المرصد العربي للعلوم الاجتماعية
Arab Social Science Monitor
Observatoire Arabe des Sciences Sociales

Humanities in the Arab World in Times of Conflict and Change

2024

Fourth Arab Social Science Report

Hoda Elsadda

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HUMANITIES IN THE ARAB WORLD IN TIMES OF CONFLICT AND CHANGE

Hoda Elsadda

Fourth Arab Social Science Report
2024

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The ASSM Team

PREFACE

The Arab Council for the Social Sciences (ACSS) is pleased to present the fourth Arab Social Science Report (ASSR). This Report is distinct, being the first on the humanities after three Reports that examined the social science scene in the Arab region.

The ASSR is the signature publication issued by the Arab Social Science Monitor (ASSM) program at the ACSS. The ASSM works to understand the context of knowledge production and circulation in the social sciences and humanities by documenting and analyzing the landscape of social sciences and humanities research in the Arab region.

When the ACSS decided to survey the landscape of knowledge production in the humanities in the Arab region, as part of its efforts to support and highlight the humanities in the region, we were fortunate that a prominent scholar, Dr. Hoda Elsadda, accepted to be the lead author of this important Report. The study covers the twenty-first century, with a focus on the decade from 2011 to 2021. During this period, the Arab region witnessed a number of uprisings and political movements and changes that generated an abundance of contributions to knowledge in the humanities. These transformations, coupled with ongoing and new crises, have shaped the contours of a new era that does not only require new knowledge but also necessitates new ways of disseminating this knowledge and ensuring that it reaches its audiences. Moreover, the waves of turmoil and war that the region has witnessed and is still witnessing, as well as economic and administrative collapses, make it even more important to rethink the trends, needs, and priorities of knowledge production.

This ASSR joins a series of initiatives undertaken by the ACSS in the field of the humanities. Through various activities, programs, and projects of its own or with other partners in the region and globally, the ACSS strives to support the production of knowledge in the humanities as it does in the social sciences.

Among the most important initiatives in the humanities is the production of the section on the Arab Region in the World Humanities Report (WHR) (https://worldhumanitiesreport.org/region/arab-region/). The WHR is one of the outcomes of the international conference in Liège, Belgium, in which the ACSS participated through several sessions. Under this initiative, the ACSS continues its work through a second phase that involves conducting in-depth interviews with organizations, platforms, and groups working in the field of humanities, to better understand the landscape of critical work in these fields in the Arab region. This phase will result in a database and a webpage documenting the important work currently being done in critical humanities in the region.

The humanities have also entered the ACSS grant and fellowship programs through several partnerships, most notably with the Arab Fund for Arts and Culture (AFAC)

through a joint grant program for research on the arts; and with the Constantine Zurayk Cultural Foundation through a new program on “Nation, Identity, and History.” The latter partnership, which resulted in the ACSS receiving its first funding from an Arab entity, aims to encourage emerging researchers in the humanities and social sciences to explore and build upon the studies and archive of Dr. Constantine Zurayk. The archive is housed and available at the American University of Beirut.

In addition, the ACSS is enhancing the institutional presence and future of the humanities through the new generation fellowship (NewGen) in partnership with 16 participating universities in the region. The program aims to help form a new cohort of researcher committed to critical scholarship, research, education, mentorship, and public engagement in various fields of the social sciences and humanities.

The ACSS is also active in researching/documenting the current and future status of archives. This effort is supported through projects and working groups in the field of archival studies, most notably a working group on “Gendering the Archive.” Additionally, there is a project on “Gender Oral History Archive” in collaboration with the American University of Beirut.

The results of these projects and activities have been highlighted and disseminated through workshops, panel discussions, and seminars/virtual webinars, in addition to sessions at the ACSS biennial conferences, which have hosted a number of social sciences and humanities scholars as keynote speakers.

Through the ASSM, which publishes this Report, the ACSS maps the infrastructure of social sciences and humanities knowledge production in the Arab. For this purpose, it has developed and continuously updates seven databases on institutions and resources which are available through free and open access (https://dataverse.theacss.org/dataverse/assm).

Through this Report, the ACSS is opening up new and ambitious research agendas that will enrich the work of the ASSM. We hope that these agendas will also serve as a source of inspiration for other researchers, as well as for universities and research institutions, to conduct similar studies and surveys in the field of the humanities.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the ACSS team who worked on producing this report, specifically colleagues Nada Chaya, Rami Ofeich, Elias Kattar, and Liliane Bou Mansour. Gratitude is also extended to the ACSS Board of Trustees and the ASSM Advisory Committee for their valuable contributions and important guidance.

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ACSS, Beirut

INTRODUCTION

This report seeks to address knowledge production in the humanities in the Arab world in the twenty-first century, focusing on the decade from 2011 to 2021. It is based on the premise that revolutionary movements that swept, and continue to sweep, the Arab region have caused an existential and epistemological upheaval in Arab societies, and opened new spaces for expression and action, spaces that benefited from the technological revolution and social media networks; and that despite, or perhaps due to, successive defeats, disasters, and political and economic crises, there is a remarkable momentum in knowledge initiatives and contributions in the Arab world.

The report adopts a critical approach to knowledge production in the humanities, aiming to achieve the following objectives: 1) monitoring and analyzing key research trends, topics, and intellectual contributions to the humanities in the 21st century; 2) highlighting outstanding knowledge production in the Arab world, especially in the last decade, that is, subsequent to revolutionary movements that swept the region in 2011; 3) identifying obstacles and challenges for scholars in the field; and 4) coming up with some preliminary questions.

For practical considerations, the disciplines covered in the report are limited to literature, philosophy, history, translation studies, and women and gender studies. A separate section is dedicated to independent artistic initiatives, and another to digital humanities. It is important to note, however, that the report is only a first step in mapping the scene of knowledge production in humanities in the Arab world in the 21st century.

The report is divided into four chapters, the first of which discusses challenges and opportunities in the production of knowledge in the humanities about the Arab world. The second chapter examines new trends in the humanities in selected disciplines: literature, philosophy, history, translation studies, and gender studies. The third chapter highlights independent artistic initiatives, featuring some of their manifestations in the Arab world. The fourth chapter highlights the role of digital humanities from a futuristic perspective. The report concludes with some preliminary indicators and questions, revisiting topics about the humanities posed throughout.

It is worth noting that this report is the fourth in a series of reports issued by the Arab Social Sciences Monitor of the Arab Council for Social Sciences, and

the first to focus on the humanities. The three previous reports[1] dealt specifically with the state of the social sciences in the Arab world, with some references to the humanities and related disciplines. This report therefore benefits from the rich insights of the previous reports, and builds on information and statistics provided by the databases of the Arab Social Science Monitor,[2] the background papers written specifically to enrich the report (see Appendix), and a variety of other sources.[3]

1. What Are the Humanities?

"It is fortunate that George Makdisi's important book *Nash'at al-insāniyyat 'ind al-muslimīn wa fī al-gharb al-masīḥī* [The Rise of Humanism in Classical Islam and the Christian West] should reveal that, unlike what Jacob Burckhardt and many others believe, the modern system of knowledge we call the humanities did not originate in Renaissance Italy in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, but in Arabic schools, mosques, and rulers' palaces in Iraq, Sicily, Egypt, and Andalusia from the eighth century AD onwards. It was in these places that the traditions and methods of legal and jurisprudential knowledge were formed, along with non-religious studies--or what is commonly called 'literary studies'--from which European humanists drew many of their ideas, not only about knowledge but also about the environment surrounding the learning process, where debate, disagreement, and argumentation were characteristics of the time. ... Recognizing how much Arab and Islamic culture contributed to the formation of a comprehensive educational system, that we today call the Western liberal modern system, is truly a return to our soul" (2005 سـعيد).

Definitions of the humanities and associated disciplines vary across cultures and countries. *The Encyclopedia Britannica* defines the humanities as "those branches of knowledge that concern themselves with human beings and their culture or with analytic and critical methods of inquiry derived from an appreciation of human values and of the unique ability of the human spirit to express itself."[4] But one soon comes up against the problematics of definitions and associated concepts; we find it difficult to say that social sciences, or even some applied sciences, are not concerned with human beings and forms of expressing the human psyche, hence

1 First report by Dr. Mohammed Bamyeh: *Social Sciences in the Arab World: Forms of Presence*; second report by Dr. Abdellah Hammoudi: *Social Sciences in the Arab World: An Approach to Arabic Language Outputs* (2000-2016); third report by Dr. Ahmad Dallal: *The Academic Universes and Career Trajectories of Social Scientists in the Arab World.*

2 https://dataverse.theacss.org/dataverse/assm

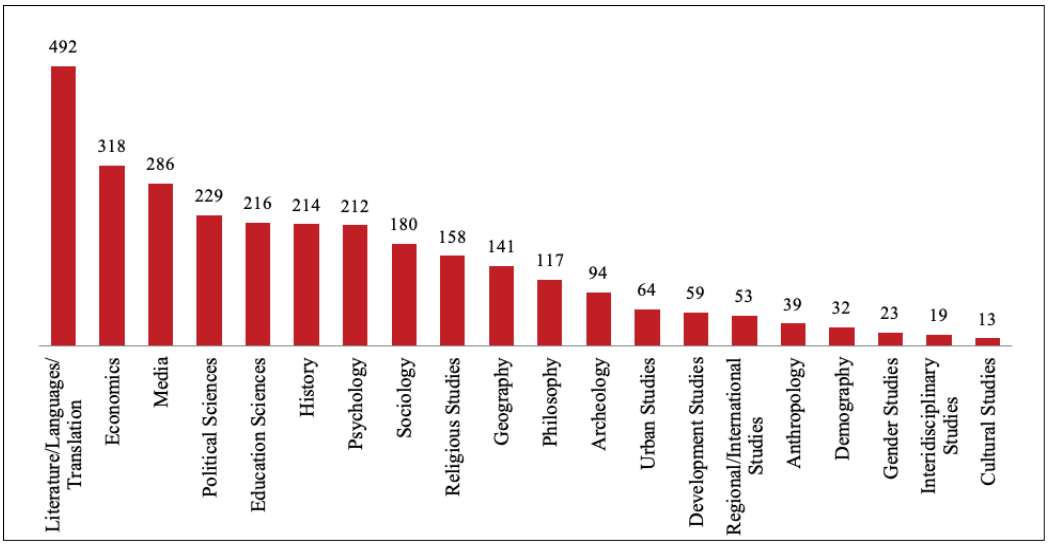
3 I would like to thank the authors of the background papers for this report (see Appendix). I also thank Dr. Fadi Bardawil, Dr. Rahma Bourqia, and Dr. Mounir Saidani for reading the report and providing valuable feedback.

4 *Britannica*, s.v. "Humanities.". Accessed May 28, 2024. https://www.britannica.com/topic/humanities.

there is no clear agreement on the definition of the fields of knowledge that fall under the term "humanities." Additionally, the boundaries between the humanities and social sciences are found to be more rigidly demarcated in Europe and the United States than in, say, Russia or Latin America (Hall, Jarrick and Scott 2015, 3). The same applies to the Arab world, especially considering the region's colonial histories. For practical purposes, the humanities have traditionally been defined by academic disciplines taught in universities: philosophy, literature, drama, linguistics, history, music, fine arts, media, cultural studies, religious studies, and archaeology, in addition to new fields that emerged in the 21st century, such as digital humanities, environmental humanities, and medical humanities.

In the Arab world, *insāniyya*t (derived from *insān*, meaning human) is the literal translation of "humanities," yet a quick look at the emergence of specializations falling under the humanities at Cairo University, for example, shows that the faculty concerned with the humanities is the Faculty of Arts, which includes among its different departments, languages, philosophy, history, geography, sociology, and psychology.[5] Tarek El-Ariss argues that the translation of humanities into Arabic includes *Adāb* and *Funun*, drawing attention to the difficulty of translating the term *Adāb* into English due to its multiple significations: "literature, *belles lettres*, ethical and aesthetic refinement" (El-Ariss 2023).

Figure 1: Number of universities offering social sciences/humanities degrees in the Arab region (out of 1,377 universities)



Source: ASSM 2021a.

5 Faculty of Arts at Baghdad University, Faculty of Arts and Humanities at the Lebanese University.

While more than half of Arab universities offer programs in the humanities and social sciences, according to the databases of the Arab Council for Social Sciences,[6] a smaller number offer degrees in philosophy and history compared to economics and political science, while the presence of relatively new fields, such as cultural studies and gender studies, is limited (Figure 1).

This report adopts a more comprehensive view of the humanities in the Arab world that goes beyond the boundaries of disciplines within higher education institutions based on the following assumptions and considerations:

First, knowledge production in the humanities is not limited to research and specialized studies delineated in accordance with conventional academic standards, but also essentially includes multiple other forms of expression: newspaper articles, literature, cinema, and the arts.

Second, sites of knowledge production in the humanities in the Arab world go beyond universities to include non-governmental civil society organizations, independent media initiatives and platforms, and digital journals, to name but a few. Taking into account the importance of universities and higher education institutions in the production of knowledge, some reports indicate that most research in the humanities and social sciences is produced outside university campuses, i.e., in independent research centers or civil society organizations (2015 باميـــة; Hanafi and Arvanitis 2016),[7] despite the presence of around two-thirds of research centers on university premises (ASSM 2021b; ASSM 2021c), which raises questions about the actual reality of these university centers and their research activity.

Third, humanities in the Arab world include both intellectual production in Arabic, as well as that of researchers (or those working in the cultural field who reside in Arab countries--or outside the Arab region but have family ties and feel a sense of belonging the Arab world--yet publish their research and contributions in foreign languages, due to one or more of the following considerations: (a) some universities in the Arab world require publication in foreign languages to meet promotion requisites; (b) researchers in the Arab world prefer to publish in foreign

6 https://dataverse.theacss.org/dataverse/assm

7 In *Social Sciences in the Arab World: Forms of Presence*, Mohammed Bamyeh focuses on the social sciences as academic disciplines, including history. He also touches upon interdisciplinary specializations, such as gender and cultural studies. Since history is also a discipline in the humanities, and since most interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary studies are considered fields falling between the social sciences and the humanities, I argue that what applies to the social sciences on knowledge production outside university walls, in both Bamyeh's report (2015 بامية) and Sari Hanafi and Regas Arvanitis' *Knowledge Production in the Arab World: The Impossible Promis*e (2016), is true for the humanities as a whole.

languages for better communication with research circles in the West, aiming to achieve academic status and gain more recognition[8] (Haikal and Omar 2021, 84);[9] and (c) there is currently a significant number of Arab researchers outside the Arab world who have been forced to travel and work abroad, due to unstable political conditions in most Arab countries, or the increasing restrictions on research and freedom of expression in Arab universities. Fadi Bardawil draws attention to the large wave of migration that followed the defeat of the revolutionary movement that erupted in the Arab region in 2011, a wave that included young men and women who participated in, influenced, and were influenced by, the revolutions. They are now writing in foreign languages, enriching societies that embraced them with their experiences (Bardawil 2023).

Examples of Arab scholars writing in English or French are too numerous to list here. The main idea concerns the impossibility of defining production of knowledge in the humanities in the Arab world on the sole basis of the language of publication. There are additionally abundant examples of Arab researchers writing in foreign languages who are keen to open communication channels with research circles within the Arab world, either through translation, participation in conferences and lectures, or by contributing articles written in Arabic and published in Arabic journals and periodicals. In many cases, the language of publication is chosen according to the nature of the venue, contextual requirements, or target audience.

Fourth, the report focuses on the humanities, taking into consideration the many points of intersection between them and the social sciences in general, particularly in connection with interdisciplinary studies. For example, history is regarded by historians as a humanities discipline, while many other scholars consider it part of the social sciences. With regard to philosophy, how do we answer the question: Who produces knowledge in philosophy? Is the answer limited to academic philosophy professors? Is the research output of philosophy professors to be considered philosophical contributions, or research in the history of philosophy, culture, and thought? Are there examples of researchers in anthropology, literary criticism, or other disciplines who approach philosophical questions?

Fifth, while Arab societies are characterized by cultural and linguistic diversity, the Arabic language takes center stage, especially in official fora, whether cultural or

8 For example, in their article on Egyptology in Egyptian universities, Fayza Haikal and Amr Omar point to the scarcity of publications in Arabic in the field of archaeology, due to the preference of distinguished Egyptian university researchers to publish in English to facilitate scientific communication with their foreign counterparts.

9 In the same vein, a 2019 survey conducted by the Arab Council for Social Sciences revealed that social scientists in the Arab region who were proficient in English had more opportunities to publish in international peer-reviewed journals than their Arabic-speaking colleagues (دلال 2023).

political. In modern history, with the emergence of post-independence states in the second half of the twentieth century, revitalizing Arabic and Arabization initiatives were integral parts of liberation projects and the restoration of national identity, and Algeria is but one example. This, however, resulted in the marginalization of many important languages in the region, such as Amazigh, Kurdish, and Nubian. This report focuses on knowledge production in the humanities in Arabic language, and does not address knowledge produced in other languages in the Arab region.

Sixth, the report monitors significant developments in the production of knowledge in specific humanities disciplines in the twenty-first century, focusing on the second decade, characterized by Arab revolutions, while also taking into consideration the emergence of some key transformations in the last decade of the twentieth century. The periodization adopted here is mostly related to local, regional, and global political transformations, and thus presumes a close connection between political affairs and fields of knowledge. It is crucial to note, however, that it is impossible to standardize key moments in this periodization across all Arab countries, due to variations in historical contexts. In addition, it cannot be said that politics is the sole factor shaping the evolution of knowledge fields; other aspects, such as the impact of cultural actors, paradigm shifts within knowledge fields, or the transformation of host institutions, also play a role, not to mention the difficulty of dissemination and circulation of knowledge among Arab countries.

2. Humanities in the Arab World in the 21st Century

"Over the past two decades, and more prominently since 2011, the Arab World has been the location of a global phenomenon related to the humanities. It consists in a remarkable, perhaps even unique, paradox. ... The Arab region has become the graveyard of the humanities ... [with the rise of violent] discourse and practices prohibiting the arts, destroying antiquities, and targeting artists. ... At the same time, the Arab world has become perhaps the epicenter for the birth as well as the re-launching of concepts about human dignity, freedom, and justice, which are the very foundation of the humanities" (Omri 2023).

The report engages with this profound paradox in an effort to both understand it and analyze its various ramifications. Since the beginning of the 21st century, the Arab world has been the site of events and transformations that shook the region's political systems, swept the lives of entire communities, and displaced thousands in search of safety and decent living. These changes posed new questions for Arab societies, addressed by intellectuals and cultural actors, but also by a wider body of activists, lay people, and social media users taking advantage of the technological revolution that facilitated the circulation of information and opinions. We are now witnessing a scene as rich as it is complex. As mentioned earlier, it

is not feasible to restrict discussion of the humanities in the Arab world to higher education institutions or research centers, ignoring the abundant knowledge production circulating on social media. Challenges posed in this report include the following. What new questions have imposed themselves on Arab societies? Who is to engage with such questions? To what extent do institutions (higher education or independent research) contribute to supporting research and exploring the issues at hand? Which among these institutions are the most effective? Can one accurately talk about supportive institutions, especially considering the political and social constraints limiting the ability of most of these to guarantee continuity and freedom of expression? What is the role of individuals as dynamic players in knowledge production, posing new issues and concepts? Can art generate new thoughts on life and existence? What is the relationship between art and philosophy? Who is the philosopher? How does one categorize new production in prison literature?

I. KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION IN THE HUMANITIES ABOUT THE ARAB WORLD: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

1. Neoliberalism

Discussion of the humanities generally, and in the Arab world specifically, usually diverts into attempts to defend their value and justify the importance of supporting and providing necessary resources for them. Since the 1980s, and with the rise of neoliberalism in the 1990s, the "university" has been the target of attacks aiming to change its meaning and the role it plays in society. The university as an idea is conceptualized as a democratic public space that fosters critical thinking, instills the values of citizenship, and encourages innovative research in all fields, especially research that engages with, and challenges, dominant views and hegemonic ideologies. Yet with the popularization of neo-liberal thought, the concept of the university has shifted away from this essential role. David Harvey defines neoliberalism as "a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade" (Harvey 2005, 2). Gradually, and as a result of the adoption of neo-liberal policies in various parts of the world, higher education institutions have come to adopt market logic, universities being run as if they were profit-generating corporations. We now speak of knowledge as a commodity, rather than as an inherent component of the public good; students become consumers of knowledge, or customers that universities are keen to please; and the goal of higher education becomes the acquisition of skills suitable for the market. In this way, the language of economic gain and loss prevails in evaluating subjects taught and in determining the priorities of higher education, culminating in a stage where money and profit take precedence over all other considerations, or as Chomsky puts it: "profit over people" (Chomsky 1999). Critics of neoliberalism attribute decline in the status of the humanities and social sciences to the dominance of neoliberal values and ideas, and to deliberate policies that seek to minimize the role of academics in engaging with societal issues, undermining students' political awareness, and thus eliminating spaces capable of producing critical alternatives to hegemonic ideologies. A prominent example of the impact of neoliberal policies on teaching humanities in universities is the decision to close the philosophy department at Middlesex University, UK despite its success in attracting students and producing outstanding research.[10] Henry Giroux argues that transnational corporations are

[10] I include this information by way of example, yet there are many others in the United States and Europe of a systematic process of shrinking social science and humanities programs in universities. For more details on the Middlesex University example, see Wolff 2010.

not interested in supporting critical thinking, yet "[t]o speak truth to power is not a temporary and unfortunate lapse into politics on the part of academics: it is central to opposing all those modes of ignorance, market-based or otherwise instrumental rationalities, and fundamentalist ideologies that make judgments difficult and democracy dysfunctional" (Giroux 2009).

However, despite the systematic attack on knowledge production sites in the humanities in both the media and political lobbies, and taking into consideration political decisions that have reduced resources available for research in the humanities within public institutions in many parts of the world, the battle over the fate of institutions producing knowledge is ongoing and still unresolved.[11] This is in addition to the fact that the scene in the twenty-first century indicates the vitality of the humanities and their ability to keep abreast of societal developments (Braidotti 2016, 30). At the global level, Rosie Braidotti argues that since the last decade of the twentieth century, theoretical innovations in the humanities revolved around interdisciplinary research clusters under the label of "studies," such as gender studies, cultural studies, media studies, etc. Such clusters have succeeded in producing "alternative visions of the self, the human, knowledge, and society" (Braidotti 2016, 16). In other words, despite persistent attempts to undermine specific fields of knowledge, alternatives and new forms of knowledge have emerged that break the rigid boundaries between specializations and establish interdisciplinary approaches in the humanities.

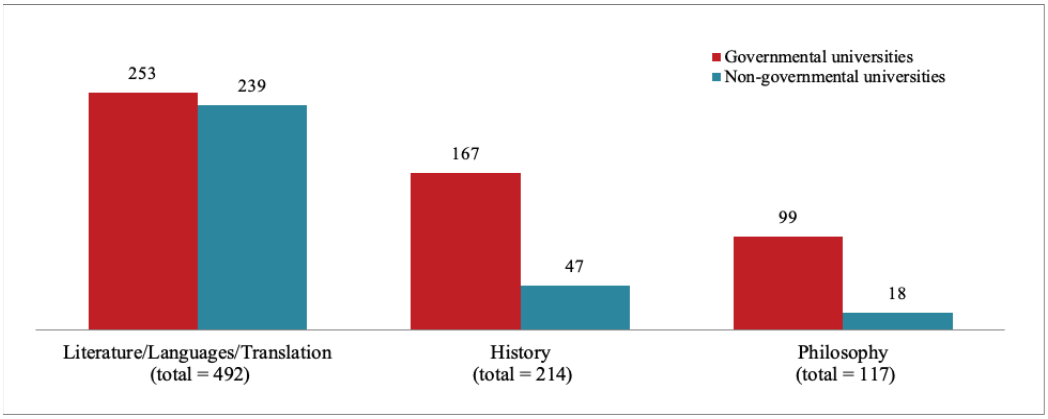
The winds of neoliberalism started blowing over higher education institutions in the Arab world in the 1990s, leading to radical changes in educational policies, with legislations that paved the way for the establishment of private and foreign universities in several Arab countries. In Egypt, the state gradually abandoned subsidies for higher education, establishing special tuition-fee programs within governmental universities, to name just one example. These developments are consistent with a political inclination to reduce state support for education in Egypt in general, and university education in particular, adopting a market-based, profit-oriented logic in dealing with the university education portfolio.

