agree to open a bank account for the ACSS branch was not easy, however one bank in Amman did agree to do so and talks continue with another bank as well. In Abu the Dhabi Free Zone, the process of setting up a CLG seems to be going smoothly except for the slow pace because of lockdowns due to Covid-19 as well as the large amount of paperwork required. Several banks have confirmed that they would open accounts once the CLG is established.

In the meantime, ACSS members were formally informed about the plans to open new entities outside Lebanon, a decision that had to be approved by the majority of members through a formal vote before finalizing the process.

Some members expressed worry if this would mean that the ACSS would be leaving Lebanon and moving to another location in the region. Some also were not comfortable with the idea of a CLG as well as the choice of countries. Therefore an open forum was organized on December 7, 2020 with members of the BoT and Secretariat meeting with ACSS members to explain the reasons for these steps. During the meeting, the Director General and BoT explained that the pursuit of alternative banking avenues was imperative given the dire economic situation and banking controls in Lebanon. In addition to obstructing our work and delaying the transfer of funds to grantees, current restrictions

in Lebanon have also resulted in incurring sizeable financial losses on the ACSS[1] They also emphasized that by adopting these measures, the ACSS is attempting to put a solid institutional framework and financial infrastructure in place to safeguard against future shocks and controls. They reiterated that opening new entities in other countries does not have implications for the main office in Beirut and that the ACSS and its staff will continue to operate from Lebanon. The ACSS location in Lebanon remains optimal not least because of the freedom of speech it affords and ability to convene researchers to engage in open and critical discussions as well as a relatively open visa regime (for when convening resumes). Finally, the BoT and Director General, made sure to emphasize that as a matter of principle, the ACSS does not work with governments and would not submit to any potential future pressure from any government.

Although the number of participants at the virtual meeting was not large, the general mood seemed to accommodate the decisions to open branches and subsidiaries in view of the great difficulties ACSS has been facing. More importantly, participants seemed to genuinely appreciate what ACSS has achieved in the past decade in terms of networking and supporting the social science academic community in the Arab world. Despite that, and in the meantime, the ACSS received a few, significant, negative reactions. In view of these reactions particularly coming from Palestine, the BoT and Director General organized a virtual meeting on December 16, 2020 with the ACSS Palestinian network to clarify the situation and to solicit their ideas on how the ACSS can support Palestinian researchers in the face of continued occupation as well as a deteriorating political situation.

As mentioned, the decisions were put to a formal electronic vote:

- Voting for the Amman branch took place on October 8-10, 2020. Results were: 52 in favor, 0 abstain.
- Voting for Abu Dhabi branch took place on December 18-21, 2020 - Results were 39 in favor, 8 against, 9 abstain.

As mentioned above, the application materials for the Amman branch are ready to be submitted to the Ministry of Social Development. The authorized signatories will be ACSS Director General, Seteney Shami, as well as Dr. Mary Kawar, a founding member and active voting member of the ACSS. The paperwork for the registration of the company in Abu Dhabi has also been completed. Dr. Munzoul Assal, member of the ACSS BoT who now resides in the UAE and is employed at the University of Sharjah, will act as the authorized representative of the new CLG in the UAE and will be an authorized signatory along with the ACSS Director General, Seteney Shami on the application procedures.

[1] As a result of the financial crisis in Lebanon that starting emerging as of October 17, 2019, the Central Bank issued some regulations that affected the modality of receiving and using fresh international funds. Specific bank accounts were opened to deposit these funds subject to a rule allowing banks to retain 15% of these funds that the client cannot withdraw or use. The rule was eventually eased off, allowing banks to release all the fresh international funds against a percentage commission that is agreed upon separately between the bank and the client. ACSS negotiated the commission @4% of the credited funds. As requested by the Board of Trustees during their January 2021 meeting, further legal discussions with the bank top management will take place early on in 2021 to reduce this commission to an acceptable minimum.

Most recently, the ACSS has started looking into the possibility of establishing a relationship with Fortes Securities, a London-based brokerage business, whereby the company would offer 'custodial' services that allow the ACSS donors send funds to the company's Barclays Bank (UK) which would then be periodically transferred to the ACSS 'fresh funds' account in Lebanon. The service would be offered for free as part of the company's 'charitable arm' except for banking transfer fees. The BoT has accepted the offer in principle and the Director General has started an exchange with Forte Securities to ensure the safety and legality of the procedures.

B. The 5-Year Strategy

In 2020, the ACSS concluded the final year of its 5-year Strategy (2016-2020), which had laid out an ambitious program of institutional and programmatic growth . Progress on the strategy is reported in this section. We also report on the RBM Logframe (see Results-based Management section below) which guides the institutional and programmatic development of the ACSS and is reviewed and revised at periodic staff meetings and BoT meetings.

The targets outlined in the 5-year Strategy were the following: Governance, Financial Sustainability, Regional Reach, Institutional Support, Publications and Research Uptake. The below section summarizes progress within each of these targets, with some activities being further detailed in the relevant sections of the report as indicated. The commentary below also notes where the targets were accomplished but given the changes in context, in fact, ended up not being sufficient for the ultimate aims. In addition, activities scheduled for 2020 that could not be carried out are also explained.

Target 1: Governance **Fully revised & functional charter, by-laws, & internal processes**			
Timeline: 2016-2017			
Aims: Strengthening institutional capacities; smooth BoT elections, leadership transitions, & conflict resolution; effective Board-Director-Staff relations			
Activity	Start Date	End Date	Responsibility
Revisions of the text of Charter and By-laws	May 2016	January 2017	BoT, Director, F&A Manager, & Lawyer
Revision of chart of authority & addition of some internal policies	May 2016	January 2017	BoT, Director, & F&A Manager
Ratification of revised Charter & By-laws by members & associated legal procedures	March 2017	September 2017	BoT, Director, F&A Manager, & Lawyer
Staffing	September 2016	Ongoing	Director & F&A Manager

a) All governance activities were implemented on schedule in 2016 and 2017. However, given recent decisions by the BoT to diversify the institutional structure of the ACSS by establishing branches and subsidiaries, this will require institutionalizing new governance and administrative arrangements.
b) Adequate staffing has long been a challenge for the institution and a continual work in progress. A major milestone was achieved through the successful recruitment of Dr. Moushira Elgeziri as Associate Director in 2019, after a search that lasted two years. In April 2020, a new Head of Administration and HR, Ms. Martine Cortas,[2] was recruited who took up all tasks related to general administration, human resources, membership affairs and BoT preparation and follow up. This relieved the Finance Manager of her heavy responsibilities and allowed her to focus on financial reporting, budgeting and planning.

Target 2 **Financial Sustainability**			
Timeline: 2016-2020			
Aims: Adequate core funding; Long-term co-funding partnerships; Endowment			
Activity	Start Date	End Date	Responsibility
Discussions with donors concerning core funds	June 2016	Ongoing	Director
Financial consultant for endowment	November 2016	April 2017	BoT A&F sub-committee, Director, & F&A Manager
Endowment fundraising	January 2017	Ongoing	BoT, Director, & F&A Manager
Developing 3-4 strategic co-funding partnerships	January 2018	Ongoing	Director & F&A Manager

a) Core funding has been successfully obtained through the grants from Sida and Ford Foundation. Other current donors are highly unlikely to commit core funds and it is not clear if there would be a renewal from the Ford Foundation after the current grant ends in 2022 Thus the search for new core fund donors remains a priority.
b) Work by the DG on endowment fundraising was scheduled to start in the second half of 2019, however the unexpected events unfolding since October in Lebanon and Covid-19 in 2020 have created new urgencies and work on endowment was put on hold. Hopefully this can be resumed in 2021.
c) Co-funding partnerships on a number of grants and training programs have been put in place with: the Fondation Maison des Sciences de l'homme (FMSH) in Paris,

[2] Sadly, Martine Cortas passed away on February 20, 2021

The Arab Fund for Culture and Arts, the University of North Carolina, the American University of Beirut and the University of Wisconsin, Madison. (For details see relevant sections under "Grants and Fellowships" "World Humanities Report" and "ASSM" below).

Target 3: Regional Reach **Functioning focal points & regionally representative membership pool**			
Timeline: 2016-2018			
Aims: Diversity of regional participation in governance & activities			
Activity	Start Date	End Date	Responsibility
Algeria Focal Point established	June 2016	December 2016	Director & F&A Manager
Targeted membership drive	March 2017	Ongoing	BoT Membership sub-Committee, Director, & PA
Development of two more focal points	January 2018	December 2018	Director & F&A Manager

a) The Algeria Focal Point has proceeded more slowly than planned due to both bureaucratic and political factors. An agreement was reached in 2017 with Dr. Nacer Djabi (a former member of the Board of Trustees) to act as senior advisor and to oversee the work of the focal point and an annual plan was developed for 2018-2019. The political unrest in Algeria, followed by the pandemic delayed most of the planned activities for 2019-2020. However, starting in late 2020, virtual activities began to be successfully implemented.

b) Applications for individual membership continue to come in steadily and the total number of members as of January 2021 is 695 members divided as follows: 81 active (voting) members; 516 associate (non-voting) members, 98 students (non-voting) members and 2 (non-voting) institutional members. The pandemic put on hold some of the benefits of membership such as the travel grants for conference participation that had been highly appreciated and utilized by members. On the other hand, virtual meetings have been held with members and this has in fact led to more communication and sharing of information – something that the ACSS intends to continue moving forward. The membership sub-committee also discusses in each of its meeting how to attract a more diverse group of members and is particularly committed moving forward to increase the institutional members of the ACSS.

c) As discussed in the previous report, the BoT during their retreat of September 2018, stated that it would be premature to decide on a 3rd focal point before 2020. This decision was based on the experience in both Palestine and Algeria and the time it took to put an effective structure in place and ensure good communication and coordination with the Beirut office. It has also been noted that the Associate Director – an Egyptian - would act as an informal focal point in Egypt, where

networking and support for researchers is vital given the difficulties they are facing. The situation in 2020 put an end to the plan for more focal points. Since energies are now being expended on creating branches and subsidiaries – these (if successful) will create new institutional presences and their actual substantive roles (beyond making available banking options) will be deliberated on and developed once they are established.

Target 4: Institutional Support **Complement the focus on individuals with support & networking for universities & research organizations**			
Timeline: 2017-2019			
Aims: Effective programs & activities designed & implemented in order to achieve the desired balance			
Activity	Start Date	End Date	Responsibility
Develop a plan for institutional collaborations & networking	January 2017	June 2017	BoT, Director, & Staff
Develop one new program for institutional support	January 2018	December 2018	Director & BoT
Develop one new program for institutional support	January 2019	December 2019	Director & BoT
Activities for networking institutions at ACSS biennial conference	January 2019	December 2019	Director & BoT

a) Planning for supporting institutional collaborations and networking proceeded on schedule, and includes three aspects: (1) As mentioned above, work has begun on a strategy of incentives to encourage institutional ACSS membership, (2) Co-funding programs with sister organizations (mentioned above and detailed in the relevant sections of the report), and (3) The launch of the "New Generation of Social Scientists in the Arab region" program, which is an integrated research and training program based at Arab universities that supports, mentors and networks students in their undergraduate and graduate years till the post-PhD phase (See "New Generation" project below).

b) As scheduled and mentioned in earlier reports, new institutional support grants programs were developed in 2018 and 2019. The "Research on the Arts" is through an ongoing partnership with the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture (AFAC) (see RAP section under "Fellowships and Grants" below). In addition, grants for institutions were introduced into the Research Grants Program starting in June 2019 and two cycles have been held (see RGP section under "Fellowships and Grants" below). Finally, the New Generation program also provides institutional support for a select group of universities in the region (see section below on New Generation program).

c) Through partnerships and institutional grants (AFAC-ACSS; RGP, the New Generation program's partner universities and partners in the Research Ethics new grant (see relevant sections below), the ACSS has developed a network of partner institutions. We hope to highlight these at the 5th ACSS Conference in 2021.

Target 5: Publications **Publications support & development of new dissemination outlets & formats**			
Timeline: 2017-2020			
Aims: ACSS becomes a major source of publishing & disseminating new social science knowledge about the region			
Activity	Start Date	End Date	Responsibility
Fully launch Working Papers, Field Reports & Directory, quarterly e-newsletter	January 2017	December 2017	Publications sub-committee, Editorial Review Board, & Communications staff
Develop 1-2 new web outlets for dissemination	January 2018	December 2018	Publications sub-committee & Staff
Planning the New Social Sciences Journal	January 2019	December 2019	Publications sub-committee, Editorial Review Board, & Communications staff
Launch *Journal of Social Sciences in the Arab Region*	January 2020	December 2020	Publications sub-committee, Editorial Review Board, Director & Staff

a) The Working Papers and quarterly e-newsletter are well underway and issued regularly and reach a wide readership. The production of the Directory has been moved to 2021 to mark the 10th anniversary of the ACSS. As mentioned in previous reports (2018, 2019), the Publications sub-committee decided to not introduce Field Reports as they were regarded as not feasible.
b) One new web outlet was launched as planned in 2018 – the "Beirut Forum" which is the website of the Critical Security Studies Working Group project (See section on Working Groups below). Another outlet is proceeding more slowly – this is a site for training and discussions on the topic of Research Ethics in the Social Sciences.
c) After extensive discussions by the BoT, it was decided that rather than launch a social science journal, the ACSS would launch an annual "Reviews" (Qira'at in Arabic) publication that will publish reviews of the literature and state of the art articles. During 2019, the content of the first volume was commissioned, assembled, translated and compiled. The circumstance of 2020 delayed finalization and publication, but the issue will certainly appear in 2021. Plans and content for the second volume also were put in place in 2020.

Target 6: Research Uptake **Supporting collaboration between academic & non-academic researchers & institutions for policy & public impact**			
Timeline: 2018-2020			
Aims: Effective programs & activities designed & implemented to enhance policy impact & broader societal engagement			
Activity	Start Date	End Date	Responsibility
Develop a new program for university & civil society collaboration	January 2018	June 2018	Director & BoT
Develop a new program for research & private sector collaboration	January 2019	June 2019	Director & BoT
Develop a new program for research & public sector collaboration	January 2020	June 2020	Director & BoT

a) In 2018, the ACSS experimented with strengthening collaborations between academia and civil society through the Bassem Chit Early Scholar Career Fellowship (in collaboration with Lebanon Support (LS) a research NGO, and the Rosa Luxembourg Foundation). Important insights were gained through this one-cycle program and the ACSS plans to continue this kind of programming – another issue that had to be postponed beyond 2020.
b) The plans to launch new programs for promoting collaboration with public and private sectors were also delayed by the events of 2019 and 2020, although there are some new ideas that can begin to be implemented in 2021.

C. Results Based Management (RBM)

Overall and Specific Objectives and Logframe:

Since 2013, the ACSS has been implementing a Results Based Management (RBM) approach and has developed a Logframe to monitor and measure projects and activities in terms of how they meet the overall and four specific objectives of the institution (Appendix 1 - Logframe).

The Overall Objective is:

To achieve a functioning institutional structure that identifies and supports improved social science in the region.

The Specific Objectives are:

1. *To improve and expand production and use of social science research to address regional issues;*
2. *To achieve a new and larger generation of social scientists integrated into regional networks;*
3. *To achieve institutionalization of ACSS as a credible recognized network of researchers; and*
4. *To promote and implement good governance within the ACSS (this was added in 2016 based on the external evaluators' recommendations).*

In addition to internally documenting and monitoring activities, as of 2015, the ACSS has been conducting an annual survey of grantees (sent out every January) that requests updates on outputs and publications and solicits their opinions on their experience with the ACSS (Appendix 2- Survey). The annual survey has been developed for gathering data for the Logframe and is considered an important input for planning and monitoring institutional growth and programmatic activities. In 2017 we adopted a new questionnaire which focuses particularly on the impact and the uptake of the research produced through ACSS grants.

The 2020 survey was sent out on January 1, 2021 and elicited a 28% response. Overall, the results displayed in the Logframe were satisfactory keeping in mind the exceptional circumstances witnessed in 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. It is worth noting that the cancellation of the 4th Research Forum, that was scheduled for spring 2020 had an impact on the results of the survey. At the very least the number of activities and number of participants in events have decreased sharply which then reflect on the percentages of various indicators reported in the RBM.
Despite this, the Logframe reflected the following increases compared to 2019:

- A 10% increase in the number of joint projects and initiatives
- A 70% increase in number of MOUs with other organizations
- A 10% increase in committee, advisory and consultation meetings
- An increase in the representation of women researchers applying to the ACSS 5th Conference (51% females vs. 49% males)
- Other positive indicators: Social media outreach (+28%), monthly visitors to our website (+12%) and an increase in ACSS membership (individual +13% & institutional +64%)

III. ACTIVITIES AND DEVELOPMENTS IN 2020

A. Institutional Development

Funding for developing institutional capacities is spread across all ACSS grants through both direct and indirect support budget lines. Core funding from Sida and Ford is essential for this component.

Board of Trustees

The Board of Trustees met in person on January 17 - 18, 2020 and virtually in September 22-28, 2020. The January meeting always includes a review and approval of the finances of the previous year and of the upcoming year's budget. This meeting was preceded by the three BoT sub-committee meetings: Membership, Administration and Finance, and Publications. The BoT also heard a detailed presentation of the New Generation of Social Scientists (NewGen) project, and began the process of planning the 5th Conference that would be held in Spring 2021. International and regional collaboration proposals were discussed and approved including the planned joint project with CODESRIA for research on the Sahel to be funded by Sida. The Director General also discussed plans for an external evaluation to be initiated in 2020 and on which basis the new 5-year strategy would be developed.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the second BoT in 2020 was held over Zoom on September 22, 25 and 28, 2020. The meeting mainly focused on the developments in the banking sector in Lebanon after the October 2019 uprisings and the devaluation of the Lebanese Pound. The Director General presented few options and updates on her endeavors to open branches in the United Arab Emirates

(UAE), Jordan, and Cyprus to safeguard the funds that ACSS receives from the various funders and to facilitate the transfers to grantees and affiliated researchers. The BoT decided to proceed with opening a branch in Jordan and a Company Limited by Guarantee (CLG) in Abu Dhabi, UAE. Other administrative issues were reviewed including the preparation and implementation of a Risk Management Policy. The Finance Manager presented a new financial strategic approach that was informed by a Financial Strategic Workshop presented by Spring Strategies as part of the resource provided by the Ford Foundation to its Ford Build grantees.

