جامعة جورجتاون قطر
GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY QATAR

Center *for* International *and* Regional Studies

DIGITAL MIDDLE EAST

SUMMARY REPORT

About Georgetown University in Qatar

Established in 1789, Georgetown University is one of the world's leading academic and research institutions, offering a unique educational experience that prepares the next generation of global citizens to lead and make a difference in the world. Georgetown University in Qatar (GU-Q), founded in 2005, empowers students and shapes the human capacity that the MENA region needs for the 21st century, providing a holistic educational experience built upon the highest academic standards. GU-Q's Bachelor of Science in Foreign Service (BSFS) stresses multidisciplinary studies in a global context. It is the same globally respected program and curriculum offered at the Georgetown University Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service in Washington D.C. The BSFS degree is offered in one of four majors: International Economics, International Politics, Culture and Politics, and International History. Students can also pursue a certificate in one of three concentrations: Arab and Regional Studies, American Studies, or Media and Politics. To learn more about GU-Q's exciting events and programs, or to benefit from its wide array of research, please visit qatar.sfs.georgetown.edu

About the Center for International and Regional Studies (CIRS)

Established in 2005, the Center for International and Regional Studies at Georgetown University in Qatar is a premier research institute devoted to the academic study of regional and international issues through dialogue and exchange of ideas; research and scholarship; and engagement with national and international scholars, opinion-makers, practitioners, and activists.

Guided by the principles of academic excellence, forward vision, and community engagement, the CIRS mission revolves around five principal goals:
• To provide a forum for scholarship and research on international and regional affairs
• To encourage in-depth examination and exchange of ideas
• To foster thoughtful dialogue among students, scholars, and practitioners of international affairs
• To facilitate the free flow of ideas and knowledge through publishing the products of its research, sponsoring conferences and seminars, and holding workshops designed to explore the complexities of the twenty-first century
• To engage in outreach activities with a wide range of local, regional, and international partners.

About the Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development

Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development (QF) is a private, non-profit organization that supports Qatar on its journey from a carbon economy to a knowledge economy. It does this by unlocking human potential for the benefit of not only Qatar, but the world. Founded in 1995 by HH the Father Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, Emir of Qatar, QF is chaired by Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser. QF carries out its mission via three strategic pillars: education, science and research, and community development. For more information, visit www.qf.org.qa.

Digital Middle East: State and Society in the Information Age
Working Group Summary Report

DIGITAL MIDDLE EAST: STATE AND SOCIETY IN THE INFORMATION AGE
WORKING GROUP SUMMARY REPORT

CIRS launched the "The Digital Middle East" research initiative in 2014. Academics from various disciplinary backgrounds were invited to Doha to discuss their research findings and share their chapter submission on themes related to the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in the Middle East. The topics ranged from the effects of technology on the Arab uprisings to state measures being undertaken to incorporate technology into everyday life. The project offers grounded reflections on how information technologies are affecting a region that is already in the throes of change, but also provides a conceptual framework for understanding and analyzing the multiple dimensions and various articulations of the digital turn.

First, studying how the advent of the information era has impacted the Middle East is fraught with considerable challenges, not least the risk of homogenizing a complex region. While identifying broad trends and capturing general tendencies that came to characterize a digital Middle East, this project also recognizes the need for differentiation-based analyses.

Second, the dynamics that define the digital Middle East are as much rooted in ongoing social, political, cultural, and economic reconfigurations as they are associated with evolving communication developments and changes in information technologies. To that extent, information technology-induced developments and digital practices are of interest not simply because of their ability to produce change, but because they are in and of themselves manifestations of ongoing changes in the region. The digital Middle East merits renewed attention because the widespread adoption of ICTs is deeply intertwined with ongoing mutations within society. Seen from this perspective, the question of how the contemporary Middle East adopted and adapted new information and communication technologies is as revealing as the question of how those technologies are affecting the region.

Third, increasingly the adoption of digital technologies is consolidating global dispositions, not least the ability to produce content and to consume information that is unbounded by temporal frames and spatial constraints. Many of the digital developments that can be observed in the Middle East are indicative of the advent of a global digital culture that spreads far and wide—being itself tied to the global cultural economy. In fact, there are several striking commonalities between emerging tendencies in the region and trends that can be observed more globally. Yet, these global interactions and intersections often result in disjunctions. The digital Middle East is as much imbricated in processes of globalization as it is shaped by local exigencies, national realities, and regional dynamics; it lies at the intersection of the local and the global.