With the increase in the number of profit-seeking universities in Arab countries since the 1990s, there has been a declining interest in the humanities. Hence the majority of history and philosophy departments are now located in governmental universities (Figure 2).

---

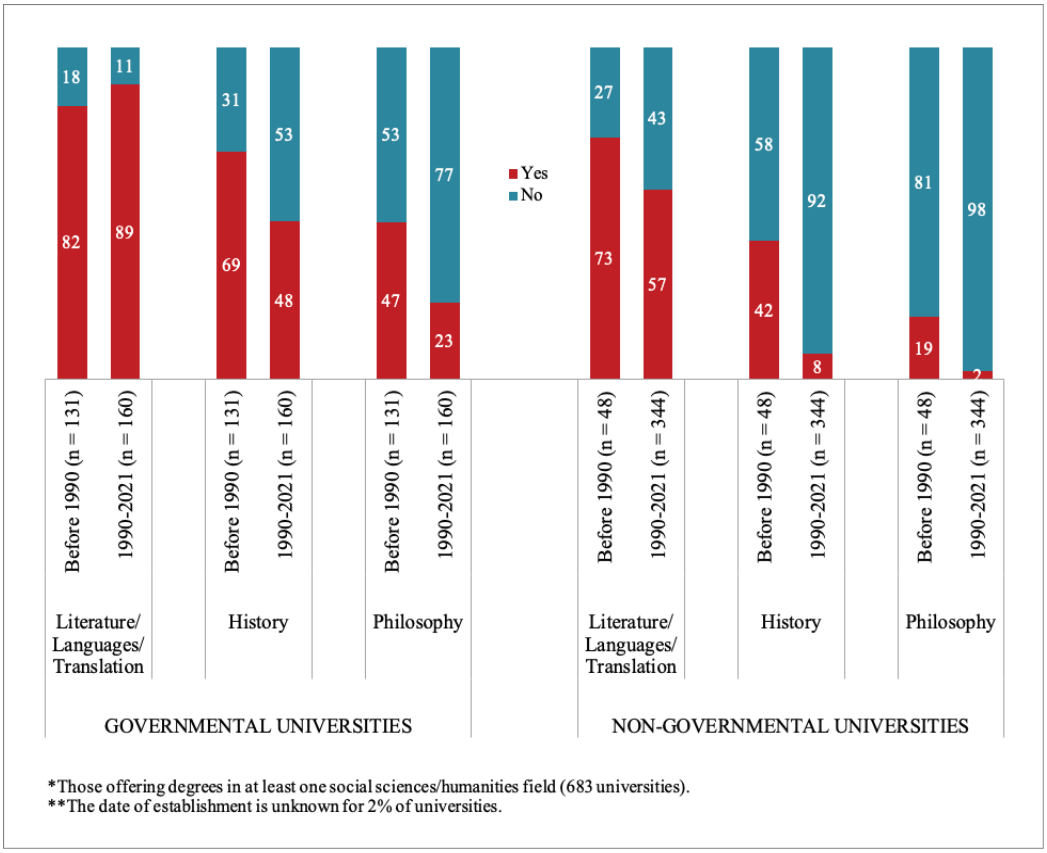
11 In June 2011, a group of professors at British universities resigned from the Arts and Humanities Research Council to protest what they called the neoliberal takeover of academia. The same year also witnessed the publication of *The Assault on Universities: A Manifesto for Resistance* (edited by Michael Bailey and Des Friedman), a collection of essays offering a scathing critique of the privatization of education in Britain and the neo-liberal policies of David Cameron's coalition government. In general, there is a noticeable growth of resistance movements within academia against the flood of neoliberalism (2012 الصدة).

Figure 2: Number of governmental and non-governmental universities offering degrees in select humanities fields in the Arab region



Source: ASSM 2021a.

Figure 3: Availability of select humanities fields in universities offering degrees in social sciences/humanities* in the Arab region by establishment date of the university (%)**



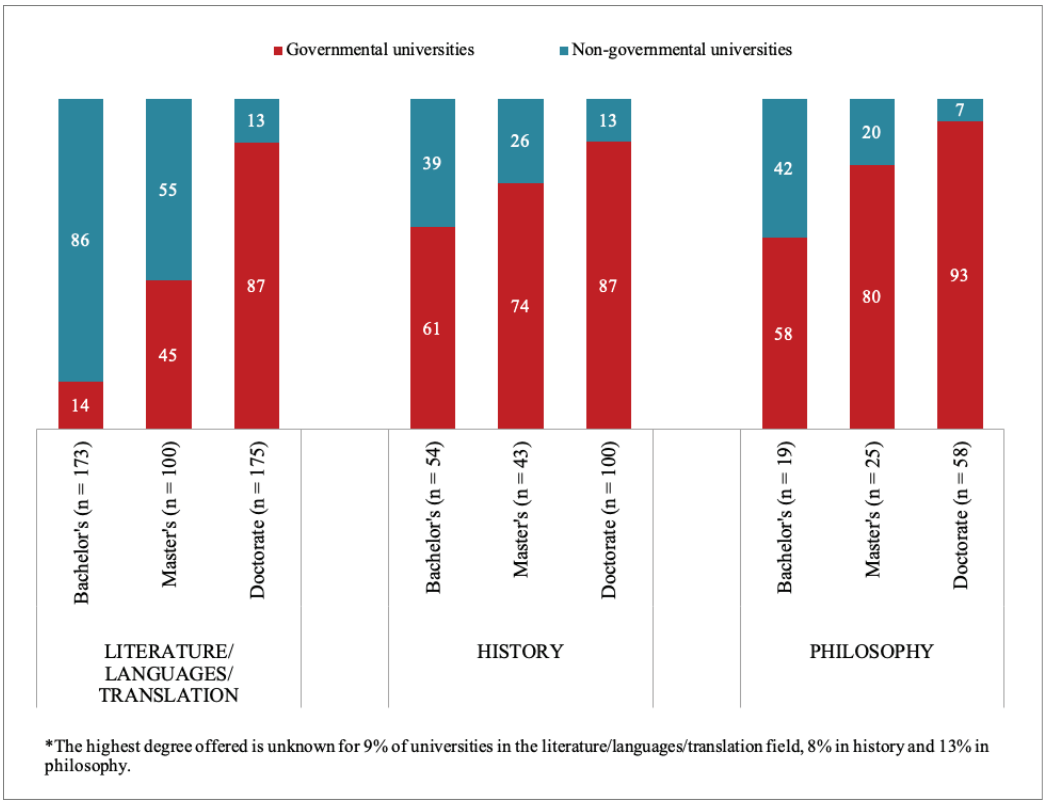
*Those offering degrees in at least one social sciences/humanities field (683 universities).
**The date of establishment is unknown for 2% of universities.

Source: ASSM 2021a.

The picture becomes clearer when we compare universities established before the onset of neoliberalism with those established in the 1990s onwards (Figure 3). In general, the proportion of universities offering programs in philosophy and history has declined with the large increase in the number of universities established after 1990, and the decline is significantly greater in non-governmental than governmental universities. As to literature, languages, and translation, the gap is overall narrower between universities established pre- and post-1990, bearing in mind that the graph does not distinguish between literature, language, and translation in available programs; so there is insufficient information available on whether there has been a decline in interest in literature majors or they were substituted with languages and translation.

If we consider graduate programs an indicator of interest in academic research in universities, we find that the vast majority of doctoral programs in philosophy, history, literature, languages, and translation are located in governmental universities (Figure 4).

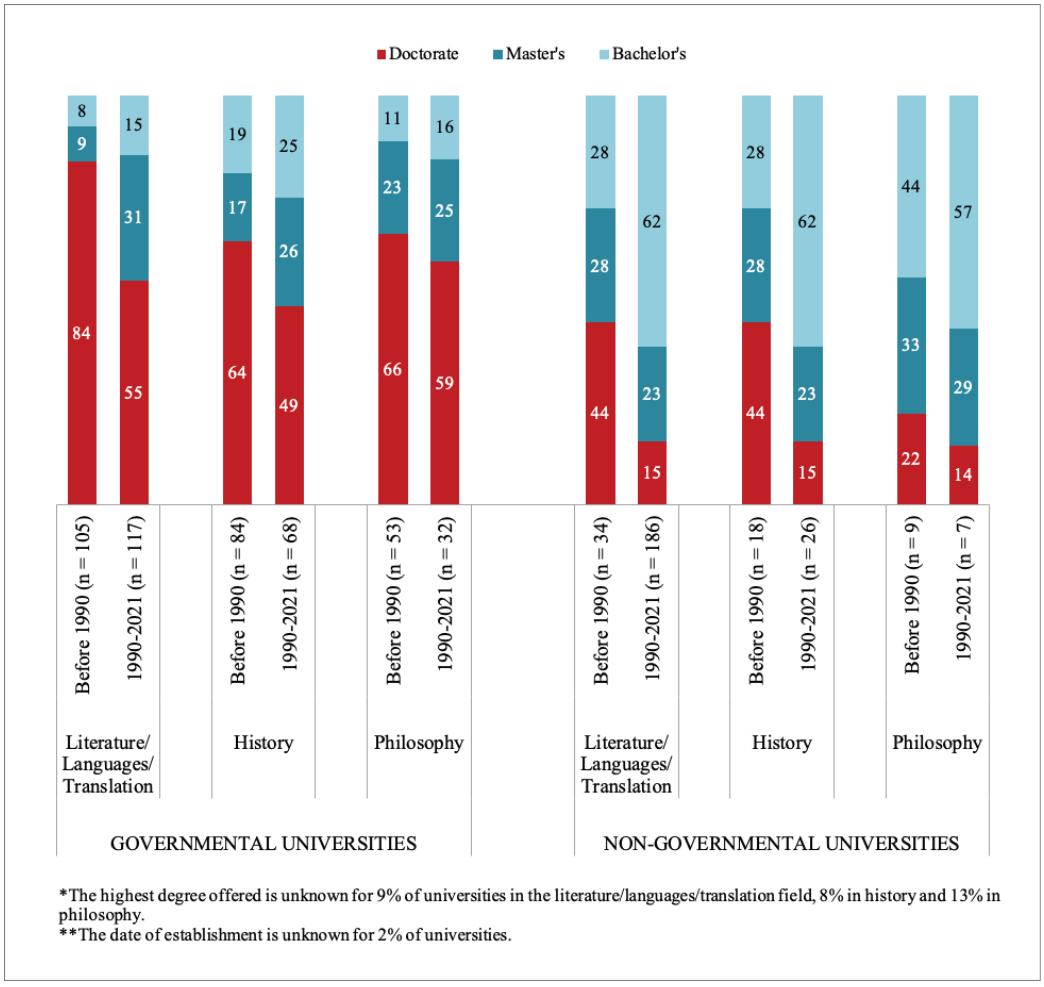
Figure 4: Governmental/non-governmental distribution of universities offering degrees in select humanities fields in the Arab region by highest degree offered in the field* (%)



Source: ASSM 2021a.

In addition, compared to non-governmental universities, the decline in the availability of doctoral degrees after 1990 in governmental universities remained limited (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Highest offered degree* in select humanities fields in the Arab region by establishment date of the university (%)**



*The highest degree offered is unknown for 9% of universities in the literature/languages/translation field, 8% in history and 13% in philosophy.
**The date of establishment is unknown for 2% of universities.

Source: ASSM 2021a.

2. The Impact of Politics and Conflicts on Knowledge Production

The challenges faced by Arab researchers are not limited to the prevalence of neoliberal policies and their impact on educational institutions. Since the early decades of the twentieth century, especially during the post-independence period and the emergence of the modern nation state in the form of republics or monarchies, academics have suffered from restrictions imposed on their freedom

and the interference of politics and politicians in university affairs.[12] Some researchers have even paid dearly for their views and beliefs (Bardawil 2019). This is in addition to the phenomenon of hurling accusations of blasphemy at researchers, writers, and artists on flimsy bases, such as contempt of religion or disturbing public peace, claims mobilized by conservative groups supported by institutions in power.

Political conflicts between Arab countries also negatively impact the work and continuity of professional associations. In Iraq, for instance, the Union of Arab Historians was an active and important institution in Baghdad, yet following Saddam's invasion of Kuwait in 1990, a number of Arab historians demanded the removal of its headquarters from Baghdad, which ended up in the establishment of another union in Cairo, naturally weakening this important association. Similarly, wars and armed conflicts that beset the Arab world had a devastating impact on the Society of Iraqi Historians and Archaeologists upon the American invasion of Iraq in 2003 (2023 عفيفـــي).

3. Geopolitical Challenges

Geopolitical challenges associated with the history of colonization in the Arab region have led to the emergence of various scholarly circles and communities working in the fields of the humanities, at times intersecting and converging, at others diverging. In the Maghreb, colonial history has contributed to the continuation of close ties between the Maghrebi cultural elite and France, French theorists, and theoretical schools, which impacts critical production in Arabic. On the other hand, we perceive tangible connections with Anglophone research *milieus* in the Arab Mashriq. Then there is a third circle: Arab and non-Arab researchers working in American and European universities, writing and publishing in foreign languages, and undergoing various challenges in complex contexts. Mara Naaman argues that there is a large gap between researchers specializing in Arabic literature within the Arab world and their peers working in universities in the US and Europe (Naaman 2010, 448). This gap is related to the language barrier as well as cultural and political differences for multiple reasons, but it is also associated with the historical context of the emergence of literary studies in Western universities. These early beginnings shaped specialized programs in universities in terms of course descriptions, historical periodization, and the adoption of a particular literary canon in teaching, thus these emergent programs in Western universities

12 Political influence on sites of knowledge production is not exclusive to the Arab world, due to the interconnectedness of knowledge and power. Seteney Shami traces the development of Middle East studies in the United States and how they were impacted by political changes, pointing to the growing securitization of academic knowledge, or the influence of security considerations on the latter in the name of national interest (Shami and Miller-Idriss 2016).

focused on the philosophy of language, philology, and the study of ancient literatures. Naaman compares *Fossoul: Majallat al-naqd, al-adabī* (Fossoul: Journal of Literary Criticism), published in Cairo, with Brill's *Journal of Arabic Literature*. She argues that while Fossoul has sought to build bridges between disparate circles working in the field of Arab literary criticism since its inception in 1980, publishing articles by Arab writers as well as translations of work written by non-Arab theorists and scholars, paying particular attention to modern literary production, *Journal of Arabic Literature*, like other similar journals, continues to prioritize classical Arabic literary production (Naaman 2010, 455-457).

The existence of research circles that do not organically converge means that a Moroccan researcher engaging with French theoretical concepts and terminology, for example, would coin new terms and idioms for them in Arabic. However, due to the absence of a specialized body tasked with the standardization of usage of such coined terminology across Arab countries (Omri 2023), this results in difficulty of communication in Arabic among Arab researchers. A researcher from Morocco, for instance, may find it difficult to understand scholarship written by an Iraqi researcher in Arabic, due to the discrepancy in terminology between the Mashriq and Maghreb, but also due to differences between her/his intellectual and theoretical background, in this case French, and that of the Iraqi scholar.

The issue of parallel research communities is exacerbated in some disciplines more than others. Ammar Baadj points to a challenge faced by historians specializing in Assyriology with no command of Arabic and therefore no access to important literature published by Iraqi historians in this language over the last seven decades. Baadj traces the same phenomenon in Arabic and Islamic studies, where no citations of scholarship written in Arabic by Arab researchers exist, besides the near total absence of reviews of Arabic-language books in Western journals, or citations of Arabic sources in lists of important research in the field (Baadj 2010).

4. Publication and Accessibility Challenges in the Arab World

Researchers in the Arab world, as well as those living abroad, struggle to access Arabic sources for a number of reasons, most important among which is the crisis of publication and accessibility. In the field of literary studies, for example, Mohamed-Salah Omri points to the weakness of academic publications in Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia, besides their limited circulation, in addition to commercial publishers showing more interest in literary works than in academic research (Omri 2023). There are also numerous restrictions on the distribution and circulation of books between Arab countries, despite the important book fairs held in several Arab capitals. Access to all scholarship written in Arabic on a specific topic remains a

major obstacle for humanities researchers in the Arab world, due to the scarcity of databases or comprehensive online platforms available in open access.

Nevertheless, one can still observe a remarkable progress and expansion in the fields of digitization and creation of online platforms over the past decade. There are now a number of digital platforms and libraries, both in Arabic and other foreign languages, that make books and studies in Arabic available; some do so in open access, others involve a monthly subscription, with a third category requiring enrollment in a particular university or citizenship of a specific country. Among the digital libraries that require a subscription is Abjad, which includes books, novels, and stories in Arabic for a monthly fee, as well as e-Marefa, which allows institutional subscription. There are also online libraries that make digital books available for purchase, such as Neelwafurat and Al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation. Additionally, there are some digital libraries that provide Arabic books and manuscripts in subscription-free open access, such as AlSharekh Archives, offering access to Arabic literary and cultural journals; the Princeton University archive, which contains studies in Arabic, Turkish, and Persian; the University of Victoria archives, which provides Arabic manuscripts; and the British Library (in partnership with the Qatar Digital Library), which includes 15,000 volumes in Arabic.[13] This is in addition to the University of Michigan Library, which contains 1,800 Arabic texts; the New York University Library, which includes more than 17,000 Arabic volumes;[14] and the University of Bologna, which holds 450 Arabic manuscripts.[15] In addition, there are institutions that provide digital books and studies in Arabic contingent on enrollment in those institutions, such as the American University of Beirut, the University of Chicago, the University of Edinburgh, the Islamic University of Lebanon, and the American University in Cairo, to name a few. Finally, there are platforms that require users to be citizens of a certain country, such as the Egyptian Knowledge Bank, which can only be accessed with an Egyptian national ID or university email address.

5. Knowledge and Power

Perhaps one of the most significant challenges facing knowledge production in the Arab world is the unbalanced power relations between countries of the North and South. Regarding research funding, it is noticeable that research projects in both Arab universities as well as research centers outside universities rely mainly on foreign, and primarily Western, funding (Hanafi and Arvanitis 2016, 75). In general, total R&D expenses in Arab countries have been minimal for

13 https://alkitabdar.com/bl_manuscripts_online

14 https://dlib.nyu.edu/aco

15 https://alkitabdar.com/bologna_library

nearly four decades, ranging between 0.1% to 1.2% of GDP and falling below the global average (Hanafi and Arvanitis 2016, 68). This reliance on foreign funding for academic research is but one manifestation of the dominance of Western research agendas and priorities over local ones stemming from the needs of Arab societies. In modern times, European languages, especially English, are at the forefront of research publication; global databases and ranking systems are all biased in favor of English-language publishing, making publications in Arabic invisible, unread, unreferenced, and uncitable (Hanafi 2011). Hence, publishing in English has become a condition for promotion within most Arab universities, and a prerequisite for engaging with international research circles.

Unbalanced power relations between North and South also create hierarchies among forms of knowledge, influencing the definition of what knowledge is worth circulating and documenting; publication in English in a reputed journal has become a deed of recognition by guardians of the temple of knowledge. At the same time, research evaluation criteria are now constantly under revision. Open-access publications available to a wide range of readers has also become an essential demand, especially in countries of the Global South, a way of resisting Northern monopoly of information and control over peoples' destinies.[16] However, the language and location of publication remain to pose a dilemma and a difficult choice for scholars in the South, resulting in a "double bind": "publish globally and perish locally vs publish locally and perish globally" (Hanafi 2011).

6. Organizations or Individuals?

There is general consensus among Arab researchers that one of the most significant challenges obstructing knowledge production in the region is the absence of institutions to support academic research, or rather their weakness or inability to sustain themselves for political, economic or bureaucratic reasons. Such institutions are primarily responsible for preserving the accumulation of expertise and building a research repertoire that contributes to the formation and training of new generations of researchers. As a consequence of their absence, several specializations, fields of knowledge, and research projects heavily rely on individual rather than institutional efforts.

Here, the following questions pose themselves. Does institutional discontinuity necessarily entail an epistemological rupture? Has the weakness of official institutions motivated the academic community to seek alternative frameworks outside the official structure? Have independent actors played a role in counterbalancing

16 See the 2015 statement by the Latin American Council of Social Sciences (CLACSO) on the necessity of making knowledge available in open access (CLACSO 2015).

institutional weakness? How do we explain the current momentum in historical studies on the Arab world, despite all obstacles and caveats?

Also, despite important beginnings in comparative literature studies in Egypt in the 1940s, its spread in the 1960s and 1980s, and the establishment of specialized associations and journals concerned with comparative studies throughout the twentieth century, this field of specialization has remained dependent on individual rather than institutional efforts (Omri 2023).[17] Among the most prominent founders of comparative studies are: Ferial Ghazoul (American University in Cairo), Hussam al-Din Khatib (Damascus University), Saad Albazei (King Saud University) (Omri 2023), Marie-Thérèse Abdelmessih, and Amina Rachid (Cairo University) (الخواجـة 2023). On the same issue, Walid El Hamamsy, Assistant Professor in the English Department, Cairo University, notes the role of a new generation of professors in the inclusion of courses focusing on feminist and postcolonial theories in the 1990s, despite the conservative context in which they work (الخواجـة 2023).

7. Humanities in Specialized Research Centers and NGOs

Another hierarchical categorization of forms of knowledge emphasizes the importance of academic research, that is, research conducted by professors and published in academic journals, as opposed to that conducted by researchers in specialized institutions, or that done by activists and published in print or made available online.[18] In an interview, Seteney Shami, Director-General of the Arab Council for the Social Sciences, refutes this assumed hierarchization of value. She argues that "knowledge produced outside of the academe is not non-academic" (Kreichati 2019), in the sense that it adheres to generally accepted research standards, or because it produces valuable, useful, and grounded knowledge in innovative forms that deviate from commonly known academic formalities. Hence, the decisive criterion here should not be the location of publication, but the actual value of the knowledge produced.

Specialized research institutions play a key role in the production of knowledge in the Arab world, perhaps the main role, especially as most research in the humanities and social sciences emanates from these centers (Hanafi and Arvanitis 2016). As

17 Algerian Society for Comparative Literature, Tunisian Society for Comparative Literature, Saudi Society for Comparative Literature, *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* (the American University in Cairo), *Muqaranāt* (Egyptian Society for Comparative Literature), *Cahiers Algériens de littérature comparée, al-Adāb al-'alamiyya* (Syria), *'Ālam al-fikr* (Kuwait), *Thaqafāt* (Bahrain).

18 According to Kreichati's definition, research organizations include specialized research centers within universities, local or international NGOs working on development or advocacy projects (Hanafi 2010; Majed 2015), state-affiliated centers, and centers affiliated with international organizations.

Kreichati argues, there are no strict boundaries between academic and civil society research spaces, with many university professors working in research centers in addition to their academic work. Kreichati interviews a number of researchers at selected Arab research centers in an attempt to understand what this sector offers researchers, compared to higher education institutions. These include The Center for Palestine Studies, The Centre for Arab Unity Studies, The Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, The Arab Council for Social Sciences, The Centre for Social Sciences Research and Action (formerly Lebanon Support), and The Knowledge Workshop. Kreichati identifies a number of reasons that encourage Arab researchers to work part- or full-time with such research centers, most important among which are: additional income opportunities, ideological inclinations, the deployment of research to effect real change on the ground, work flexibility, acquiring new skills, scarcity of academic jobs in the Arab world, lack of academic freedom within many universities, and seeking a work environment that allows for greater freedom and innovation. Despite these advantages, work in research centers is not free of other challenges, some similar to those encountered within universities, including political censorship, bureaucratic obstacles, especially in dealing with state regulatory agencies, and the difficulty of securing necessary funding for research (Kreichati 2019).