During the September meeting, the applications received for the external evaluation were reviewed and a decision was made to extend the application deadline in order to encourage a more experienced pool to apply. After a discussion of the rapidly changing context and continuing uncertainties, the BoT took a decision that instead of a five or seven year strategy, the ACSS would develop a 2-year interim strategy (2021-2022). This would enable the ACSS to lay the groundwork for a realistic long-term strategy that would take into account international, regional and national uncertainties and the 'new normal'.

Administrative and Financial Systems and Processes

New accounting system

The Microsoft Navision Dynamics accounting system which the ACSS purchased in 2018 was put into use in 2019. During 2020, results of experimenting with the new accounting system in 2019 were compared with the software ACSS has been using for the past six years ensuring the accuracy of the outputs and ACSS will go live with the new software as of January 2021

New office space

As the ACSS has expanded in terms of staff and activities, it was decided to rent new space on the first floor of the same building where the ACSS is located starting February 1, 2020. The additional space includes several meeting areas which can accommodate large gatherings, workshops and training sessions. This unfortunately coincided with the pandemic and there have been few convenings since the space was rented. On the other hand, the extra space has enabled us to practice social distancing in the office to keep the staff safe in the workplace during the pandemic.

Internal Management and Control Audit

As a result of the Internal Management and Control Audit that was conducted by PKF Littlejohn LLP during December 2019 upon the request of Sida, actions have been taken to respond to the comments of the auditors. The draft report and an update since early 2020 on our responses/actions are attached to this report (Appendix 3 – Audit Report).

Database and Information Systems

The ACSS is in the process of harmonizing three major components of its IT infrastructure. These include a new grants management system (GMS), a central database, or customer relations management (CRM system), and a new website with an advanced content management system (CMS). In 2020, the ACSS selected Good Grants as its new GMS and AwardForce as the company that will implement it. AwardForce is one of the leading companies in this field and offers several features that will drastically improve not only the applicants' experience but also facilitate the work of ACSS staff administering and processing the applications. The new GMS will also be used to manage ASSM surveys and the ACSS membership application process.

A crucial part of the new IT infrastructure is the syncing of data between GMS and the new CRM, Salesforce. We are currently 'populating' the CRM with our current data and contacts, unifying data sources from several ACSS units. It is in the final stage of completion and will be up and running by spring 2021. As CRM, Salesforce will be acting as the central database and will be the main connector between the different systems: the GMS and the CMS.

The final component in this new IT infrastructure is a new website. In 2020, the ACSS examined various options for website development and decided to use WordPress as our Content Management System (CMS) for the new website for the following reasons: Open Source, Easy to Use, Secure, Search Engine Friendly, Flexible Hosting, and Highly Customizable.

We are now in the final phases of carefully selecting a website development company to take on this task. To secure the above infrastructure, we purchased an Internet connection that relies on a Microwave link, which minimizes any possible connection issues.

Staffing

New staff members who have joined the ACSS team include:

- Ms Lubna Maaliki started on February 6, 2020 as full-time program coordinator for the "New Generation of Social Scientists" funded by the Open Society Foundation (OSF).
- Mrs. Martine Cortas Ghantous joined on April 6, 2020 as Head of Administration and Human Resources.
- Mrs. Vera Zeidan joined on September 14, 2020 as Assistant to the Director General and Special Projects.
- Ms. Samera Azzi joined as part-time accountant as of August 10, 2020.
- Ms. Lilian Bou Mansour joined as part-time graphic designer as of December 1, 2020.

Just as we welcomed new staff on board, we also lost Mr. Emad Kaskas, part-time senior accountant who passed away on November 14, 2020. Mrs. Martine Cortas Ghantous, Head of Administration and Human Resources also passed away on 20 February 2021.

The endeavors to recruit a communications manager have resulted in a one-year consultancy agreement with Mr. Michael Huijer as Senior Communications Consultant. ACSS is now on the look for a full- time staff Communications Manager.

By the end of 2020, the office included 20 employees as follows: 16 Lebanese, 1 Egyptian, 1 Jordanian, 1 Palestinian, and 1 Bangladeshi, out of whom 14 are females and 6 are males. In addition to the Beirut-based staff, the ACSS focal points in Palestine and Algeria who work on a part-time basis, include two senior consultants and one administrative/program coordinators (two Palestinians and one Algerian), making the total gender balance 16 females and 8 males.

The ACSS continued to rely on part-time consultants for programmatic work, sometimes dure to the absence of appropriate full-time staff and sometimes due to the specialized nature of the tasks. For 2020, these included:

- Dr. Jamil Mouawad – consultant for the Research Ethics initiative.
- Dr. Deema Kaedbey – consultant since February 1, 2018 coordinating the "Critiques of Power" working group.

- Ms. May Wazzan – consultant for the "New Generation of Social Scientists" program from July 2019 until December 2020.
- Dr. Lucine Taminian – lead researcher for the Survey of Social Sciences in Iraq Project from September 2019 through June 30, 2021.
- Ms. Muneira Hoballah – consultant for work on the humanities, including the World Humanities Report from July 2018 and through 2021.
- Dr. Hoda Elsadda - lead researcher for the Arab Oral History Archive: Gender, Alternative Histories, and the Production of Knowledge, (Gender Oral History Archive – GOHA) from July 2019 to November 2021)

Staff Professional Development (PD)

The ACSS is invested in the professional development of its staff and encourages them to use the generous funding available for further education and enhancement of staff career opportunities. Funding is not restricted to programs and trainings related to the ACSS work requirements or mission, but is in fact open to the preferences of the staff member. Staff who make use of the PD opportunities are allowed to take 20 days off during the year to pursue their studies. In 2020 several staff members enrolled in educational and training programs as follows:

- Najwa Tohme, Finance Manager, is enrolled in an MA in Psychology (Clinical/Counseling) program since August 2019 for a duration of 2.5 years.
- Elie Rahmeh, Accountant, enrolled at the American University of Culture & Education (AUCE) to obtain a BA in accounting. He started his studies in July, 2019 and is expected to finish in February, 2021.
- Farah Alsouri, Senior Grants Officer, started an MA program in Public Policy and International Affairs in 2018, and during that academic year the ACSS funded her two courses. In 2019, Farah was able to secure a scholarship and therefore the ACSS no longer pays her tuition but only contributes to her registration fees and provides her with PD days. She has continued her studies and is due to graduate in 2021.
- ACSS has covered the membership fees for Jana Chammaa, Senior Program Officer, with the Project Management Institute as well as all expenses related to the Certified Associate Project Management Exam CAPM.
- As part of her professional development plan, we have covered the membership fees for Nada Chaya, ASSM Project Leader, with the Population Association of America and the International Union for the Scientific Study of Population.
- Rebecca Daher, Program Assistant attended two specialized workshops: Excel financial modeling and Excel Dashboard.

In addition, general staff trainings undertaken during 2020 and subsidized by the ACSS included:

- Excel for all staff for all stages: beginner, intermediate and advanced, with people joining at the level that matched their level.
- Training on "Virtual High Impact Facilitation Intensive" by Spring Strategies. This was attended by a few staff members including the finance manager, NewGen coordinator and senior program officer.
- Moreover, the Ford Foundation organized a management training over a few months, that focused on financial strategies, risk management and communications for its Build

grantees, which was attended by the director general, associate director and finance manager. Select staff from programs also who attended specific sessions relevant to their work.

Focal Points

To ensure more robust regional outreach and networking, the ACSS decided to establish focal points in different countries. The structure of the focal point comprises:

- An agreement with a local NGO for administrative and financial support;
- A consultancy agreement with a senior researcher to oversee functions of the focal point on a part time basis;
- A small advisory committee of 4-5 prominent researchers serving on a voluntary basis.

The basic role of the focal point is to disseminate funding opportunities and assist potential applicants in applying to them; receiving financial reports and receipts from grantees and disbursing payments (when and if required especially where there are banking restrictions in place) to local ACSS grantees; the planning of training and networking events; providing feedback to ACSS secretariat and Board of Trustees on local/national thematic and programmatic priorities. At the moment, the ACSS has two focal points in Palestine and Algeria.

Palestine Focal Point

As mentioned in last year's report, the Palestine focal point launched a writing project on "Colonial Social Engineering" through a call circulated to 70 young researchers. In early 2020, 13 complete proposals were received and in the end seven were ready for support. Once completed the papers will be published by ACSS, probably as an occasional publication.

On November 30, 2020 the focal point organized an orientation meeting on Zoom for the NewGen fellows in Palestine, to introduce them to the activities of the office. The meeting was attended by head of the focal point office Dr. Eileen Kuttab and the NewGen program coordinator in Palestine Dr. Abaher El Sakka.

The focal point also organized a meeting for the NewGen fellows with the Women's Studies Institute at Birzeit University on 14 December. Drs. Lena Meari and Amira Salmi of the Institute gave a presentation on gender studies under colonial rule, that was followed by a discussion.

Due to the Covid-19 restrictions, many of the activities the focal point had planned for 2020 did not take place, including for example, a workshop on academic writing, visits to schools and universities to promote social sciences and a small grants project for research on Palestine.

Algeria Focal Point

The social and political turmoil in Algeria that started in 2019 continued well into 2020 and was compounded by the spread of Covid-19 which imposed new restrictions leading up to the closure of universities and a general slowdown of activities. As a result, most of the events scheduled by the Algeria focal point could not take place according to plan. These included trainings on research ethics and on proposal writing which had to be postponed to 2021. However, the Algeria focal point was able to organize virtually on Zoom, the first of a series of country network meetings with Algerian ACSS grantees on December 12, 2020 as well as a seminar on anthropology in Algeria on January 14, 2021.The aim of the country network meetings, which will continue in 2021, is to introduce grantees to each other and allow them to present their projects and discuss them with their peers and finally to

brainstorm on activities that the Algeria focal point can organize that address the needs of Algerian grantees.

Membership

Applications for individual membership have been steadily increasing and mentioned above, the ACSS has been encouraging institutional membership. In 2020 ACSS received 129 membership applications for various categories of which 78 were accepted. By December 2020 the ACSS members represented the following categories: 77 active (voting) members; 507 associate (non-voting) members, 95 students (non-voting members) and 2 institutional members. During their January 2020 meeting, the BoT ratified the Code of Ethics and Conduct that pertains particularly to members but generally to all participants in ACSS structures and activities. A membership strategy is currently under review by the Membership Committee in preparation for the upcoming ACSS strategic plan.

In their September 2020 meeting, the Membership Committee explored ways of encouraging active members to nominate themselves for board membership and associate members to become active members. They also discussed how to expand membership by adding new categories such as "Friends of the ACSS" that include individuals who are interested in the social sciences but are not social scientists themselves, as well as "Honorary Members" of the ACSS

Funding

The ACSS was able to secure more funding in 2020 for current and future projects. New grant funds were received from:

- Carnegie Corporation NY: US$ 1,500,000 for "Knowledge, Publics and Crisis in the Arab Region" for the period October 1, 2020 – September 30, 2022
- Ford Foundation: A supplement of US$250,000 to their current Build grant of US$2,250,000. Of this supplement US$100,000 is ear-marked as capital reserve funds.
- Open Society Foundation – Amman: US$170,000 for "Knowledge Production on Gender and Women in the Arab Region" for the period September 1, 2020 – December 31, 2022
- Sida: A preliminary approval for a grant amounting to SEK19,000,000 for the "Sahel" project extending for 4.5 years as of 2021.

B. Conventions

Funding for these activities are drawn from the Sida grant, with grantees' participation expenses covered by their respective programs, including Sida, IDRC and Carnegie Corporation

The ACSS organizes a biennial Conference and a biennial Research Forum on alternate years in addition to other public events.

Research Forum

We had planned to organize the ACSS Fourth Research Forum in Tunisia in April 2020. However, three weeks before the scheduled date, and due to Covid-19, we had to reach the difficult decision of cancelling it along with all the workshops and grantee events that were slated to take place during the Forum. We did manage however to conduct three virtual workshops for the RGP and NPF programs as will be explained in detail below.

Preparations for the 5th Conference

The ACSS had scheduled its 5th Conference for May 21-23, 2021 to be held in Beirut. In addition to showcasing ACSS projects and grantees, the conference selects a number of papers through an open competition thus bringing in new researchers into its networks and serving as a forum for researchers from different parts of the world to meet and learn more about each other's work.

"Interrogating the Social Sciences in the Vortex of Crises: Waves of Discontent and Demands for Change" was chosen as the theme of the 5th Conference, which will focus on interrogating the social sciences and knowledge production during these turbulent times. The past years saw the emergence of a number of social forces, enhanced through social and protest movements that took on a variety of forms and used various means of expression. Presentations will explore innovative, intellectual and methodological tools necessitated by the severity of events in the Arab region and the world at large, the latest of which is the struggle, with varying degrees of success, against the spread of the Corona pandemic (Covid-19). On the other hand, the pandemic also has compelled the protest movements in many Arab countries to reconsider collective actions, such as mass rallies, and to opt for safer protest activities. The 5th ACSS Conference will address these issues through four sub themes: Inequality and Resistance; The State and Risk Society; Infrastructure and Survival; Global, Regional and National Ecologies.

In 2020, a 12-person conference committee was formed, which includes five BoT members and the two Focal Point representatives, the rest being drawn from among distinguished scholars from ACSS networks. The committee worked collaboratively in identifying the themes and writing the call. During the last quarter of 2020, the committee reviewed the 212 abstracts received and selected 120 abstracts (90 individual & 30 organized panels) to be included in the conference. Each abstract or panel proposal was reviewed by three members of the committee. Applicants come to us from 30 countries from across the globe. The selection has increased the number of panels at the conference from 39 in the 2019 Conference to 63 in 2021. This is a strong indicator that the quality of proposals has improved greatly since only those that received 3 'yesses' were selected.

In its latest meeting in January 2021, the BoT decided to postpone the 5th conference to September 2021. It is planned to take place in Beirut as an in-person event. Meanwhile the ACSS will continue to closely follow up the Covid-19 situation and the development of the political and economic situation in Lebanon, which could still possibly affect the conference date and venue.

The ACSS Annual Lecture Series

In 2015 the ACSS inaugurated its Annual Lecture event. Each series of four lectures is named after a prominent Arab social scientist. The Annual Lecture celebrates prominent social scientists from the Arab region and encourages research along the paradigms and perspectives that they developed. The first series was named after the Palestinian political scientist and historian, Dr. Hanna Batatu. The second series celebrates the Moroccan sociologist and activist, Fatema Mernissi.

Fatema Mernissi Annual Lecture Series:

In 2019, ACSS inaugurated the Fatema Mernissi Lecture Series in Beirut, coinciding with the anniversary of the passing away of the late Moroccan writer and sociologist.

The second Fatema Mernissi lecture titled " Religious Knowledge in the Arab World from a Feminist Perspective: From Critique to Reconstruction" was presented as a virtual event by Dr. Omaima Abou -Bakr, professor of English and Comparative Literature at Cairo University on December 17, 2020. Abou-Bakr's lecture focused on the production of religious (Islamic) knowledge in the Arab world by women writers and researchers from the late 19th century until the beginning of the 21st century. It traced the evolution of this scholarship over its different stages, one of which is the important work of Fatema Mernissi. Abou Bakr presented an overall analysis of this scholarship, giving examples that illustrate the development of feminist research methods focusing on specific aspects of Islamic sciences, with a view towards reform from within.

A video of the event was posted on the ACSS Facebook page and YouTube Channel for further dissemination (Please see https://www.facebook.com/538505439505548/videos/238530284363572)
In addition, a link was published to a Publication that includes abstracts and biographies from the first and second lectures, as well as Mernissi's biography in three languages (Arabic, English and French). A short video, produced by the ACSS about the life and the legacy of Fatema Mernissi, was also shown. (Please see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7eyxkSYhPhM)

The two-hour lecture was introduced by Drs. Seteney Shami, DG, and Hoda Elsadda, professor of English Literature at Cairo University and moderated by Mr. Elias Kattar (ACSS). The talk was widely attended by more than 300 participants both on Zoom and the ACSS Facebook page, where it was broadcast live. The wide scale interest in the lecture was also evidenced by the numerous (125) comments, questions and greetings received during the event.

The event also received wide regional coverage.

Donors' Forum:
Convening various donors and partners to discuss regional needs and research priorities has been a regular activity of ACSS since 2015. The latest donors' meeting in 2019 was a successful event that brought together several of the ACSS donors and sister regranting organizations in a discussion around challenges facing the Arab region and philanthropic organizations as well as potential areas of collaboration There was a consensus at the meeting on the need to maintain an informal forum and network of philanthropic and research organizations that can meet annually to find synergies and connections between the different organizations to optimize efforts and resources. The ACSS was asked to continue to facilitate this forum as an annual meeting.

While the spread of Covid-19 did not make a face-to-face meeting possible in 2020, the ACSS organized a two-hour virtual meeting on Zoom on 16 October 2020 with its donor organizations. The ACSS Director General presented an update on the current economic and banking situation in Lebanon, as well as ACSS endeavors to open new entities in other countries. She also discussed ACSS new directions and programmatic ideas including higher education, gender, ethics and the establishment of a network of regional associations (Appendix 4 – Donors' meeting documents).

ACSS staff brainstormed internally on ways of systematizing the discussions and conversations with donors and sister organizations and decided that in addition to the donors' forum which the ACSS would continue to organize on an annual basis, we would also organize another forum on "Knowledge Connections" that would bring together some donors but also new partners including civil society, research groups etc. to discuss among other topics, how knowledge can be 'translated' between

academia, civil society, public, private sectors and so on. We plan to start both these annual events in 2021.

C. Grants and Fellowships Programs

Funding for the ACSS grants and fellowships program are from Sida (RGP, ECFP and NPF); IDRC (RGP); Carnegie (ECFP); Mellon Foundation (RAP, RGP and ECFP), OSF (NPF) and Ford Foundation (SGP)

In the previous year we reported major successes in our work ranging from research programmatic activities, workshops and new partnership programs such as the Sahel project with CODESRIA. The year 2020 marked a watershed for the Grants and Fellowships (G&F) unit and imposed a new set of challenges on both our programs and grantees. The outbreak of the pandemic negatively affected the ability of our grantees to conduct fieldwork and complete their projects on time. Moreover, the financial situation in Lebanon and the capital control restrictions imposed by Lebanese banks, affected our ability to transfer grant funds in a timely fashion. Also, we had planned to organize the ACSS Fourth Research Forum in Tunisia in April 2020, but as indicated under "Convenings" above, we had to reach the difficult decision of cancelling the Research Forum along with all the grantees' workshops and events.