Finally, while the digital Middle East is associated with the adoption of new forms of ICTs, such development is not purely technological; nor does it designate circumscribed media forms and narrowly defined communication practices. Defining the boundaries of what may be termed the digital sphere is a challenging endeavor, considering the multidimensional nature of the ongoing transformations and the coexistence of the digital and the non-digital.

Individually and collectively, the chapters that constitute this volume offer vivid accounts of how digital technologies are affecting the region. The research findings paint a complex picture of a digital Middle East we are only just beginning to apprehend. This Summary Report provides outlines of all of the chapters that were authored as a result of this research initiative in an edited volume titled *Digital Middle East: State and Society in the Information Age* (Hurst/Oxford University Press, 2018).

Digital Middle East: State and Society in the Information Age
Working Group Participants and Contributors
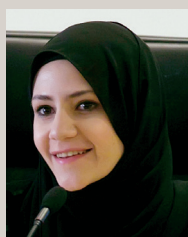
Ilhem Allagui
Northwestern University in Qatar

Haya Al Noaimi
SOAS, University of London
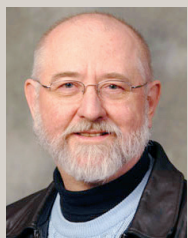
Jon W. Anderson
Catholic University of America

Zahra Babar
CIRS, Georgetown University in Qatar

Shahd Dauleh
Northwestern University in Qatar

Marion Desmurger
UNESCO

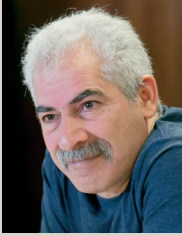John Downing
Southern Illinois University

Muzammil M. Hussain
University of Michigan

Mehran Kamrava
CIRS, Georgetown University in Qatar

Joe Khalil
Northwestern University in Qatar

Gholam Khiabany
University of London
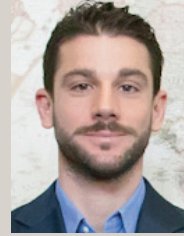
Dionysis Markakis
Queen Mary University

Suzi Mirgani
CIRS, Georgetown University in Qatar

Mark Allen Peterson
Miami University

Damian Radcliffe
University of Oregon

Vít Šisler
Charles University

Annabelle Sreberny
SOAS, University of London

Daniel Varisco
Qatar University

Elizabeth Wanucha
CIRS, Georgetown University in Qatar

Ingmar Weber
Qatar Computing Research Institute (QCRI)

Shafiz Affendi Mohd Yusof
University of Wollongong in Dubai

Norhayati Zakaria
University of Wollongong in Dubai

Mohamed Zayani
Georgetown University in Qatar

Valbona Zenku
Georgetown University in Qatar

Table of Contents
Paper Synopses

1. *Mapping the Digital Middle East: Trends and Disjunctions*
   Mohamed Zayani

Much of the Middle East has been facing formidable challenges. Undemocratic political systems, non-participatory forms of governance, economic stagnation, lagging human development, social inequality, high rates of unemployment, demographic pressures, youth radicalization, and escalating political and sectarian violence are only the pointed manifestation of these challenges. But the Middle East is also in the throes of change, politically, socially, economically, and otherwise. One facet of the region's transformation is its gradual immersion in the digital era. Increasingly, states, groups, and individuals alike are attempting to capitalize on transformation opportunities enabled by information and communication technologies (ICTs). Advances in information technology infrastructures and the fast pace of digitization have impacted the Middle East remarkably, albeit to varying degrees. Enhanced connectivity and high levels of use of ICTs favored a wider adoption of the Internet and related technologies by different players and forces in the region. Ease and speed of communication, along with broad diffusion, are engendering a gradual restructuring of the public communication space.