II. NEW TRENDS IN THE HUMANITIES IN THE ARAB WORLD IN THE 21ST CENTURY

1. Literature and Literary Studies

Since the beginning of the modern period, literature and *littérateurs* have been a magnifying and reflective mirror of political and social change in Arab societies. In addition to this, such creative authors and artists have played a key role in envisioning the modern state, defining its contours and the aspirations of its citizens. Still, some argue that the disciplines of literary studies and literary criticism in the Arab world are "traditional," or conservative, due to political and security interferences with university programs, censorship of academics and researchers, or restriction of academic freedoms.[19] On the other hand, the Arab cultural scene is not devoid of creative literary studies conducted outside the walls of universities, either published by research centers or available in English or French.

Despite political and societal constraints that shrink the space for creative freedom in general, the literary field, specifically creative writing, has remained a relatively free space for expression and experimentation, compared to literary studies in Arab universities. The Arab world is characterized by what seems to be a permanent paradox: restriction and suppression of freedom of thought and expression, on the one hand, literary imagination and creativity despite the restrictions, on the other.

It is no easy task to draw generalizations about recent trends in Arabic literary studies outside their epistemological and geographical contexts. Still, it is possible to discern some new research trends formulated and developed by researchers able to create, or join, research circles outside official institutional frameworks (this can take the form of founding independent journals or local, regional, or international research groups). In what follows, I offer an overview of two major trends in the twenty-first century: a. the cultural turn in literary studies and b. revisiting and critiquing the Arabic literary canon. I also highlight some literary genres that have emerged prominently in response to political circumstances or as a result of rapid technological advancements.

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19 In Libya, for instance, literary studies have tended to adopt the official discourse of the Libyan state, focusing primarily on literary works endorsed by the regime (Omri 2023). Variations on this observation can be found in most Arab countries.

The Cultural Turn in Literary Studies

"From Literary Criticism to Cultural Criticism" was the title of an article written by Hassan Hanafi in *Fossoul*, published after the January 25, 2011 revolution. Khairy Douma adopts this title to delineate the shift in literary criticism and literary studies in the Arab world in the twenty-first century. This shift to cultural criticism in literary studies did not start in 2011, and Douma traces the changes in critical approaches in seven literary/cultural journals between 2010 and 2021.[20] There is general consensus among specialists on the important role cultural and literary periodicals and journals have played in shaping the cultural field and disseminating cultural knowledge from the nineteenth century onwards, acknowledging them as an indicative criterion for understanding political, literary, and cultural currents in the Arab world. Douma classifies cultural periodicals and journals in the Arab world into three categories: the first "directly adheres to the cultural establishment, and plays an ideological role in its service," the second "also adheres to the establishment, albeit with a certain degree of independence, derived from the moral worth of the editor/editorial team," and the third is comprised of journals published by "marginal groups not wishing to be affiliated with the directives of the establishment in any way." Douma draws attention to the evolution most literary and cultural journals have undergone, especially in the second half of the twentieth century, taking the path of specialization and addressing a particular audience, which lost them their role in reaching a more general readership (2023 دومـة).[21]

This cultural strand approaches literary texts as cultural practices, with critics adopting the basic assumptions of cultural studies, paying attention to such questions as who writes, where they write, and why. It also sheds light on the religious, social, and political factors governing the production and reception of literary knowledge, and on what is marginalized and excluded from the literary canon (Pacifico 2020). In the context of a cultural reading of Arabic literature, Richard Jacquemond pinpoints certain works that can be seen as harbingers of revolutions, such as Ahmed Khaled Tawfik's 2008 novel *Utopia*, set in a dystopian Egypt in 2023. In this novel, a severe economic crisis ravages the country, leading

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20 The selected journals are: *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* (annual), published by the Department of English and Comparative Literature at the American University in Cairo; *Journal of Arabic Literature* (available two or three times a year), which includes articles in English and is published by Brill; *'Alamāt* (semi-annual), published in Meknes, Morocco; *'Ālam al-fikr* (quarterly), published by the Ministry of Guidance and News in Kuwait; *Fossoul: Majallat al-naqd, al-adabī* (quarterly), published by the General Egyptian Book Organization in Cairo, *Nizwa* (quarterly), published by the Ministry of Information in Oman, and *Al Jadid* (monthly), published by the Arab Center for Publishing in London.

21 "It is certain that these highly specialized literary and critical journals have their purpose and value for researchers and specialists, as well as an important status in universities and research centers, yet this purpose and status came at the expense of the journals' general "literary" quality, and its reception by readers" (2023 دومة).

to a stark social divide: a privileged minority resides in gated communities, while the majority is relegated to extreme poverty. The novel ends with the revolt of the majority/the people and the storming of forbidden gatherings. Jacquemond argues that the youth-led 2011 revolution fulfills this prophecy, with the people driving change and steering its course. Hence it is also a revolution against the "nahdawi paradigm" that has dominated the Arab cultural landscape in modern times, wherein a cultural and artistic elite has traditionally assumed the role of vanguard, claiming responsibility for modernizing Arab societies and driving change (Jacquemond 2015).

At a quick glance, the titles of issues of the journals under study include: "Cultural Criticism," "Perceptions," "New Poetics," "Feminist Studies," "Discourse Analysis," "Literary Criticism and Interdisciplinarity," "Trauma and Memory," "The Other America," "The Imaginary and the Documentary," "The Desert: Human Geography and Symbolic Economy," "Friendship: Representations and Cultural Variations," "Third World Literature," "Literature and Journalism," "Elite Culture and People's Culture," "Critical Consciousness and the Culture of Questioning," "Defenseless Culture," "Culture of Patriarchal Oppression," "Culture and Violence," "Mobile Culture," "Marginal Culture," "The Adventure of Writing and the Culture of Questioning," "Feminism: Exile and Diaspora Literatures," "Women's Cinema," and "Repressed Femininity," to name a few. This is in addition to the continued presence of themes closer to traditional literary criticism, focusing on textual analysis, rhythm, and style, according to Douma (2023 دومـــة).

One of the manifestations of the cultural turn in Arab literary studies is scholarly attention to popular culture and literature as important texts that enrich the Arab cultural canon. In their book *Popular Culture in the Middle East and North Africa*, Walid El Hamamsy and Mounira Soliman argue that the main reason for the neglect of popular culture in academic studies in the Arab world is the intellectual elite's perception of popular expression as inferior, considering some of its modern manifestations, such as rap and hip-hop, imitations of Western forms incongruous with Arab societies, as opposed to traditional forms of singing seen as authentic expressions of Arab identity. This position ignores the many and varied intersections between Arab cultural forms and their Western counterparts throughout the twentieth century, according to the authors. They note the growing interest in different popular forms of cultural expression in the twenty-first century, especially in the aftermath of the 2011 Arab uprisings, with a noticeable surge in studies on street art and culture, which imposed themselves on the cultural reality in various Arab countries (El Hamamsy and Soliman 2013).

As for interest in themes related to Arab revolutions, Douma notes in his background paper a sporadic and brief interest in journals affiliated with official institutions,

followed by a near-total absence accompanying the defeat of the revolutions. Interest, however, persists in journals independent of official Arab institutions, such as *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics, Journal of Arabic Literature*, and *Al Jadid* (2023 دومــة).

Re-Reading/Writing the Arabic Literary Canon

For a considerable part of the twentieth century, the novel occupied a privileged position in the Arab cultural field compared to other literary forms, such as poetry and the short story, not only as a genre in line with the cultural shifts of the modern period (1999 عصفــور), but also one that shapes and contributes to the formation of national identities and imaginaries. In this way, the novel became a site of controversy and an arena for ideological battles. These battles have had serious repercussions on authors, ranging from censoring their work to threatening their lives. There are numerous examples that affirm the importance of literary texts and their impact on the public sphere, whether directly or indirectly. Hence, I argue that many of the literary debates in the cultural field regarding literary standards and artistic tastes, controversial award ceremonies, and criteria for selecting texts for translation are all ultimately cultural battles over the formation of the Arab canon and the shaping of national identities.

Recent critical readings of Arab modernism have sought to shed light on how the Arab literary establishment grasped the Western system of modernity, resulting in the emergence of "novelism" in Arab culture, that is, the institutionalization of the novel as another standard for measuring modernity and modern writing in Arab and Persian literatures, according to Kamran Rastegar (Rastegar 2007). At the same time, the elevation of the novel as the undisputedly modernist literary genre and as the expression of the spirit of modernity--or world vision--has led to the marginalization of other literary genres and forms of cultural expression. Samah Selim argues that the national novelistic canon was built on the suppression and marginalization of the popular novel (Selim 2004), as well as various other forms of expression that did not necessarily conform to the criteria imposed by the cultural elite in the 20th century. For instance, critics of the modernist system--prevalent in Arabic literary criticism in the 20th century--which prioritizes Western-style cultural production consider Muhammad al-Muwaylihi's *Ḥadīth ʿĪsā ibn Hishām* (1907) the first Arabic novel, due to its focus on contemporary social issues in the Arab world. This is in contrast to the novel *Zaynab*, which owes its prominence to its adherence to the European literary form (البحـراوي 1996، 45-47). Kamran Rastegar notes that the neglect of *Ḥadīth ʿĪsā ibn Hishām* is due to its failure to meet the "requirements of the genre" of the Western novel, the epitome of modernity sought after by *littérateurs* (Rastegar 2007). On the other hand,

Radwa Ashour views Ahmad F*ā*ris al-Shidy*ā*q's *al-Sāq 'ala al-sāq fī mā huwa al-Fāriyāq* (1855) as the first Arabic novel, arguing that al-Shidyaq's literary project, which aimed to renew traditional forms and methods and assert continuity and connection instead of rupture with heritage, was marginalized by the Nahda elite due to its incompatibility with their ideological choices (2009 عاشـــور).

Re-reading and re-writing the Arabic literary canon in the twenty-first century take several directions that address the modernist and nationalist theoretical frameworks that influenced its formation and shaping in the twentieth century. One of the earliest theories to resist Western hegemony was postcolonial theory, which was first underscored by Anwar Abdel Malek in the 1960s, and later promoted by Edward Said in his seminal book *Orientalism* (1978). Using postcolonial approaches had significant results for critiquing colonialist discourses, and highlighting the challenges of language and its role in shaping consciousness and consolidating ideologies. While acknowledging the importance of postcolonial approaches, they have overemphasized the impact of colonialism on literature, culture, and history, ignoring other intellectual and cultural trajectories and forms of literary production and knowledge that were marginalized and not given due recognition (Aboul-Ela 2010, 744). In addition, despite critiquing colonialist discourse, most postcolonial approaches contributed, directly or indirectly, to the consolidation of Eurocentrism, minimizing the ability of colonized peoples to act, resist, and create alternative ideas and visions. They also focused on literature written in English or French by writers from the South, ignoring literature written in local languages in general, and Arabic literature in particular (Waïl 2002; Waïl and Saunders 2003).

New research trends are emerging in the twenty-first century that seek to overcome Western centricity in dealing with the Arab literary canon using decolonial approaches. These approaches engage with the mechanisms of formation of both the Arab and world canons, questioning global power relations in the production of knowledge and the epistemological constraints imposed on world literature. They attempt to overcome the hegemony of Western theories and strengthen research ties among countries of the South, especially Latin America and its theorists, shedding light on the literature of minorities and the marginalized, and adopting comparative methodologies to escape the confinement of a single dominant narrative (Abdelmessih 2018).

In a 2017 article, Hoda El Shakry engages with the modernist premise that pits modernity against tradition, highlighting the role of the Tunisian cultural elite in overcoming this modernist binary, offering a decolonial reading of material published in three Tunisian periodicals in mid-twentieth century. This reading disrupts and challenges dominant Orientalist narratives about the one-way flow of academic and cultural knowledge, from the Western imperialist center

to the colonies in Asia and Africa, as Maghrebi cultural periodicals reveal the transnational networks of the period, connecting through publication, circulation of knowledge, and funding opportunities, as well as the diversity of readership (El Shakry 2017, 141-142).

One of the most significant cultural projects that reinterpret history in general, and the Arab literary canon in particular, is the feminist project. This approach utilizes gender as an analytical tool, founded on the fundamental premise that official history is shaped by the perceptions of a dominant cultural elite at a specific historical moment. In the early modern period, the perceptions of the Arab elite were shaped by envisioning an imagined national identity defined within the context of struggles over homeland, heritage, and relationship with the Other. These social perceptions are necessarily gendered and assume specific characteristics of ideal gender roles. Such perceptions reflect, and align with, conflicting political and ideological affiliations. The dominance of this elite in the cultural sphere has inevitably led to the marginalization of other perceptions of the homeland and other discourses that were previously recognized, popular, and widely accepted. Re-reading the modern Arab literary canon from a gender perspective raises questions about the processes of inclusion and exclusion in canonical literature, and has the potential to reclaim literary voices that have been marginalized due to non-conformity to the ideological paradigms of the dominant cultural elite. One of the direct outcomes of the feminist project is rewriting Arabic literary history by recovering the voices of women writers who were themselves marginalized, as was their literary production, such as Zaynab Fawwaz, Labiba Hashim, Asma Halim, among others, and opening the door to the experimental creative endeavors of women as well as men, ones that did not adhere to the dominant ideologies of the literary elite (Elsadda 2012).

Along the same lines, several intellectual projects have emerged, seeking to uncover and highlight the marginalized and overlooked aspects of the literary canon in the Arab region, such as the literature of ethnic minorities, Nubian literature in Egypt, and Amazigh literature in the Maghreb. These projects transcend the national project of post-independence states that, in their quest to rid themselves of colonial legacy, leaned towards the dominance of the Arabic language and marginalizing other languages tied to ethnicities that have a long history in the Arab region.

The field of Amazigh literary studies is still in the process of formation in terms of defining its boundaries, especially as regards the relationship between ethnicity and literary language: Does Amazigh literature include the experiences and visions of writers of Amazigh origin regardless of the language they choose to publish their works, or is it limited to literature written in Amazigh? There is no conclusive answer to this question to date. What is certain is that the Amazigh awakening

witnessed in the 21st century has grown and strengthened over the course of a few decades, thanks to the efforts of civil society (بويعقوبـــي 2021).[22] It succeeded in gaining official recognition in the wake of the Arab revolutionary movement when the Moroccan Constitution was amended in 2011, acknowledging Amazigh as an official language, while in Algeria, the Constitution was amended in 2016 recognizing Amazigh as a national language, followed by the establishment of the Algerian Academy of Amazigh Language in 2017 (الكبلـــي 2021). Mohamed Oussous traces the remarkable expansion of what he calls the consolidation-and-evolution stage of the Amazigh short story in Morocco from 2008 onwards, resulting from the official recognition of Amazigh: first with the establishment of the Royal Institute of Amazigh Culture, then with the recognition of Amazigh as an official language in the 2011 Constitution (أوســوس 2021).

There is also a growing interest in Nubian literature and Nubian writers in the twenty-first century. It has become one of the research trends that reshape the established literary canon, by including marginalized voices and critically engaging with nationalist narratives that diminish already existing diversity. This interest came in response to the emergence of a significant body of literature by Nubian writers who offer new visions of what nationalism means and of the relationship with the homeland, visions fully aware of challenges faced by an ethnic group living on the borders (Naaman 2011; El Refaei 2014; Gilmore 2015). In 2005, Hajjaj Adol, one of the most prominent Nubian writers, won the Sawiris Award for Best Egyptian Novel for his work *Ma'tūq al-Khayr,* placing Nubian literature at the heart of the history of the Egyptian Arabic novel. Critical interest in Nubian literature persists, despite ongoing debates over nomenclature and the place of Nubian literature in Arabic literature.[23] Adol took part in drafting the 2014

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22 See also books on Amazigh grammar, such as *A Grammar of Amazigh* (Fatima Sadiqi and Moha Ennaji) and *A Reference Grammar of Tamazight: A Comparative Study of the Berber Dialects of Ayt Ayache and Ayt Seghrouchen* (Ernest T. Abdel-Massih).

23 The award sparked controversy among writers due to Adol's role in adopting the Nubian cause and presenting it in international forums. The Nubian cause is linked to the construction of the High Dam in the 1960s, which necessitated the displacement of Nubians from their homes and lands. However, they were not fairly compensated for their losses, and they were marginalized, their problems ignored, for decades. Advocates for their right to return to their lands were accused of being separatists. In 2006, Adol wrote a book titled *'Udabā' Nubiyyūn wa nuqqād 'unsuriyyūn* (Nubian Writers and Racist Critics), with a foreword by poet Ahmad 'Abdel Mu'ti Hijāzī (according to the author's preface, the book was written in 2003), published by the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies. In the book, Adol launches an attack on Egyptian intellectuals for ignoring the Nubian cause, accusing them of racism. In his foreword, Hijāzī agrees with Adol on the importance of addressing the specificity of Nubian literature "within the framework of Nubia belonging to Egypt, and its culture belonging to Egyptian culture, which encompasses multiple specificities without its unity being fragmented or disintegrated" (حجازي 2006، 8). However, he rejects the description of Egyptian intellectuals as racist, and objects to Adol's view that Nubian literature should be attributed to those who write it, because "literature is an art that belongs to language before it belongs to any other origin" (حجازي 2006، 9).

Constitution, which included a transitional article directing the state to "develop and implement projects that return the Nubian people to their original areas and develop them within ten years."

In the wake of revolutionary movements in the Arab world, and despite the outbreak and exacerbation of political crises and armed conflicts in several Arab countries; the political defeats of forces of change and reform in several parts of the Arab region; and the growing number of Arab migrants in search of safety, we see--perhaps also as a result of these crises--"an leap of creativity and its contemporaneity" (Omri 2023), in literature, arts, and the cultural field at large, as well as innovative modes of writing, expression, and communication with the target audience.

Literature and the Technological Revolution

Among the most significant evolutions worth considering in order to grasp new developments in the cultural sphere is the technological revolution of the 21st century, with the proliferation of blogs and social media such as *Facebook, Twitter*, and others, as well as the wide-ranging availability of books and articles on the Internet. In this context, Tarek Al-Ariss notes how some Arab publishers and authors use *Twitter* to publish poetry, novel excerpts, or translations of work by international writers, thus reaching a wide audience that can interact with this published literary material directly. He points to a specific tweet on solitude translated from Russian poet Dostoevsky's work and posted on *Adāb* publishing house's *Twitter* account, garnering the interaction of a large number of users, some sharing excerpts on solitude by Arab and non-Arab authors, others interacting by posting their own poetry verses. In this way, *Twitter* turns into an Arab and global cultural platform where "responses construct a new literary imaginary, connecting cultural traditions across languages and time periods," and thus achieves a fundamental instructive goal in the humanities, one usually restricted to educational institutions, especially academic comparative literature programs (El-Ariss 2023).

Prison Literature

Prison literature returns in a new form. Prison literature is a literary genre that features prominently in Arab fictional and poetic output in the modern period. It includes novels, short stories, and poetry written by male and female authors depicting their anguish of incarceration in Arab prisons for adopting political views and stances opposed to the authorities. Additionally, prison literature also includes writings by authors who did not undergo imprisonment themselves, yet aimed to document the stories and experiences of others. Classics of Arabic prison literature include Ibrahim Tuqan's poem "al-Thulathā' al-aḥmar," immortalizing

the execution of three Palestinian *fedayeen* at the hands of the British authority (1930), Abdel Rahman Munif's *Sharq al-Mutawaṣṣit* (1975), about horrific torture in an unnamed country, Farida al-Naqqash's *al-Sijn dam'atān wa warda* (1985), Nawal El Saadawi's *Mudhakkirāt fī sijn al-nisā'* (1986; trans. *Memoirs from the Women's Prison*, 1994), Fathi Ghanim's novel *Ḥikayat Tū* (1987), about Shohdy Ateyya's murder in Nasser's prisons, Iraqi author Yousef Al Sayegh's *Sirdāb raqm 2* (1992), and Malika Oufkir's *al-Sajīna* (1999), about the horrors of Tazmamart prison during the Years of Lead in Morocco, to name just a few.[24]

After 2011, there has been a significant surge in literary production about prison experiences. This genre combines art with political activism, constituting what Tarek Al-Ariss calls "a form of exposure," one that uses social media and technology as means of participating in resistant activities and expressing political opposition. Faten Morsy notes new forms of articulating experiences of imprisonment different from traditional literary forms such as novels or poetry. These new forms of expression include documentary films, for instance Syrian;[25] smuggled letters written in prison, such as Omar Hazek's letters from Egypt, written in 2014 and first published in *Al-Masry Al-Youm*, later going viral on social media, which express the frustrations of a generation of aspiring revolutionaries who dream of a better tomorrow; online platforms, such as *Samidoun*, a website which publishes the testimonies of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons; reflections inscribed on scraps of paper; blogs; images and videos; storytelling projects; and songs (Morsy 2023). Yet memoirs and the novel persist as means of depicting the experience of imprisonment.

Dystopian Literature

Dystopian fiction, or literature of the corrupt city, has also spread in the Arab world, literature that exposes ugliness and injustice, and envisages the future based on lived reality, painting a bleak and frightening picture of life to motivate the reader to correct mistakes of the past, thus sounding the alarm. For example, Ahmed Naji's novel *Istikhdām al-ḥayāh* (2014; trans. *Using Life*, 2017) takes place in post-2011 Cairo, after the defeat of the revolution and the loss of hope from the author's perspective. The novel tells the story of Cairo, the corrupt city that Naji abhors, buried under rubble and swarms of flies, inhabited by wretched people whose souls have been disfigured as much as their city. The narrative is

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24 The list of novels, short stories, and poems that fall under the genre of prison literature is too long to include here. There are also many studies on prison literature in the Arab literary tradition (see Morsy 2023).

25 *Off the Grid: Syria's Slaughterhouses* (Mouhsin Ennaimi 2018); *True Stories of Love, Life, Death and Sometimes Revolution* (Nidal Hassan 2012); *Taste of Cement* (Ziad Kalthoun 2017); *Obscure* (Soudade Kaadan 2017); and *Last Men in Aleppo* (Feras Fayyad 2018).

interspersed with illustrations by Ayman Al Zorkany, which complement the text. Two years after the novel's publication, excerpts appeared in *Akhbar Al-Adāb* magazine, leading to the author's trial and imprisonment on charges of violating public morality. The verdict sparked widespread outrage among intellectuals, and a petition was circulated in protest. In 2016, the Court of Cassation overturned the imprisonment sentence and ordered a retrial, after the author had spent a year in prison. The novel *Distubiā 13* by Tunisian journalist and filmmaker Mohamed Boukoum, published in 2021, is another example that takes place during the political transition period in Tunisia, marked by corruption, followed by the Corona crisis and a general state of depression. In general, most Arabic dystopian novels are set in cities where freedoms are absent under repressive dictatorial regimes.[26]

2. Philosophy

"Philosophy is not just a thought without time or place, without society or civilization. Rather, it is an intellectual system that emerges in an era, is established by a generation, serves a society, and expresses a civilization" (حنفـــي 1985، 15).