On a more positive note, however, The G&F used the lockdown time imposed by the pandemic efficiently and organized a series of strategy meetings among its team that took place between March and April 2020. In these meetings we reflected on our work, evaluated our programs, discussed better dissemination and outreach tools, institutionalized our processes and procedures, divided labor among the grants staff and set objectives for our unit. One major accomplishment in the aftermath of these discussions, has been the creation of a comprehensive database for all grants and awarded grantees since the establishment of the ACSS. This list did not only serve to enhance the institutional memory of the ACSS, but will also be used as a key document that will help us generate qualitative and quantitative analysis about the work our grantees do and the projects we fund. Additionally, we will examine this database to determine research trends and identify emerging themes in the region. As the list indicates, since its establishment, the ACSS has awarded 322 grants to 434 researchers within 35 cycles of its seven different programs.

We realized early on the struggles our grantees have been facing since the spread of Covid-19, not only on the level of their grants, but also as regards the heavy toll the pandemic has incurred on their mental and physical health. Therefore, we wrote a letter in March to all of our grantees, checking in on them, and offering assistance in discussing how to implement fieldwork and research in these turbulent times (Appendix 5 – letter to grantees). The letter was appreciated and we received plenty of inquiries and requests from grantees in different programs asking to revise their work schedules. Since March, the grants and fellowships team has been meeting with each grantee and fellow separately to rearrange the execution of their projects. As we continuously reiterated that the health of our grantees and research participants is of utmost priority to the ACSS, we revised contracts and outputs and extended grants to all grantees who requested amendments on their projects.

Following is a review of the progress made in the core grants offered by the Grants and Fellowships Unit in 2020:

Research Grants Program (RGP)

RGP is based on open call for proposals for research under a broad theme selected usually in consultation with the Board of Trustees. It provides funding and support for up to 18 months for individuals and teams and 24 months for collectives and institutions, and targets regional and diaspora researchers, senior and junior researchers post the PhD.
The RGP program is now in its 8th cycle. The theme for the first three cycles was "inequality, mobility and development"; the following three cycles carried the title "environmentalism, impoverishment and social justice movements: Interdisciplinary perspectives" and the third three cycles, which were launched in 2019 now address the theme of "health and livelihoods in the Arab region: wellbeing and vulnerability in conflict" (see below).

As mentioned in the 2019 report, the ACSS started preparations for cycle 7 of RGP under the new theme of "Health and Livelihoods in the Arab Region: Wellbeing, Vulnerability and Conflict". Earlier, in 2018 the ACSS had commissioned a consultant to draft a concept note for the new theme and organized a consultation meeting to map the research scene and understand the landscape of main actors in this area. This was followed by a roundtable on the topic at the 2019 ACSS 4th conference to announce the program and collect more reactions on it. Following these preparatory steps, we designed a call for proposals that went out in July 2019. An advisory/selection committee was recruited including seven scholars from Lebanon, Egypt, Iraq, Palestine, Jordan and the US. We also sent to the committee some questions about the nature and focus of the program and asked them to comment on the scope of the program, clarity of the message, and suggested areas of work. We used their answers to start a discussion on how to further refine the program after the 7th cycle.

An important innovation in the 2019 RGP7 cycle is that the call was opened not only to individual researchers and research teams as in previous RGP cycles, but also to institutions and collectives. The decision was based on the ACSS strategy to encourage institutions to develop and pursue research agendas on specific and timely topics and to also accommodate the increasing number of informal research groups who have been getting together systematically to conduct research on specific issues. In the call for proposals, we were also keen on emphasizing the centrality of the ethical considerations in doing research on health and in situations of conflict. This is not only important because of the need to protect respondents and researchers in those situations, but also because the ACSS is leading an initiative to advance research ethics as a central but overlooked component in our region's research in humanities and social sciences. So, not only did we ask applicants to specifically address how they would deal with ethical issues in research, and made this part of the proposal evaluation criteria, but we also suggested ethics and bioethics themselves as areas of potential research.

RGP Cycle 7:
The call for the 7th cycle of the RGP was announced on July 25 and closed on November 24, 2019. For this cycle, we received 71 applications (35 individuals, 27 team projects, 1 collective and 8 institutions) from 16 countries. The ACSS secretariat screened out 32 applications from the pool because they were either incomplete or did not address the theme of the call. The selection committee met on January 30-31, 2020, and selected 7 projects (2 individuals, 2 teams and 3 institutions) from Morocco, Palestine, Jordan and Lebanon (Appendix 6 – List of funded projects).

Advisory Committee First Meeting – February 1, 2020:
After the committee had spent two days reviewing and deliberating proposals for the 7th cycle, we organized a session on the last day to discuss the content and quality of the proposals they examined, and to suggest programmatic refinements.

Members of the committee were particularly intrigued by the question of disciplinary boundaries and the fact that some of the otherwise strong proposals, were written from a purely public health perspective and did not address a social science problematic. As repeatedly noted - also in other programs offered by the ACSS - the methodology sections were the least developed parts of the proposals and several applicants suggested methods that were not necessarily appropriate to their objectives. In addition, the committee noted that not many applicants were fully aware of the ethical considerations or implications of their research and they strongly recommended a more active role by the ACSS in training on ethics. They were also concerned about the role of consultants and research assistants in the individual projects. In their view, adding consultants and research assistants qualified the proposals for the institutional or collective, but not the individual grants. Moreover, the committee was curious about why proposals did not locate health within the political or international contexts and did not refer to macro issues pertaining to health, focusing instead on the micro level. They also noted that suggested themes in the call for proposals were limiting and did not open the way for proposals on conflict particularly the wider understanding of health and conflict. They expressed their wish to see more proposals on policy as a subject of research not as an outcome. In the end, the decision was to rewrite the call for proposals to make it more structured, and encourage applicants to push boundaries and become more creative.

We also shared the envisioned structure (separate advisory and selection committee meetings) with the advisory/selection committee on the last day and to our surprise, members of the committee unanimously voiced their desire to continue to serve in both the advisory and selection roles. They agreed that they found it extremely useful to discuss proposals as a group who represented different disciplines and countries. This collective process, they noted, made for better, more sound and well-informed decisions. They also agreed that the mentorship did not have to be offered to all grantees, but only to those who needed it.

Revision of the Call:
As a result of these rich discussions and the feedback, the team requested the committee's help in revising the call for proposals to better articulate the goals and target audience of the program. Three members – Drs. Jocelyn DeJong, Suhad Daher-Nashef and Hania Sholkamy – volunteered to do this task. The revision process lasted a few months and included extensive exchanges between the three members and between them and the fellowships and grants team. The result was this revised call.

Grantees' Workshops:
For each cycle, the ACSS organizes workshops for its grantees to introduce them to the advisory/selection committee and other awardees from the same cycle. During the workshop, grantees present their projects and get extensive feedbacks on methodology and conceptual questions before starting their projects. The first workshop for this cycle was scheduled to take place in conjunction with the ACSS Fourth Research Forum planned on April 1-4, 2020 in Tunisia. We had planned a two-day workshop for grantees to meet the selection/advisory committee, to be followed by various opportunities to integrate into ACSS networks and participate in capacity building sessions through the regular roundtables and events we organize in the forum. As mentioned previously we cancelled

the Research Forum but went ahead with organizing the grantees' workshop by dividing them into two parts: (i) a series of individual one-on-one sessions between grantees and mentors (members of the advisory committee) organized between April 9 and 24, 2020 and, (ii) a three-hour online session organized on May 18, 2020, on research ethics led by Dr. Jamil Mouawad, ACSS consultant on research ethics, and Ms. Jana Chammaa, ACSS Senior Program Officer, leading ACSS's Initiative on Ethical Dilemmas.

Projects for the 7th cycle were scheduled to start in mid-April 2020, but given the ramification of the pandemic and the financial restrictions imposed by Lebanese banks which jeopardized the ACSS ability to transfer grant funds on time, we delayed the start of projects till August 2020.

RGP Cycle 8:

On August 13th, 2020, a week after the Beirut Port explosion, we launched the 8th cycle of the research grants program (see announcement here). Despite the horrific events that shook the whole country, and the personal trauma that many of the ACSS staff went through, we were all convinced that the best we could do under those challenging circumstances was to continue to do our work. We opened the call announcement with the following statement:

> *While deeply saddened by the recent events in Beirut last week, we believe it is our duty and mission to continue to do our work. We firmly believe that the work ACSS does along with its partners, regionally and internationally, in the service of scholars and researchers in the Arab region is of vital importance to lay the groundwork for a better tomorrow.*

The planned deadline for receiving applications was on December 8, 2020. However, we were surprised to receive only around 20 applications by the deadline and therefore decided to extend the deadline till January 28, 2021 while simultaneously screening and sending applications to the selection committee in order to maintain the timeline of the grant. The selection committee meeting will be organized virtually during on February 17 and 18, 2021. Grantees who will be selected in cycle 8 will be invited to an online workshop in April 2021.

Workshop concluding RGP three cycles on Environmentalism:

As reported previously, the ACSS organized three RGP cycles on the theme of "Environmentalism, Impoverishment and Social Justice Movements: Interdisciplinary Perspectives". After completing the three cycles, we partnered with the ODUM Institute for Research in Social Science, a research institute housed at the University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill (U.S.) and organized a workshop titled "Environmentalism in the Arab Region: Concepts and Methods". The call for applications targeted applicants who applied to the RGP three cycles on environmentalism and their projects were among the top ranked but were not selected to receive a grant. After consultation with ODUM we decide to open the workshop to the public, to include a diversity of topics and geographies. The aim of the workshop was to train participants on mixed research methods and develop their knowledge on the state-of-the-art concepts and frameworks in the field of environmentalism. We received 32 applications and the workshop trainers selected 13 participants. The three trainers selected by ACSS and ODUM were:

- Reem Saad is an Associate Professor of Social Anthropology at the American University in Cairo (AUC).

- Roland Riachi is an Associate Researcher at the Department of Political Studies and Public Administration (PSPA) at the American University of Beirut (AUB).
- Kevin Swartout is an Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology with a secondary appointment in the School Public Health at Georgia State University in Atlanta, GA.

The workshop was organized at the ACSS offices from February 10 to 14, 2020. The format of the workshop – combining methodological and research design with substantive environmental issues – was much appreciated by the participants. They all came to the workshop with topics on the environment that they had been working on and could therefore directly apply what they were learning during the workshop on their work in progress and receive comments from the instructors.

Early Career Fellows Program (ECFP)

The Postdoctoral Fellowship Program was launched in 2015 to enable young researchers, up to three years out of the PhD, to pursue their research and publishing plans, become part of Arab research networks, plan a research career in the Arab region and expand their opportunities in finding tenure in academic institutions in the region. In order to respond to existing needs and talents in the region, the program is open by theme as well as to all disciplines in the social sciences and humanities. Starting with cycle 5, the program was renamed the Early Career Fellows Program (ECFP) and the term of the fellowship was extended from 9 to 12 months.

Cycle 7, 2020:
Cycle 7 was launched on March 20 and closed on May 29, 2020. For this cycle we received 16 applications only from 8 Arab countries, compared to 34 applications in the previous cycle. This was doubtless due to the restrictions imposed by the pandemic and especially that this fellowship encourages mobility within the region. We organized a review process followed by the selection process. We invited four reviewers from Tunisia, Palestine, Syria and Egypt. This was followed by a meeting among the three selection committee members from Lebanon and Palestine. The reviewers read all applications and raised their recommendations to the selection committee which met virtually on July 2, 2020 and selected six fellows. One of the six fellows declined the fellowship offer because he received another fellowship opportunity in Germany and was reluctant to move to Beirut after the August explosion.

Selected fellows represented different disciplinary backgrounds in social sciences and the humanities, including architecture, sociology, and economics. They covered topics ranging from urbanism, body and race, lived experiences of veiled women, environmental social transformation, and female labor in the Arab region. Also, we organized a virtual cohort meeting for the fellows on December 14, where they met and presented their projects to each other. This initiative came in response to the comments we repeatedly heard from ECFP fellows about their wish to network with other colleagues in the program.

Fellows selected in this cycle are invited to present their work in the upcoming ACSS 5th Conference that will be held in Beirut between May 21-23, 2021. (Appendix 7 – List of funded projects).

Small Grants Program (SGP)

The Small Grants Program (SGP) was initiated in November 2016. The two themes of the program are "Youth" and "Urban Spatial Inequalities" (based on the request of the Ford Foundation) and the main purpose of the program is to provide junior researchers in the region with access to flexible funding with a short turnover period. The program accepts three rounds of applications spread throughout the year. The SGP supports five types of activities: travel grants to conferences, organizing workshops, internships, dissemination events, and funding for pilot studies. The program is funded by a grant from the Ford Foundation and with supplementary funds from the SIDA and IDRC grants to the ACSS.

The final round of the 2019 cycle of the SGP, coincided with the spark of the Lebanese uprising. As a result of the restrictions on transfer of funds in the aftermath of the protests, we put on hold all SGP grants that were awarded in the third-round of the 2019 cycle. In August 2020, we were able to resume the program's activities and successfully managed to transfer grant monies to grantees in the Arab region and they will continue to work on their projects until April 2021.

After three years of successful implementation, funding for the SGP (from the Ford Foundation) came to an end in 2019 and we did not announce a new cycle in 2020. We are in the process of exploring how to continue to offer this program which has provided an invaluable modality of flexible and timely funds researchers in the region to undertake for a wide range of activities.

ACSS-FMSH Short-term Postdoctoral Mobility Program in the Social Sciences and Humanities

This short-term fellowship program is organized in partnership with the Fondation Maison des sciences de l'homme (FMSH) in Paris, and is managed by both the ACSS and FMSH. The fellowship is short-term (2-3 months) and targets individual researchers who are residents and nationals of the Arab region. The recipients of this fellowship should have received their PhD degree within the past 6 years, and plan to conduct research in France (including field research, library and archival work, as well as other types of data collection). In addition to a monthly stipend of €1,600, the FMSH helps applicants in finding a host institution in France for their intended period of stay.

Cycle 3 – 2020:

The call for the third cycle of the ACSS-FMSH applications was announced in September 2019 and closed in December 2019. For this cycle we received 18 applications from six Arab countries. A committee of three scholars from France and the Arab region was formed, and met in person in Beirut on February 21, 2020. The committee selected four fellows from Tunisia, Jordan, Morocco and Palestine. The fellowship period was postponed till the second half of the year, because France was not issuing visas due to the lockdown (Appendix 8 – List of funded projects). Eventually, most fellows were able to travel to France during the last quarter of 2020, and some will have their fellowships during the first quarter of 2021.

MoU with FMSH Renewed till 2023:

The ACSS and FMSH conducted an internal evaluation of the program and interviewed some of the previous grantees. The evaluation was positive and grantees expressed their appreciation of the program and the training opportunities it offered them both on the level of research rigor and networking. As a result, the ACSS and FMSH renewed this fruitful partnership for another three cycles by signing an MoU that ends in 2023. It was agreed that the ACSS would make more financial

contributions to the program through inviting grantees to present their research at the ACSS Research Forum that is organized biennially.

AFAC-ACSS Research on Arts (RAP)

In 2017, the ACSS and the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture (AFAC) agreed to partner on a collaborative research grants program for funding research on the arts. The program offers up to 18 months of funding to individuals, teams, collectives and institutions and encourages both academics and art practitioners to apply to the program.

Workshop for Cycle 2 Grantees:
On January 4 – 5, 2020, grantees from cycle 2 (Appendix 9 - call for applications, and list of grantees and their topics) were invited to a two-day workshop in Beirut to meet with members of the selection committee (jurors) and other awardees from the same cycle. Grantees had the opportunity to engage in critical debates and receive feedback on their research topics in open discussions with their fellow grantees, as well as during one-on-one meetings with RAP jurors including Drs. Walid Sadek, Jack Persekian, Maha Maamoun, Tarek El-Ariss and Driss Ksikes.

Presentations by grantees were followed by a dynamic discussion between the researchers and the jurors around art as a form of disruption as well as critical approaches and paradigms for the study of the arts. Researchers were challenged to look into dynamics that link the arts with other sectors and strongly encouraged to disseminate their findings to the public. In addition, the RAP grantees benefited from a session on Research Ethics in the Social Sciences delivered by the ACSS team.

Cycle 3 - 2020:
In 2020, prior to the announcement of the Cycle 3, AFAC and ACSS conducted a small-scale internal evaluation of the program to probe into the clarity of the program message, its coherence and rigor as well as outreach and performance. Most importantly, both organizations were curious to know whether it indeed still made sense to reach out to academics and art practitioners within the same program and subject them to the same criteria of judging projects. We posed these and other questions to the selection committee of Cycles 1 and 2 and the result was an immensely rich discussion on what constitutes significant knowledge and outputs for the RAP program. We translated what we learned into a clearer, less academic, more neutral and more inclusive call for application that speaks to both academics and art practitioners and encourages interdisciplinary projects (see revised call here).

Cycle 3 was opened on July 7, 2020 and closed on September 18, 2020. We received a total of 87 application: 52 from individuals, 26 team and collectives, and 9 from institutions. The applications came from academics and art practitioners from the Arab region specifically from: Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, and United Arab Emirates. The 2020 selection committee included: Drs. Aseel Sawalha, Alia Moussallam, Tarek El Ariss, Kirsten Scheid and Omar Berrada.

The selection committee met virtually on December 8 and 9, 2020 and selected 11 projects (4 individuals, 5 teams, 1 collective and 1 institution) from Lebanon, Jordan, Palestine, Iraq, Syria, Morocco and Egypt (see selection committee statement here) Grantees from this cycle are invited to present their projects to the selection committee at a virtual workshop that will take place early February 2021.

New Paradigms Factory cycle 4 on "Gendered Resistance"

One of the earliest programs established at ACSS, this fellowship aims at supporting writings by Arab junior scholars and activists to turn their research into publications for a larger audience. This takes place through a 9-month mentorship program at the end of which a publication including essays of grantees is published. The program targets holders of the MA degree in the Arab region who completed their fieldwork on the essay topic.

In Cycle 3 of the program, the ACSS published the work of seven junior scholars and activists from the Arab region in its first special issue in Arabic on Gendered Resistance.

Cycle 4 – 2020:
On December 12, 2019, the ACSS launched cycle 4 of the New Paradigms Factory (NPF) writing fellowship, on the theme "Gendered Resistance." Four prominent gender scholars from the region representing different disciplinary and thematical dimensions, were appointed as mentors to work closely with fellows on developing their writing skills and improving their articles. The four mentors are: Dr. Hoda Elsadda (English and Comparative Literature, Cairo University), Dr. Lamia Moghnieh (Anthropology, EUME fellow), Dr. Islah Jad (Gender and Politics, Women's Studies Institute and Cultural Studies Department at Birzeit University), and Dr. Asmaa Benadada (Political Sociology, University of Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah). The deadline for submitting applications was on January 20, 2020 and the ACSS received 56 applications from 11 Arab countries: Algeria, Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia and Yemen.