While these technological changes are far from turning Middle Eastern societies into "information-intensive societies" or "network societies," their impact is nonetheless increasingly felt. The growing adoption of a wide range of e-technologies and digital tools in almost all spheres of everyday life is introducing complex dynamics that beg for a better understanding: How have digital transformations and adoption of ICTs affected Middle Eastern societies? What are the social, cultural, and economic implications of these unfolding changes? How are the various participatory technologies that Web 2.0 affords redefining state-society relationships, and how is the Internet reconfiguring power relations? What are the security implications of a wired Middle East for the state and for individuals? How are digital technologies affecting the region's local cultures and, in turn, how do adopted social norms and ingrained cultural practices shape online activities and experiences? How do issues of Internet governance play out in the region and how do competing interests and values, both internally and externally, determine Internet policies? What does it mean for an evolving society—one that increasingly operates in a high-tech environment—to navigate the disjunction between tradition and modernity? Is the adoption of ICTs promoting social inclusion or is it engendering new forms of marginalization? And finally, to what extent can these ongoing digital transformations truly alter the reality and disposition of a region long known for its aversion to change?

By engaging with these questions, this collaborative project hopes to shed critical light on unfolding changes in the Middle East that are deeply intertwined with the increasing adoption of ICTs. It seeks to unravel the multifaceted digital transformations that the region has been experiencing and to understand the dynamics associated with these technology-related changes. The research offers a grounded reflection into how fast-changing information technologies that have been introduced and widely used over the past decade or so are impacting the region at the level of the state and society. It pays particular attention to the complex ways in which advances in ICTs have affected individual and community experiences, communication habits, social relations, commercial transactions, cultural practices, and political realities.

Mohamed Zayani is Professor of Critical Theory at the Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in Qatar and Director of the Media and Politics Program. He is also an Affiliate Faculty with the Georgetown Communication, Culture and Technology Graduate Program and co-director of the CCT Institute on Media, Technology and Digital Culture in the Middle East. His works include *Bullets and Bulletins: Media and Politics in the Wake of the Arab Uprisings* (Oxford University Press, 2016) co-edited with Suzi Mirgani, and *Networked Publics and Digital Contention: The Politics of Everyday Life in Tunisia* (Oxford University Press, 2015; winner of the ICA Global Media and Social Change Best Book Award; the NCA Sue DeWine Distinguished Book Award; and the ASA Communication, Information Technologies and Media Sociology Book Award). Currently, he is a Research Fellow with the University of British Columbia's Liu Institute for Global Issues in the School of Public Policy and Global Affairs.

2.   *The Changing Nature of Socialization among Arab Youth: Insights from Online Practices*
Ilhem Allagui

Digital media have affected the lives of youth in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region on many levels, particularly in the social realm. Research indicates that youth are spending increasing amounts of time online. A 2015 social media report shows that 89 percent of Facebook users in the Arab world access the Internet daily. Among the surveyed social media users, 25 percent said they spend 16–30 minutes per day on social networking sites (SNS), 23 percent spend 5–15 minutes, 20 percent spend 31–60 minutes, and 15 percent spend 1–2 hours. More affordable data packages and better access to the Internet, particularly with more places offering free Wi-Fi, are enabling more users to spend extended time online.

These changes are not without implications. Not only are social networks evolving with the development of the technical landscape, but the users' own online practices are expanding, their social experiences are changing, and their relationships to the "real world" are being reconfigured. Capturing these changes in their full complexity is a challenge. Existing research on new and emergent media trends in the MENA region tends to focus on shifting media habits. It is largely informed by macro-analyses aimed at understanding who accesses what platform, the amount of time spent online, and where, when, and how users are accessing the Net. Not much attention has been paid to the more profound and subtle social transformations accompanying these technological adoptions; and their potential effects and likely implications on youth have not yet been duly analyzed. A micro-perspective can help yield insights into the nature of these changing practices and shed light on evolving forms of engagement online.

This chapter focuses on online communication practices that are developing among Arab youth. It explores how youth who form online relationships adapt to and interact with evolving digital technologies. It provides a needed understanding of Arab youth friendship practices, in particular how digitally connected youth negotiate social relationships in an environment that is defined by well-delineated social norms. Although socializing counts as one of the top online activities, we know little about how the youth experience and negotiate this digitized socialization. What is not clear is how social relationships evolve on the Internet, and what it means for young men and women to move back and forth between the real and virtual worlds—how they move from their screens to experience "real-life" and back again to cyberspace. We do not have a full understanding of how youth appropriate the technological tools at their disposal when they form social ties on the Internet—how they construct new relationships, maintain existing relationships, or abandon old ones. Similarly, we do not know the implications these dynamics have on self and group identities, much less on traditions and values.