In its Greek etymology, Philosophy is the love of wisdom. In academia, it is the specialization concerned with questions of existence, life, and human nature, as well as logic, ethics, and knowledge. In Egypt, for example, "philosophy is studied according to a four-era periodization: the Greek era, divided into Hellenic (Athens) and Hellenistic (Alexandria) philosophy; philosophy of the Middle Ages, covering Christian and Islamic philosophy, the latter in turn including theology and Sufism; followed by modern philosophy, beginning with Descartes and ending with Hegel; and finally, contemporary philosophy, which begins with Marx, Kierkegaard, or Nietzsche and continues to the present day. In addition to this historical approach, certain philosophical specializations are taught as independent subjects, including logic, ethics, and aesthetics. These core subjects in the four-year course of study are then supplemented by other specific philosophies, such as philosophy of science; research methods; philosophy of history, religion, and language; ancient Eastern and contemporary Arab thought, philosophical texts in foreign languages, etc. (مغيـث 2023).

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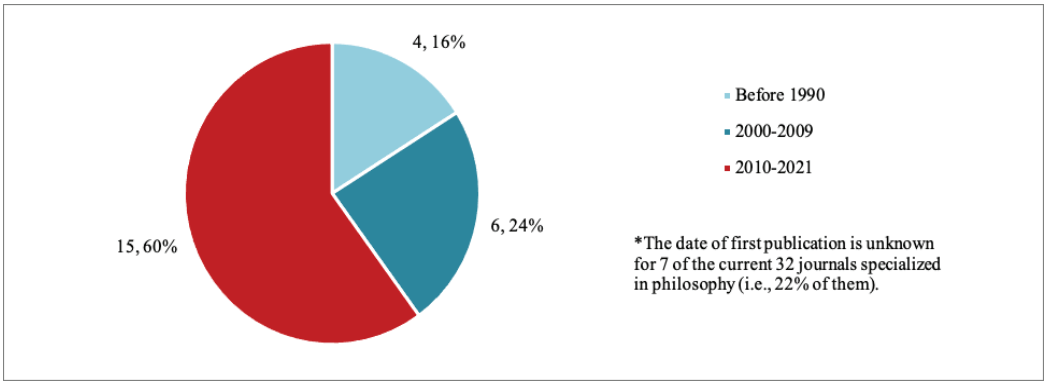
26 The list of dystopian novels published after the Arab revolutionary movement is long: Basma Abdel Aziz's two novels, *al-Ṭābūr* (2013; trans. *The Queue*, 2016) and *Hunā Badan* (2018; trans. *Here Is a Body*, 2021); Ahmed Khaled Tawfik's *Fī mamarr al-fi'rān* (2016); Ashraf al-Khamaisi's *Ḥāris al-ṣaṭḥ* (2017); Mohamed Rabie's *'Uṭārid* (2015), longlisted for the Arabic Booker; and Palestinian writer Ibrahim Nasrallah's *Ḥarb al-kalb al-thaniyā*, winner of the 2018 Arabic Booker for Best Novel. Some dystopian novels were published in French, such as Boualem Sansal's *2084: La fin du monde* (2015) and a collection of stories titled *Iraq + 100: Stories from a Century after the Invasion* (2016). The collection was edited by Iraqi writer Hassan Blasim, Editor of Comma Press, and included some dystopian stories such as "Kahramāna" and "Operation Daniel."

In the Maghreb, and since the beginning of the twenty-first century, teaching philosophy has expanded due to changes in the shape of the university as a whole, in Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria. As Ait Hanna notes, "most universities have now come to include philosophy departments, and the number of students majoring in philosophy in faculties of arts and humanities has expanded, from a few dozen at the end of the last century to thousands today." In Morocco, this took place against the backdrop of the establishment multidisciplinary faculties, leading to transdisciplinary MA programs allowing for research in areas common between philosophy and other disciplines, such as gender, cultural studies, and discourse analysis. It is likely that such new disciplines played a key role in attracting students to enroll in philosophy departments. These structural developments allowed knowledge production in philosophy to open up to more contemporary issues (2023 آيـت حنـا).

Despite this, there is a general waning interest in philosophy as a major, particularly in new private universities in the Arab world (ASSM 2021a). Yet in the face of this declining interest in establishing philosophy departments in new universities in the 21st century, there are several associations, journals, and independent groups concerned with philosophical studies emerging, such as the Minerva Circle in Morocco, Ami(e)s de DionYsos, which publishes a quarterly journal with the same title, Association des études de la pensée et de la société-Fawaçil in Tunisia, and Mominoun Without Borders, founded in 2013 and run by intellectuals from various Arab countries in the Mashriq and Maghreb. The organization is based in Morocco, with various publications available both digitally and in print, including its two journals *Dhawāt* and *Yatafakkarūn*. This is in addition to professional associations and journals specialized in philosophical studies, as well as some journal focusing on cultural and interdisciplinary studies. It should be noted that the majority of current peer-reviewed journals specializing in philosophy were first issued in 2010 or later (Figure 6).

Figure 6: First publication date of philosophy periodicals in the Arab region*



Source: ASSM 2021d.

The emergence of philosophy as a discipline in Arab universities is linked to the establishment of modern universities in the 20th century, taking advantage of the translation movement and flourishing of the press in the second half of the 19th. In the first half of the 19th century, Rifa'a al-Tahtawi traveled to Paris with an expedition of 40 students to study modern European languages and sciences, later writing *Takhlīs al-Ibrīz fī Talkhīs Bārīz*, in which he expressed his admiration for the progress of sciences in France, yet "[warned against] philosophical writings and their availability to lay people, considering them a threat to faith. However, he later expressed admiration for some passages in Voltaire's *Dictionnaire philosophique*, began translating Montesquieu's *L'esprit des lois*, was inspired by Rousseau's Emile in his book *Ta'līm al-Banīn wa-l-Banāt*, presented a brief overview of logic in *Manāhij al-Albāb*, and started translating an introduction to philosophy titled *Qala'id al-Falasafa*. With the emergence of the Arab press and its following of world events, especially in Europe, names of philosophers began to appear in newspaper articles with brief references to their ideas, and such names as Voltaire, Rousseau, Guizot, Marx, Nietzsche, and others gained currency" (مغيـــث 2023).

Several translations followed in the first half of the 20th century, and Ahmad Lutfi al-Sayyid, for instance, translated Aristotle's works, including *Ethics, Physics, On the Heavens, On Generation and Corruption,* and *Politics*. Others translated works by Plato, Nietzsche, Descartes, and writings by other contemporary philosophers. The first philosophy department was established at Fuad I University (later Cairo University) in 1908 (مغيث 2023). Several other Arab universities followed suit over the first half of the 20th century in both the Mashrq and Maghreb.

Translation has played, and continues to play, a foundational role in shaping philosophy departments and determining research priorities. Mohammed Ait Hanna underscores the pivotal role translation has played in the field of philosophy in the 21st century, where the proliferation of translated texts surpasses that of original works, prompting a re-examination of long-standing problematics. Colonial history and the language of publication also play a key role in determining which sources are translated and the continued presence of French thought in the Maghreb. As Ait Hanna writes, "philosophical production in the Maghreb remains tied to the French and German languages. While French dominates in Morocco and Algeria, in Tunisia, in addition to French, there is a great deal of openness to German. ... However, intellectual dialog with the Other has expanded, and is no longer limited to French or German; rather, we are witnessing an openness to other languages, such as Spanish or Portuguese philosophy, both of which had little presence in the Arab cultural scene and philosophical production" (آيـــت حنـــا 2023).

Regarding the main trajectories of philosophical studies in the Arab world since their inception in the 20th century, Tarik Sabry proposes categorizing them into four philosophical positions in connection with the issue of tradition and modernity, which continues to occupy a significant space in Arab thought. The first position is "historicist/Marxist," represented by Abdallah Laroui, who calls for a radical rupture with the past, finding no prospect for progress or development without resolving our relationship with tradition. The second position is a "rationalist/structuralist" one, represented by Mohammed Abed al-Jabri, who rejects the idea of a radical rupture and argues for the modernization of tradition from within, in accordance with the present and the changing realities in the Arab world. The third is the "cultural/*salafist/turatheya* position," represented by Taha Abdurrahman, a major and significant stance in Arab culture, but one that is equally complex and contentious. Abdurrahman differentiates between *turatheya* and *turathaweyah*. *Turatheya* refers to intellectual schools that elevate the importance of tradition and take it as a significant reference point. *Turathaweyah*, on the other hand, is a more orthodox stance that considers Islamic heritage the only acceptable discourse within Arab culture, and is thus hostile to all others. The fourth position is "anti-essentialist," and uses "de-territorialisation of thought" as a double-edged critique. Proponents of this approach call it *tajawuz*, meaning "to surpass the duality problematic between modernity and heritage," and Sabry believes they "hold the key to the Arab intellectual impasse." Thinkers who advocate this approach include Abdelkebir Khatibi, Abdesslam Benabdelali, Abdul-Aziz Boumeshouli, Fatema Mernissi, and Edward Said. Sabry concludes that engaging with everyday life, as defined by Lefebvre, is a prerequisite for understanding the complexities of the present (2016 بومســـهولي; Sabry 2010).

Suzanne Kassab emphasizes the importance of global events and variables in shaping philosophical questions and epistemological issues that Arab intellectuals address and formulate. She identifies two main trends after the 1967 defeat: the first is culturalist and identitarian trying to address the question: Why did the Arab liberation project fail? Proponents of this trend are concerned with seeking answers to questions about heritage, the connection between religion and modernity, the relationship with the West, and the ability of Arabs to produce a philosophy of their own. The other trend asks political questions about the absence of democracy, the restriction of freedoms, and the role of authoritarianism in suppressing thought and progress, in order to answer the question of failure (2021 كســـاب). Kassab examines enlightenment discourses in Egypt and Syria in the 1990s and early 2000s, arguing that the question of democracy has surpassed that of identity, as reflected in the revolutionary movements that erupted in 2010-2011, where the slogans of freedom, democracy, and justice resonated loud and clear (Kassab 2019).

On philosophy in the 21st century, Mohammed Ait Hanna observes what he calls the manifestations of discontinuity and continuity in philosophical production in the Maghreb, "a discontinuity that manifests itself in the lack of interest in certain issues, trends, and questions, such as modernity and ideology, or in major critical projects (such as those of Professor al-Jabri, Tayyeb Tizini, and others), as opposed to a rising interest in limited issues and new questions such as recognition and gender. … We also perceive a general detachment from, or silence on, the writings of some thinkers, most notably al-Jabri and Khatibi. Attention to these intellectuals does not go beyond a seminar or a newspaper supplement here and there, while they are virtually absent from current productions. On the other hand, other thinkers still have a strong presence which continues to get even stronger, most notably Taha Abdurrahman, whose works receive multiple reprints, writings about them proliferate, and his methodology and thought are embraced, studied, and analyzed". Some thinkers have also renewed their philosophical writings, engaging with real questions on the ground, such as Abdesslam Benabdelali in Morocco, and Fethi Meskini, Fathi Triki, and Mohamed Mahjoub in Tunisia, among others (آيت حنا 2023).

"The People Want... A Philosophical Issue"

In his book *al-Falsafa wa-l-ḥirāk al-'Arabī: Tajārib falsafiyya jadīda fī al-'ālam al-'Arabī* (Philosophy and Arab Movements: New Philosophical Experiences in the Arab World), published in 2015, Abdul-Aziz Boumeshouli seeks to answer two main questions. The first is: What is the impact of revolutions on Arab philosophical thought? And the second is: Can revolution be considered a real philosophical event? This is achieved through an analytical reading of philosophical writings that engage with Arab movements, in addition to shedding light on new philosophical experiences, particularly those of the new philosophers in Morocco and Tunisia (بومسـهولي 2015ب).

The question of philosophy and the need to philosophize has emerged in the aftermath of the Arab revolutions, and has been raised in cultural forums, online platforms, book fairs, and Arab philosophy conferences in the Mashriq and Maghreb.[27] Assef Bayat uses the concept of everyday life to fathom the outcomes of the Arab revolutions. He believes that the most important legacy of the Arab revolutions, regardless of their political failure, is the change in (or awareness of) subjectivities as a direct result of experiencing revolution and moments of unity with others, equality, freedom, overcoming fear, and altruism. Paying attention to the memories of ordinary people about specific events and the ethical foundations that establish the values of cooperation and commitment can become fertile

27 For a number of important initiatives that engage with the question of revolution, see بومسهولي 2015أ and بومسهولي 2015ب.

ground for new ideas and visions for organizing social life when the opportunity arises, as has happened in the French and Iranian experiences (Bayat 2021).

Boumeshouli distinguishes between philosophy as an academic discipline and the experience of philosophizing, arguing that "the birth of a philosopher is not conditioned by his learning of philosophical theories, nor by his skill in teaching the history of philosophical ideas, but by his ability to perceive the experience of thought as one of philosophizing. Philosophizing is a necessary condition for innovation and creativity" (بومسـهولي 2015ب). Ahmad Barqawi believes in the experience of the philosophizing self, especially as he was based in Cairo in January 2011 when the Egyptian revolution broke out, and the scene of the youth in Tahrir Square resembled "the birth pangs of the self" (برقـاوي 2024، 6). Fethi Meskini, in turn, argues that "revolution is a philosophical event in the deepest sense of the word. ... It imposes on us a new horizon for the self that can no longer be denied" (بومسـهولي 2015ب، 234).

The new realities in Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria have given rise to new trends in thinking that are not concerned with grand projects, as al-Jabri's and Hanafi's were. Philosophers interacted with the Arab revolutions, since their questions stemming from lived reality converged with those imposed by the revolutions on Arab thinkers. The starting point of the new philosophers "is to consider the body the ultimate human issue in existence ... the soul/body dichotomy thus eliminated" (بومسـهولي 2015ب، 199), or, as Abdessamad El Gabbas puts it, "lifting guardianship over the body" (بومسـهولي 2015ب، 244).

"These revolutions will dictate specific concerns for philosophers, not for researchers or academic students of philosophy. At the forefront of these questions is that of the body and the right to the body ... a question lost at a certain period because previous thinkers were too preoccupied with the wrong approach to bringing about change, proposing change through the gate of re-reading heritage; thus they lost their path to life or to effecting a necessary impact and intellectual engagement in the heart of life, their works turning into argumentations and theoretical debates between one reader and another over the interpretation of heritage, hence no tangible impact by al-Jabri or Hanafi can be discerned in what took place in 2011" (Abdessamad El Gabbas in an interview with Boumeshouli). El Gabbas formulates his argument in a 2013 book entitled *al-Jasad wa-l-kawniyya: Mabādi' thawra qādima* (The Body and Universality: Principles of a Coming Revolution), which he opens with the phrase: "I deserve my body, I deserve my present, and I do not negotiate" (بومسـهولي 2015ب، 248).

Boumeshouli demonstrates the centrality of the body in Arab revolutions by pointing to the scene of Bouazizi's self-immolation which sparked the Tunisian revolution, as well as the Tunisian Femen activist who posted a topless photo of herself with the caption: "My body is mine and not a source of honor for anyone" (بومســـهولي 2015ب، 248).

Mohammed Ait Hanna observes several new trends that have emerged and expanded significantly over the past two decades, as philosophical writings turn to aesthetics of visual art, literature, music, and cinema, areas that were not previously at the center of attention. Ait Hanna argues that literature, specifically, has become a "new paradigm for philosophical thinking, replacing the paradigm of science and epistemology which prevailed in previous decades" (آيـت حنـا 2023). He also notes writings that focus on philosophy as a recipe for life and living, influenced by "self-development books" proliferating in the 21st century. Ait Hanna highlights the "Pop Philosophy" current led by Abdesslam Benabdelali, which he considers one of the most significant contemporary philosophical trends. Benabdelali defines Pop Philosophy as an attempt to "take philosophy outside the walls of the university, where knowledge becomes an obstacle to thought, with the aim of saving it from the disease of interpretations, commentaries, and annotations, to drag it away from the philosophical traditions established by the history of philosophy with the sanctity it ascribes to texts. ... It is not about substituting one subject for another, or establishing a 'popular philosophy' versus 'high culture.' What matters is not the subject of thought, but the intensity of thought" (بنعبـد العالـي 2016). In Pop Philosophy, the author addresses topics unfamiliar to the philosophical tradition, such as football, the impact of cell phones on our relationship with the world, new media, and the change in our "mental processes," so to speak. Ait Hanna notes that the influence of Pop Philosophy goes beyond addressing new topics, and has begun to affect the form of contemporary writing, where we see "a shift away from grand critical projects, toward light writing, writing in a different way… writing that fits the nature of the times" (آيـت حنـا 2023).

Islamic Feminism: A Philosophical Movement

Feminist philosophy addresses philosophical issues and concepts such as ethics, aesthetics, and logic from a perspective that takes into consideration the imbalanced power relations between men and women, and the resulting lack of recognition of women as equal agents in the production of knowledge and in determining what knowledge is worthy of preservation and contemplation. In the twenty-first century, with the growth of Islamic feminism as a critical

epistemological movement in the past two decades,[28] a movement of multinational women scholars specializing in Islamic studies, feminist scholars have engaged with the heritage of Islamic philosophy from a critical perspective, conducting several revisions. In her book *Gendered Morality: Classical Islamic Ethics of the Self, Family, and Society* (2019), Zahra Ayubi critically analyzes three works on ethics by Muslim writers written between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries (Ayubi 2019). She argues that "all of these works specifically address an exclusively male public, as the entire ethical project is based on the normativity and centrality of the individual 'man' (belonging to the educated intellectual class), that the idea of moral refinement and development is an educational and instructive process designed for this human model only" (أبـو بكـر 2022).

It may be worth mentioning here the beginnings of women's engagement with Islamic heritage in the Arab world in the modern period in the context of the emergence of a feminist movement demanding equal rights and duties. The contributions of Malak Hifni Nasif (1886-1918) and Nazira Zain al-Din (1908-1976), to name a few, are valuable ones that have added to an important accumulated body of knowledge. Women in the Arab world continue to engage with Islamic heritage, especially in the wake of the Iranian revolution and the growing influence of Islamist movements in the region. However, Islamic feminism as a philosophical epistemological movement, the definition adopted here, emerged and gained momentum in the 21st century for two main reasons. The first is related to the outstanding knowledge production of women specialized in Islamic studies and Islamic history, women academics, researchers, and activists producing expert knowledge in Islamic studies from a gender perspective. The second reason is the establishment of the Musawah group in 2009, an initiative that coordinates among women researchers in the field of Islamic studies, organizes meetings, and launches important research projects, and now includes feminist researchers and activists specialized in various fields related to Islamic studies. Members come from around the world, including a group of Arab researchers such as Omaima Abou-Bakr, Zahia Jouirou, and Asma Lamrabet, working in collaboration with Islamic feminist researchers such as Amel Grami, Yasmin Amin, and Nevin Reda. Musawah, for example, adopted a research project based on the premise that there is a discrepancy between the principles and philosophy of ethics in Islamic heritage, on the one hand, and personal status laws which discriminate against women and place them

28 We can trace the emergence of Islamic feminism back to the work of such women as Malak Hifni Nasif (1886-1918) and Nazira Zain al-Din (1908-1976), writings that contributed to the accumulation of an important body of knowledge. However, Islamic feminism as an epistemological and philosophical movement of women specialists producing expert knowledge in Islamic studies from a gender perspective began to emerge and gain momentum in the twenty-first century.

in an inferior position to men, on the other. Researchers present philosophical readings of the concepts of justice (*'adl*), benevolence (*iḥsān*), and goodness (*ma'rūf*) as mentioned in the Quran from a contemporary perspective, seeking to counter masculinist jurisprudential interpretations that have deviated from the principles of ethics as they appear in the Quran, and ignored the lived reality of Muslims and contemporaries (Mir-Hosseini et al. 2020).

3. History and Historical Studies

Historical studies as a professional discipline emerged in the 1920s and 1930s in Egypt and Lebanon, at Fouad I University (now Cairo University) and the American University of Beirut, then in Syria and Iraq, where a History Department was established at the Syrian University (now Damascus University) in 1948 followed by Baghdad University in 1957, then in the 1970s in the Gulf, Jordan, and the Maghreb, following independence. Beginnings were linked to the political context in each country; in the Maghreb, for example, early historians focused on refuting claims by French colonial historians about Moroccan history and their racist perceptions of Moroccans, with the aim of reclaiming their history and asserting their right to independence.[29] In general, the prevailing trend in Arab countries was to legitimize the current regime, monarchical or republican, with a national tone, as the national history school dominated most history departments in the region (2023 عفيفـــي).

Historical studies were considered a lively and influential space for defining the identity of emerging modern states, especially in the post-independence period, and historical schools became an expression of the political, cultural, and ideological conflicts that raged in successive historical periods. "Most historical studies tended to highlight the histories of Arab ruling families under monarchical regimes, in order to legitimize the latter and turn royal history into the official history of the state. As for republican systems, academic studies focused on the history of national movements, in order to legitimize the new regime, asserting that independence came through a process of "national struggle." In some monarchical regimes, the history of the royal family and that of the national movement overlapped, as in the case of Morocco and Senussi Libya (2023 عفيفي).

In the 1980s and 1990s, a current emerged that depicted patterns of modernization and its manifestations, until a new generation of new historians, influenced by subaltern studies, came along, offering alternative readings of modernist trends that went beyond the exclusionary national narrative, and

29 On the beginnings of historical studies in the Arab world and the development of its schools until the 1990s, see Choueiry 2011.

paid attention to marginalized groups, women and Nubians, for example. Dina El Khawaga concludes that "historical studies in Egypt have undergone three pivotal turning points (championed successively by Shafik Ghorbal and Mohamed Anis, then later by Assem El-Dessouki, Raouf Abbas, and Nelly Hanna), which not only developed social history and its areas of study, but also redefined the methodologies of institutional history and the history of thought, the diversity of their sources (both archival and biographical), and their conceptual frameworks, while the modernist-state approach continued to dominate in the three main fields of historiography" (2023 الخواجــة).

In Lebanon, the emergence of historical studies at the American University of Beirut (AUB, formerly the Syrian Protestant College) began in the 1920s and 1930s. Hana Sleiman sheds light on three AUB professors who played a pioneering role in shaping the discipline academically: Asad Rostom (1897-1965), Constantine Zurayk (1909-2000), and Nabih Amin Fares (1906-1968) (Sleiman 2021). Rostom received his PhD from the University of Chicago in 1923, started work as Assistant Professor at the American University of Beirut the same year, and became Professor in 1933. Rostom believed that historians should be objective, and advocated a methodological approach to writing history. Constantine Zurayk joined the faculty of the American University of Beirut in 1930, upon receiving his PhD from Princeton University the same year, and played a prominent role, along with Rostom, in adopting a historicist-empiricist method for the discipline of History in the Arab East. Zurayk occupies a special place in Arab history, and is considered a pioneer of nationalist thought and the godfather of nationalist movements in the Mashriq in the first half of the twentieth century, given his interest in the relationship between history and national belonging in a civilizational context. It is worth noting that in the early formative years of this discipline, Rostom and Zurayk were in contact with their counterparts among Egyptian historians and intellectuals, Rostom collaborating with Ghorbal to establish the Abdeen Archive. Zurayk also relied heavily on Ahmad Amin's *Fajr al-Islām and Ḍuḥa al-Islām* in preparing the History of Civilizations curriculum. Nabih Amin Fares, like Zurayk, "employed his historical work in the service of the intellectual development of Arab nationalism as a secular, historically aware project for building the future. Hana Sleiman recounts the history of the establishment of the Arab Studies Program at the American University of Beirut as a paradigmatic example of Constantine's project of a culture-based history and a pivotal site for cultivating a history-making Arab elite, specifically during the years 1937-1956 (Sleiman 2021).

We face a conundrum deciphering the trajectories of historical studies from their beginnings in the twentieth century to the twenty-first, oscillating between the discourse of epistemological rupture and that of dynamic, episodic accumulation

which transcends prevalent or dominant frameworks and turns to parallel currents and ideas always available, no matter what period. Mohamed Bamyeh notes "a kind of epistemological rupture between the different generations of Arab social scientists, whether in terms of research foci, methodologies, or academic networks. ... It is not unusual to come upon Arab scholarly communities that were active, even flourishing, during earlier stages" (بامیــة 2015، 6).