The mentors met on February 5, 2020 virtually via Zoom, discussed the applications and selected 12 fellows (Appendix 10- list of fellows and their topics). Two fellows from Syria and Palestine had to drop their fellowship awards for personal reasons. Therefore, eleven fellows are currently benefiting from this program, and they come from the following six Arab countries: Egypt, Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Tunisia and Morocco. Fellows' articles encompass a variety of topics related to the theme including: sexual harassment, birth control, and feminist associations and their movements for gender equality, gendered participation in funeral and burial rituals as a form of resistance, as well as marginalized women in the embroidery industry.

First and Second Workshops:
Originally, we planned two physical workshops in addition to regular mentorship meetings that were supposed to end in November 2020, and we were aiming to publish the special volume by February 2021. Due to the Covid-19 restrictions, we revised the timeline and decided to hold the first workshops virtually, hoping that by October 2020 we could organize the second workshop in Beirut physically and fly in mentors and fellows to our offices. However, and as a consequence of the Beirut explosion that took place on August 4, which damaged a good part of our office, and due to the continued impact of the Covid-19 we took the decision to organize the second workshop also virtually via Zoom.

The first workshop was organized online between June 1 – 4, and the second workshop from October 12 - 14, 2020. Mentorship will continue till January 2021.

The first workshop included the following sessions: (i) discussion of key theoretical concepts and frameworks relevant to the field of gender studies and to the theme of gendered resistance, (ii) research methods with focus on gender studies, (iii) and discussions on readings and unpacking keywords related to the theme. Fellows also had the chance to present themselves and their projects and benefit

from individual consultations with their mentors. The eleven fellows met with their mentors regularly twice every month from June to October 2020. They worked closely together to revise their draft articles, enhance their writing skills and ground their articles within conceptual and theoretical frameworks. As per the requirements of the program, fellows submitted a second draft of their articles on August 30th, 2020. The revised drafts along with the commitment and progress demonstrated by the fellow, was evaluated collectively by the mentors who decided during the second workshop to include all articles in the forthcoming publication.

During the second workshop three panel sessions were organized for fellows to present their progress on the articles, articulate their methodology and targeted audience in addition to rehearsing for the planned roundtables that will take place during the upcoming ACSS 5th Conference in May 2021. Two guest speakers were invited to give a lecture at the workshop. On the first day, Dr. Lina Abu Habib gave a lecture on feminist research and activism. On the second day, Dr. Hind Ahmad Zaki, assistant Professor of political sciences at University of Connecticut and specialist in gender and politics of the Middle East and North Africa, gave a lecture on "Feminist Mobilization during the Arab Spring". Both sessions were followed by a discussion between the lecturers and the fellows. One-on-one sessions were also organized during the workshop between mentors and fellows. Fellows and mentors also met the ACSS Communications and Publications team and learned more about the steps involved in publishing their articles, discussed ACSS publication guidelines and the design of the publication. We also shared alternative designs for the publication, and fellows voted on the design they liked the most. The ACSS approach to consult with the fellows about the design of the publication was greatly appreciated as it enhanced their sense of ownership of their work.

Reimagining the Sahel: A New Joint Research Program with CODESRIA

We had submitted a proposal to Sida with an early 2020 start date and according to the plan we had then, we were to have our first advisory committee meeting in Dakar in April 2020. Due to the Covid-19 deteriorating situation, we had to postpone our meeting. At the same time, three way Zoom calls were organized in 2020 to respond to various queries that Sida had concerning the proposal and various changes and clarifications were added to the proposal. On November 16, 2020, CODESRIA and the ACSS sent a final addendum to Sida including all the required modifications and explanations. We also introduced some changes into the budget. By end of 2020 we received a draft of the contract with Sida which we commented on, and are now awaiting the final contract which would enable us to launch the project.

The ACSS is looking forward to this collaboration with CODESRIA. Not only will the Sahel project be the ACSS first cross-regional grants program, but it is also a promising area of work that explores an important region in Africa that is often neglected by Arab researchers.

Lessons Learned and Next Steps:

The year 2020 has been a difficult year for G&F affecting our ability to deliver our programs in the ways we usually do and which we aspire to. On the side of the grantees, as well, the situation in their own countries impacted by the pandemic and other political and economic considerations also negatively affected their ability to undertake their fieldwork and deliver their outputs in a timely fashion. Given the overall situation, as indicated above, we had to cancel events which involved physical meetings and replace them by virtual meetings and workshops. While not ideal because nothing can replace face to face interactions, virtual meetings accomplished their goals and, in some cases, especially in the case of one-on-one between mentors and grantees, they worked quite well.

We also seized the opportunity of the lockdown and slowdown of operations to take stock of our programs, discuss our performance, cater to emerging needs, assess our partnerships and the way forward. We have already started to implement some of the ideas we discussed in the strategy meeting. We launched a database that encompasses all grantees since the inception of the ACSS, organized a cohort meeting for the ECFP and undertook small scale evaluations of our programs in order to refine our interventions and ensure they fit their purposes. In 2020 we undertook two small scale evaluations of our partnerships with AFAC and the FMSH and revisited the rationale and structure of the RGP on health and livelihoods and streamlined the call for proposals accordingly.

In the coming period of time, the G&F unit will seek to consolidate our relations with grantees and give visibility to their research and outputs. For example, around the convening of the ACSS conference, we plan to disseminate the upcoming NPF publication widely. We will organize "meet the author" sessions for the authors and produce a series of short videos interviewing fellows about their topics. The interviews will be used on the ACSS social media outlets and will also be disseminated to address wider audiences that doesn't only include the academic community, but also activists, civil society organizations and policy centers. Finally, we will hire data visualization experts that can produce several graphs and/or images that better showcase the data collected by fellows.

D. A New Generation of Social Scientists in the Arab Region (2030) (NewGen)

In 2020 the ACSS officially launched a new and ambitious program entitled "A new generation of social scientists in the Arab region (2030) (NewGen)". The fellowship provides a two-years rich multi component journey – including training, research and networking opportunities - for students at the BA, MA and Ph.D. levels - in select Arab universities.
The aim of the program is to help create a "pipeline" of students starting with the BA and continuing on to the Ph.D. who would form a new cohort of social scientists committed to critical scholarship. It also seeks to engage Arab academic institutions and campuses to form a network of universities that support students nationally and regionally. NewGen is now in its 1st cycle and will launch the 2nd cycle in February 2021.

In the first phase initiated in February 2020, the NewGen fellowship program was officially launched in four countries (Lebanon, Tunisia, Egypt, and Palestine), in partnership with a total of (12) universities:

- Four main partner universities: Lebanese American University, Birzeit University, American University in Cairo, and Sfax University
- Eight participating universities: American University of Beirut, Lebanese University, Saint Joseph University, University of Balamand (Lebanon), Cairo University and Alexandria University (Egypt), Al Najah National University, and Al Quds University-Abu Dis (Palestine).

A detailed Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the ACSS and each of the four main partner universities. Four fully engaged in-country university program coordinators (PC) were jointly recruited by the ACSS and each main partner university. The PC is based at the main partner university and is responsible for the program outreach, participating in reviewing applications, fellow on-boarding, coordination of program offerings, planning for monthly activities, opportunity creation, fellow guidance, troubleshooting, and community building. The PC is also expected to liaise with the university/universities where the fellows are studying to facilitate a successful implementation of the program in line with its objectives, policies, and expected outcomes. A Letter of Agreement (LoA)

was signed between the ACSS and the Program Coordinators to document and organize the relationship and responsibilities and define the terms of engagement and compensation.

The ACSS organized a successful in-person two-day workshop (Feb 6 - 7, 2020) in Beirut to onboard the four PCs. The group discussed and fleshed out the program's goals, KPIs, activities, and the program implementation details. The ACSS also reviewed the students' selection process and criteria. Since February 2020, the four PCs have successfully reviewed applications, implemented monthly activities, conducted one-on-one sessions with the fellows, provided guidance, and referred fellows to experts in the field.

Call for applications:
The call for cycle 1 of the NewGen Fellowship was announced on February, 2020 and closed on April 30, 2020. Closely following the launch, the Covid-19 outbreak and university closures impacted the program outreach plans, including the planned on-campus information sessions aimed at soliciting good applications for the program. In line with the staggered approach, the call for applications remained open till July 30, 2020 (Appendix 11 – NewGen call for applications poster 2020). Consequently, the number of applications was lower than expected and the selection process had to be divided into a series of phases. For this cycle, the ACSS reviewed 320 completed applications and through a competitive and robust selection process, the ACSS selected 100 fellows from Lebanon, Tunisia, Palestine, and Egypt to join the first cohort participating in the pilot of the NewGen fellowship.

Fellows Selection Process:
Our target for Cohort 1 was 120 fellows. However, due to the Covid-19 outbreak and university closures we reached a modified target of 100 fellows More than half of the applicants (72%) are female and (85%) are first generation university students. Among the eligible applications, a dozen came from Algeria, Yemen, Syria, Sudan, and Morocco, mainly students who are currently studying in Lebanon and Egypt on scholarships. We will continue to monitor and analyze the data from applications in order to address gaps and provide well targeted activities.
Each eligible application was then reviewed and scored by two reviewers: an internal ACSS reviewer and the university program coordinator assigned to that country. Prior to the assessment process, ACSS conducted an online training workshop for all reviewers (ACSS staff and university PCs) to walk them through the scoring methodology.

Applications were scored based on the evaluation criteria including for example, knowledge of social sciences, written skills, academic standing, fluency in Arabic and English and critical thinking. Bonus points were awarded for research experience, publications and awards as well as (disadvantaged) socio-economic standing.

Two interview committees each comprising three ACSS staff members and a consultant conducted interviews with applicants. The 30-minute interview was a tool for ACSS to learn more about the applicant's background, interest in the social sciences, commitment to the program, and future plans and confirm fit for the program.

Fellow Onboarding:
As a welcoming activity, an onboarding session was held for the selected fellows on August 13, 2020 (Lebanon, Palestine, and Tunisia) and September 25, 2020 (Egypt). The onboarding sessions were led by the four PCs: Dr. Abaher El-Sakka (Birzeit University – Palestine), Dr. Houssem Eddine Chachia

(Sfax University – Tunisia), Dr. Latife Reda (Lebanese American University – Lebanon), and Dr. Hanan Al Sabea (American University in Cairo – Egypt). The session started with a brief self-introduction of the fellows followed by an overview of the components of the two-year journey of the fellowship, rules and regulations, and the importance of the program for students in the Arab region. After that, each PC spoke at length about the 2020 monthly activities for each country.

Following the onboarding session, fellows were invited on September 21, 2020 to a "meet & greet" session where they were engaged in social activities via zoom for 3 hours. Each PC facilitated a specific social activity that included collaborative work, done through a shared Google Slide. The purpose of the activities was to bring fellows closer and search for common grounds among them. The activities led to interesting discussions on activism, social change, social movements, Arab cuisines, and corruption. During the session, fellows shared their excitement to be part of the NewGen fellowship program that does not only help address training needs and understand current pressing issues from a social science perspective, but also in bridging the gap in fellows' knowledge of different societies in the Arab region.

Handbook:
As the selection process was taking place for the first phase, NewGen staff were working on fleshing out the fellowship journey including contracts with the fellows, a handbook for the fellows to refer to concerning program rules and regulations, as well as the structure and organization of fellowship activities. All accepted fellows received a copy of a 'fellowship agreement' and 'fellowship handbook'. The contract and handbook serve as contractual documents to organize the relationship between all parties involved (fellow, partner university, PC, and ACSS) including the roles and responsibilities of each of the parties. Fellows were asked to carefully study their rights and duties and return a signed copy to the ACSS. Once signed, fellows are officially considered enrolled in the program.

Monthly Activities:
On September 25, 2020 the New Gen program coordinator launched the program's monthly activities with a lively discussion on the first of the ACSS Arab Social Science Reports (ASSR) entitled "Social Sciences in the Arab World. Forms of Presence" authored by Dr. Mohammed Bamyeh, Professor of Sociology at the University of Pittsburgh and current chair of the ACSS Board of Trustees (BoT). Prior to the discussion, fellows were asked to read ACSS's first Arab Social Science Report (2015) and prepare questions for the author.

After the inaugural lecture, the PCs at the main partner universities tailored and delivered various monthly activities for the fellows in each country based on findings from the application screening and data collected from the first fellow survey. The monthly activities included elements of skill development, knowledge building, career guidance, community building, academic discussions, and student-led activities. While most of the activities were organized and managed online due to the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic, few activities, such as field trips to museums and research institutions took place face-to-face in Palestine and Egypt.

On December 26 and 27, 2020, PhD fellows received a two-day training on Pedagogy and Teaching with Dr. Mahmoud Natout, co-founder of Play (L3B) and visiting assistant professor of education at the Lebanese American University. The training focused on developing educational philosophies, designing meaningful learning tools, and creating educative experiences. PhD fellows presented their final assignments – a lesson plan about a topic of their choice – on December 23,

2020. Feedback from the participants was positive. PhD fellows saw great value in learning from Dr. Natout and from one another, as well as a chance to explore and exchange ideas.

In addition, on December 16,17, and 18, 2020, the fellows completed their first digital training on Podcast creation, part of a series of trainings provided by the ACSS NewGen coordinator Lubna Maaliki to enhance their digital skills such as blogging, data visualization, and digital storytelling. The fellows learned how to research material and create digital content related to the social sciences in a form of a podcast. Digital skills will enable fellows to create and share digital content related to their learning, career, and social activities.

Community Building:
A private Facebook group was created for the fellows to serve as a safe and closed space for participants to share their biographies, discuss issues, communicate, create networks, and share projects and relevant information to the program and the social sciences. It is also used as a platform to share important announcements, assignments, and collaborative work.
Also, as part of the community building plan, the New Gen program coordinator introduced a "peer buddy" program. Two fellows from different countries were paired based on similar interests, and level and field of study for mutual support during the fellowship journey and exposure to new cultures. The program aims to improve fellowship integration, network creation, and promote information exchange.

The ACSS is currently designing thematic workshops with methodological components including urban space, gender studies, global history, environmental studies, and future of work. Graduate fellows are required to take two of these workshops.

Online Courses:
The ACSS is currently designing a series of online courses for the NewGen fellows to be administered starting January 2021. A competitive RFP process was announced to select a technical partner to support staff and subject matter experts (SMEs) in designing and delivering the courses. An ACSS selection committee identified Data Flow Learning (DFL) as the best fit for this project. A series of thematic courses (urban and gender studies) and a critical methodology course are now in the pipeline and agreements have been reached with SMEs to deliver them as follows:

- Critical Methodology Course: Consists of several modules (including how to think like a social scientist, data management, research ethics, comparative research, and research proposal writing. Dr. Seteney Shami, Director of the Arab Council for Social Sciences (ACSS) and Dr. Fadi Bardawil, Assistant Professor of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies at Duke University will deliver the module on "How to think like a social scientist". Other subject experts will be chosen to address other methodology-related modules.
- Urban Studies Course: Dr. Aseel Sawalha, Associate Professor of Anthropology at Fordham University
- Gender Studies Course: Dr. Hoda El Sadda, Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Cairo University.

All courses include readings, short lectures, discussion elements, assignments, and a 2-hour meeting with the SMEs through Zoom on a weekly basis. A Letter of Agreement (LoA) was signed between

the ACSS and the SMEs to document and organize the relationship and responsibilities and define the terms of engagement and compensation.

Lessons Learned and Next steps

The second half of 2020 witnessed the real launch of NewGen in terms of activities but the period also coincided with the heightened spread of Covid-19 and the state of semi-paralysis all over the world. The pandemic impacted the program's outreach plans. Planned visits to deliver information sessions to faculty and potential fellows in each campus of the participating universities were cancelled and replaced by a series of online webinars, intensified social media campaigns, and active and frequent email exchanges between NewGen staff and the main partner universities. The number of applications received for the first cohort of the fellowship was lower than expectations and we decided to extend the application deadline. In the end, we accepted around 100 fellows instead of the planned 120.

The shift to organizing activities online instead of face to face also posed some challenges. On one level, the shift was disappointing particularly for the fellows who were expecting face to face meetings and exposures with their colleagues and PCs. The NewGen coordinator came up with the peer buddy activity to lessen the sense of disappointment and encourage fellows to get to know each other better online. More seriously however, is that most of the fellows happened to be simultaneously getting familiarized with the system of on-line classes at their own universities. Fellows seemed stressed with the sudden surge of on-line activities and some found it difficult to navigate this new terrain. In response, the PCs communicated frequently with the fellows and were responsive to their inquiries and concerns. As for the monthly activities, the PCs demonstrated a great deal of flexibility to accommodate fellows' needs and personal schedules. They made sure fellows' concerns were heard and met with reasonable solutions. At the same time, PCs had to learn how to virtually conduct sessions and follow up with their fellows. To lessen their burden, the NewGen coordinator provided them with a manual of instructions on how to conduct online activities efficiently. She also kept an open channel of communication to provide continuous guidance and support during the monthly meetings with the PCs.

Finally, the program encountered challenges in negotiating the participation of some universities and the reasons have not been clear. This was the case with the participating universities in Palestine (Al Quds-Abu Dis and Al Najah), Egypt (Cairo and Alexandria University) and Lebanon (Balamand University). In the case of Egypt, we have accepted fellows from the universities of Cairo and Alexandria who took personal initiative to apply to the program while negotiations with their universities are still underway.

Phase 1 has been rich with unexpected events that forced us to seek solutions and come up with innovative ideas. As we launch phase 2, we will bring on board the many lessons we have learned and continue to refine NewGen and seek new sources of funds to ensure its continuity and sustainability.

Partnerships:

In 2020 we spent time planning for phase 2 of NewGen: expanding into new countries and new universities within the same countries of Phase 1. We have decided to take the program to Sudan and have approached the following three universities: Al Ahfad University for Women, Al Nilain University, and Al Khartoum University and are awaiting responses from their presidents. ACSS's board member, Dr. Manzoul Assal (from Sudan), is helping NewGen establish contact with the three universities.

As for partnerships with new universities in countries where we have already established presence, we are approaching four new universities: Manouba University and Tunis Al Manar University (Tunisia), and Al Azhar University-Gaza and Bethlehem University (Palestine). The universities were selected based on their academic reputation and their social science courses offering. Thus far, Tunis Al Manar, Manouba, and Bethlehem universities showed interest in becoming participating universities and we hope to sign LoAs with them early 2021.