The aim of this chapter is to shed light on these technologically mediated forms of interaction. Driving this inquiry is a grounded attempt to understand the impact of social networking on the ways in which Arab youth manage their social interactions and relationships. More specifically, I explore how young adults use the Internet and other digital technologies to form relationships and maintain social relations. Of particular interest are the shifts in the sociocultural practices of users that are triggered by their immersion in new forms of social connectedness. Using narrative analysis to recount the negotiation of online/offline relationships through stories told in person or in a mediated form, I highlight various strategies that young Internet and social media users tend to adopt to manage their online/offline relationships. A key contention of this paper is that the negotiation of

these relationships may not be as spontaneous as the instantaneity of social media leads one to believe. If anything, online relationships tend to be constructed both intentionally and strategically in ways that take into consideration socio-cultural factors and variables.

A second claim that motivates this chapter relates to the underlying dynamics of and shifting boundaries between online and offline relationships. One of the aims of this analysis is to reveal patterns of movement between online and offline relationships as they pertain to the adoption of Internet and social media, and to shed light on micro-practices that develop in a highly connected environment. Contrary to how it may appear, online interactions and virtual relationships are not making real-world interactions obsolete. If anything, the various forms of socialization that youth in the MENA region engage in on social networks suggest that the online/offline dichotomy can only be superficially maintained. Not only are the two worlds intertwined in complex ways, but the hybridity that underpins them is key to understanding sociality in a social media-intensive environment.

This chapter unfolds through five sections. Starting with a brief socio-cultural contextualization of the research, and followed by a review of the literature regarding the development of online relationships among youth, I then lay out my research design and provide a narration of mediated relationships of youth living in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. Drawing on personal stories, user accounts, and media narratives, I then discuss personalized micro-practices associated with social media usage among Arab youth and explain their significance. I conclude with reflections on how digital technologies have impacted social relations without necessarily unsettling traditions.

Ilhem Allagui is Associate Professor in Residence at Northwestern University in Qatar. Her academic experience includes more than ten years of teaching at the University of Montreal, the American University of Sharjah, and Northwestern University in Qatar. Her research interests focus on the social integration of new media, Arab cultural industries, and marketing communication practices in the MENA region. She joined the World Internet Project network in 2007, and launched the Emirates Internet Project, which was awarded a UAE National Research Foundation grant in 2009. She serves on the editorial board of the *International Journal of Communication*. She earned her MSc and PhD in communication sciences from the University of Montreal.

3. *Virtual Worlds, Digital Dreams: Imaginary Spaces of Middle Eastern Video Games*
   Vít Šisler

In his famous manifesto, game theorist Eric Zimmerman declared the twenty-first century a "ludic century" that is largely defined by games. If linear media and non-interactive information were defining elements of dominant cultural forms like film and video in the twentieth century, today information has taken, what Zimmerman calls, a playful turn. With the advent of game-induced experiences, media and culture are becoming systemic, modular, customizable, and participatory. As a result, the ways in which people spend their leisure time and consume art, design, and entertainment are increasingly game-oriented; at the very least, they are amenable to experiences that are connected to games in one way or another.

Video games are a global phenomenon; they pervade much of society irrespective of age, gender, or social status. Half a billion people worldwide play games online for at least an hour a day, and an estimated one billion people play regularly on consoles, personal computers, and mobile devices. Correspondingly, video games are a strong engine for economic growth. In 2013, the industry sold 160 million games and generated more than $21 billion in revenue in the United States alone, with the global industry revenue estimated at $93 billion.

The new global cultural economy constitutes a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order that cannot adequately be understood in terms of prevailing center-periphery models. Arjun Appadurai coined the term "mediascapes" as a part of his analytical framework for exploring global cultural flows. By mediascapes he means both the distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information (newspapers, television, and films), which are now available to a growing number of private and public actors throughout the world, as well as the images of the world created by these media. Video games are inherently transnational by virtue of their industrial, textual, and player practices. As such, video game cultures transect mediascapes in ways similar and dissimilar to television and film, transcending national boundaries and migrating between cultures. Video games emerge as spaces of exploration; their reliance on player activity to become "finished" texts calls for an analysis of the particularities of play, including local cultural, political, and social context.