In Morocco, historical writings emerged after independence in the context of the Moroccan historical school, as manifested in Abdallah Laroui's book on the social and cultural roots of Moroccan nationalism.[30] The historical current which chronicles Moroccan regions and tribes also experienced a significant growth, with a number of theses and historical writings, first among which was Ahmed Toufiq's book on the Inoultan tribes in the High Atlas of Morocco, whose publication initiated the stage of social history.[31] A significant portion of the research conducted by the Moroccan historical school was informed by the methodologies of the French Annales school, while placing emphasis on Moroccan sources and innovative approaches to historical studies.

There is no doubt that institutionalized history in the Arab world is not in a desirable state due to several reasons, including the authoritarian policies of post-independence states, regional and international conflicts, and the systematic destruction caused by wars. Mohamed Afifi notes the lack of academic cooperation among History Departments in Arab universities, as well as the decline of some Arab research institutions, such as the Egyptian Society for Historical Studies, established in 1945. Due to Egyptian civil work laws, which do not distinguish among charity, research, or cultural associations, the Society's role has diminished significantly. He also mentions the Society of Iraqi Historians and Archaeologists, which brought together a group of distinguished historians from across the Arab world, but whose work was halted due to the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, as well other legal reasons. Disputes among Arab countries cast a shadow over the work of cultural institutions, as was the case with the Union of Arab Historians headquartered in Baghdad. Following Saddam's invasion of Kuwait in 1990, and subsequent demands to relocate the Union from Baghdad, another was formed in Cairo, resulting in the existence of two unions that do not recognize one another (عفیفــي 2023).

These recurring disruptions have had a negative impact on building solid scholarly associations. Yet, at the same time, they became an incentive for finding non-traditional frameworks for communication and research collaboration.

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30 *Les origines sociales et culturelles du nationalisme marocain (1830-1912)* (1977).

31 *Al-Mujtama' al-Maghribī fī al-qarn 19 (Inūltān 1850-1912)* (Moroccan Society in 19th-Century Morocco (Inoultan 1850-1912) (2011).

Archival Challenges: Between Erasure, Prohibition, and the Logic of Archiving

Erasure and obliteration have been characteristic features of several historical periods in modern times. Di-Capua points to a telling incident in Egyptian history when, upon overthrowing his comrade Mohamed Naguib in 1954, Nasser rushed to the radio building to delete recordings with Naguib, and any broadcasts that referred to him. In the years following the Free Officers Movement, a systematic operation of national amnesia was carried out (Di-Capua 2009). This is in addition to a process of "memoricide"[32] (Masalha 2015), amidst the political struggles over land and memory in Palestine in particular.[33] The frequency of deliberate destruction of certain archives, due to wars or political conflicts, has increased in the last decade.

In general, historians researching Arab history face several difficulties in accessing national archives in particular, or the official archives of post-independence states, for reasons related to the excessive securitization of access procedures which directly determine what can be made available and to whom. This is in addition to officials in charge of archives considering themselves guardians or owners of the archives, under the pretext of preserving national security, even when it comes to information and documents that have absolutely nothing to do with national security (Ghazaleh 2019; Fahmy 2013).

In addition to the challenges of erasure and prohibition of archives, which we find in some countries, Omnia El Shakry draws attention to the need to question the logic of archiving itself, or the logic used to define the limits of the sayable, to use Foucault's concept, a necessarily selective logic which charts the paths of memory and forgetting for individuals, nations, and intellectual currents (El Shakry 2015).

Writing Arab History in the 21st Century

Despite these restrictions, and, again, perhaps because of them, historians resort to seeking alternative sources of information and constructing historical narratives that differ from the official one. Some are involved in building alternative archives independent of official institutions. The question of the archive has become a pressing issue not only for researchers and scholars across various disciplines,

32 Nur Masalha uses the term "memoricide," akin to "genocide," to describe the process of eradicating Palestinian memory by erasing names in Palestine.

33 Hana Sleiman notes that The Palestine Research Center of the Palestinian Liberation Organization was one of the first targets hit by Israel during the 1982 invasion of Beirut (Sleiman 2016, 42).

but also for non-academic practitioners; one can observe several interventions and reflections on archive-related issues emanating from outside the academic field and its specialists. In May 2018, *Mada Masr*, an independent media platform in Egypt, published a series titled "The Archive as a Battlefront," noting they had received several articles on archives, reflecting a growing interest in archive-related issues among a variety of researchers, activists, artists, and filmmakers. The platform invited those interested to participate in a dialog about the archive (Mada Masr 2018). This dossier opened the door to reflections and questions that engage with definitions and uses of archives, their potential as spaces for resistance and subverting official narratives, and the limits of archives in general, and visual archives in particular, where the image is presented as the truth, with no consideration of its surrounding context. Contributors, filmmakers and photographers, contemplate the use of visual archives in artworks and films, which has increased exponentially in the 21st century due to technological advancements and ease of access to images through various social media platforms. Mohammad Shawky Hassan, a filmmaker who has utilized archival material in his work, engages with the prevalent idea of the archive as a space assumed to contain more reliable evidence of historical events compared to others, and highlights the need for an "understanding of the archive's limitations, and of how it derives power from its materiality and consequent alleged factuality" (Hassan 2017).

There is a notable surge in archiving and archive building, particularly digital archives, in the 21st century, especially after 2011, due to several reasons. Most important among these is the political openness in the public sphere, which allowed for numerous discussions and the emergence of new voices expressing themselves and their own concerns, and engaging with political and intellectual issues in an unprecedented manner (Ryzova 2014; Joudi 2023). These new archives are characterized by being mostly the work of independent individual or group efforts, often driven by the difficulty of accessing information and documents in official archives, a lack of trust in those archives, or a desire to challenge official narratives and produce resistant historical counter-narratives.

Archives play a prominent role in the ongoing conflicts surrounding the historiography of the Arab revolutions, countering the official narratives of many Arab regimes that seek to spread despair and frustration by disseminating rumors about conspiracies and hidden agendas behind the movement, thereby denying people's agency and ability to effect change. In the light of this openness, oral history archives emerge, documenting political events and social developments from the perspectives of ordinary people and their experiences, as well as accounts by oppressed people seeking justice, and migrants forced to flee their

homelands in search of safety. Additionally, the archives of art, cinema, and heritage also flourish.[34]

Reem Joudi identifies 27 independent archival initiatives on the Arab world according to several criteria, including the use of gender as a lens to approach the world, as well as gender as an actual practice, for example: activist archives, such as 858: An Archive of Resistance[35] and Creative Memory of the Syrian Revolution;[36] archives of the disappeared and forgotten, such as Archives des luttes des femmes en Algérie (Archive of Women's Struggles in Algeria);[37] nostalgic photography archives, mostly family photo archives or images from previous historical periods; Queer archives focusing on marginalized groups in the region;[38] in addition to gender oral history archives, such as The Knowledge Workshop in Lebanon,[39] Women and Memory Forum (WMF) in Egypt,[40] and Gender Oral History Archive (GOHA) at the American University of Beirut.

Writing History Outside of Academic Institutions

Unofficial archives have proliferated in the 21st century, as mentioned earlier, and so have websites and online platforms run and contributed to by individuals who do not specialize in writing history, so called "amateur historians." Afifi notes the presence of some of these initiatives as *Facebook* pages, such as "Sirat al-maḥrūsa" (Biography of Egypt), "Tārīkh wā ḥaḍārat al-Maghrib al-Islāmī" (History and Civilization of the Islamic Maghreb), and "Tārīkh mar'ī" (Visual History). In addition to these platforms, Afifi refers to cultural salons, especially those available virtually, such as Egyptian poet Zein Alabdin Fouad's salon, which highlights specific periods in Egyptian and Arab history and their characteristics, in addition to television programs that feature historical figures and events (2023 عفيفـــي), as well as historical series and films that play a vital role in shaping historical consciousness.

Literature and History

The relationship between literature and history has long been a subject of debate. From a positivist perspective, history is a discipline concerned with facts and real

34 On alternative archives and resistance, see Khouri 2023.

35 https://858.ma

36 https://beta.creativememory.org

37 https://www.facebook.com/archivesfemmmesdz

38 Reem Joudi, "Affective Gendered Mapping of Digital Archival Initiatives in the Arab Region," 2024.

39 https://www.alwarsha.org

40 https://wmf.org.eg

events. Literature, on the other hand, is a realm of imagination, not bound by facts, a view that suggests a strict dichotomy between truth and fiction, between the objectivity of history and the subjectivity of literary writing. However, another perspective views literature as providing authors with the opportunity to tackle politically tabooed issues and create historical narratives alternative, or parallel, to the official narrative. In her 1994 book, Samia Mehrez argues that the boundaries between literature and history are not rigid, but rather more fluid than generally assumed. She examines the works of Naguib Mahfouz, Sonallah Ibrahim, and Gamal al-Ghitani as creative texts that largely contributed to shaping the narratives of Egypt's social and political history (Mehrez 2005). Literature also allows for bypassing processes of erasure and exclusion in official historical narratives and recovering different, even conflicting, voices, feelings, and positions, as the literary narrative allows for the inclusion of contradictory, sometimes ambiguous, opinions (Jebari 2022). Mohammed Bamyeh suggests that historical novels "may offer a more comprehensive view and even deeper knowledge than rigorous academic studies, which, unlike literary works, require strict methodologies and verifiable evidence, and are therefore necessarily limited to a narrower range of knowledge than the novel can accommodate." He cites examples of Arab historical novels which have played a significant role in social historiography specifically, such as Abdul Rahman Munif's quintet *Mudun al-milḥ* (*Cities of Salt*), where we encounter a description of psychological changes and patterns of social ties "unparalleled in any historical or sociological study" (بامیــة 2015، 9).

Mohamed Afifi notes a remarkable surge in historical novels in the 21st century, citing the examples of the winners of the Arabic Booker prize: Bahaa Taher's *Waḥat al-Ghurūb* (*Sunset Oasis*), whose events take place at the end of the nineteenth century, in 2008; Youssef Ziedan's *'Azāzīl (Azazeel)*, on Coptic history, in 2009; Abdel Wahab Issawi's *al-Dīwān al-Isbartī* (The Spartan Court), on the colonial history of Algeria, in 2020; and Jalal Barjas's *Dafātir al-warrāq (The Bookseller's Notebooks)*, on the period between 1947 and 2019, in 2021 (عفیفــي 2023).

The intersections between literature and history are most evident in autobiography, which has long occupied a liminal space between the novel, biography, and history. Within this liminal space, various forms of writing and terminology have emerged, which twentieth-century critics, both in the West and the East, have sought to theorize and define, such as autobiography, biography, memoirs, diaries, autobiographical novels, and self-narratives. Hala Kamal traces the beginnings of autobiographical theory from a comparative perspective, highlighting the contributions of Arab critics in translating new terminology, drawing on the Arabic literary traditions of biography and historiography. She concludes that "in Western culture, autobiographical discourse resembles fictional narration ... while autobiography in Arab culture is more intertwined with historical writing" (كمــال 2020، 72). Kamal sheds light

on the role of feminist theorists in revolutionizing and expanding the concept of autobiography, making the boundaries between forms of self-writing more fluid and flexible, and formulating the concept of "life writing" to encompass diverse forms and types of writing the self and history. It also opens up an interdisciplinary space that crosses various fields of knowledge, at the intersection of the humanities and social sciences, even the natural sciences and arts, as seen for example in such writings as musical autobiographies, medical memoirs, oral history, or self-narratives (كمـال 2020، 90).

One of the most prominent examples of writing outside the boundaries of genre and discipline is Iman Mersal's book *Fī 'athar 'Inayāt al-Zayyāt* (2019; *Traces of Enayat*, 2023), which won the 2021 Sheikh Zayed Book Award. This work traces the biography of Enayat al-Zayyat, a young Egyptian writer who died in the 1960s under tragic circumstances, leaving behind but one single novel, *al-Ḥubb wa-l ṣamt* (Love and Silence). Mersal's book, which traces al-Zayyat's life, is a cross-genre work that utilizes narrative, academic research methods, and investigative journalism. It combines biography and autobiography within a balanced critical perspective that crosses defined genre boundaries and blends creativity with documentation and historical facts, re-reading a feminist experience and presenting it after careful review within a coherent narrative structure. Mersal's book is a good example of overcoming archival challenges that obscured Enayat al-Zayyat's biography. Mersal searches for information in newspapers, through interviews with Enayat's friends and communication with her relatives, and by visiting places associated with her; an archival adventure which results in understanding the logic of archiving that governed the life of this forgotten writer.

Rewriting Official History

It can be said that initiatives to rewrite official Arab history post-2011 constitute a notable current in the field of historical studies, especially if we agree this was a watershed moment in Arab history and the history of the world at large. These initiatives come in various forms: articles, workshops, books, conferences, and artistic works. Leyla Dakhli reminds us that writing history necessarily begins with questions stemming from an issue in the present, which necessitates determining who we write for and why. As she argues: "To interrogate historical sources to find out what they reveal about the society they emerged from, as well as to navigate the spaces where 'subjected knowledge' and the 'historical knowledge of struggle' emerge, may help end what Foucault considered 'the tyranny of globalizing discourses.'" She adds: "Expressing the problematic in these terms is, evidently, to suggest that all history is engaged, that is a response to questions of the present, and speaks always of the present moment" (Dakhli 2016, 356).

Dakhli specifies the moment of witnessing events in Tunisia between December 2010 and January 2011, which raised questions such as: “Are deep historical structures or global events the triggers of revolution? Or is it the minor, local and immediate ones that shake the world? And who decides what is a major and what is a minor event in world history, anyway?” She adds: “It is precisely in these differences and in this uncertainty that I look to locate the writing of history” (Dakhli 2016, 358).

These questions arose within the framework of a conference held in 2012 at Princeton University, marking the 50th anniversary of Albert Hourani’s *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939*, which brought together a group of historians and scholars from different generations specializing in Middle East Studies. Questions about the Nahda and re-reading its premises and hypotheses as expressed by Hourani in his foundational book dominated the conference, questions that have been repeatedly raised at times of crisis in the Arab region, especially after 2011 (Hanssen and Weiss 2016).

Nahda is not the only period that witnessed revisions; several others that deal with different periods related to local and regional events in Arab countries can also be found. Morocco, which in the 1960s-1980s underwent what was called the “Years of Lead,” opened the door to reconciliation with yesterday’s revolutionaries and opponents of the existing political regime, by establishing the Equity and Reconciliation Commission, similar to what took place in South Africa. This had repercussions on the academic writing of history, and a new discipline in history departments called *temps présent* (present times) emerged (Kenbib 2006). With this in mind, one can ask: Do the events and realities experienced by Arab societies not give rise to new genres of writing history? Moreover, the growing awareness of Morocco’s African connections has helped increase interest in African and Saharan studies.

In Egypt, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the 1967 defeat, a group of researchers and artists gathered for a workshop titled “Geography for Defeated Heroes” on May 16-June 22, 2017. The workshop “attempted to deconstruct the concept of ‘defeat’ and explore its potential implications in the present.” It focused on “the period between the 1960s and 1980s, considering defeat throughout history” (2018 مجـدي). Among the participants was artist and translator Rawya Sadek, currently rewriting the biography of Doria Shafik, a pioneering feminist who had a significant impact on the Egyptian feminist movement. However, due to her opposition to the policies of the Nasserist period, Shafik was isolated, the contents of her office confiscated, her magazine *Bint al-Nīl* (Daughter of the Nile) suspended, and she was placed under house arrest (2018 صـــادق). Sadek starts

from a moment in the present when a generation that participated in the January 25th revolution feels defeated and isolated.

4. Translation and Translation Studies

Since the early beginnings of the translation movement in the Arab world in the modern period, the selection of works to be translated has been linked to the political/cultural project of the translator or the sponsoring institution. In Egypt, Muhammad Ali Pasha paid attention to translating modern Western sciences, and relied on the efforts of Rifa'a Rafi' al-Tahtawi to train a generation of translators as a key element of his project to build a modern state independent of the Ottoman Empire. Muhammad Ali sent students to Italy, France, and England to study modern sciences, and one of the conditions of the expedition was that they must translate the books they learned into Arabic. The first expedition was sent to Italy upon his assumption of power in 1809 to study military sciences, shipbuilding, printing, and engineering. This was followed by other expeditions to France and England to study various specializations, including in the second half of the nineteenth century the humanities, various literary genres, arts such as theater and opera, history, and geography. These early translators became the nucleus of the modernization movement in Egypt (2023 حنـــا).

The translation movement continued, and many of the pioneers of the Nahda emerged as translators aiming to transfer knowledge as well as spread ideas they adopted, using translation as a vehicle to achieve this goal. For example, when Shibli Shumayyil translated Ludwig Büchner's commentary on Darwin in 1884, he was not so much concerned with conveying the exact meaning of words and phrases accurately as he was with conveying essential ideas about the philosophy of evolution and progress (Elshakry 2008, 705). As Marwa Elshakry clarifies, the primary goal of translation at the time was to, consciously, explain and propagate ideological ideas the translator espoused and sought to disseminate through the translation of certain texts.

Translation plays a significant role in legitimizing knowledge in the humanities. The symbolic value of theories and concepts in the academic field is not solely realized due to their importance; their continued use and repetition across time and space become a condition for their recognition and establishment as foundational and universal concepts (Schogler 2018, 82). In the literary field, we find that translating a novel or a poetry collection into a foreign language enhances the value of the literary text as well as the symbolic capital of the author. Translation directly contributes to the internationalization of a literary text and increases its chances of occupying a privileged position in the international literary canon. Moreover, Omri cites a critic speaking to him of novels that are "born translated," highlighting

the close relationship that has grown between translation and literary production, especially after the launch of the International Prize for Arabic Fiction in 2007, which includes, in addition to the monetary award, the translation of winning works into English. There are other literary awards, such as the Naguib Mahfouz Medal for Literature, awarded by the American University in Cairo, where the prize consists exclusively of the translation of the winning novel. Here, translation plays a major role in capitalizing on the recognition that a literary work receives abroad to increase its value at home; the novel thus gains its value mainly from critical reception in the West rather than by the local reading public (Omri 2023).

In an article on the reception of translations of Arabic literature in Britain, specifically novels written by women, Vron Ware argues that Western readers cannot engage with translations of literary productions that deal with gender relations in the Islamic world in isolation from the cultural frameworks imposed by national and neo-imperial narratives (Ware 2011, 73). Ware discusses the London Book Fair held in 2008, which focused on Arabic literary production. She argues that culture has become a fundamental tool in foreign diplomacy and international relations, and that promoting the reading of translated literature is an integral part of British international relations with the Arab world, regardless of the concerned authors' goals or aspirations, or some of them trying to direct readers to receive and interpret their work according to a certain intentionality or purpose.[41] Both the publicity and media coverage of the fair highlighted the convergence of publishing houses' commercial interests with Britain's international relations (Ware 2011, 56).

Sameh Hanna argues that the issue of translation in the Arab context has long been confined to "the question of production: What, how, and how much do we translate?," despite translation being a political, social, and cultural act. Hanna writes: "Translation can no longer be seen as a neutral communicative act in which the translator plays the role of an impartial mediator. If in theory translation is hoped to be an act of communication that seeks to achieve understanding between two cultures, daily reality negates this, as it becomes a tool exploited by multiple individuals, institutions, and pressure groups to achieve specific political goals, or to promote one point of view or intellectual argument over another" (37 ،2008 حنا).

When we discuss translation as an integral part of knowledge production in the humanities, we are necessarily talking about translation as practice and production, on the one hand, and translation as explicatory discourse, i.e., translation theories and mainstream research approaches, on the other.

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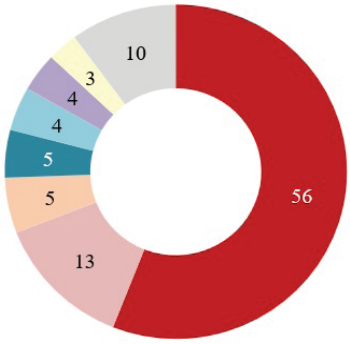
41 Vron Ware analyzes the reception of *Banāt al-Riyāḍ (Girls of Riyadh)* in its English translation and the dispute that erupted between the author and the translator. She notes Rajaa al-Sanea's attempt to direct readers to read her novel away from dominant Western ideas about women in Saudi Arabia and their struggles in a patriarchal society (Ware 2011, 72).

To identify some indicators of translation as a practice in the Arab world in the past decade, from 2011 to 2021, Sameh Hanna observes and analyzes translations published by the National Center for Translation in Egypt, for example, in light of a previous study on the Center that covered what was published in the first decade of the 21st century. Hanna notes a remarkable development in the number of languages being translated, as translation from an intermediate language has largely decreased and the number of original languages being translated increased. For example: "The publications translated from English in the fields of literature, literary studies, theater, and cultural studies in a country like Egypt from 2000 to 2006 amounted to 77% of the volume of published translations, compared to 3% for publications translated from French, and 20% for total published translations from all other languages. ... However, in the period from 2011 to 2021, this gap between English and other languages narrowed clearly (Figure 7) … [where] books published from English accounted for 56% of all books translated from all languages, while French, for example, accounted for 13% of the total published translations, and the remaining share was distributed among other languages, some of which were not previously on the Arabic translation map, such as Danish, Yugoslavian, Bengali, Azerbaijani, among others" (2023 حنـــا).

Figure 7: Original languages of books translated into Arabic at the National Center for Translation in Egypt between 2011 and 2021 (%)



English
French
German
Russian
Greek
Spanish
Persian
Other languages*

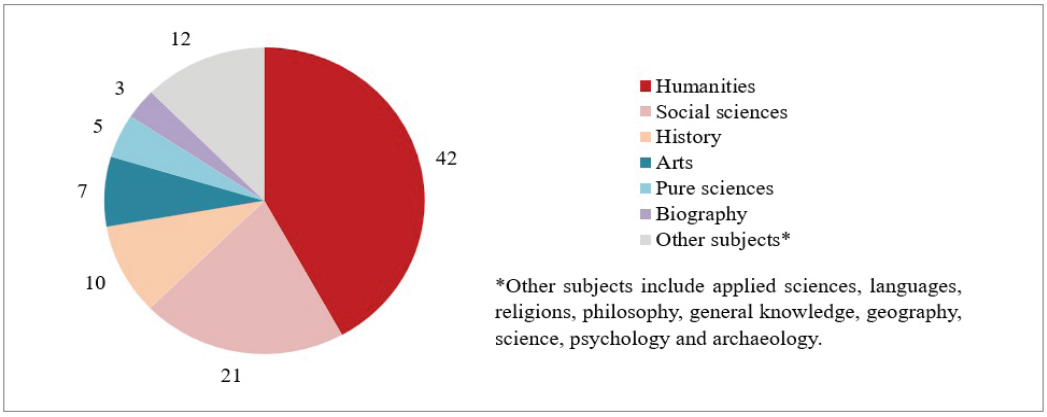
*Other languages include Italian, Chinese, Hebrew, Latin, Urdu, Japanese, Azerbaijani, Turkish, Bosnian, Kurdish, Hungarian, Yugoslav, Iranian, Portuguese, Polish, Czech, Danish, Syriac, Kazakh, Korean, Norwegian and hieroglyphics.

Source: 2023 حنا.

As for the fields of knowledge that are translated into Arabic, Hanna notes "the continued dominance of literature in its various genres, as its share of what was translated reached 42%, compared to 21% for social sciences, and only 5% for pure sciences" (Figure 8). Interest in other fields such as history, art, and "religious

studies of a historical and social/anthropological nature" has also grown, as has attention to other literary genres besides the novel, such as theater, poetry, short stories, and graphic novels (2023 حنـا).

Figure 8: Subjects of books translated into Arabic at the National Center for Translation in Egypt between 2011 and 2021 (%)



Source: 2023 حنا.