E. Gender Programs

New project on Mapping the Production of Knowledge on Women and Gender in the Arab Region (MPK)

In the fall of 2020 the Open Society Foundation (OSF) – Amman office, approved a grant to the ACSS to undertake a research project entitled "Mapping the Production of Knowledge on Women and Gender in the Arab Region". The project is a joint undertaking between the ACSS and the University of California Davis Arab Region Consortium (UCDAR), under the leadership of Dr. Suad Joseph, and proposes to undertake the mapping of the production of knowledge (MPK) over the past fifty years under the specific title of Women and gender in the Arab region: Socialities. The purpose of the project is to 1) critically evaluate and map the knowledge that has been produced about women and gender in the Arab region since the 1970s and 2) develop an integrative analysis of the findings of that research. In order to achieve its objectives, the project will 1) train and mentor graduate students in research and integrative analysis; 2) make research findings (the integrative analysis) available in publicly accessible multimedia platforms, including designing and developing a website to make findings available for free public access; 3) disseminate research in regional and international scholarly and publicly accessible outlets; 4) mobilize knowledge by working with regional scholars and scholar activists to share and evaluate the findings of the mapping and the integrative analysis and to consider their implications for the training of graduate students and the production of new knowledge on women and gender in the Arab region.

The universities and scholars involved are: Birzeit University-Palestine (Dr. Lena Meari), University of Sharjah (Dr. Nawar Golley), Lebanese American University (Dr. Zina Sawaf), the American University of Beirut (Dr. Sara Mourad) and the American University in Cairo (Dr. Martina Rieker).

Gender Studies in the Middle East and North Africa

As mentioned in last year's report, the ACSS organized a two-day workshop on October 6-7 in Amman, funded by IDRC and OSF, Jordan to discuss the status of gender studies in the Middle East and North Africa. The workshop brought together 43 academics and activists from MENA residing in Iran, Turkey, Jordan, Lebanon, Tunisia, Canada, USA, Egypt, Palestine and Sudan in a lively discussion on the historical evolution of gender studies as well as different themes related to gender as it intersects with other disciplines/topics.

In 2020 the ACSS invited some of the participants in the workshop as well as other scholars to develop full-fledged papers on specific themes including issues that were not adequately covered during the workshop, for example, women, security and conflict and gender and the law. The papers we commissioned are as follows:

- Hoda El Sadda on the NGOization of gender studies.
- Dalia Ghanem-Yazbeck on gender and security.
- Weeam and Doaa Hammoudeh on gender and health in conflict situations

Country-specific papers:

- Zahia Jouirou on gender and law in Tunisia.
- Lena Meari and Nida Abu Awwad on gender and higher education in Palestine

In addition, IDRC commissioned Lina Abu-Habib, Serena Canaan and Yara Taraboulsi to write a paper on women's economic empowerment. All the papers were concluded in 2020 and will be peer reviewed and published as an ACSS Occasional Publication in 2021.

The Arab Oral History Archive: Gender, Alternative Histories, and the Production of Knowledge (GOHA)

Through a collaboration with the American University of Beirut (AUB) and with funding from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, the ACSS is participating in a three-year pilot oral history project entitled: The Arab Oral History Archive: Gender, Alternative Histories, and the Production of Knowledge, (henceforth: Gender Oral History Archive - GOHA.) The project aims to create new collections of oral histories and utilize oral history methodologies and archives in order:

a) To support and develop situated feminist studies and a feminist multidisciplinary critique of knowledge production practices and research methodologies in, from and about the region (including those related to the development and operation of archives); and
b) To create a more inclusive and critical body of new situated knowledge, and subaltern archival repositories about the region.

Within the above-mentioned two aims, the project will work along four main axes:

c) a) Documentation, long term preservation of and access to primary source materials from under-represented groups in, from and about the region, with a focus on oral histories and gender perspectives;
d) b) Knowledge production and creation of a research and teaching hub focused on gender research and oral history;
e) c) Training of stakeholders (academics, students, researchers, activists, heritage and cultural practitioners) in gender studies, archival practices, oral history and ethnographic methods; and
f) d) Networking (regional, Global South and international) to increase institutional collaborations and build long-term capacities and sustainable networks on feminist best practices and collections of oral history.

The project will be housed at the Faculty of Arts and Sciences (FAS) at the American University of Beirut (AUB). The collaboration is formalized through a sub-contract awarded by AUB to the ACSS to fund the implementation of the research tasks by taking the lead on and managing one of the two subprojects under the Gender Archive, specifically, the subproject on: Arab Women from Generation X: Women of the 70s. Countries covered under this sub-project include: Lebanon, Egypt, Iraq, Palestine, Jordan and Syria. In addition, the ACSS will collaborate with AUB on general and joint activities of the project. Dr. Hoda Elsadda, consultant, is providing intellectual leadership and

programmatic management of the Women of the 70s sub-project. She is also contributing to the creation of a research/teaching hub and delivering training for stakeholders and other outputs.

In 2019 the project organized several launching activities including a workshop on gender-sensitive research methodologies (June), as well as planning coordination meeting (October). In 2020, the pace of work slowed down due to the political turmoil in Lebanon, Iraq and Syria, in addition to the Beirut Port explosion in August 2020 and the spread of Covid-19. Between illness, caring responsibilities, financial constraints and limitations on mobility during the pandemic, the team decided to postpone all scheduled workshops and conduct interviews via online platforms. 110 interviews were conducted with women from the generation of the 70s and the research team met regularly once every two weeks via zoom to discuss, share notes, and follow up the interviewing process. On the whole, the interviews went well. However, some were not perfect due to internet problems and the limited technological skills of some of the interviewees.

The plan for 2021 is to organize two online workshops for the archive working group, one online workshop on the ethics of oral history and one workshop on gendering the archive. It is also planned to begin publishing the interviews during the course of 2021.

F. Working Groups

Funding is provided by the Carnegie Corporation and the Sida Supplementary grant for Critical Security Studies (CSS) and New Regionalisms; and by the Mellon Foundation for Critiques of Power (CoP) and for Ethnography as Knowledge (EK).

Working Groups aim at bringing scholars from across the Arab region, and globally, who are at different stages in their academic careers, to work collectively on a research theme or project. This collaborative work not only allows networking, mentorship and the sharing of academic knowledge, skills and experience, but it also encourages interdisciplinary research within the social sciences and the design of innovative and diverse outputs targeting different audiences within the region and beyond. The first working group was on Producing the Public: Space, Media, Participation. Currently the ACSS has four ongoing working groups: Critical Security Studies (CSS), New Regionalisms, Ethnography as Knowledge and Critiques of Power (CoP).

Ethnography and Knowledge Working Group (EKWG)

The Ethnography as Knowledge Working Group, launched in 2019, is engaged in a collaborative exploration of the critical knowledge that can be generated from attention to embodied, emotional and cognitive aspects of the ethnographic endeavor and from the methodological adaptations that the ethnography makes as a result. The group is interested in understanding how ethnography can counter dominant regimes of knowledge about the Arab countries and produce a more nuanced ethnographic understanding of the Arab region today. In a special journal issue entitled "Ethnography as Knowledge in the Arab Region" (*Contemporary Levant* vol. 2, no. 1), the collective proposed that particular modes of attention are vital for ethnographic research, including attention to fear, sound, memory, lies, movement, dreams, and the immersive quality of violence.
The objectives of this working group are:

a. Charting the potential for ethnographic research to inform knowledge about the region, including the production of academic and non-academic outputs, with theoretical as well as practical implications
b. Engaging with researchers across the region to extend the collective and to develop networks of exchange. The group intends to discuss experiences and identify salient topics and professional domains where ethnography plays a role or can come to do so.
c. Collaborating between working group members, other scholars, scholarly networks, and institutions according to the thematic interests of the individual members, with a particular interest in South-to-South collaborations
d. Excavating, from a genealogical perspective, potential "ancestors" of ethnographic knowledge in the region

After consecutive meetings between ACSS and the Ethnography and Knowledge working group (EKWG), in 2020, the core members of the EKWG were able to identify three sub-themes to work on: (1) Ethnography and Medicine in the Arab region, (2) Ethnography and Commoning and (3) Research in Turbulent Times. They also identified the main group outputs and activities including written publications, podcasts, meetings and WG retreats, traveling regional roundtables, participation and organizing sessions at regional and global conferences, and an Arabic language ethnographic glossary.

List of 2020 activities:

- A Reflection Paper on "Reflexivity: Beyond Positionality" is under review with the "Commoning Ethnography" Journal. This paper was written collectively by the six members of the working group: Drs. Lamia Moghnieh, Samar Kanafani, Zina Sawaf, Elizabeth Saleh, Helena Nassif and Muzna Al-Masri.
- Two online meetings on "Research in Turbulent times: Doing Research in Lebanon" (on September 13, 2020 and October 11, 2020) were held gathering a community of anthropologists working in/on Lebanon to examine the value of doing anthropological research in these turbulent times that Lebanon is witnessing (in relation to the Beirut Port explosion, the broader political, economic and financial situation and the Covid-19 pandemic). Some of the questions the group poses include: How can anthropologists reconcile the importance of research with the urge to respond to urgent needs that deprioritize the longer-term investment in ethnographic research? How can they engage with this emergent political moment and still maintain their academic rigor? For a summary of the discussions that took place, read this twitter thread written by Dr. Muzna Masri, coordinator of the "Research in Turbulent Times" subgroup:
  https://twitter.com/zamakan/status/1305256021070426115
- A call for ethnographic diaries was launched on October 16, 2020, after which 13 Lebanon-based researchers were selected to take part in this research-documentation collaboration. The participating researchers were asked to submit weekly diaries to document exceptional moments of their lived experiences and observations of the changes happening in a country like Lebanon that is witnessing transformations and upheavals. The participants come from a variety of academic backgrounds and include junior and senior academics and researchers. They also represent citizens of countries, long-term residents, refugees, and visitors. The final output of this project will be

decided upon collectively between the coordinators (Drs. Muzna Masri and Michele Obeid) and participating researchers in the final stages of the writing process.

- Four bi-monthly meetings within the Ethnographic Diaries Group whereby participating researchers gathered online to discuss the writing process of the weekly entries which are sometimes written in pairs or individually.
- On December 8, 2020, a closed online discussion was organized by the "Ethnography and Medicine in the Arab Region" subgroup (Drs. Lamia Moghnie and Mustafa Abdulla) on "Medical Anthropology in Arabic Speaking Countries". Five medical anthropologists took part in this conversation and shared insights on the impact of Covid-19 on their societies and the role of medical anthropology in responding to the pandemic.
- Dr. Samar Kanafani organized a panel titled "Anthropological method(ologies) 30 years on: challenges and prospects in the age of 'safety' and 'big data'" as part of the 16th EASA Biennial Conference: "EASA2020: New anthropological horizons in and beyond Europe", which was held virtually on 21-24 July 2020. For more information, check this link: https://easaonline.org/conferences/easa2020/panels
- Dr. Muzna Masri organized a panel titled: "Knowing in the Field: Ethnography in Overbearing Conditions", as part of the IUAES2020 Congress "Coming of Age on Earth: Legacies and Next Generation Anthropology ", which will be held on March 9 to 14, 2021 in Šibenik, Croatia. Five papers (including one by Dr. Masri) will be presented as part of this panel
- Two podcasts were recorded (which are currently in production phase and will be published in early 2021) consisting of interviews with Arab women anthropologists

Lessons Learned and Next Steps:

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, several of the working group activities were postponed that were initially planned for spring and summer of 2020 with communities of anthropologists in Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria. The pandemic also made it difficult for EKWG members to conduct fieldwork within their individual research projects, and as a result they had to postpone the start of their research activities until early 2021. Another setback is related to the fact that most of the members of this working group are based in Lebanon and have suffered collective grief and trauma as a result of the Beirut explosion on August 4, 2020. They found it difficult to conduct ethnographic research in the very society they live in. This sentiment was echoed at the "Research in Turbulent times" online meetings with other anthropologists working in/on Lebanon.

One of the goals of the coming period is to expand the network of regional scholars working on ethnography and knowledge and to establish a stable and dynamic membership structure. Another goal is to ensure a constant flow of outputs in Arabic and English within the thematic groups mentioned above. Three members have identified their own individual research projects which they are in charge of and outputs within these projects will be produced in 2021. In addition, as all ACSS working groups, the EKWG will be an integral component of the first ACSS Summer Academy planned for July 2021 and will be in charge of mentoring and teaching a cohort of junior researchers interested in producing knowledge ethnographically.

Critical Security Studies Working Group (CSS)

Launched in 2016, this interdisciplinary network of scholars is pursuing research that challenges the dominant understanding of the Arab region as a threat to global security and is also providing training and professional mentorship to junior scholars based in the Arab region. The working group is

approaching its 5th year as an ACSS working group. It seeks to to develop into the "Beirut School of Critical Security Studies" that is unique in a number of ways:

- The theoretical backgrounds are drawn from scholarship predominantly produced by Arab and other scholars from the Global South
- It turns attention to the idea of a "region", in this case the Arab region, as an object of study
- It focuses on the production of *insecurity*, rather than *security* and is developing approaches, methods, and concepts in line with this.

With the establishment phase of the CSS ending in December 2019, the working group assessed its collective progress and began planning its second phase. During the first phase, the CSS working group laid out its structure and defined its main outputs and signature activities. The CSS Summer Institutes (three held so far) and the mentoring efforts, have been the most important components of the project. The first phase included the following core members: Drs. Samer Abboud, Omar Dahi, Waleed Hazbun, Coralie Hindawi, Nicole Grove, Jamil Mouawad and Sami Hermez.

During the new phase, which started with a January 2020 in-person planning meeting, the WG was reconfigured to bring in new core members including: Drs. Zaynab el Bernoussi, Bashir Saade, and Guilia Dardari. Past core members Drs. Waleed Hazbun and Coralie Pison Hindawi, joined the ranks of affiliate researchers along with Drs. Karim Makdisi and Noura Erakat. Dr. Sami Hermez replaced Dr. Samer Abboud as a co-coordinator of the working group alongside Dr. Omar Dahi. Continuing core members will have the primary responsibility for sustained intellectual leadership and promotion of the project and are expected to be active contributors to signature activities, while affiliate members will continue to contribute to the project, and especially to its outputs and electronic platform, but with less programmatic and implementation responsibilities than core members.

Collaborations: Security in Context

In 2020, the CSS working group joined the global research network of "Security in Context", which is a US-based initiative for interdisciplinary research and pedagogy that promotes critical research and policy analysis on key questions on peace and conflict, the political economy of security and insecurity, militarism, and geopolitics particularly as they intersect with the processes of climate change, population movement, and reorganization of global powers. Security in Context is based at University of Massachusetts Amherst with partnerships in the United States and elsewhere in the global South. The Beirut School will engage in an organic partnership with Security in Context as a main 'hub' in the region for collaboration on multiple levels: a) collaborative research on themes of overlapping interests, b) mentorship of students, c) public engagement, d) development of pedagogical outputs. The Beirut School took part in a joint activity with Security in Context, a Feb 29/March 1 2020 planning meeting to launch the collaboration. Second, the Beirut School along with Security in Context is assembling a virtual roundtable on "borders and the state in light of Covid-19" which will be featured on both websites in 2021.

In addition, as an extension of the CSS working group, there is a plan to organize an ACSS-CLACSO-Latin East-SiC Joint Working Group on the topic of " Security Policies and Insecurity Production in Latin America and the Middle East." To this end, on December 3, 2020, ACSS organized an online closed workshop in partnership with the Latin American Council of Social Sciences (CLACSO), the North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA) and Security in Context (SiC), gathering 10 researchers from Latin America and Arab region. The aim of the workshop was to discuss the formation of a working group that would generate research around the theme of "Security Policies and Insecurity Production in Latin America and the Middle East ". This meeting is a culmination of

discussions between the four institutions about ways of moving forward following the indefinite postponement of the CLACSO-ACSS sponsored Latin East conference that was scheduled to take place in Buenos Argentina in May 2020.

List of 2020 activities:

CSS planning meeting - January 7-8, 2020:

A two-day planning meeting was held at the ACSS office on January 7 and 8, 2020, with the aim of both taking stock of the working group achievements and charting a path forward for the next phase. The discussions revolved around developing a vision and strategy for the project beyond its current state, in addition to important questions that relate to leadership, decision-making, intellectual and theoretical contributions, and general questions around programming and partnerships of the working group as a whole.

Joint call for articles in partnership with Security in Context: Borders and the State in Light of Covid-19 - August 15, 2020:

Critical scholars of borders were invited to reflect on the question of borders in light of the Covid-19 pandemic response. Some questions addressed by the researchers included:

- How can historical and critical readings of borders help us understand the current moment?
- In what ways does your own research help us understand the importance of borders to understanding broader political, economic, or sociological processes or questions?
- What does the shutting down of borders imply for millions of workers, migrants and refugees who rely on border crossings for their survival?
- Can this moment be an opportunity for a paradigm shift in our understanding of related issues such as the state, international capital, as well as global solidarity and the struggle for justice?