Until recently, research on the social and cultural aspects of video games tended to focus on the "traditional" centers of the video game industry and consumption (North America, Western Europe, Australia, Japan, and South Korea), while the international flows of gaming and digital media cultures remained largely underexplored. Yet, video game cultures and game development flourished in many other regions. New scholarly research that focuses on digital gaming in regions not usually examined by game studies is slowly emerging, offering a more nuanced picture of gaming across diverse global contexts. According to a recent survey on entertainment media use in the Middle East, four out of ten people in the region play video games. These figures suggest that compared to film, television, or music, in terms of consumption, video games attract fewer people, but those who do play video games do so frequently. Importantly, video games are played almost exclusively in Arabic and English, though more frequently in English than in Arabic across the region.

Because of the limited number of games produced in the Middle East, gamers in the region remain largely dependent on games of European, American, or Japanese origin. What emerges as a result are hybrid gaming cultures that are marked by transnationalism and translocalism. What this means is that a "mainstream" Egyptian,

Jordanian, or Iranian gaming culture does not exist as such; it consists primarily of the consumption of "Western" games, albeit in new contexts and different social settings.

However, these consumption patterns are likely to change in the future. According to an LAI Global Game Services report, the video game market in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region is one of the fastest growing markets in the world, earning over $100 million in revenue from online gaming alone. As in other emerging markets, the MENA region has one of the largest populations of young people in the world. In addition, Internet and mobile penetration rates, which are higher than the global average, make the region particularly attractive for business. Several global video game companies have expressed their interest in translating and localizing their production into Arabic, and others have invested in local video game production. At the same time, a number of local video game companies have entered the market in the last decade.

Middle Eastern game production has come a long way and has evolved in interesting ways, bringing various concepts and interpretations of Islam and Islamic culture, as well as local history, mythology, literature, and popular culture into the realm of digital entertainment. Simultaneously, a variety of actors with different interests and motivations have entered the field, ranging from individual visionaries struggling to realize their dreams to private entrepreneurs seeking economic interests, and from business companies operating within the framework of an Islamic piety movement to state agencies following national interests and political agendas. Significantly, the local video game development and emerging gaming cultures in individual Middle East states are subject to different regulatory frameworks, cultural values, societal norms, and religious traditions. As a result, we are witnessing a highly complex, overlapping, and contested environment, encompassing state and private actors, local and global cultural flows, and supportive and contradictory processes.

My aim in this chapter is to explore these disjunctures and tie them into a coherent theoretical framework. In doing so, I hope to shed light on the cultural and technological processes and flows influencing both video game development and gaming cultures in the Middle East. I conceptualize Middle Eastern video games as imaginary spaces that entangle diverse and contradictory processes: global cultural flows, media policies of nation states, visions and engagements of private entrepreneurs, and migration and appropriation of Western game genres and rule-systems. On a more general level, this chapter explores the structures and mechanisms underlying video game production, and how these evolved within the broader historical, cultural, and political context of the Middle East.

Vít Šisler is Assistant Professor of New Media at the Institute of Information Studies at Charles University in Prague, and formerly a visiting Fulbright scholar at Northwestern University. His research focuses on information and communication technologies in the Middle East and educational and political video games. He has published extensively on information technologies, identity in the digital age, video games, networked public spheres, and online communities in the Middle East. His articles have appeared in numerous journals and he is the editor of *CyberOrient*, a peer-reviewed journal of the virtual Middle East published by the American Anthropological Association.

4. *Mediated Experience in the Egyptian Revolution*
   Mark Allen Peterson

While much has been written on the role of digital media in the Egyptian uprisings of 2011, there has been little sustained attention to the lived experience of the revolution and the roles that the media played in this. Reconciling large-scale political and social change with everyday lived experience has always been a fundamental problem for understanding social and political change. Social movement theories, rational actor theories, and other macropolitical theories that ascribe causality to contextual variables often avoid phenomenal accounts of the experiences of individual people, precisely because these subjective accounts appear either to contradict or to complicate the assumptions on which these theories are founded. Nowhere is this truer than in times of revolution, when everyday routines, practices, and norms, including those involving media, are disrupted, and people struggle to find ways of being in the world when normality is in flux. To study revolutions therefore implies not only a focus on political behavior "from below," but also recognition of moments at which "high and low" are relativized, made irrelevant, or subverted, and the micro and macro levels fuse in critical conjunctions.