Regarding publishing houses concerned with translation, we find that their number has increased in the last decade, both within the Arab world and in Europe, the latter undertaking the publication of books that cannot be published in the Arab world due to censorship, such as Manshurat al-Jamal in Germany and Dar al-Mutawassit in Italy. There has also been a surge in open-access e-publishing, as we see, for example, in the case of Hindawi Foundation (2023 حنـا).

Research Approaches in Translation Studies

Translation studies theorists categorize research approaches into four: 1. linguistic approaches; 2. cultural approaches; 3. cognitive-epistemological approaches; and 4. sociological approaches. Hanna writes: "All approaches--except perhaps the linguistic--pay attention to the translator's role and agency in one way or another, whether from a cultural, cognitive, or sociological perspective" (حنـا 2023). Generally speaking, the issues of literary translation, translation theory, and intercultural studies are at the forefront of researchers' interests.[42]

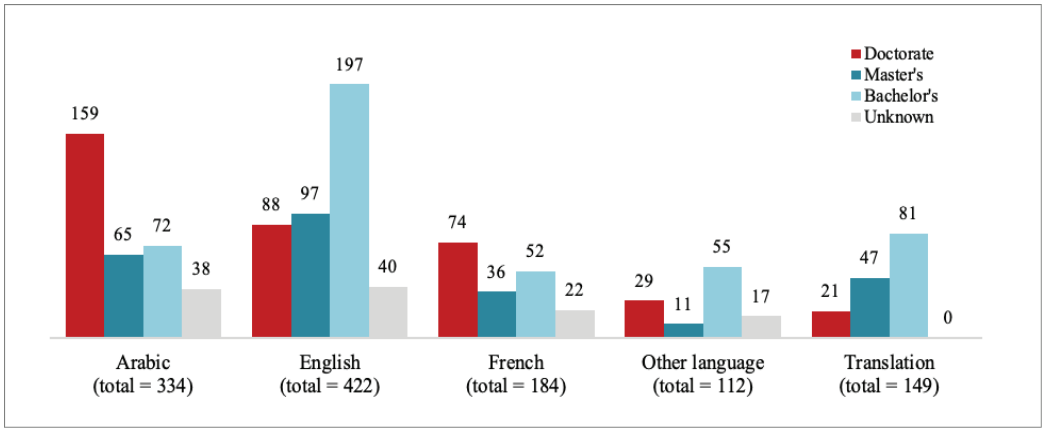
In general, translation studies in the twenty-first century have moved beyond the narrow view that confines them to linguistics, focusing on language and the correct choice of vocabulary, promoting ideas emphasizing the translator's fidelity to the original text, or, conversely, anxiety about the translator's betrayal of that

42 For more on researchers' interests in the field of translation, see Zanettin et al. 2015, p.168.

text, a trend that sees the translator's most important function as constantly searching for the right word and equivalent to the original text. Since the 1970s, theorists have viewed translation as a form of social, cultural, and political activity, hence the need to pay attention to the contexts in which translation is produced, from the background of the translator and her/his research project, to publishing houses and sponsoring parties, to dominant narratives that frame the recipients' understanding of the translated work and its direction.[43] Based on these shifts in translation studies, "the idea of betrayal and fidelity in translation ... has become a thing of the past" (2009 حنـا). Translation studies have also become an interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary field.

As for translation studies in higher education institutions in the Arab world, Sameh Hanna argues that translation "is still a minor subject in undergraduate literature and linguistics programs, still mostly limited to teaching language skills required for the job market." One exception, according to Hanna, may be Qatar University, where a minor in translation offers "a compulsory course titled 'Contemporary Translation Theories.' From the course description, there is notable uniqueness in the topics included, such as 'Cultural Transformation in Translation Studies,' 'Translation and Ideology,' 'Translation and the Translator's Invisibility,' etc. MA programs in translation are relatively limited compared to those focusing on Arabic, English, or French language (and/or literature) (Figure 9), including the Cultural Politics of Translation MA at Cairo University, which offers courses such as 'Introduction to Translation Studies,' 'Translation and Gender Studies,' and 'Politics of Translation in the Arab World'" (2023 حنـا).

Figure 9: Number of universities offering degrees in literature/language specializations in the Arab region by highest degree offered in each



Source: ASSM 2021a.

43 For an overview of the most important translation theorists from a narrative theory perspective and its use to provide a political approach to translation and the role of translators, see Baker 2006.

When it comes to journals specializing in translation studies, Hanna observes that these publications are "dominated by a purely linguistic approach," with some exceptions, such as some of the articles published in *Awaser* and *Fossoul* in Egypt, and *The Moroccan Journal for Translation Studies*. At the same time, Hanna notes the openness of Arab researchers to "translational traditions outside the Euro-American center," such as those of China and Latin America, and that "translation from the Arab tradition has begun to take its [proper] place" thanks to researchers of Arab origin in the West, due to the climate of academic freedom and availability of research resources (2023 حنـــا).

Translation and the Arab Revolutions

Recent cultural approaches to translation discourses and emphasis on the translator's role in propagating a certain ideology or taking sides in an ongoing conflict or event have shifted translation studies toward an activist turn. This turn asserts the translator's role as political activist, that is, the writer/translator becomes a witness to incidents of torture in prison, or plays the role of mediator in giving voice to the voiceless. Examples include translators who help asylum seekers; those who translate from vernacular into classical language or vice versa, whether to communicate a particular message to the world or support a minority language; or translators who become revolutionaries participating in an ongoing conflict by translating revolutionary artistic expressions, such as graffiti, on the walls of Aleppo.[44]

The remarkable impact of the Arab Spring on Arabic translation studies, as indicated by previous research, was that it led to a broader perspective on what activity constitutes "translation." As mentioned earlier, the study of translation in the Arab world has for decades been confined to textual features and the mechanisms of language and meaning transfer from one text to another. Perhaps the political phenomena and discourses that led and gave birth to the Arab Spring can help us to add other equally significant ones worth investigating from a translational point of view. Examples include the translation of images, graffiti, and wall writings that spread in the "Tahrir squares" of several Arab capitals, as well as that of chants

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44 According to Gould and Tahmasebian in *The Routledge Handbook of Translation and Activism*, "four paradigms of the translator-activist can be identified: that of witness-bearer, of voice-giver, as vernacular mediator, and as revolutionary". They also acknowledge Mona Baker's role in leading the "activist turn" in translation studies: "For Mona Baker, a translator-activist without whom translation studies, like this book, is unthinkable" (Gould and Tahmasebian 2020). It is useful to mention two other books that were instrumental in driving the activist turn. The first is *Translating and Interpreting Conflict*, an edited volume by Myriam Salama-Carr. The book consists of selections from papers presented at the first international conference on "Translation and Conflict," held at the University of Salford in November 2004, as well as solicited articles. The second book is Mona Baker's *Translation and Conflict: A Narrative Account*. For more, see Salama-Carr 2007 and Baker 2006.

and slogans raised in these squares. Other phenomena also emerged, related to the use of social media to transmit and translate speeches from these squares into different languages. All these phenomena have received marginal interest from Arab researchers; perhaps the coming years will witness greater attention to them (حنـا 2023).

This shift toward activism in translation studies in the wake of the Arab Spring is evident, for example, in four publications (a special journal issue, and three books) published in English that address questions and texts related to the revolutions from a translation perspective. In February 2012, an entire issue of the English-language journal *boundary 2* was dedicated to translating Tunisian views and approaches to Tunisia's revolution, targeting a wide range of readers worldwide. The issue featured articles by researchers and revolutionary activists that seek to move beyond stereotypical analyses, focusing on direct experience, and paying specific attention to Tunisia's political, social, and cultural realities. For example, Mohamed-Salah Omri writes about the prominent role poetry and poets played in both revolutionary mobilization and illuminating the revolution's rapid developments. He specifically highlights the contributions of Mohamed Saghir Ouled Ahmed, dubbed "the poet of the Tunisian revolution" (Omri 2012). Mounir Saidani, on the other hand, describes the first forty days of the Tunisian revolution based on his personal activist involvement, as well as his experience as a sociologist (Saidani 2012). The issue also includes two articles by Abdeljelil Temimi, historian and founder of the Temimi Foundation for Scientific Research and Information, in which he sheds light on the Foundation's initiatives in documenting the Tunisian revolution, through conducting discussions and interviews with revolutionary activists and participants (Temimi 2012a; Temimi 2012b).

As for the books mentioned earlier, the first was published in 2012, only one year after the outbreak of the Egyptian revolution on January 25, 2011, *Translating Egypt's Revolution: The Language of Tahrir*, edited by Samia Mehrez. The book includes articles written by students at the American University in Cairo who participated in a seminar on translating the revolution, designed and taught by Samia Mehrez, in an attempt to build bridges between academic education and current events outside the university walls, and in response to students' enthusiasm and participation in the revolution. The articles address students' experiences in translating the revolution, including the translation of chants, songs, slogans, and jokes, for example. This is a translation that involves interpreting meanings and ideas by situating them in their political, cultural, and historical contexts, that is, a translation that does not stop at linguistic significations, but rather uses inter- and transdisciplinary concepts and approaches to decode the words and phrases used and reformulate

them in creative ways. Samia Mehrez describes the students participating in this translation seminar as eyewitnesses immersed in the immediate event, meaning that their study of political events in the Middle East differs from that of experts, as "[t]hey are testifying, rather, to what they have seen and heard." (Mehrez 2012, 4).

The second book, *Translating Dissent: Voices From and With the Egyptian Revolution*, edited by Mona Baker, was published in 2016. The basic premise of the book is that the various forms, methods, and mediating functions of translation "must be brought to the center of the political arena and conceptualized as integral elements of the revolutionary project" if we are to strengthen the networks of solidarity and promote the values of pluralism that unite contemporary protest movements (Baker 2016, 1). The book includes essays that address discursive and non-discursive phenomena, and multiple translation experiences based on the practice of translation as an activist and political act. The book also includes an interview with Philip Rizk, Egyptian filmmaker and writer, and one of the members of Mosireen, "a volunteer media activist collective that came together to document and transmit images of the Egyptian Revolution of 2011."[45] Rizk argues that translation is the basis of Mosireen's work: "We came together to try to translate the spirit of the revolt. … [W]e sought to translate the street through images, in the hope of breeding anger, in the hope of forcing the audience to face the reality of the brutality of the regime, in the hope of instigating revolt." (Rizk 2016).

The third book, *The Routledge Book of Arabic Translation Studies* (2020), is edited by Sameh Hanna, Hanem El-Farahaty, and Abdel-Wahab Khalifa. The book includes three chapters on the relationship between translation and the Arab revolutions. In a chapter on translating tweets related to the events of July 3, 2013 in Egypt, when The Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) ousted President Mohamed Morsi, Neil Sadler analyzes the translation using three approaches: linguistic, narrative, and affective. On the affective approach, he concludes that the purpose of the tweets during that period was to help readers understand the depth of physical experiences during the protests (Sadler 2020, 159). Another chapter, "Translating Tahrir: From Praxis to Theory with Tahrir Documents," by Levi Thompson, Emily Drumsta, and Elias Saba, addresses a project initiated by Cameron Hu, a PhD student at the University of Chicago who was studying in Cairo during the outbreak of the revolution. Hu set out to collect documents and papers circulating in Tahrir Square since the beginning of the revolution on January 25. "Tahrir Documents" include leaflets and publications distributed by protesters, parties, and groups involved in the

45 https://www.mosireen.com

revolution; Hu succeeded in gathering a number of students and volunteer translators to develop a website for uploading the translated documents.[46] The authors argue that what distinguishes the field of Arabic translation is that most Arabic translation scholars are also practitioners, hence the rigid divide between theory and praxis found in European and American research is much less pronounced. This work is thus an important addition to the development of the field of Arabic-English translation as both theory and praxis (Thompson et. al., 2012, 176).

5. Gender Studies

The field of Women and Gender Studies (WGS) in general is characterized by its close connection to women's liberation movements, in terms of both responding to questions raised by feminist social movements as well as producing feminist knowledge that supports their demands. The turn of the twentieth century witnessed the emergence of feminist consciousness and activism, and the national liberation movements of the 1950s and 1960s empowered women in their struggle to gain rights. However, Arab women's demands were not met under modern nation-states, particularly with regard to equality in the private sphere, in addition to the authoritarianism of post-colonial states that suppressed opposition and nationalized social movements, including women's movements. As a result, the decades immediately following the independence of Arab states witnessed a decline in independent feminist movements and the rise of state feminism. Despite some notable achievements in education, employment, and legal protection for women, the term "state feminism" is associated in the collective imagination with the polarization of feminist activists and the stifling and co-optation of independent civil society organizations (Al-Ali 2007; Elsadda 2011; Elsadda 2020; Arenfeldt and Golley 2012).

The emergence of WGS in the Arab world in the 1980s and later in the 1990s came within the framework of independent research centers established in an atmosphere of relative political liberalism in many Arab countries.[47] The institutionalization of WGS programs followed different academic and political paths in different regions. Academic, political, and cultural differences have also influenced the development and institutionalization of this new field of

46 https://www.tahrirdocuments.org

47 We find an exception in universities that were initially women's colleges, such as the Arab Institute for Women (formerly the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World), established in 1973 at the Lebanese American University in Beirut, as well as in the establishment of a Chair for research on women's issues at Ahfad University, Sudan in 1984.

study.[48] The trajectory of WGS programs in the Arab world is a direct result of the political constraints on academia in authoritarian post-independence Arab states, not to mention the conditions and history of national higher education institutions. WGS in the Arab world were thus shaped and nurtured within non-governmental research centers, established by feminist activists who founded independent organizations in the 1980s and 1990s, and seized the opportunities provided by political transformations in the Arab and global contexts (Elsadda 2023, 13).

Two significant developments occurred at the end of the 1970s and during the 1980s, loosening the grip of authoritarian states on independent feminist groups, and allowing a new generation of feminist non-governmental organizations to emerge in the 1980s and 1990s. The first was the economic liberalization policies adopted by some Arab countries, which went hand in hand with political liberalization and the establishment of multi-party regimes. The second had to do with the internationalization of women's rights (Elsadda 2023, 15-16). The Third World Conference on Women held in Nairobi in 1985 is considered by many to be the birth of global feminism, as it placed women's rights at the center of global politics. The Beijing Platform for Action, adopted in 1995 at the Fourth World Conference on Women, declared women's rights as human rights and committed states to take specific actions to ensure their compliance with agreed resolutions. It also committed governments to create national mechanisms to monitor and advance the status of women to the highest levels of government. As part of this global directive, national councils for women, or other forms of national mechanisms, were established in Arab countries (Elsadda 2023, 16).

A second generation of women's movements emerged in the 1980s and 1990s in many Arab countries. Many of the founders of the earliest women's rights

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48 In Germany, the first Chair in women's studies was established in 1980, and the first MA in gender studies was established in 1997 at Humboldt University in Berlin. Kraft asserts that the relative delay in institutionalizing this academic field, despite the presence of a strong feminist movement, is partly due to persistent claims by academic colleagues that gender experts were insufficiently academic, ideologically driven, and lacked critical intellectual objectivity (Kraft 2014, 109 and 111). In Poland, women's and gender studies programs emerged in the early 1990s after the end of one-party rule and the transition to democracy. These programs were "characterized by a strong pro-Western orientation, as scholars in Poland were eager to catch up with Western feminist traditions"; however, many debates arose later about the "hegemony of Western, and particularly American, feminist discourse" (Filipowicz 2014, 11). In Latin America, the 1970s saw the emergence of military regimes hostile to social movements and activist-oriented research. Women's studies research emerged outside academic circles in the 1980s, garnering funding from international organizations. In brief, different histories, political regimes, and academic contexts played a crucial role in shaping the contours of this emerging discipline. For an overview of the challenges facing women's studies programs in universities worldwide, see Pande 2014.

NGOs were women with a history of political activism or who were members of political parties. NGOs in the Arab world provided research and training opportunities for academics who established or joined them to circumvent many of the restrictions and limitations set by academic institutions, or to secure an additional source of income. Moreover, academics' participation in NGOs enhanced their reputation and research, as this involvement added value to their symbolic capital. Many academics gained intellectual status through their participation in NGO programs and activities. Women academic activists in the Arab world thus took the lead in producing knowledge on women's and gender studies in the region. In Morocco, renowned sociologist and Islamic feminist pioneer Fatema Mernissi was an active member of the women's movement and a supporter of feminist activism. Mernissi is an excellent example of an intellectual and academic who invested her symbolic capital in empowering feminist activist organizations and disseminating feminist concepts and ideas to a wider audience (Elsadda 2023, 16-18).

Non-governmental organizations were not necessarily a safe haven for research and activism, facing many challenges in addition to political, cultural, and financial restrictions. NGOs established in the 1980s and 1990s were founded under strict laws issued in the 1950s and 1960s. As such, their legal status was precarious and their ability to operate contingent upon political considerations beyond their control, and most could not communicate or interact with grassroots constituencies. Most of them also relied on international funding, making them easy targets for politically motivated smear campaigns and accusations of being in the pocket of Western imperialism; they became prisoners of a system where the goal of sustaining work became a constant struggle (Elsadda 2023, 18).

Trajectories and Directions

A general survey of the trends and issues addressed by women's NGOs reveals a diverse landscape. On the developmental side, the focus is on socio-economic challenges facing women and the impact of inequality on their lives and families. From a cultural perspective, on the other hand, there is a focus on issues of identity. There are discussions on the role of religions and the challenges of interpretation from a gender perspective, as well as critical contributions from a postcolonial feminist perspective to representations of Arab and Muslim women in Western narratives and media, including critical readings of modernist discourses on the "women's question" in the Arab world. The scene also involves revisiting Arab history from a gender perspective, highlighting the role of women from previous centuries. The opening up of political and

cultural spaces has also allowed the establishment of newspapers, journals, and publishing houses specialized in women's issues (Elsadda 2023, 19).[49]

The 1990s witnessed a significant increase in knowledge production in the field of women's and gender studies. In Egypt, the first issue of the feminist journal *Hagar* was published in 1992.[50] In 1993, Nour Publishing, Dār al-Mar'a al-'Arabiyya, (1994-2003) was founded in Cairo, coinciding with the establishment of Jam'iyyat al-Mar'a al-'Arabiyya (the Arab Women's Association) in Beirut. Its journal, *Nour*, aimed to provide a platform for women's voices and contributions to social and cultural debates in the Arab world. The Women and Memory Forum was established in 1995 with the goal of producing knowledge about women and gender in the Arab world from a feminist perspective that engages with colonial and modernist discourses that frame narratives about women and gender in post-independence states.[51] There has also been a significant increase in knowledge production about women's and gender studies from a rights perspective, with a particular focus on the legal rights of women in personal status laws.[52] In this context, the Arab Institute for Women at the Lebanese American University in Lebanon published the journal *al-Raida* for the first time in 1976. And in 1992, The Lebanese Association of Women Researchers (Bahithat) was established, bringing together independent women researchers who reject forced divisions on religious or political grounds (Elsadda 2023, 20).

In Morocco, the publishing house Le Fennec was founded in 1987, focusing on publishing articles and books on women's rights, human rights, law, and Islam.[53] Between 1987 and 2003, Le Fennec published a series of studies called "Collectif Approches" on the status of women in Morocco, edited by Aïcha Belarbi. At the Maghreb level, women's NGOs founded in the 1980s and 1990s, such as Collectif Maghreb-Egalité 95 (CME 95), conducted research based on women's lived

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49 In Egypt, three important publications emerged in the 1980s: *Al-Mar'a al-Jadīda* (The New Woman), a newspaper published by the eponymous NGO in 1986; *Nūn*, a feminist journal published by the Arab Women's Solidarity Association led by Nawal El Saadawi in 1989; and *Bint al-Arḍ* (Daughter of the Land), a feminist journal co-edited by Iman Mersal and Gihan Abou Zeid, in Mansoura, Egypt in 1985.

50 *Hagar*, edited by Hoda Elsadda and Salwa Bakr, was conceived as a journal specializing in women's studies, aiming to promote research and knowledge production in Arabic. Six issues were published between 1992 and 1998.

51 The Women and Memory Forum: https://wmf.org.eg

52 Examples include work done by: Center for Egyptian Women's Legal Assistance, Egyptian Center for Women's Rights, El Nadeem Center for Rehabilitation of Victims of Violence, and the New Woman Foundation, which also pioneered research on women's reproductive health. In the 1990s, NGOs addressed controversial and taboo issues, such as violence against women and violations of their bodily rights.

53 Publisher Layla Chaouni was an active member of the women's movement in the Maghreb.

experiences, which was a key factor in reforming the Moroccan Family Code (Moudawana) in 2004. In Tunisia, the magazine *Nisā'* appeared in 1985 and lasted for two years (Elsadda 2023, 21).[54]

The 1990s marked an important decade that witnessed the expansion of women's research within the Islamic feminist movement, an intellectual feminist project that--consciously--challenges the dominance of androcentric interpretations and knowledge, re-reading Islamic texts, interpretations, and history from a feminist perspective. This practical definition includes both the knowledge production of researchers who engage with Islamic heritage from a religious standpoint, as well as researchers who strategically do so to confront the dominance of traditional androcentric knowledge, which negatively impacts societies striving for gender equality. Islamic feminists in the Arab world have made significant contributions to Islamic studies, carving a niche for themselves within the global Islamic feminist movement (Elsadda 2023, 21).

Women's and Gender Studies Programs at Arab Universities

Women and Gender Studies programs at Arab universities began institutionally as a response to one of the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals, which specified gender education as a means for gender empowerment, a focus that emerged in the 1990s and was emphasized in 2000. When these programs found their way into universities, many of them were conceptually crystallized within the framework of neoliberal policies in higher education institutions, and thus became embedded in market logic and neoliberal language (Elsadda 2023, 21). However, it is important to note the role of Arab feminist academics in incorporating gender theories, concepts, and issues into the curricula of courses they already teach, as seen in the English department at Cairo University, the American University of Sharjah, and the University of Jordan (Golley 2019).