The first article in this virtual roundtable series was written by Dr. Leslie Gross-Wyrtzen and published on Oct 17, 2020 on the Beirut Forum and Security in Context website. The title of the article is "Policing the Virus: Race, Risk, and the Politics of Containment in Morocco and the United States" and can be found at the following link:
http://www.thebeirutforum.com/leslie-grosswyrtzen

CSS Webinar, "Economic Sanctions and the United States' Endless Wars in the Middle East" - August 17, 2020:

The ACSS Working Group on Critical Security Studies in the Arab Region, in collaboration with the Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP) and publishers of *Middle East Report*, organized a webinar to discuss the use of economic sanctions as a coercive tool in United States policy towards the Middle East. This webinar was moderated by Dr. Waleed Hazbun (University of Alabama) and brought together contributors to a recent issue of Middle East Report (No. 294) "Exit Empire--Imagining New Paths for US Policy" and scholars affiliated with the ACSS's project on Critical Security Studies in the Arab Region: Dr. Hicham Safieddine (King's College-London), Dr. Negar S. Razavi (College of William and Mary) and Dr. Omar S. Dahi (Hampshire College). The webinar sought to find answers to the following

questions: Is the American use of economic sanctions a means to continue it endless wars in the Middle East? What impact are current US sanctions having on people living in the region? To what degree are we seeing and likely to see in the future even more reliance on economic sanctions as a coercive tool? Are there any efforts within the US or elsewhere to regulate or even ban the use of coercive economic sanctions? The impact of economic sanctions on Iran, Lebanon and Syria was discussed during this webinar, to watch the video with Arabic subtitles: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vpNWcFAnaC4&t=8s

CSS webinar: "The Securitization of International Justice: Law, Security, and Politics" - October 21, 2020:

The ACSS Working Group on Critical Security Studies in the Arab Region organized a webinar about the use and abuses of tools for international Justice, which was moderated by Dr. Waleed Hazbun (University of Alabama), and included speakers: Drs. Samer Abboud (Villanova University), Oumar Ba (Morehouse College) and Stacey Philbrick Yadav (Hobart and William Smith Colleges). With examples from Yemen's war, the Special Tribunal of Lebanon, and the Palestinian struggle for justice, the speakers tackled the use of judicial mechanisms, such as the International Criminal Court (ICC), to prosecute genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and crimes of aggression. What role can international courts play in prosecuting these crimes and seeking justice? Are there other non-judicial mechanisms that could help to provide accountability and promote justice? For a discussion of these questions, watch the full webinar:
https://www.facebook.com/538505439505548/videos/982624028888117

Publications in 2020:

El Dardiry, Giulia, and Sami Hermez. "Critical Security and Anthropology from the Middle East." *Cultural Anthropology* 35, no. 2 (2020): 197-203.
https://journal.culanth.org/index.php/ca/article/view/4709/524
Saad Amira*, "Does excessive violence help improve public health? Management of "insecurity" in Palestine", Beirut Forum, July 2020.
http://www.thebeirutforum.com/saadamira
*Saad Amira was a CSS Grants 2018 grantee and a participant in the Second Summer Institute.
Leslie Gross-Wyrtzen, "Policing the Virus: Race, Risk, and the Politics of Containment in Morocco and the United States", October 2020.
http://www.thebeirutforum.com/leslie-grosswyrtzen

Lessons Learned and Next Steps:

- Despite the proliferation and acceleration of foreign interventions, political conflicts and violence in the Arab region, regional scholarship has not been successful in analyzing these events from a critical perspective and researchers based in the region seem to be still influenced by Western scholarship and knowledge produced by international organizations and NGOs. This low interest in critical perspectives on security in the Arab region is reflected in the low number of applications received in the working group past activities such as the small research grants program (21 applications in total), the Second Summer Institute (64 applications in total) and the Third Summer Institute (102 applications in total). The acceptance rate for each call for applications for the signature activities ranged from 19% to 26% due to the lack of quality research proposals taking a critical approach to (in)security issues.

- The CSS working group working structure is now focused on signature activities and research outputs produced collectively and in synergy by a group of core, affiliate and network members.
- The CSS working group has been seeking to address increasing engagement with regional Arab scholars. The core group has been actively striving to connect with regional-based senior scholars and have also remained in contact with many graduates of the CSS Summer Institutes, assigning them as research assistants, helping them out with publication prospects and soliciting short articles for the Beirut Forum. More engagement with regional researchers will be reflected in the future membership of the core and affiliate groups and in the upcoming activities planned for the next phase of the group.
- Many core and affiliate members of the WG were undergoing pressure at the professional (relocations, promotions, job-searching, publications other than CSS) and personal levels, which slowed down the production of certain outputs related to workshops and individual ACSS-funded research.

New Regionalisms Working Group

The New Regionalisms working group is coordinated by Dr. Adam Hanieh (Reader in Development Studies at SOAS-University of London) and addresses the continually emergent, inter-connected, inter-penetrated and overlapping nature of regions, with a focus on the Middle East and North Africa region. With this working group, the ACSS hopes to challenge conventional ways of thinking about the Middle East and North Africa as representing a state of exceptionalism and to explore the region as part and parcel of the global system. This WG represents the first program of the ACSS to systematically bring Turkish and Iranian scholars into its networks.

The working group situates itself within the emerging literature of "comparative regionalism" to acknowledge that regions are now a structural component of global politics. Three major themes will be explored: (1) how alternative forms of regionalization, be that Chinese, Gulf, Turkish, Russian, Iranian, are shaping the Middle East region; (2) the driving factors as well as the effects of competing visions on regional development, cooperation and integration among various power centers in this region; (3) the increasingly complex role of non-state actors alongside state actors in furthering regionalization.

List of 2020 Activities:

New Regionalism workshop in Beirut - February 8-9, 2020:

In February 2020, a call for papers was announced to solicit contributions in Arabic and English around the theme of 'New Regionalisms and the Middle East'. Forty-one applications were submitted in response to the call, out of which only 12 abstracts were selected. Authors of selected papers were invited to an in-person workshop held on February 8 and 9, 2020 in Beirut in the presence of Dr. Hanieh. This workshop follows the first workshop which was held in London on November 2018. The submitted papers for the second workshop focused on the following questions posed in the call for papers: what are the features of the current regional power struggles? What are the evolving linkages of the Middle East with other regions and countries in the current contemporary period? What is the role of finance and other sectors in shaping the Middle East's regional patterns and its connections to other parts of the world market? Three subthemes were identified through the workshop: China and the

Middle East; Religion as a broker of regional power relations and Translocality across borders. Planned outputs from this meeting include a background "think piece" by Dr. Adam Hanieh (SOAS) and a special issue in a journal which will include three papers presented at the meeting.

Lessons Learned and Next Steps:

- ACSS and the working group faced some difficulty in finding researchers knowledgeable about the topic and approach of regionalism. The applications received from scholars in the Arab region, Turkey and Iran were minimal, and the approaches adopted in the proposals were always taking the non-critical and Western-influenced take on proposed topics. Even from among the 13 researchers who attended the February 2020 workshop in Beirut, we decided to only work with four of the researchers (three papers) to come up with a good quality peer-reviewed publication. The hope is that the ACSS Academy and other activities (summer institutes, workshops and trainings), coupled with the New Generation program, would help train junior researchers in this and other areas.
- The ACSS and its working groups are hoping that as the latter accumulate research and publications, develop pedagogical tools (syllabi, teaching manuals, textbooks etc…) and build up networks with regional universities and scholars, along with the increased visibility of their work on the Beirut Forum (the Beirut Forum in the near future will feature the work of all ACSS working groups; see below), there will be enough material for regional junior researchers to grapple and engage with.

While the plan of this working group was to work under the following themes: China and the Middle East, religion as a power projection and translocality (or border regions), the current plan is to rethink the three themes and leave them fluid and less prescriptive. The working paper written on "Space, Scale, and Region: Thinking Through the New Dynamics of the Middle East", will be the focus of the next phase and a virtual workshop will be organized in March 2021, gathering researchers working on the regions. Those will be invited to write reflections by engaging with the themes in the paper for their own perspectives. Another goal of the next phase is to identify and develop prospective themes for background briefings, annotated bibliographies and literature reviews, in addition to identify potential contributors for blog and think pieces. These proposed outputs will be posted on the WG's page on the ACSS website and the Beirut Forum. Dr. Hanieh will be joined by Dr. Hamza Hamouchene, who is a London-based Algerian researcher-activist. Dr. Hamouchene brings in a North African dimension, which will be very valuable for this project.

Critiques of Power Working Group

In December 2020, the Critiques of Power working group (CoP) concluded its activities as a working group, after four years of intellectual commitment to collaborative engagement with Arab critical thought and praxis.

In addition to the political and financial situation in Lebanon, the pandemic heavily impacted the ability of CoP members to sustain their commitment to the projects of the working group. While the restrictions on travel and holding in-person workshops was substituted by online communications and workshop, that could not change the difficulty of having members dedicate much of their time and effort under very stressful circumstances. Consequently, while CoP members had initially shown enthusiasm about holding a second Critical Practices Forum in December 2020, on the topic of translation and new media, that could no longer be possible. Similarly, while most CoP members had

participated in co-organizing for the ACSS Academy and setting its program when it was planned for 2020, many members may not be able to participate. As one member of the CoP expressed it, the multiple crises and the drastic changes that hit Lebanon and the MENA region in the last four years are yet to be intellectually grasped in all their impacts and implications.

Despite all the challenges of the year 2020, the CoP was still able to organize the "Arab Critical Theories and Horizons of Emancipation" workshop. Originally planned for 2019, but postponed due to the political situation in Lebanon, and then postponed for a second time in March 2020 due to the pandemic, the workshop eventually moved online. Held over three sessions and three weeks June 26, July 3rd, and July 10th 2020, this closed workshop brought together eight scholars from across the Arab region and the world, to re-read the intellectual productions of Arab thinkers and writers from the 11th century to the present. Through their presentations and discussions, participants and working group members debated themes such as conceptual translation across time periods, language and positionality, gender and sexuality, among other relevant questions and topics.

While the CoP did come to an end, the networks created are maintained at ACSS and in other projects involving the members. Many CoP members took part in the World Humanities Report (see Humanities Forum and Report below), as co-editors of and as contributors to the report. A number of CoP members are still committed to co-organizing and participating in the ACSS Academy in 2021, with a focus on archives, critical Arab theories, including Arab feminist theories and genealogies. In addition, following the reverberating success of the 2018 Forum on Alternative Archival Practices that was organized by the CoP, a number of members of the working group are discussing a collaborative writing project to reflect on the Forum and some of the themes and questions it generated. Additionally, as ACSS prepares to start another working group on gender archives in Arab countries, some CoP members will be consulted for this project, to ensure continuities between past and future working groups at ACSS.

Lessons learned:
Launched in 2017, the CoP represented a unique experience in organizing a working group that included members from a diversity of academic backgrounds-- from media studies to political science and history, and a wide level of seniority: from PhD candidates to tenured professors. Members also resided in different types of academic institutions across three continents. This experience demonstrated interesting lessons in collaborating across different positions and locations. The ability of the working group to create spaces of intellectual exchanges for scholars and practitioners, to address topics and questions related to archival practices, translation, gender, and generational shifts in Arab leftist and feminist thought, represented an important lesson in how to bring together these diverse groups and individuals. On the other hand, it became evident how time and work constraints in academia made it difficult for scholars from different positions, locations and fields to sustain a practice of meeting regularly to engage with texts and intellectual productions outside their current focus. Though the current form of the working group has come to an end, the spaces that it opened, the networks that it has developed, and the lessons that it has provided in organizing across disciplines and positions are invaluable and will continue to be carried into future ACSS projects.

Pan-working groups Projects

As the working groups held their discussions and discussed outputs, several common ideas emerged and that will now be organized as pan-WG projects. In addition, the inaugural Academy brings together the WGs into close collaboration, something that was welcomed by members of the group

given the many cross-cutting themes as well as common methodological and epistemological concerns.

Glossary:
The Glossary or Lexicon is a cross-cutting interest among all ACSS working groups. The aim is to produce an Arabic Glossary to enrich social science terms in Arabic and highlight potential diversity in interpretation of terms contingent on contexts, both historical and contemporary. This project was started in April 2020 by sharing among all ACSS working groups a google excel sheet that includes categories of terms, their descriptions and examples of how a term has been used in different texts. The sheet is periodically being updated by members. The lexicon will be an important 'side-event' at the fifth ACSS conference in 2021, thus expanding participation in its co-creation to conference participants.

The Beirut Forum:
The CSS working group had initiated the Beirut Forum in the group's website to publish their outputs. Since other ACSS working groups are seeking their own online portals to showcase their work, the ACSS is actively working on turning the Beirut Forum as the joint website for all its working groups. Moving forward, the ACSS will transform the online forum and refurbishing it to include information, activities, blogs, podcasts, glossary and other outputs produced by all its working group.

G. World Humanities Report

The ACSS is leading the Arab Region's contribution to the World Humanities Report (WHR), a Mellon funded initiative with support from UNESCO. The WHR is an outcome of the 2017 World Humanities Conference in Liège. It marked the launch of a cross-regional collaboration to identify and promote the conditions under which the humanities might flourish in the next decade. The aim of the current WHR report is to encourage humanistic methods and understandings in knowledge production and in socio-economic, political innovation more generally.

The Arab WHR report engages researchers, students, faculty, policymakers and other stakeholders keen on critically understanding the landscape and impact of humanities knowledge creation in the Arab region. It is divided thematically into six sections addressing some of the most relevant contemporary debates in the field, including:

1) Urgency and Temporality
2) Layered Hegemonies
3) Feminist Platforms
4) Universities and Public Pedagogy
5) Language, Translation and Traveling Concepts
6) Artifacts from the Past and Future: Resistance through archiving

Each of the six sections includes (a) 4-6 rigorous, forward thinking, academic essays or think pieces by junior and senior regional scholars, commissioned for this report (28 total) (b) case-studies on related humanities collectives, platforms and institutions from the region, featuring the results of a 90-minute ACSS survey along with research-based analyses (27 total) (c) theme-specific interactive activities for students and teachers to engage critically with WHR essays and case-studies (6 total). The collection of essays, case studies, and lesson plans is designed to be relevant to secondary and tertiary students, as well as conducive to self and instructor-led learning.

Apart from the section introductions, framing the diverse contributions, the report will also include an overall introduction and a summary of recommendations. These practical and targeted recommendations aim at fostering the conditions for critical and experimental production in the humanities. Importantly, we hope to impart the urgency of integrating regional insights into social, political, technological and corporate innovation, globally and cross-regionally. Centering social justice and self-reflexive criticality as guiding values, we emphasize the applicability and need for humanistic ways of thinking across disciplines, from art to business or medicine.
The ACSS final report will be sent to the global WHR team for web design and publication by mid-March 2021.

Twenty-eight Essays across Six Sections:
The 4000-5000 word essays are currently undergoing the final stages of the editorial process prior to publication. The ACSS editorial board has reviewed the essays and copy-editors were hired to ensure readability and accessibility to cross-regional audiences, from policymakers to students and researchers.

A selection of the Arab WHR essays will serve as Volume II of the new Arabic-language ACSS publication series: Qira'at: ACSS Reviews in the Social Sciences and Humanities. The essays to be included are currently under review by the ACSS Board of Trustees. The proposal was presented during a meeting of the Board of Trustees sub-committee on Publications meeting in January 2021. Essays will be translated into Arabic as needed and adapted as per Qira'at editorial guidelines.

WHR Survey and Case-Studies:
The ACSS team identified over 100 critical humanities organizations across the Arab Region to survey (please click to access the ACSS survey in English, Arabic, French). A total of 27 organization have responded so far and we hope to feature 100 organizations at the Virtual Museum website launch (December 2021; see more details below). In-house researchers are currently analyzing the data and undertaking desk-research to write individual features on the critical significance of each organization to humanities knowledge production.

WHR Lesson Plans:
As part of the ACSS' effort to build pedagogical models and toolkits, this report will feature a total of six lesson plans across six sections. Each activity aims to introduce and hone students' and scholars' critical tools for analysis and humanistic, ethical modes of inquiry.
The lesson plans reference both ACSS WHR content as well as other regional resources. By directing post-secondary students and teachers to Arab productions, we hope to increase the visibility and perceived value of critical, regional humanistic productions.

We will continue to grow this database of open-access lesson plans. The pedagogical toolkit will be made available to teachers and students from around the globe who can look to us for creative, decolonizing pedagogical resources.

H. The Arab Social Science Monitor (ASSM)

Funding for the ASSM is provided by the Carnegie Corporation of New York. The Palestine Survey is funded by Sida and the Dataverse project is funded by a sub-grant from the University of North Carolina.

The Arab Social Science Monitor (ASSM) is an observatory of the landscape of the social sciences and higher education in the Arab region. It documents the infrastructure of knowledge production in terms of institutions and resources and accounts for the evolving capacities and characteristics of the social science community across the region. The ASSM makes data and knowledge produced available for the public through two main mechanisms: (1) online databases and (2) publications.

ASSM Governance and Staffing

The ASSM advisory committee met on January 16 and was updated on the status of the various ASSM activities such as the ASSM databases of the infrastructure of knowledge production of social science and humanities in the Arab region and the Arab Public Data Initiative. The main discussion during the meeting pertained to the third Arab Social Science Monitor Report that focuses on the career trajectories of Arab social scientists and humanists in academia.

In terms of staffing, the ASSM team currently consists of Nada Chaya, Project Leader of the ASSM, and Rami Ofeich, Data Analyst. In addition, the ASSM engages consultants to implement some of its activities. Given the increase in the number and complexity of ASSM activities, the ASSM needs more full-time staff and the issue of staffing will be given high priority in early 2021 to better implement and expand ASSM activities.

Second Arab Social Science Report (ASSR2)

The Arab Social Science Monitor Report (ASSR) is one of the key publications of the ASSM and a flagship ACSS publication that is published periodically with each version focusing on one aspect of the state of social science research in the Arab region.

The ASSR2, the second in the series of ASSRs, titled "Social Sciences in the Arab Region: An Approach to Arabic Language Outputs (2000-2016)" (2000-2016) – whose lead author is Professor Abdellah Hammoudi – was finalized, copy edited, produced and printed in 2018. A summary of the ASSR2 was translated to English in 2020. The ASSR2 was buttressed by eight background papers that conducted a critical review of select social science disciplines in the Arab region to gauge the content of social science products in the Arab region. Five of these background papers are now part of an ACSS Review Volume (*Qira'at*) that will be produced in partnership with UNESCO (For more details see Review Volume *Qira'at* below). Based on the work done for the background paper on social psychology, a paper titled The 'Status of Arabic Social Psychology: A Review of 21st-Century Research Articles' was published by the authors of the background papers (Drs. Reem Saab and Arin Aiyanian) in the September 2020 issue of the journal *Social Psychological and Personality Science* (https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1948550620925224).

Third Arab Social Science Monitor Report (ASSR3)

The ASSR3, whose lead author is Dr. Ahmad Dallal, Dean, Georgetown University in Qatar, is titled "The academic universes of social scientists in the Arab world: Career trajectories and networks in universities". The ASSR3 aims to chart the career trajectories of social scientists and humanists within the academic sphere in the Arab world and explore the factors that enable or constrain the progress of these careers. It focuses on individual as well as institutional and occupational characteristics of the careers of Arab social scientists and humanists within the universities in the Arab region. The report is based on quantitative data collected in 2019 through an online survey of the characteristics and career trajectories of Arab social scientists and humanists as well as six qualitative background papers

commissioned and prepared to provide the institutional context (http://www.theacss.org/pages/third-assm-report). Initial analysis of the quantitative data collected was done in house in 2019 and based on this, the lead author presented a rough draft of the report during the meeting of ASSM advisory committee of January 16, 2020, in Beirut, Lebanon.

Three papers were commissioned in 2020 for more in-depth analysis of the quantitative data collected. The first paper, authored by Dr. Maia Seiverding is titled "Social scientists and social science careers in the Arab region: An analysis of the characteristics of Arab social scientists and humanists survey 2019". The paper presents multivariate analysis of the predictors of higher academic rank among university-based respondents and of publication quality and quantity among the full sample. The second paper was written in Arabic by Dr. Abdelkader Latreche and titled "Taqrir tahlil nata'ij al-marsad al-Arabi lil-ulum al-ijtima'iyya" (Report on the analysis of the findings of the ASSM). A third paper was commissioned to conduct semi-structured interviews with a random sample of respondents to the ACSS online survey and is authored by Dr. Cyrine Ghannouchi and titled "Report on Phase II: Semi-structured interviews".

A long abstract of the ASSR3 was prepared by the lead author Dr. Ahmad Dallal (http://www.theacss.org/uploads/cke_documents/ASSR3-long-abstract.pdf) and a live interview was conducted with him by ACSS board member, Dr. Bassam Haddad, on December 29, 2020. The interview was broadcast live on the ACSS Facebook and Jadaliyya Facebook . At the time of writing the report, the interview Facebook metrics indicated 299 likes, 49 shares and 47,000 views on the ACSS Facebook page.

Periodic Survey on the Careers of Arab Social Scientists

The ASSM carries out the periodic survey of Arab social scientists with the aim of better understanding their characteristics and career trajectories. The survey, conducted in 2014/2015 and 2019, and its analysis, are one of the inputs for the 1st and 3rd ASSM reports. In 2020, the ASSM finalized the methodology, implementation plan, core questionnaire, and standard analysis and tables for turning the survey of social scientists into a standing product of the ASSM. Supplemental questionnaire modules that address a particular theme will be developed for each survey, as needed. As one of the inputs of the ASSRs, the periodic survey will be conducted in conjunction with most ASSRs. To access the full report Periodic Survey on the Careers of Arab Social Scientists, please click here (https://drive.google.com/file/d/12gJDfVEwJXtFRXj29S6Wcfk6ISS3OWot/view?usp=sharing)
The core questionnaire that will be used to collect data in each wave of the survey consists of four modules on the respondent's 1) Personal information; 2) Higher education background; 3) Employment history; and 4) Research areas and publications. For harmonization purposes, the modules have been designed to contain mostly the same questions as the updated ACSS standard profile (to be rolled out soon) that is used for applications, membership and other purposes.

The data collection tools developed by the ASSM (databases of the infrastructure of social science and humanities knowledge production + core questionnaire of the periodic survey on the careers of Arab social scientists) will provide a standard and regularly collected data source that tracks/documents the institutional landscape of social science research and higher education in the Arab region as well as the characteristics and career trajectories of Arab social scientists. These tools are currently applied at the regional level but will also be used at the country level, where applicable. The first such instance will be through the "The social science experience in Iraqi universities" project (see below).

Standard summary tables

In 2020 standard summary tables were constructed to present data collected through ASSM databases and through the standard analysis of the periodic survey data. These tables aim to make data compiled by the ASSM more accessible and predictable (/uploads/cke_documents/Standard-tables_ASSM-Databases.xlsx).

Palestine report: Study of higher education and research in Palestine

As indicated in the 2019 annual report to Sida, the Applied Research Institute in Jerusalem (ARIJ) drafted a report on "Study of Higher Education and Research in Palestine" which the ACSS complemented by commissioning some in-depth studies to address the gaps and some emerging issues not covered by the baseline report. In 2020 the ACSS commissioned a new set of papers and outputs including bibliographic reviews, analytical papers, think pieces and reports, data bases and consultations.

These outputs – the follow-up research - is divided into four phases, with each phase containing a series of activities/products and building on the one preceding it. The first phase focuses on documentation (including through standard tools developed by the ASSM such as the database of social science infrastructure) and background think pieces, while research in the second phase will be thematic. The third phase will present recommendations and the fourth hopes to build on current ACSS projects and might launch pilot projects, depending on availability of funds. For more information on the follow-up research, please click here.

Iraq project: The social sciences experience in Iraqi universities

The two-year project titled "The social science experience in Iraqi universities" stems from the interest of the ASSM to document social science knowledge production in the Arab region and to learn from the richness of the Iraqi experience in social sciences.

The goal of the project is to better understand the current state of social sciences in Iraqi universities through an update of an assessment made by a group of researchers in 2007 published in the report "The State of Social Sciences in Iraqi Universities: Survey, Evaluation, and Prospects for development" that gives a good baseline against which to evaluate the findings of this project. The two objectives this project aims to achieve are:

- Getting a snapshot of current status of the social sciences in Iraqi universities through (a) documenting the social science infrastructure in six Iraq universities, and (b) studying the career trajectories of social science scholars in these universities.
- Based on the results of the survey, a multidisciplinary course will be offered online to students selected from the six universities.

Implementation of this project was delayed in 2019 and 2020 due to the unfortunate security situation in Iraq. The project was further stalled by the constraints of the Covid-19 pandemic, which necessitated re-planning activities to be held online instead of face-to-fact meetings/workshops in Iraq, Amman and Beirut as previously planned.

When the political situation in Iraq stabilized, a meeting of the three-member Advisory Committee was held, virtually on June 24, 2020. During this meeting the list of universities where the study would take place was selected and included: Baghdad university, Salahaddin University (Kurdistan), Thi-Qar university, Kufa university, Tikrit university and Mosul university. Another virtual meeting was held

with the Advisory Committee on November 25, 2020 to discuss communications with the ministries of higher education and scientific research in Baghdad and Kurdistan to request permission to undertake the study. Towards the end of 2020, the ACSS got the approval from both ministries to proceed with the project (Appendix 12- Iraq Project advisory committee; project team).

ASSM Databases

One of the core functions of the ASSM is to document the infrastructure of social science and humanities knowledge production in the Arab region and make it public through online databases. The ASSM continues to refine and update these databases.

In May 2020, the university-based research centers database was updated and was further refined in December 2020 resulting in a total of 770 university-based research centers in this database.

In February/March 2020, 79 non-university-based research centers engaged in social sciences and humanities (SSH) were added to the database and the existing 249 centers were updated. The database was further refined in December 2020 resulting in a total of 376 such centers

In April/May 2020, 275 universities were added to the database and the existing 1,088 universities were updated, based on the available websites of the ministries of higher education and other country-level sources, resulting in a total of 1,363 universities (636 offering SSH programs and 727 not offering SSH programs).

Update of the social science and humanities periodicals database started mid-May 2020 and was completed in December 2020, mostly based on the websites of universities, the ISSN portal and country-level sources. The total number of periodicals listed in the database is 1,505 with two-thirds published in four countries: Algeria, Egypt, Iraq and Morocco.

These four databases are publicly available at https://dataverse.theacss.org/dataverse/assm

Arab Public Data Initiative

The Arab Public Data Initiative is a two-year project that is being implemented in collaboration with the Odum Institute for Research in Social Science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. It aims to promote the norm of data preservation and data sharing among social scientists and research institutions in the Arab region. The work of this Initiative is guided by an active and engaged advisory committee (Appendix 13-Dataverse advisory committee; project team).

The two main activities of this Initiative are (1) archiving social science datasets on and in the Arab region in a dedicated repository – ACSS Dataverse (the first interdisciplinary social science data archive in the Arab region) and (2) capacity building for researchers, administrators, librarians, and archivists in the region on the principles and global best practices and tools in data archiving.

One hundred and twenty datasets have been deposited into the ACSS Dataverse – www.dataverse.theacss.org – since it went live in June 2019. Datasets that are deposited in the ACSS Dataverse are de-identified, processed in keeping with global data archiving standards and made available to the public at no charge. In 2020, the 4th in the series of trainings on data management and sharing was conducted virtually (For more details see Data Sharing for the Public Good training series above)

Study on the impact of Covid-19 on Arab social science and humanities scholars

The ACSS commissioned a paper to examine the effects of Covid-19 among Arab social science and humanities scholars, "Academic Challenges in the Time of Covid-19: Arab Social Scientists and Humanists in Focus", authored by Dr. Caroline Krafft, consultant. The study is based on quantitative data collected in September 2020 through an online survey (in Arabic, English and French) designed by the ACSS and the study team for the purpose and targeted Arab scholars in the humanities and the social sciences with Masters and Doctoral degrees working in scholarly settings (universities or research centers).

The questionnaire covered eight topics: (1) highest degree and current academic affiliation (2) demographics (3) current work position (4) hours of work and the impact of Covid-19 (5) teaching and the impact Covid-19 (6) research and fieldwork/data collection and the impact of Covid-19 (7) professional development activities and the impact of Covid-19 and (8) work-life balance and the impact of Covid-19. To access the full report Academic Challenges in the Time of Covid-19: Arab Social Scientist and Humanists in Focus, please click here.

Data was analyzed and the report presented a descriptive analysis of the self-reported impact of Covid-19 on scholars, with a particular focus on which scholars were especially affected.

The report author referred to the report in a special session on 'Labor markets in the MENA region during the Covid-19 outbreak' held on October 9, 2020 at the international conference of Middle East Economics Association. In 2021, the study report will be translated to Arabic and French and disseminated in a targeted way.

Looking back and looking forward: Lessons learned

In 2020 the ASSM made progress on all the activities. It continued to address the unmet need for social science data management and sharing in the region through its work on archiving social science datasets and capacity building. It finalized the methodology of the periodic survey on the careers of Arab social scientists and the core questionnaire of this survey was harmonized with the new ACSS online application form. Four ASSM databases of the infrastructure of social science and humanities knowledge production underwent a major update. Standard summary tables were developed to periodically present data collected by the ASSM in a standardized way. The Iraq project on the current state of social sciences in Iraqi universities was re-launched and received the approval from Ministries of Education in Iraq. The ASSM participated in designing and planning for follow-up research to the study of higher education and research in Palestine and a study was conducted on the impact of Covid-19 on Arab social scientists and humanists.

In 2021, the ASSM will develop its full team to better implement and expand its activities. There will be focus on better planning and more targeted outreach of knowledge produced by the ASSM. The ASSM will need to develop a sustainable vision for the ASSR and its various components. The amount of time it takes to develop the various inputs into the ASSRs and the writing and production of the report is currently underestimated. This, in addition to the changing landscape of higher education, necessitates such a vision. Finally, the ASSM will develop a plan that makes ASSM products accessible to a broad range of audiences and higher education stakeholders.

I. Training

ACSS started developing its training programs in 2015 many of which have been co-funded with other organizations thus fulfilling one of the targets of the ACSS 5-year Strategy, namely developing a number of long-term co-funded programs and partnerships. In 2018, ACSS redesigned its training offerings to further emphasize interdisciplinarity and field building as well as the promotion of academic networks that create opportunities for cross-national research as well as foster regional collaborations for local knowledge production.

Data Sharing for the Public Good

To help address challenges of data management and archiving in the Arab region, the ACSS organizes a series of trainings titled "Data Sharing for the Public Good". This training is a result of a two-year project that the ACSS is jointly implementing with the Odum Institute of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill under the title of Arab Public Data Initiative (see above). One of the activities under the Initiative is capacity building for researchers, administrators, librarians and archivists in the region on tools of data sharing and archiving for social science and public policy, and learning from global best practices in data archiving. Through open calls for applications two such regional trainings were conducted in 2019 and were attended by trainees from diverse sectors (public, private, academia, NGOs, UN, …).

- First training: April 9-11, 2019, Beirut: 18 participants (out 33 applicants) from eight Arab countries
- Second training: October 1-4, 2019, Amman: 16 participants (out of 65 applicants) from eight Arab countries

Preparations for the ACSS Academy July 1-16, 2021, Beirut

The ACSS Academy will be a biennial event organized by the ACSS which provides an opportunity for junior researchers in the Arab region to engage with critical theory and analysis, advanced writing, professionalization skills and networking. The participants will be mentored by a team of established faculty members working on the themes of three of the ACSS working groups: Critiques of Power, Critical Security Studies and Ethnography as Knowledge.

The ACSS Academy was originally planned to be held on July 2020 in Lebanon but due to the Covid-19 pandemic, we had to postpone. However, since the call for applications had already gone out, ACSS staff and members of the working groups have continued with the review and selection of applications. As of now, the plan is to organize some of the Academy's trainings virtually starting March 2021.

One hundred and twelve applications were received from Morocco, Algeria, Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Jordan, Yemen, Tunisia, Iraq and Saudi Arabia. After a two-step application process, 40 participants were accepted by members of the working groups. Twenty MA and PhD NewGen fellows have applied and will join the Academy (See the NewGen program). The applications were reviewed by a selection committee comprising member of the three working groups.

The Academy program will include thematic and mentoring sessions, trainings, fieldtrips, professionalization sessions, and a mini conference (Appendix 14 - Draft of the Academy program).

Workshop on Environmentalism

As reported under "Grants and Fellowships" above, the ACSS organized a five -day workshop on February 10-14, 2020, titled "Environmentalism in the Arab Region: Concepts and Methods" which targeted applicants to the RGP three cycles on Environmentalism, Impoverishment and Social Justice Movements: Interdisciplinary Perspectives". Over the five days, participants were trained on mixed research methods and familiarized with main concepts and frameworks in the field of environmentalism.

J. Research Ethics Initiative

The ACSS launched a pilot project in 2016 to promote regional collaboration on relevant research ethics guidelines, practices and structures. The Initiative aims to:

- Strengthen research ethics infrastructures in the Arab region;
- Build a network of individuals and institutions that can contribute to the development of a culture of research ethics in the region (research institutions, think tanks and NGOs…);
- Strengthen the capacity of the ACSS to mentor and train its grantees on research ethics principles and issues.

In 2016, the ACSS launched its "Research Ethics for the Social Sciences" initiative. The first two phases of this initiative (2016-2017; 2018-2019) resulted in the development of the first drafts of the ACSS guidelines on ethical conduct of social science research and a questionnaire for grantees, a training manual and the first set of real case studies on the challenges of applying research ethics principles (solicited through a call). All along, the ACSS has continued to conduct trainings and workshops on research ethics for ACSS grantees and NGOs in various countries in the Arab region (Palestine, Jordan, Algeria and Lebanon). These activities will form the basis of the next phase of this project which will culminate in the building up and launching of "The Arab Platform for Ethical Research in the Social Sciences," an online, interactive training website which will enhance and promote the work of ACSS under this initiative.

in 2020 ACSS collaborated with AUB and Birzeit University in an IDRC-funded grant on ethics that suggests a number of activities: a mapping of existing institutional practices and processes with a focus on universities (AUB), developing, hosting, and operating a learning portal (Birzeit) and supporting new research and training on research ethics (ACSS). This grant allows the ACSS to launch (1) a small grants program exclusively for research on ethical dilemmas, (2) An ad hoc committee for Research Ethics and (3) Model guidelines and procedures for the following types of institutions: universities, research NGOs, professional research associations and research organizations (to be published on the platform). During the third phase, the ACSS will continue to organize various training activities for different types of individuals and organizations (both online and face-to-face), in addition to continuously update its guidelines and questionnaire.

List of 2020 activities:

Trainings:

As part of its efforts to promote a culture of ethical conduct of social science research, an online session with ACSS Research Grants Program-cycle 7 grantees was held as a webinar on May 18, 2020.

Grants for Research, Networking and Dissemination: Cycle 1-2021:

The ACSS announced a call for applications on August 2020 within the Initiative on Ethical Dilemmas in Social Science Research (IED). This funding opportunity covers three kinds of activities/outputs: Writing a thinking/reflection paper for publication; organizing a dissemination event with community and research participants; and conducting additional fieldwork to explore new ethical approaches. This call was intended for researchers who were previous grantees and fellows of the ACSS. A selection committee was formed which included Drs. Jamil Mouawad, Rima Nakkash, Jihad Makhoul, and Samer Ghamroun. Selected grantees will work on their proposed projects from February until April 2021, with a first draft submitted in May for review by the committee and a second and final draft due in July 2021. A total of 30 applications were received, from which only two projects were selected to receive a grant and two others were conditionally accepted and asked to review their proposals based on committee feedback.

Lessons Learned:

- There is a noticeable interest in questions of ethics, especially among the younger generation of social scientists and there are few if any go-to sources of information to address ethical conundrums especially those that are complex and not straightforward. In general, Arab universities do not play this role. Notwithstanding their interrelatedness, there is confusion among younger scholars in their understanding of ethics, positionality and methods, which indicates a need for critical thinking and training in these areas.
- As is confirmed by previous ACSS experiences and the submissions to the first cycle of the ACSS call for applications within the Initiative on Ethical Dilemmas in Social Science Research (IED), researchers in general are unable to explain and write clearly their ethical conundrums and discuss specific solutions or strategies. As we announce the next cycle of the grants, we will make sure to provide more information in the call on how to articulate an ethical conundrum. This situation has also given us ideas of how to design the training workshops we provide to grantees to address this gap in understanding what a research dilemma is..

K. Regional, South-South and Global Collaborations

From inception, the ACSS has given importance to South-south, cross-regional and global collaborations as part of its identity and mission. The ACSS seeks to be an entity through which Arab researchers will engage in robust Arab region collaborations and networking but also become integrated into cross-regional and global research projects and social science convening.

In 2020, the ACSS seized opportunities to promote collaboration with sister organization in the Global South as indicated below.

ACSS/CODESRIA collaborative project

As indicated earlier in this report under "Reimagining the Sahel: A new joint research program with CODESRIA)" the ACSS and CODESRIA completed the project proposal and related documents and submitted them to Sida. We are awaiting the greenlight to launch the project by organizing a meeting with the advisory committee and drafting the call for proposals for the first joint research awards cycle, hopefully in the first quarter of 2021. As repeatedly stated, the Sahel project has the potential to be a significant cross regional initiative that could present a model for similar

collaborations between South-South organizations as well as researchers from across the African continent. It is also promising in the sense that it would challenge colonial and security discourses about the Sahel region, that overlook the cultural richness of the region and the resilience and adaptation capacities of its inhabitants.

CLACSO

The year 2020 was rich with ideas of collaborations with CLACSO. As indicated under "Working Groups" above, a virtual meeting was organized between CLACSO, the ACSS and the North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA) to discuss the formation of a cross regional working group on "Security Policies and Insecurity Production in Latin America and the Middle East", a topic of great relevance to the Arab and Latin American regions. In addition to this, discussions are also underway with CLACSO for the formation of a working group on higher education that would engage the ACSS, CLACSO and CODESRIA . The working group would focus on the right to education from a Global South perspective and would adopt a comparative research perspective. CLACSO is in discussion with the OSF to obtain funding for the project.

In addition, ACSS is collaborating with CLACSO in its Latin American Forum on Research Evaluation (FOLEC-*Foro Latinoamericano sobre Evaluación Científica).* This forum focuses on different dimensions around research assessment and aims to generate proposals from Latin America and the Caribbean, in dialogue with international trends and good practices, mainly in the SSH, where diversity of voices and contributions are so important for open science and SDG research agendas. Dr. Seteney Shami participated in the international virtual meeting "Towards a Transformation of Social Science & Humanities Research Assessment in Latin America and the Caribbean", that was held on October 28th 2020 and presented on the view from the Arab region on open science and open source publishing. The conversation on how to work together on these important issues is continuing, with joint activities that will take place in 2021.