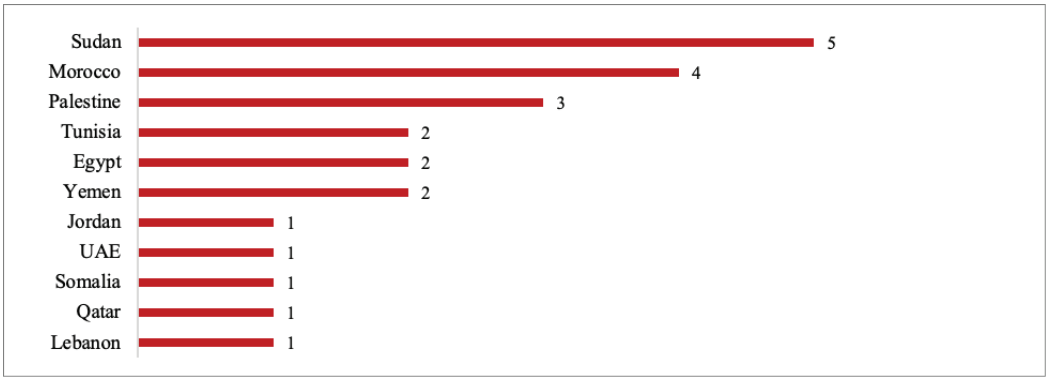
A number of academic programs and research centers were established within universities at the end of the 1990s, such as the Institute of Women's Studies at Birzeit University in 1997, the MA in Gender and Development Studies at the same university in 2000, the MSc. in Gender and Development at Ahfad University in Khartoum in 1997, the Center for Women's Studies at the University of Jordan in 1998, and the MA in Women's Studies in 2006. In Morocco, the Center for Studies and Research on Women was founded in 1998 at the Faculty of Arts in Dhar El Mehraz, Fez, and the Center for Women's Studies was established at the Faculty of Arts in Rabat (Sadiqi 2008, 464). In Egypt, the Cynthia Nelson Institute for Women's Studies was established in 2001 at the American University in Cairo, and a few

54 For the purposes of analysis and an overview of *Nisā'* and the contributions of the Tunisian Association of Democratic Women and the Association of Tunisian Women for Research and Development, see Labidi 2017.

years later, the institute offered an MA in Gender and Women's Studies in the Middle East and North Africa. The stories behind the institutionalization of these programs highlight the efforts of feminist activists with strong ties to women's movements in establishing gender programs. In Yemen, the Empirical Research and Women's Studies Center was founded in 1996 by Raufa Hassan, a prominent women's rights activist. A second wave of programs and institutes emerged at universities after 2010; like their predecessors, they were driven by the efforts of strong women activists. In Tunisia, a gender studies program was established in 2015 at the University of Manouba by Dalenda Larguèche in collaboration with Amel Grami and Raja Ben Slama, all feminist scholars whose history is a testament to their struggle for women's rights. In Beirut, an MA in Interdisciplinary Gender Studies was established in 2016 at the Lebanese American University. In Egypt, a Professional Masters in Gender and Development was established in 2017 at the Faculty of Economics and Political Science, Cairo University. In the Gulf, an MA in Muslim Women's Studies was established at Zayed University in the United Arab Emirates, as well as another in Women, Society, and Development at Hamad Bin Khalifa University in Qatar (Elsadda 2023, 21-22).[55]

Universities offering academic programs in women's and gender studies constitute less than 2% of all higher education institutions in the Arab world, with only 23 universities, limited to 11 countries. The majority are concentrated in Sudan (5), Morocco (4), and Palestine (3) (Figure 10). Most of the programs in Palestine, Sudan, Somalia, Yemen, and Qatar are linked to development, while those in Morocco and Tunisia are associated with culture and literature (ASSM 2021a).

Figure 10: Number of universities offering gender studies degrees in the Arab region



Source: ASSM 2021a.

55 For more information on existing centers and programs in the Arab world, see Tadros and Habib 2015. The authors point out that some programs mentioned in the research literature do not appear on university websites, making it unclear whether they were translated into actual practice (Tadros and Habib 2015, 6). See also Asfari Institute for Civil Society and Citizenship 2019.

There are three main approaches to WGS programs at Arab universities, including: a. literary feminist and postcolonial studies which "focus on feminist theorization and problematizations of representations of women in the Middle East, in particular in Western discourses and paradigms"; b. a gender and developmental orientation which emphasizes "contemporary political, economic, and social challenges faced in contexts of underdevelopment and inequality"; and c. a third approach which centers on the family in Islam, with a focus on identity issues (Tadros and Habib 2015, 7). Given the above survey of the trajectories and directions developing within NGOs concerned with women's and gender studies, these main approaches in university programs build upon and complement the accumulated knowledge produced by women's NGOs.

It is noteworthy that the mission statements of WGS programs at Arab universities mirror those of NGOs. Indeed, the mission statements posted on the websites of some WGS centers at universities are almost identical to an NGO's, with terms such as "capacity building," "empowerment," "training programs," "advocacy," and "policy briefing" (Elsadda 2023, 22-23). The mission statement of the Regional Institute for Gender, Diversity, Peace, and Rights at Ahfad University in Sudan describes the Institute as "dedicated to achieving peace, gender equality, management of diversity and respect for human rights, with special emphasis on women's empowerment and leadership, in order to change society and bring about a better quality of life". RIGPDR seeks to promote a worldwide community of learning about gender, peace, rights and development, linking the local regional with the global" (RIGDPR). Similarly, the Arab Women's Institute at the Lebanese American University "advances women's empowerment and gender equality nationally, regionally, and globally through research, education, development programs, and outreach" (The Arab Institute for Women).

University programs focused on WGS receive support through grants from international donors who have historically funded, and continue to fund, women's NGOs established in the 1980s and 1990s. Due to their reliance on foreign donor funding, these centers and university programs often express concerns about sustainability, scarcity of resources, and the pressures related to securing new funding--challenges similar to those faced by NGOs (Elsadda 2023, 23). Moreover, the integration of WGS programs at Arab universities has not necessarily provided a safe haven for research and critical thinking in this field. Most feminist academics speak of facing resistance to gender programs within their institutions, whether from the administration, colleagues, bureaucracy, or even students, on allegations such as promoting obscenity, violating cultural or religious norms, or threatening family stability. This resistance can sometimes escalate to threats or intimidation. For instance, in 2016, after a controversy over a debate with a professor at the College of Sharia on the topic of women and Islam, a Saudi academic researcher

at Qatar University, Hatoon al-Fassi, was accused of criticizing the Quran, placed under surveillance, and subsequently banned from teaching that course (Alsahi 2017). Similarly, Raufa Hassan was forced to leave Yemen in fear for her life following a smear campaign against her. In Jordan, Rola Kawas, Dean of the Faculty of Foreign Languages at the University of Jordan, was dismissed from her position because of a video produced by her students on sexual harassment on campus, as part of a course they were taking with her. In short, all women academics, researchers, and NGO workers in the field of women's and gender studies face social and political pressures if their work is deemed to cross political or cultural boundaries (Elsadda 2023, 23).

Women's and Gender Studies Now

The early decades of the 21st century witnessed the emergence of a new generation of young feminist groups in Arab countries, formed against a backdrop of growing youth discontent with repressive and failing regimes. These groups flourished and gained prominence during and after the wave of revolutions that swept the Arab world in 2011. It must be noted that the list of young women's groups in the region is extensive, their work bold and dazzling. For the most part, these groups have chosen to remain informal. This new generation of young feminist groups has opened up new horizons in research and activism, sparking and leading discussions on sexuality, identity issues, and violence against women. From their position as feminist activists, members of these groups have also addressed highly sensitive political topics, such as politically motivated sexual violence during times of conflict and revolution, bringing the issue of state persecution of women's rights defenders to the forefront (Elsadda 2023, 23-24).[56]

The role of feminist online platforms is prominent in raising awareness, disseminating feminist knowledge, and making it accessible to a wide audience of readers by using diverse and innovative methods, in addition to providing specialized research material. Examples include *BuSSy, Ikhtyar*, and *Nazra* in Egypt, *Tanit* in Morocco, and *The A Project*, and *Khateera* in Lebanon.[57]

Deema Kaedbey argues that "feminist platforms in Arab-majority countries today may be distinguished through their focus on intersectionality, transnationality, and queerness" (Kaedbey 2023). *Kohl: A Journal for Body and Gender Research*

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56 For an overview of activism in Egypt post-2011, see Hassan 2016. For more on selected examples highlighting the contributions of young feminist groups, see the articles published in the *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*: Nazra for Feminist Studies 2015; Misk and Hasso 2015; Abbas 2015a; Abbas 2015b; Sawt Al Niswa 2015; Thawrat Al Banat 2015; Helem 2015; Association Tounissiet 2015; Sadiqi 2016.

57 For more details on feminist platforms, see Kaedbey 2023.

is a good example of some of the new trends in women's and gender studies research. Established in 2015 and based in Beirut, *Kohl* focuses on research "on gender and sexuality in the Middle East, South West Asia, and North Africa regions," and adopts a decolonial perspective aimed to "trouble the hegemony of knowledge production, and ensure that our regions and communities play a central role in redefining their own intersections and challenges when it comes to feminist and sexuality research" (*Kohl: A Journal for Body and Gender Research*, n.d.). Islamic feminist approaches are also among the most important tributaries of knowledge in the field of women's and gender studies today, a prime example of transnational feminist knowledge production (Elsadda 2023, 23-24).

III. INDEPENDENT ART INITIATIVES IN THE ARAB WORLD IN THE 21ST CENTURY

One cannot discuss knowledge production in the humanities in the Arab world without highlighting the role of art in expressing ideas and transformations within a given society, and in proposing alternative visions for the future. Indeed, art can often crystallize what is unsaid at a particular historical moment and shape critical knowledge that stimulates action for change. Artistic creativity can pave the way for revolutions, becoming their voice and conscience. A good example of the impact of songs in mobilization and expressing the concerns of ordinary people is the music of Sayyid Darwīsh in Egypt, who "crowned his life by joining the 1919 revolution and its leader" (أبو غازي 2013، 9). Similarly, the Tunisian poet Abu al-Qasim al-Shabbi's words "If the people one day wish to live, then fate must respond" became the anthem of the Tunisian revolution in the 21st century and the slogan of the successive Arab revolutions.

There is no doubt that the Arab revolutions of the 21st century have inspired artists, with several Arab countries witnessing a notable flourishing of independent art initiatives.[58] The new generation of artists has benefited from the political openness in those countries, reclaiming public spaces previously inaccessible to them, and seeking to effect changes in the governance systems of cultural institutions, community outreach, and advocacy work. Political upheavals did not affect all countries equally or with the same intensity, and some managed to avoid deep political crises. Nonetheless, the revolutionary movement had an indirect impact on them, supporting reformist movements. The period of political openness did not last long, and catastrophic developments in several Arab countries led to undermining the infrastructure of the cultural sphere and the dispersion of many artists and cultural centers outside the Arab region in search of safety. Currently, the Arab region generally suffers from restrictive policies that limit freedoms and creativity, complex laws and procedures that hinder work, and growing censorship of art. In recent years, the COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on the arts sector, and many centers were forced to suspend operations due to restrictions on mobility and public gatherings, further exacerbated by a reduction in international funding for the arts (Farhat and Helmy 2023).

58 There is no consensus on the term "independent art." Fatin Farhat and Marwa Helmy define it as follows: "In the region, independent art is generally used to describe art produced by independent artists from mainstream commercial markets and by independent art organizations not affiliated with state institutions." (Farhat and Helmy 2023).

Despite all the aforementioned challenges and obstacles, arts have remained a vibrant space for critical thought, engagement with societal issues, and raising awareness for the sake of change.

The 21st century has witnessed the emergence of cultural institutions that have played a pivotal role in supporting independent art, encouraging emerging artistic initiatives, facilitating the exchange of expertise between initiatives, and providing resources, such as Al-Mawred Al-Thaqafy (Culture Resource),[59] AFAC: Arab Fund for Arts and Culture,[60] The Young Arab Theatre Fund,[61] and Ettijahat.[62] Some institutions also responded to the crises befalling artists, such as Ettijahat, which launched the Sanad initiative to provide legal services to artists scattered across Arab countries and Europe.[63]

Another significant development resulting from the revolutionary movements in the region is the passage of positive amendments supporting culture and the arts in constitutions. In Egypt, the 2014 Constitution affirms citizens' rights to culture and commits the state to support art and literature and protect freedom of creativity. In Yemen, the 2014 National Dialogue document emphasized the importance of culture, cultural development, and the protection of creativity and heritage. In Morocco, the 2011 Constitution stipulated freedom of creativity and artistic expression. All of these are important developments for the most part, despite the lack of mechanisms to implement these provisions and the disparity between legislation and practical reality (الحسـيني 2018).

Artistic events of a different nature than the usual Arab festivals organized by the ministries of culture in most Arab countries have also emerged in the Arab region. For example, the L'Boulevard music festival in Casablanca, Morocco started as an independent initiative, and has since become "the most important music event in Morocco," successfully attracting young people and supporting a youth art movement. Another example is the Art Dubai fair, established in 2006 under the auspices of the ruler of Dubai and sponsored by major real estate companies as part of a strategy for cultural and tourism development in Dubai, which is now considered one of the largest art fairs in the world. It is also worth mentioning the Downtown Contemporary Arts Festival (D-CAF), initiated in 2011 in partnership with Al Ismaelia for Real Estate Investment, as part of a plan to

59 https://mawred.org

60 https://www.arabculturefund.org

61 https://mophradat.org/en/index/young-arab-theatre-fund

62 https://www.ettijahat.org

63 For more information on cultural initiatives and sources of support in the 21st century, see Farhat and Helmy 2023.

develop downtown Cairo for political and cultural purposes. There is also the El-Fan Midan festival, which was directly linked to the opening up of public spaces following the January 25 revolution in Egypt. The idea behind the initiative was to open up public spaces, streets and squares, to a broad audience, relying on donations from individuals, small independent groups, and volunteers. The festival also received support from the Egyptian Ministry of Culture in 2011. Performances expanded without the imposition of censorship or control by any single entity over events or participants. El-Fan Midan attracted those dreaming of change in various fields, artistic, political, and social. In August 2014, the El-Fan Midan festival was banned, drawing the curtain on this unique cultural experiment. All the aforementioned events were characterized by their independence from the ministries of culture in Arab countries, and their success in attracting the attention of a new generation of artists and those who work in the cultural field. These events and initiatives also nurtured new cultural trends or reinforced others that emerged at the beginning of the millennium then flourished over the past ten years (الحسـيني 2018).

Basma Al Husseiny identifies what she considers new trends in Arab cultural creativity and production, taking into account the differences between Arab countries in terms of what might be considered new or a continuation of existing initiatives. In the field of contemporary arts, she specifically highlights “the experience of art installation,” a trend that began mostly in the 1990s but “has become prominently present in the visual arts scene in the region” over the past decade. Al Husseiny also observes the “return of committed art,” a politically charged art form that flourished in the 1950s and 1960s, characterized by its opposition to political regimes and support for the Palestinian cause, such as the songs of Sheikh Imam, Marcel Khalifé, Nass El Ghiwane, and Khaled El Haber. Committed art has made a strong come back over the past decade, represented for example by the Egyptian band Eskenderella, a musical group that started in 2005 but gained widespread recognition in 2011 when its members participated in protests in public squares. Another example is the Lebanese troupe Zoukak Theatre, which began its activities in 2006, presenting socially engaged theatrical performances, such as “therapeutic theater and the use of theater to provide psychosocial support to marginalized groups. ... Many of its works also addressed political topics.” In Tunisia, the group Fanni Raghman Anni (Mon art, Malgré moi) was founded in August 2011, comprising young men and women who describe themselves as “street kids,” performing unconventional and politically charged works, and using the street “as a stage and platform for discussion.” Also in Tunisia, Ahl Al Kahf (Cave People), a radical art movement made up of Tunisian artists, became visible in December 2011. The group started secretly before the Tunisian revolution and then worked openly in street graffiti after the revolution, employing shock tactics in their work, and coming to an end in 2014 (الحسيني 2018).

Among the distinctive artistic markers of the decade of the Arab revolutions is the spread and flourishing of graffiti art in countries like Egypt, Tunisia, Syria, and Libya, among others. It is important to remember that the phrase *"ljāk al-dūr yā ductūr"* (It's your turn, doctor), written by a group of teenage youths in Daraa on their school fence on February 15, 2011, later arrested and tortured, was one of the sparks that ignited revolutionary anger in Syria. In Egypt, graffiti became one of the distinctive art forms expressing the demands of the revolution and radical revolutionary ideas. Nevine El Nossery argues that graffiti "is not just a form of artistic expression: it is intrinsically political. … Under authoritarian regimes, political graffiti is commonly used to express dissent and convey political messages, reflecting new aspirations." (El Nossery 2023). Similarly, graffiti flourished in Palestine, for instance, during the First Intifada, serving as a tool of resistance against Israeli authority and a form of civil disobedience (Peteet 1996). With the unprecedented openness in the public sphere in the few years following the revolutions, graffiti spread across the Arab world. Mona Abaza argues that what distinguishes graffiti post-2011, besides its widespread use to express the opinions and sentiments of the street, is its ability to "create a novel understanding of public performances, like chanting, grieving, protesting, and communicating through redefining the role of public space"; graffiti is thus considered an example of "a performative act of resistance" (Abaza 2016).

The graffiti artist movement in Egypt ended in 2014 due to security crackdowns, but not before it had been seen by a wide audience. It was also documented in several books, media outlets, blogs, and social media platforms.[64] These examples of new trends in the art field vary in form, yet they all address political and social issues, and all oppose conservative regimes and currents in society (الحسـيني 2018).

In a similar vein, the art of comics has flourished over the past decade in terms of the number of publications in Arabic, English, and French, as well as the exhibitions and groups dedicated to it. Comics had their roots in the Arab world during the 20th century, in the form of political cartoons, bearing in mind that comics are not necessarily political. What is new is the emergence of groups dedicated to creating spaces for exercising freedom of expression and working to establish vibrant platforms for storytelling art by organizing workshops, festivals, and various related activities in the region. Comic groups proliferated at the same time as Arab peoples challenged authoritarian regimes, such as *Lab619* in Tunisia (2013),[65]

64 For a notable example of research and media interest in graffiti, see Soraya Morayef's blog *Suzeeinthecity*: https://suzeeinthecity.wordpress.com/about.

65 https://www.facebook.com/Lab619

Skefkef in Morocco (2013),[66] *Habka Magazine* in Libya (2015),[67] *Garage* in Egypt (2015),[68] and *Zeez Collective* in Lebanon (2017).[69] In this context, charged with a spirit of renewal and initiative, women entered the field of satirical comics, a field almost exclusively male. Comics provided an opportunity for a new generation of feminists to express issues and concerns that were difficult to address directly, as "[t]he visual language of comics offered a powerful alternative to the written word, enabling comics and caricatures to reach a wider audience." (Chatta 2023). Feminists addressed issues such as sexual violence, the inadequacy of laws, and several other topics related to gender identities and the challenges facing women in Arab societies. Examples of feminist comics include *El Shakmagia* and *Lawayn minwaṣṣallik yā Mārī? (Where to, Marie?)*.[70]

It is noteworthy that there has been an increasing critical interest in activist art or art activism (also dubbed "artivism"), a term popularized over the past decade, encompassing various forms of purposeful artistic expressions or those that use art to express a political or social position and disseminate it on a wide scale.

The term "artivism" is used to describe the work of artists who employ their creativity to express their political positions and engage with the political sphere. It is also used to describe activists who use art to raise awareness and mobilize people to participate in supporting political causes during a specific historical moment (Borrillo and Soliman 2020, 131).[71]

Independent Cultural Industries: Cinema as an Example

There is no clear consensus on the term "cultural industries" in the Arab world. However, it generally encompasses approximately 13 forms of creative expression, such as film, music, and publishing. Due to the lack of agreement on the term's implications, the components of this sector are often addressed separately and without coordination. Statistics indicate that the revenues of creative industries amount to approximately $2.250 billion annually, or 3% of the world's GDP (Farhat and Helmy 2023).

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66 https://www.facebook.com/skefkefmag

67 https://www.facebook.com/HabkaMagazine

68 https://www.facebook.com/comixgarage

69 https://www.facebook.com/zeezcollective

70 https://wheretomarie.net/meeting

71 For more examples on the topic, see: أمشنوك 2022أ؛ أمشنوك 2022ب؛ عزت 2005؛ الأندلوسي 2021؛ القيق وعباس 2023؛ فرزلي 2020؛ بن قدور 2022

Independent film industry witnessed significant advancements in the 21st century, thanks to the technological revolution of the 1990s, particularly the shift to non-linear light digital technology. This shift led to radical changes in the economics of the profession, in terms of affordability of production costs and the possibilities of making work on multiple media available. Filmmakers in the Global South and the Arab world leveraged modern technology to overcome the limited resources available to them to work and the restrictions imposed on independent production in their countries. Another factor that altered the conditions of film production in the Arab world, specifically in the field of documentary films, was the availability of European funding as well as funding from local and international development institutions. However, as Viola Shafik alerts us, while films from the Arab region influenced British, German, French, and Belgian networks by gaining opportunities for screening and circulation, filmmakers also had to consider the needs and expectations of Western audiences. This consideration could sometimes lead to a disconnect between a film product and its country of origin, particularly in terms of accessibility to local audiences (Shafik 2023). Then, in the early 2000s, funding patterns in the Arab world evolved, and the system of co-production grew in collaboration with film festivals and institutions such as the Dubai International Film Festival, Abu Dhabi Film Festival, Doha Film Institute, AFAC, and most recently the Red Sea Fund.

Viola Shafik highlights a significant development in film production in Lebanon, particularly after the end of the civil war and the emergence of a new generation of filmmakers who spearheaded a movement of independent, creative, and experimental films. “Akram Zaatari for instance directed more than thirty videos on daring topics, including homosexuality. … It is Mohamed Soueid, however, who may be considered the real godfather of post-war Lebanese independent and experimental cinema. He began his career with his first video in 1990 and directed subsequently *Cinema al-Fouad* (*Sinimā al-fū’ād* 1994), which was at the time most unconventional for portraying a Lebanese transvestite. … His most accomplished documentary, *Nightfall* (*‘Indamā ya’tī al-masā’* 2000), part of a trilogy on the civil war, focused on a Lebanese student squad of the Palestinian Fatah movement, to which the director himself belonged. As a one-man crew, Soueid succeeded in capturing the painful but also trivial disillusionment of this group” (Shafik 2023, 5). Soueid’s ideas and presence contributed to the establishment of the Aflamuna (formerly Beirut DC) foundation in 1999. One of the foundation’s goals is to support independent films in Lebanon, and among its most important cultural initiatives are the Beirut Cinema Days and The Arab Film Week. Viola Shafik believes that Aflamuna has significantly contributed to creating a nurturing cultural environment for creative films, placing Lebanon at the forefront of artistic and aesthetic innovation in Arab cinema (Shafik 2023, 6).

Documentary cinema was one of the most significant forms to benefit from these major developments in filmmaking techniques, funding, and accessibility. A substantial surge occurred in the aftermath of the Arab revolutions, leading to an increase in the production of creative documentary films. For example, Tunisian filmmakers produced 89 documentaries in the first three years following the Tunisian revolution. In Syria, the Abounaddara group, founded in 2010 and comprised of young Syrian filmmakers, produced more than 250 short documentary films, averaging one film per week, to document and comment on rapidly unfolding events away from conflicting ideologies (Shafik 2023).

The Abounaddara experience has been described as "emergency cinema": the use of cell phone cameras and eyewitness testimony to describe events intersects with what has been called "citizen journalism," highlighting the vital role independent individuals play in documenting and widely disseminating successive events during times of conflict.[72] Viola Shafik cautions against considering citizen journalism, or films produced by ordinary citizens, the ultimate truth; these citizens are participants in an ongoing conflict, and the films they produce reflect their points of view and specific narratives that may not necessarily be accurate. Additionally, despite the importance of this production in offering alternative perspectives to dominant narratives, citizen journalism has become a double-edged sword, with authoritarian regimes using the same technological capacities to craft counter-narratives against the revolutionary stories activists aim to document and disseminate through this type of journalism. As Shafik puts it: "In other words, new media through which quite a number of Syrian films have been released has been too easily conflated with social agency and imagined as a liberating force disregarding the fact that it may be likewise used to perpetuate inequalities and oppression." Nonetheless, there is a clear trend in independent Syrian documentaries toward "direct cinema" which conveys events using a "reality effect." There are many examples of direct cinema that present what is happening in the Syrian war using an "observation-without-intervention" technique, such as the films of Talal Derki and Feras Fayyad, who document conditions in Syria's besieged cities, and whose films have been nominated for the Academy Awards for the Best Foreign Documentary category. For example, Talal Derki presents his film *'An al-ābā' wa-l-abnā'* (*Of Fathers and Sons*, 2017) as a first-hand account of the life of an Islamist warrior preparing his underage children for battle, while his *al-'Awda ilā Ḥumṣ* (*The Return to Homs*, 2013) is a lyrical account of his own travels, as director, to Homs, tracing the lives of the two main characters from the beginning of the protests to the deadly military siege (Shafik 2023, 9).

72 For further clarification and information on film production, see Shafik 2023.

Based on her observations of the Arab cinematic landscape in the last decade, Viola Shafik argues that the tools of modern technology and the Arab revolutionary movement have had a radical impact on Syrian cinema in particular. For example, Shafik points to the foundation of the Bidayyat for Audiovisual Arts group in Beirut, "a civil company, launched in early 2013, to support and produce documentaries and short and experimental films, and to organize specialized training courses on documentary filmmaking. ... Bidayyat envisions a creative, independent, open and interactive cinematic and audiovisual culture that is influential in our societies and is open to other societies. … Bidayyat aims to be a space for the exchange of expertise and interaction between young people interested in documentary and short and experimental filmmaking, with the ultimate objective of creating a cultural and cinematic space. This space will offer artistic and professional support, as well as financial aid to help make their film projects a reality."[73] One of the distinctive features of Bidayyat is its collective culture: decisions are made by the team; projects are selected according to the recommendations of an independent committee; and profits are used to support the company's work. Bidayyat has successfully produced dozens of short films by young directors, making them available in open access on its website. According to Viola Shafik, one of Bidayyat's most important activities has been to train Syrian talents within Syria through online platforms, encouraging them to express themselves despite the pressing surrounding circumstances, which have necessitated strategies of seizing opportunities quickly, or producing low-budget resistance films, also known as "guerrilla filmmaking" (Shafik 2023).

Shafik notes that this tendency toward forming collectives in the context of the film industry is often found during times of social and political turbulence, and is usually associated with leftist ideologies. The beginnings of cooperatives in the cultural field, especially cinematic collectives, took their shape and character in Egypt within the independent film scene (Indiecinema) before the Arab revolutions. Sometimes, these collectives took the form of commercial companies to avoid the interference of authorities, for example, Semat[74] (founded in 2001), Fig Leaf Studio,[75] Rufy's,[76] and Hassala.[77] Mosireen[78] and Cimatheque[79] were in term founded in the aftermath of the Egyptian revolution.

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73 https://bidayyat.org/about.php

74 https://www.arabfilmnetwork.com/portfolio-item/semat-production

75 https://www.instagram.com/figleafstudio/?hl=en

76 https://rufysfilms.com

77 https://www.film-documentaire.fr/4DACTION/w_liste_generique/S_65317_G

78 https://www.mosireen.com

79 https://cimatheque.org

Shafik adds that one of the manifestations of the Arab revolutions on cinematic production is the focus on subjectivity, particularly in feminist cinema. Digital technology has facilitated the use of cameras within private spaces at home. She refers to the beginnings of autobiographical cinema, depicting individual subjectivities, reminiscent of filmmakers like Youssef Chahine, Mohammad Malas, and Nouri Bouzid, among others. However, these filmmakers relied on high-cost productions aimed at a broad cinema audience, whereas autobiographical films in the 21st century, especially post-revolutions, mostly depend on small handheld cameras that allow the director to present their personal perspective on events and politics without much attention to distribution outlets. Examples include Nadia Kamel's film *Salaṭa Baladī* (*Salade Maison*, 2007) which explores the life of the director's mother of Jewish origin, and her decision to visit her family in Palestine, as well as the post-revolution period depicted in Nada Riyadh and Ayman El Amir's film *Nihāyāt saʿīda* (*Happily Ever After*, 2016) about their extramarital relationship during the revolution. Such films crystallize the subjectivity of a generation that does not pay much heed to religion, does not respect authority or adhere to societal values, and does not fear the new or the unexpected, a generation that learned rebellion and how to say "I" instead of "we" (Shafik 2023, 16). Nevertheless, in some subjective films about the revolution, the "I" was representative of the group rather than the individual.

One characteristic of the focus on subjectivity is the treatment of the body as a site for storytelling or as the story itself; "a 'storyteller,' a body that is … in itself the site of socio-political contestation and drama, a powerful point of convergence between the physical and the imagined" (Shafik 2023, 19). An example of this is Samaher Alqadi's film *Kamā urīd* (*As I Want*, 2021), which presents "a strongly participatory auto-biographic documentary that uses the female body--the filmmaker's herself first of all--as the very locus of cultural and political contestation." The film addresses the severe sexual assaults that occurred in Tahrir Square in 2013 (Shafik 2023, 20).

In the context of the growing wave of subjectivity and the exploration of the inner self in cinema over the past decade, Shafik notes an increase in films that address queer identities and homosexuality, by directors from Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Egypt. Yet, Lebanese cinema remains at the forefront of producing films about queer identities.

IV. DIGITAL HUMANITIES IN THE ARAB WORLD IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Digital humanities are an academic research field where the humanities intersect with digital technology. There are two main streams within digital humanities that complement each other: the first is concerned with "the use of digital tools by the scientific community working on humanities (literature, linguistics, archeology, history, economy, sociology, anthropology, etc.) and [the second involves digitized] academia-based knowledge resources" (Bayoumi and Oliveau 2020, 16). Applications of digital humanities include "the Text Encoding Initiative (TEI), electronic editing, scholarly communication and publishing, e-literature, textual analysis and text mining, immersive and virtual environments in multimedia research, digital imaging, sound analysis, information aesthetics and approaches to visualizations of humanities topics and research, advanced geospatial applications, etc." (2017 شـــاهين). Digital technology has become an integral part of conducting academic research across various fields, with tremendous developments in the 21st century, including building digital archives, online databases, and the digitization of academic journals and books, to name but a few. This has revolutionized the ease of access and wide availability of information, as well as its preservation from loss or destruction.[80] On the other hand, there remains a gap between North and South in the capabilities and resources necessary for digitizing libraries or creating digital archives.

There are significant digitization projects in the Arab world, including the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, which is "becoming one of the leading Internet-based archive centers in the world as well as a digital resource center linked to numerous other libraries." Other examples include Qatar National Library, Abu Dhabi Media Network, The Palestinian Museum, and the National Library of the Kingdom of Morocco (Bayoumi and Oliveau 2020, 14). In addition to these major institutions and libraries, Laila Sakr mentions initiatives by individuals or independent institutions that have successfully created digital archives. One such example is the Arab Image Foundation (AIF) in Lebanon, an independent institution established in 1997 to preserve, make available, and study images from the Middle East, North Africa, and Arab diaspora communities from the

80 Let us not forget the destruction of al-Nuri Mosque in Iraq by ISIL, and the fire that destroyed the Egyptian Geographic Society in 2011, with the subsequent loss of this knowledge heritage. Hence, one of the goals of digitizing archives is to preserve the identity of the Arab region and its intellectual heritage (Bayoumi and Oliveau 2020, 16).

19th century to the present.[81] Sakr also refers to R-Shief, a digital archive for social movements and protests that she founded in 2008, "to collect, analyze, and visualize social media content in English and Arabic. R-Shief would become a repository of multiple social movements from Occupy Wall Street to the 2011 Arab uprisings" (Sakr 2023b).[82]

Arab Techies

Researchers in the field of digital humanities commend the role played by the Arab Techies group in shaping a digital culture in the Arab world that significantly contributed to empowering the revolutionary movements in 2011. They also value the workshop held in Cairo in 2008, which brought together Arab technology specialists, as well as the Arab Bloggers Meeting held in Beirut the same year, as key milestones that launched Arab creativity in the field of technology. Additionally, the vital roles of Sami Ben Gharbia from Tunisia and Alaa Abd El-Fattah from Egypt are highlighted for their contributions in "turn[ing] a savvy but loose community of geeks into a regionally organized network of activists" (Della Ratta and Valeriani 2017, 131).[83]

Since the mid-2000s, Arab technologists have been developing Arabic-language digital content management systems such as Drupal, the search engine Yamli, and the morphology website Qutrub, which facilitated the creation of websites, blogging environments, platforms like Wiki Gender, and web forums. Laila Sakr notes the important role played by Ahmed Gharbeia in the development of wikis and training technology professionals to use them to make information available and create open spaces for interaction (Sakr 2023b). Gharbeia co-created Wiki Gender,[84] a participatory platform that provides feminist knowledge in Arabic to support community activism. Gharbeia defines wikis as follows: "Wikis are epistemological and organizational entities that can act as catalysts for the emergence of self-organizing groups with common interests. They may also serve as a good means of establishing methods of community activism that complement the efforts of contributors besides their other organizational and activist affiliations. Additionally, they can be experimental fields for self-organization and hubs for accumulating and providing specialized qualitative knowledge in the fields of pure sciences, humanities, and their intersections with issues of governance, community organization, and public policy" (2020 غربيـــة).

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81 https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/a/arab-image-foundation-aif

82 https://www.r-shief.org/about

83 See also Sakr 2023b.

84 https://genderiyya.xyz/wiki/الصفحة_الرئيسية

Digital Glitch

In her book *Arabic Glitch: Technoculture, Data Bodies, and Archives*, Laila Sakr uses the concept of digital glitch to weave a fascinating narrative of the trajectories of technological innovation in the Arab world, highlighting the pioneering role of Arab technologists in developing programs and algorithms in Arabic, which facilitated data analysis on social media platforms. Sakr defines a digital glitch as follows: "The glitch is a slipping, a digital banana peel. It is a loss of control. It interrupts the system, revealing the wiring beneath the technology and rendering it vulnerable. It arrives without warning and carries unexpected lessons. … The glitch is a cloud of unknowing--there is no specific ontology, epistemology, or politics" (Sakr 2023a). She adds: "The concept of 'glitch' comes from the mechanical term for a sudden interruption, noise, error, or malfunction. … Noise becomes political when it translates into voice. … [G]litches provide an important critical lens for understanding the operational logic of systems of power: through its cracks and failures, the dynamics of systems become visible" (Sakr 2021, 242).

Sakr argues that this digital glitch, which may result from an error or malfunction that disrupts the system and creates noise, can become a catalyst for creativity and the development of new and innovative technological solutions. These solutions, emanating from the field of technology, have repercussions on the ground, in politics and life. Arab programmers and technologists are engaged in struggles--contemporary global struggles--that are reshaping the culture of resistance, protest, and revolution. By analyzing tweets, blogs, and social media posts in general, we can understand the limitations of these digital media and the extent to which tech activists influence social movements and the form of cyber activism (Sakr 2021, 242).

Laura Marks argues that the digital glitch exposes the material reality underlying the digital image, particularly in countries with poor infrastructure, which is the case in most of the Arab world. In this manner, the digital glitch becomes a metaphor for the challenges facing knowledge production in the Arab world, on the one hand, and a pertinent illustration of Arab artists' creative ability and utilization of glitches to produce experimental art that has its own aesthetics and political implications, on the other (Marks 2014, 257). Marks highlights artistic works where the digital glitch is employed for meaning-making, pointing specifically to the aesthetics of low-resolution videos in the digital film *Les trois disparitions de Soad Hosni* (*The Three Disappearances of Soad Hosni*), directed and written by Lebanese filmmaker Rania Stephan in 2011. The film weaves together clips from Soad Hosni's films, where images are marked by multiple scratches "eating into the image as memory appropriates the past" (Marks 2014, 260). Marks concludes that glitches "arise in imperfect conditions," leading some artists to "abandon the

search for a sharp, faithful, 'lossless' image and instead look with curiosity at the conditions that cause loss, 'artefacts,' and poor resolution. What they find often proves to be a keen metaphor for historical consciousness; what they create constitutes an act of historical consciousness." (Marks 2014, 270).

Art and Technology

In the background paper to this report, Laila Sakr highlights visual artworks where digital technology intersects with artistic creativity. For example, Sakr refers to a series of five Jordanian short *YouTube* videos called *The Box*, which address issues in Jordanian and Arab societies concerning the relationship between humans and technology, the extent to which technology has become a central driver in our daily lives, and its impact, or lack thereof, on individual agency and interaction with society (Sakr 2023b).[85]

Regarding the relationship between contemporary Arabic literature and digital technology, Hossam Nayel observes the ongoing debate in Arab cultural circles about digital Arabic literature, which began in Tunisia in 1973. The first Arabic digital novel, titled *Ẓilāl al-wāḥid* (Shadows of the One), was published in 2001 by Jordanian author Mohammed Sanajleh, incorporating digital techniques like hypertext. Sanajleh later published a booklet titled *Riwāyat al-wāqi'iyya al-raqmiyya* (The Novel of Digital Realism) in 2004, in which he anticipated the emergence of a new Arabic literature that would align with the age of digital technology. He founded the Arab Internet Writers' Union in 2005, and continues to publish digital novels (نايـــل 2020، 215).

In his book *Leaks, Hacks, and Scandals: Arab Culture in the Digital Age*, Tarek El-Ariss explores major transformations in storytelling techniques and modes of expressing dissent and opposition to the mainstream in Arab culture in the digital age. He highlights the contributions of "a new generation of activists and bloggers, and hackers and leakers, who are increasingly occupying the position of the 'intellectual speaking truth to power.'" El-Ariss discusses what he terms practices of "Hacking (ikhtiraq), leaking (tasrib), revealing (ifsha'), proliferation (tafashshi)," as writing techniques but also as political practices and conceptual tools that help us understand the trajectories of Arab culture in the digital age (El-Ariss 2019). The pioneers of these new practices are Arab activists, both male and female, who have created new avenues for cultural and political expression.

In the field of the novel, which has long played a pivotal role in shaping national narratives in the modern period, drawing on Benedict Anderson's theory of

85 https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCCkjFHWwDBfemghfAV85vGA

nations as imagined communities whose contours were formed in parallel with the development of national consciousness through the spread of printing, newspapers, and novels, El-Ariss observes radical shifts in the methods and language used by writers to engage with dominant ideas and express their dissent or opposition. These techniques are closely linked to social media practices, where storytelling, the construction of narratives, and political opposition manifest through actions such as exposure, hacking, leaking, revealing, and proliferation. El-Ariss starts from what he considers a turning point in 2006 which had repercussions on the Arab world and the broader global context. It was in this year that *WikiLeaks* was created in response to the US invasion of Iraq, and it was also in this year that the first video documenting a torture incident in Egypt was leaked on *YouTube* by Egyptian journalist Wael Abbas. El-Ariss discusses two novels whose authors use techniques of exposure and defaming to reveal the injustice and corruption they observe in the political system. The first novel is *Istikhdām al-ḥayāh* (*Using Life*) by Ahmed Naji, published in 2014.[86] The second, *Tarmī bi-sharar* (*Throwing Sparks*) by Saudi writer Abdo Khal, published in 2010 and winner of the International Prize for Arabic Fiction, presents a bleak picture of marginalized communities and includes leaked videos of torture in the palaces of the wealthy. El-Ariss argues that the protagonist in *Istikhdām al-ḥayāh* takes on a role similar to that of a *WikiLeaks* hacker, while the narrator in *Tarmī bi-sharar* plays a role akin to that of an activist or prison guard who leaks videos of detainees' torture in prisons (El-Ariss 2019).

86 See the section titled "Dystopian Literature" in chapter II of this report.

V. INDICATORS AND QUESTIONS

The main objective of this report was to monitor and analyze the state of knowledge production in the humanities in the Arab world in the 21st century, based on a broad definition of what constitutes "humanities." This definition included, in addition to traditional disciplines taught in universities, artistic and literary creativity as well as journalism. The scope of the humanities adopted here was not limited to university walls but went beyond them to open up to civil society spaces and institutions, in addition to media outlets. It was not possible to achieve this ambitious goal within the time and resources available for writing, and this report is envisioned as a preliminary step toward exploring some of the developments in the humanities across a number of selected disciplines. Additionally, it was not feasible to provide detailed examples from all Arab countries on various topics; the examples included in the report are meant to illustrate the main idea rather than provide a comprehensive survey.

The report started from an initial hypothesis about the centrality of the 2011 Arab revolutionary movement to understanding and analyzing knowledge production in the humanities in the Arab world, and about the state of the field in the 21st century. The movement gave birth to new questions and ideas, as well as opened up previously unavailable spaces for expression, creativity, and the crystallization of intellectual and research currents hitherto lurking in the margin. Based on this hypothesis, a set of questions were posed that the report tried to answer through analytical readings of some research trends in a selected number of disciplines in the humanities.

The report raises many research and epistemological questions about the revolution and the transformations witnessed by Arab countries. The question of revolution was discussed, and prominently so, over the past decade, with this relevant question posed: Is the revolution a philosophical event? The answer affirmed that the revolution *is* indeed a philosophical event in the deepest sense of the word. The revolutionary movement enforced the importance of philosophical engagement with reality, and the emergence of a Pop Philosophy movement that goes beyond the walls of universities to engage with changes on the ground. The revolutions that erupted to demand democracy and dignity also helped support philosophical trends that go beyond questions of identity and the dichotomy of tradition and modernity; they primarily engage with everyday life and with political and social questions about the foundations of citizenship, freedoms, and democracy.

The revolutions also gave an epistemological and activist boost to certain research and intellectual currents that began in the last decade of the twentieth century and gradually grew in the twenty-first. In the field of gender studies, Islamic feminism has strengthened as a critical movement that engages with philosophical issues in Islamic heritage and produces new feminist knowledge. In addition, this feminist intellectual movement is arguably one of the best examples of new directions in research, in that it is a transnational movement that is interdisciplinary *par excellence*, with its interwoven fields of study complementing one another. It also transcends the boundaries of official sites of knowledge production, such as universities and research centers, to include activists working through multiple platforms.

One of the central themes in this report is the re-reading of canonical histories, political, cultural, artistic, or literary, aimed at constructing multiple historical narratives within the field of literary studies. For example, the report highlighted the contributions of feminist scholars in discovering the voices of female writers and poets who had been marginalized in Arab literary history, and in engaging with the reasons behind their marginalization or exclusion. These alternative readings began in the last decade of the twentieth century and grew, even flourished, in the twenty-first, successfully contributing to the writing of a new literary history. Naturally, these contributions were not limited to feminist scholars alone. Since writing history always begins with a problem formulated as a question, the Arab revolutions raised new questions that prompted researchers to revisit other historical periods marked by revolutions, as well as those characterized by defeats and setbacks, in an effort to understand the present and envision the future.

In the field of history, there has been a significant increase in the participation of non-specialists or ordinary people in documenting and formulating historical narratives on social media, thanks to the technological revolution that has opened up wide spaces for expression and participation in the production of knowledge. This heightened interest in documentation and in recording observations and analyses of events has led to a remarkable momentum in the availability of information and news. However, it has also instigated another problematic: the difficulty of verifying information or its potential loss. The technological revolution has also facilitated the creation of archives, especially in the last decade, as rival currents and groups have competed to document historical narratives that express their points of view on current political events. It can be argued that archives in general, and digital archives in particular, have been at the center of the struggle over historical narratives in the last decade.

As for the status of the arts in the past decade, despite restrictions, censorship, limited resources, and the repercussions of the recent pandemic, the arts

have remained a center of critical thought and creativity. Graffiti has flourished to become one of the most significant artistic means of expressing political messages, while comics have emerged to address complex issues, such as sexual violence, with the aim of reaching a wider audience of readers. In cinema, the technological revolution and popular movements have had a radical impact on Syrian cinema in particular and Arab cinema in general. Moreover, the opening of political spaces, albeit briefly, encouraged filmmakers to explore sensitive issues, focus on subjectivity, and emphasize the body as a contested space. The question of the body is vividly manifested in the arts, cinema, theater, literature, and visual art, becoming a central issue in several fields of knowledge, especially in philosophy and literature.

In the field of digital humanities, we observe a rise in the creation of large and significant archives and projects. There are also creative contributions in employing the 'digital glitch' as an objective correlative for the deterioration of infrastructure and the challenges that hinder knowledge production in the Arab world. Moreover, we find rich intersections between technology and literature, with some authors using techniques first developed in the field of technology, such as hacking and leaking, to shape political narratives. This is in addition to increasingly acknowledging the role of Arab technologists in shaping a digital culture that has facilitated the Arab revolutionary movements.

The report raises numerous questions about language, the locations of knowledge production, disciplinary boundaries, and actors and their role in supporting research currents. The report adopted the hypothesis that knowledge production in and about the Arab world cannot be limited to scholarship written in the Arabic language for several reasons, the most important of which are: the valuable knowledge production of Arab researchers in foreign universities written in French, English, or German; the increasing phenomenon of Arab researchers moving to the West due to lack of opportunities and financial support; and the shrinking space for academic freedoms in some countries, especially after the defeat of the Arab revolutions. However, the language used in knowledge production remains an important question and an issue that may require pause, especially if we agree that language is not just a means of expression, but a vessel in which ideas, concepts, and theoretical frameworks are shaped and an essential element in the formation of consciousness. The Arabic language is the language of Arab culture; it is the main common element among Arab countries, despite the cultural and social differences that may permeate them. Here we must ask the question: How can we work to support research and publication in the Arabic language? Is it useful to work on this within a reality that still exists, and which marginalizes knowledge production written in non-European languages? How can researchers in the Arab world create networking mechanisms to formulate projects that benefit

from the progress and development of knowledge in the world and at the same time break free from colonial hegemony over knowledge, i.e., projects that seek to decolonize knowledge. And do these projects require the production of knowledge exclusively in Arabic?

The question of language is closely tied to a second question about the sites of knowledge production and their relationship to the target audience. In the field of film production, Viola Shafik draws our attention to the phenomenon of the availability of European funding and support from international organizations for the production of independent Arab films in the 21st century, which provides opportunities for independent Arab cinema to be screened and disseminated. These films are a definite addition to the global body of cinematic production, but they raise questions about the extent to which the industry is influenced by Western audience expectations as opposed to Arab audience requirements. Along the same lines, Fadi Bardawil writes about the large wave of emigration by Arab scholars in the wake of the defeat of the Arab revolutions, mostly among the generation that enthusiastically participated in the revolutionary movement and then chose to emigrate voluntarily or forcibly due to the political changes that befell the region. These scholars are now writing in foreign languages and contributing to the enrichment of their host societies. The question remains: To what extent do locations of production affect the epistemological product and its engagement with the expectations of society and the public?

The question of language and the location of knowledge production manifests itself differently as we witness, in the Gulf states for instance, a remarkable increase in the establishment of branches of Western universities; the question then becomes how these universities relate to the host societies and how these societies in turn relate to knowledge produced in foreign universities.

The third question concerns the boundaries and definitions of disciplines in the 21st century. The technological revolution has provided new possibilities for a wide audience to write, analyze, and create platforms that engage with topics related to history, literary criticism, and philosophy, to name a few. In addition, digital humanities have brought about actual changes in the research methodologies of specialists in general. We are now witnessing a notable shift toward interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary studies. There is also greater flexibility within universities, allowing students to use open-access websites, such as *Wikipedia*, which contain contributions that have not undergone the peer-review process typical of established academic journals in different specializations. Perhaps the question here is: Who produces knowledge in the humanities? What are the most important sites of knowledge production? And are we witnessing a change in the role of the university?

As for the final and perhaps most important question, it stems from the definition of the humanities as given above in the report, as the branches of knowledge that are concerned with human beings and the exploration of human values. In light of the successive catastrophes that have befallen the Arab world, civil wars, armed conflicts, and a genocidal war as clear as daylight, we find ourselves increasingly traumatized by the analyses and justifications presented to continue these wars, killings, and destruction. We are asked to defend ourselves and to explain axioms about shared values and equal rights, except they are neither shared nor equal, at least not for us. The question is: What do we, researchers, scholars, and those interested in culture and the production of knowledge in the humanities, do in the face of these successive tragic events for a more just and humane world?

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APPENDIX: BACKGROUND PAPERS

- **أنور مغيث**، الفلسفة في المشرق العربي.
- **خيري دومة**، الإنتاج المعرفي في الدراسات الأدبية والنقدية (الدوريات العربية 2010-2020): تحليل للمضمون واستكشاف للاتجاهات الأساسية.
- **دينا الخواجة**، تاريخ وأنثروبولوجيا وآداب: التنوع في نشأة التخصصات في العلوم الإنسانية في القرن العشرين، وتأثيرها على أوضاع إنتاج المعرفة في الحاضر.
- **سامح فكري حنّا**، دراسات الترجمة العربية في القرن الحادي والعشرين.
- **محمد آيت حنّا**، الإنتاج الفلسفي في بلدان المغرب خلال العقد الأخير.
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