InterAsia

As mentioned in previous reports, the ACSS had signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the InterAsia Partnership which includes (in alphabetical order) Duke University, Göttingen University, the Hong Kong Institute for Humanities and Social Sciences, the National University of Singapore, the Social Science Research Council and Yale University. The ACSS is participating actively in planning the inaugural InterAsia Academy to be held in February 2021, however no other activities or convenings took place in 2020.

Middle East Institute at Columbia University, in collaboration with the Columbia Global Centers: Special Commission on Social Science Research in the Middle East and North Africa

ACSS has joined a project to establish a Special Commission on Social Science Research in the Middle East and North Africa to develop guidelines for the conduct of responsible, ethical and constructive social inquiry. This two-year program is based at the Middle East Institute at Columbia University, in collaboration with the Columbia Global Centers, the American University of Cairo, the Rabat Social Studies Institute, and the Arab Council for the Social Sciences and is led by Dr. Lisa Anderson, dean emerita, School of International and Public Affairs, and Faculty Associate, Middle East Institute, Columbia University https://www.mei.columbia.edu/ and Dr. Saloua Zerhouni, professor of political science at Mohammed V University and president of the Rabat Social Studies Institute (RSSI), Rabat. ACSS director general, Seteney Shami serves on the Steering Committee.

This project aims to improve the quality of social science research on, and in, the Middle East and North Africa. To that end, it will establish, and support the work of, a Special Commission on Social Science Research in the Middle East and North Africa tasked with:

- identifying impediments—institutional, economic, political, sociological—to the conduct of social science research in the region today;
- proposing long-term strategies for addressing such impediments and promoting and sustaining social science research there;
- recommending mechanisms for greater co-operation among social science communities within and beyond the Arab Middle East and North Africa so as to strengthen research designed and conducted by local scholars and pursued in the interests of both scientific progress and human welfare;
- developing guidelines for the ethical conduct of research in and on communities under duress and in circumstances of disparate power relations;
- fostering shared perceptions of the value of social science research and of the circumstances that advance it, within the region and beyond, so as to nurture regional and international audiences for such research in the future.

There are two phases to the work of the Commission. In the first phase, the focus is on raising awareness of the structural context of social science research in the Middle East and North Africa, identifying elements that are common to, or different from, other environments in the Global South, particularly sub-Saharan Africa. This phase would both examine the context of research and probe the locus of responsibility for enhancing opportunities to conduct responsible social science research in and on the region. This will reflect not only assessments of the research done (and not done) by researchers within the region but also appraisals of the quality and utility of work done on the region by researchers based elsewhere, particularly the United States.

The second and more ambitious phase of the work of the Special Commission is to develop responses and remedies for the deficiencies identified. These will be addressed to a variety of audiences, from governments to university leaders, international organizations to academic societies. The specific recommendations will be varied and will reflect the diagnosis of the problems.

On October 10, 2020, the project organized a special session at the Middle East Studies Association entitled "The Political Economy and Ethics of Social Science Research in the Arab World" in which Dr. Shami participated as a speaker. The project also planned convening four regional workshops and several US-based panels in 2020 to address the questions this project treats and the outcomes it proposes. Due to the pandemic these have been digital and postponed to 2021.

IV. OUTPUTS, DISSEMINATION AND ELECTRONIC PLATFORM

Through all the following activities, the number of outputs enabled by the ACSS or produced directly by it has been steadily growing as indicated in the following sections:

A. Online Activities

New Database

The ACSS plans to improve its overall digital presence and user experience by upgrading several of its IT infrastructure components. These include a new grants management system (GMS), a new

database, or CRM, and a new website with an advanced content management system (CMS). The first two were put in place in 2020, and the ACSS is currently in its final stages of selecting a website development company.

The new database, or CRM called Salesforce, will play a principal role in this new infrastructure. It will be the central depository for all ACSS data related to applications, contacts, institutions, publications, events, surveys and several other components. It can have certain aspects of its data embedded into the new website, providing a publicly-available database for such information, for example, list of grantees and an overview of all ACSS publications and events. For more information, please see section on Database and Information Systems above.

Website

As the ACSS programs continued to grow in 2020, we updated our current website to reflect our expanding offerings. New pages (for programs, projects or activities) have been added, and selected grantees are regularly uploaded to the website.

We also continued to implement our strategic plan for the ACSS blog, known as the Digest, which is the most dynamic part of our website. Over 2020, we continued to diversify the type of content featured, and increased our coverage of our own events and activities, especially in Arabic. Calls for applications and job opportunities have become regular posts, as more and more organizations continue to contact us to circulate their calls. This has made the roundups of social science calls for the Arab region (published once a month) a regular staple on our blog and shared on social media and with our mailing list. We have also included our new publications (16 in 2020) on the website under "Publications" and the Arab Social Science Monitor sections. The expanded offerings of the Council have also led to more digital exposure: the ACSS website received on average over 5,600 visitors per month in the year 2020, an increase of at least 12 percent compared to the previous year's monthly average.

Social Media

As our content has become more diversified (including coverage of activities, calls for job vacancies in the region, interviews with partners and grantees, and curated posts), we have been able to increase and diversify our social media posts, thus increasing our online presence and profile. During the 2020, our Facebook followers grew by 28 percent (jumping from 26,000 in January 2020 to 33,300 by the end of December 2020), despite the fact that Facebook changed its algorithm to deprioritize business pages in favor of personal posts. Worth noting here is that this spike has been organic for the most part, since we have not engaged in any direct online advertisements for the ACSS, except for very few ads to promote existing calls for applications or proposals for specific programs.

With respect to Twitter, our followers continue to grow. The year 2020 saw a 22 percent increase, from roughly 2,700 in January 2020 to 3,300 by December 2020. This means that more and more people are finding value in our tweets and following our account. The growth in followers on Twitter was helped in part by the live tweeting we did for a series of webinars that took place in 2020.

We are also increasing our presence on YouTube, as we currently have 26 videos on the platform. The videos include lectures, panel discussions, webinars, interviews and short documentaries.

Newsletter

In 2020, we released two issues of our newsletter (Issue 1 in English, Issue 2 in English) in Arabic, English and French - the three working languages of the ACSS. Designed to help us keep our community of researchers updated on our activities and the ways in which they can take part in them, each issue of the newsletter highlighted the major activities of the preceding period, including grantee selections and publications by grantees and members as well as open calls and events to look forward to in the following months.

Much like our blog and social media posts, the newsletter has resulted in several mailing list subscribers contacting us for help to circulate calls.

Overall, the kind of response we have been getting through our online communications tools reflects the growing interest in our work and the value in the content that we provide. This in turn is helping strengthen the position of the ACSS as a reference and resource for the social scientists in the Arab region.

Webinars

August 17, 2020

Economic Sanctions and the United States' Endless Wars in the Middle East (English with Arabic subtitles)

Organized by the ACSS Working Group Critical Security Studies, in collaboration with the Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP)
Speakers: Dr. Hicham Safieddine (King's College-London), Dr. Negar S. Razavi (College of William and Mary) and Dr. Omar S. Dahi (Hampshire College)
Moderator: Dr. Waleed Hazbun (University of Alabama)
Online views: 12,819

Clockwise from top left: Dr. Waleed Hazbun, Dr. Hicham Safieddine, Dr. Omar S. Dahi and Dr. Negar S. Razavi

October 21, 2020

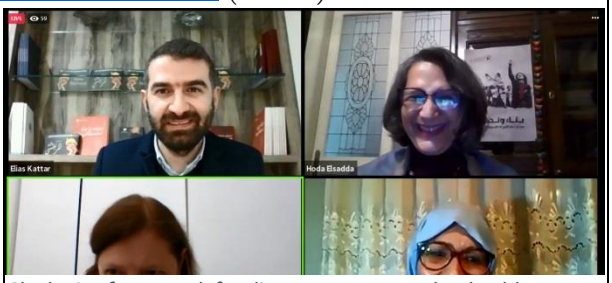
The Securitization of International Justice: Law, Security, and Politics (English)

Organized by the ACSS Working Group Critical Security Studies, in collaboration with the Middle East Research and Information Project (MERIP)

Speakers: Dr. Samer Abboud (Villanova University), Dr. Oumar Ba (Morehouse College) and Dr. Stacey Philbrick Yadav (Hobart and William Smith Colleges)
Moderator: Dr. Waleed Hazbun (University of Alabama)
Online views: 6,994

Clockwise from top left: Dr. Waleed Hazbun, Dr. Stacey Philbrick Yadav, Dr. Samer Abboud and Dr. Oumar Ba

December 17, 2020
ACSS Annual Lecture Series: Fatema Mernissi Second Lecture (Arabic)
Speakers: Dr. Omaima Abou-Bakr (Cairo University),
Introduced by Dr. Seteney Shami (ACSS) and Dr. Hoda Elsadda (University of Manchester)
Moderator: Mr. Elias Kattar (ACSS)
Online views: 15,755



Clockwise from top left: Elias Kattar, Dr. Hoda Elsadda, Dr. Omaima Abou-Bakr and Dr. Seteney Shami

December 29, 2020
The Academic Universes of Social Scientists in the Arab Region: Career Trajectories and Networks in Universities (Arabic)
Interview with Dr. Ahmad Dallal, author of the Third Arab Social Science Monitor report
Speaker: Dr. Ahmad Dallal (Georgetown University Qatar)
Interviewer/moderator: Dr. Bassam Haddad (George Mason University)
Online views: approx. 48,000

Dr. Ahmad Dallal (left) and Dr. Bassam Haddad (right)

ACSS staff and BoT members were particularly active in several non-ACSS webinars in 2020. They participated in numerous virtual panels and conferences organized by partners and colleagues spanning different continents. To name but a few: Director-General Dr. Seteney Shami spoke on various topics related to social sciences in the Arab region in conferences organized by the Latin-American Council for the Social Sciences and the US-based Middle East Studies Association. Also, Associate Director Dr. Moushira Elgeziri and BoT member Dr. Ragui Assaad were panelists in a virtual summit on the impact of capacity building initiatives, organized by Foundation Maison des sciences de l'homme. Furthermore, BoT Chair Dr. Mohamed Bamyeh participated in a panel on Islam

by the Syrian Society for Social Sciences and BoT member Dr. Mona Harb took part in a panel on Beirut's reconstruction, organized by Cornell University.

B. Print Activities and E-Publications

Working Papers

Our call for Working Paper submissions remained open throughout 2020. Further to a decision by the Board of Trustees Publications Committee and the Secretariat to make the submission of a working paper a grant requirement for grantees in the Early Career Fellows Program and the ACSS-FMSH Short-Term Postdoctoral Mobility Fellowships, grantees started submitting their works as they completed their grants. In 2020, we published 9 Working Papers: 7 papers in Arabic (Paper 1, Paper 2, Paper 3, Paper 4, Paper 5, Paper 6, Paper 7); 1 paper in English, and 1 paper in French.

Political Empowerment of Youth in the Republic of Yemen: A Study in Legislation and Policies (Arabic)
Faisal Hassan Muhammad Mahbob
December 2020

The Metaphor and Its Role in Building Social Theory (Arabic)
Khaled Kazem Aboudouh
August 2020

Natural and Cultural Heritage and Its role in Developing the Tourism Economy: The Case of the Oases of Draa and Tafilalet (Morocco) (Arabic)
Abdeltif Elkhalifi
July 2020

Sawaed Al Harak: A Study on the Development of the Demographic Index of the Uprising in Morocco (Arabic)
Ben Ahmed Houga
June 2020

The Concept of Social Justice in Egypt: A Reading of Some Political Elites' Speeches (Arabic)
Amany M. EL Hedeny
May 2020

Poverty and the Poor in North Africa in the Imperial Roman, Vandal, and Byzantine Periods: A Socioeconomic Study (Arabic)
Ilies Bakkouch
April 2020

The Problems of Waste Management and Decentralization in Arab Countries: A Literature Review (French)
Maha Bouhlel-Abid

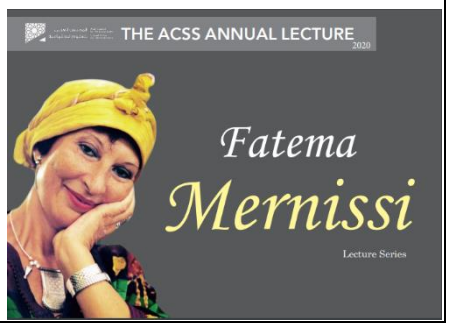
March 2020

Unpacking the Discourse of Water Scarcity in the Case of Lebanon (English)
Hussam Hussein
February 2020

"Al-Jamhour" in the Islamic Heritage: Problems of the Term and the Concept (Arabic)
Chafika Ouail
January 2020

Occasional Publication

Booklet on the Second Annual Lecture in the Fatema Mernissi Lecture Series (Arabic, English and French)
December 2020



Background Papers for the Upcoming Third Arab Social Science Monitor Report
(All papers are in English and were published in December 2020)

Memoirs of Arab Intellectuals: An Archive of Intellectual Practices
Fadi Bardawil

Transnational Academic Mobility: Experience of Arab Social Scientists
Lea Bou Khater

National Research Strategies and University Strategic Plans in the Arab Region
Diane Nauffal and Kamal Abouchedid

Promotion Policies and Recruitment in Selective Key Universities in the Arab Region
Kamal Abouchedid and Diane Nauffal

Editorial Boards in the Arab Region
Cynthia Kreichati

Social Sciences in NGOs and Research Centers in the Arab region
Cynthia Kreichati

Lessons Learned and Looking Forward
The ACSS communications unit will continue to increase outreach through digital presence and by having more newsletters to keep audiences updated on recent developments. We plan to introduce

Instagram as a fourth social media platform for the ACSS this coming year to help us disseminate our content to a wider audience. As for the publications, we aim to have more books and reports this year as well as E-publications. The purpose is to distribute and disseminate them more widely in our region through our networks, platforms and events. Finally, in 2021 we aim to consolidate the visual identity of the various ACSS publications, in addition to several other outputs.

V. FINAL REMARKS AND LOOKING FORWARD

We started out 2021 with great hope that the new year would herald the end or at least a slowdown in the spread of Covid-19 and a resumption of 'normal' life. Unfortunately, the new year was accompanied by a second, fierce wave of Covid-19 – causing large casualties and imposing on the world a new round of strict lockdowns and quarantines. The ray of hope we are now clinging to, is the recent development of new vaccines to protect against the virus. While in general, there is good news in this, until vaccines are made available on a wide scale and people have access to them, for the ACSS, this represents another episode of uncertainty about future events and activities. In their January meeting, the BoT decided to postpone the 5th Conference from May to September, hoping that by the fall, the conference can take place physically in Beirut or any other Arab capital. The expectation is that more people will have taken the vaccine and travel restrictions will have been eased. Although the ACSS staff have spent a good part of 2020 working from home, respecting the various lockdown rules imposed by the Lebanese government, this has by no means meant a slowdown in the pace of work. We made sure to organize our meetings and events on line or on a very limited physical scale in our office, while respecting social distancing. Not unlike other institutions and businesses around the world, we have found in video conferencing services such as Zoom a (close to) ideal solution to this world-wide predicament. Zoom and other similar programs have also opened our eyes to a gamut of opportunities to connect with others and participate in webinars and events, that one would not have attended otherwise. We are also seizing this technological opening to organize our own working group and 10th anniversary webinars that have been extremely well attended and received. The question for ACSS will be how to continue to benefit from the potentials these tools are making possible for networking, beyond Covid-19. In this context, in the coming year, we aim to bring all the IT and digital components of the ACSS in full harmony with one another, with a new website as one of its main pillars. The entire process has taken more time than expected, but we currently aim to finalize it all by summer 2021. The entire infrastructure will improve our audience's digital interaction with the ACSS and facilitate the staff's work as well.

We ended 2020 with wide scale internal brainstorming among staff and the BoT on how to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the establishment and active presence in the Arab region, serving the social science community. A list of ten webinars each happening on the 10th day of the month from February to November, has been thoughtfully drawn up, including both general topics of concern to our region, and others with more programmatic focus. As we collectively deliberated the 10th anniversary, we have been keen to capture timely issues of pertinence to our region and present as well the rich and variegated topics and programs the ACSS has been engaged with. We also kept in mind the need to attract different audiences and give voice to the young generation of social scientists. As we draft this report, we have successfully organized the first of these webinars entitled "Knowledge in Times of Mass Mobilization".

We folded the year with promising ideas and projects for collaboration with sister organizations in the Global South, including CLACSO and CODESRIA. We are now in the process of discussing a new project to set up a working group on "Exiting Violence" in the Arab region, with seed funding from

FMSH, which we hope would eventually open the way for larger funding from other donors. With this funding, the FMSH are no longer only our partners in the fellowship program for post-doc mobility, but are also now the ACSS first European donor.

Throughout 2020, with all its challenges, the BoT has been a great source of input and support to senior management in navigating the difficult times and reaching critical decisions to address the banking problems in Lebanon, among other things. The ACSS is keen on seeking financial and banking solutions that would be acceptable to our large community of researchers and scholars in the Arab region. At the same time, it is committed to performing its services and programs to the very same community without interruption. We realize that the line between the two is fine and places huge responsibilities on the shoulders of the ACSS. On March 9 and 10, 2021 voting will take place to choose six BoT members to replace those whose terms have come to an end. We hope the BoT in its new composition will continue to support the ACSS management in achieving its mission and meeting current challenges.

The information we gained from the institutional strengthening webinars organized within the Ford Build grant by Spring – consultants to the Ford Foundation, has been invaluable. The interactive webinars including discussion of financial sustainability, programmatic expansion, approaching donors, work strategies and communications and outreach have opened our eyes to new ideas and possibilities for the institutional strengthening and sustainability of the ACSS. In the next weeks SPRING will organize one on one meetings with the BUILD grantees – including the ACSS – to hone in on specific issues and challenges facing institutions like ours.

Towards the end of 2020, the BoT approved the choice of a two-member team of external evaluators to undertake the evaluation of the ACSS from 2015 to 2020. The evaluators have recently started their work and expect to complete the evaluation by May 2021. Not only is the assessment of strengths and challenges important for fine tuning the way forward, but the findings will be vital in informing the interim strategy that the ACSS will draw for work in the next two years in preparation for a longer five or seven-year strategy to guide our work in the future.

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