This chapter offers a first effort at a conceptual framework that recognizes the intricacy of interaction between mediation and dramatic social change by looking at the lived experience of Egyptians during the Egyptian revolution. I begin with a bird's eye account of the Egyptian revolution from the perspective of media use. I follow this with three brief accounts of people who consider themselves participants in the revolution, but whose experiences differ from the stereotyped depictions of people who massed in Tahrir Square or revolutionary bloggers hunched over keyboards in Internet cafes. I then review the concept of "mediation" that has increasingly been used in media studies to describe the integration of media into everyday social worlds. Finally, I attempt to link these sections through an analysis of the revolution as process, drawing on the processual theories of social change developed in anthropology in the 1960s and 1970s and currently going through a critical revival.

Central to any understanding of the roles played by media in the Egyptian uprisings is the recognition that in the years leading up to the revolution, media technologies had ceased to be understood as the exclusive provenance of the state. Historically, the Egyptian state had always exerted extensive control over newspapers, radio, and television, even those published by private corporations and opposition political parties. Small media technologies (cassette recorders, photocopies, and fax machines) had long been used by anti-state actors to produce and distribute media outside the routes dominated by state and corporate media, but the rise of digital media dramatically increased the availability and ease of use of the tools of media production (computers, software, recording equipment, etc.) and distribution (Web 2.0 applications) to the extent that they provided significant alternative sources of media content. Initially ignored by the state, except as a tool for measuring progress toward development goals, new media came to provide channels of communication outside state control and, perhaps more importantly, to symbolize the possibility of alternative forms of Egyptian citizenship.

The Egyptian uprisings can only be understood within the context of more than a decade of protests against Egypt's "human security regime" that peaked in 2005 and again in 2010. For decades, the Egyptian state posited itself to its Western sponsors as the only vanguard against an anti-Western Islamic regime, while positioning itself at home as the guarantor of a moral order that supported secular modernity while enforcing racial, gender, and religious boundaries against public transgression. This role as double-guarantor

justified the establishment of a strong security apparatus that operated with relatively few constraints. State media played a central role in this project. While everyday experiences with the state were often mediated by fraught interactions with police and other state actors, state media provided an alternative narrative featuring a paternalistic state protecting and supporting its subjects from internal dissension and the invisible hands of external enemies. Aside from voting in parliamentary and presidential elections, Egyptian citizens were confronted with a paucity of available civic practices.

The experience of collective events is necessarily mediated; it is experienced through media technologies whose form and content both shape and are shaped by the events they represent. Mediated experiences are at once experiences refracted through communication technologies and shaped by interpersonal activities and also interactions through which mediated experiences are affirmed, contested, and interpreted. These mediated experiences are both collective, in that people are connected by media uses and practices, and by common activities and spaces, and yet they are also deeply personal and individualized, in that specific sets of technologies, interpersonal relationships, and embodied practices that comprise one person's unfolding experience will be different from another's. I argue that these two dimensions could be theorized using the concepts of network and assemblage.

When Egyptians look back at the events that began to unfold in January 2011, they usually describe a series of events with a unified character. The eighteen-day movement in Tahrir Square, for example, is conceived as a unified body of protesters challenging the ruling regime. Examined empirically, however, such a perception is revealed as a construction, a story collectively composed through myriad media by excluding the contingent moments that existed during the protest process itself. I argue that we can understand the relationship between mediated experiences of events and agent-driven uses of media technologies—especially digital media—in constructing collective narrative accounts of these events by turning to processual analyses of the sort called "social drama" or "field theory." Field theory allows us to see the revolution as a series of struggles over the symbolic meaning of revolutionary activities, in which media practices play a crucial part. What is ultimately at stake is the definition of the symbolic configurations that define the structure of the field itself, and the contours of the media ecologies through which these struggles take place.

Mark Allen Peterson is Professor and Chair of the Department of Anthropology and Professor in the International Studies Program at Miami University in Ohio. His research interests include ethnography of communication, mass media, information technologies, nationalism, transnationalism and globalization, among others. His most recent book is *Connected in Cairo: Growing Up Cosmopolitan in the Modern Middle East* (Indiana University Press, 2011). He has published extensively in *Anthropology Today*, *Childhood*, *Contemporary Islam*, and *New Review of Hypermedia and Multimedia*, and has contributed chapters to several edited volumes.

5. *Women's Digital Activism: Making Change in the Middle East*
    Annabelle Sreberny

The Arab spring of 2017 is profoundly different from that of the Arab spring of 2011. The latter embodied and diffused a considerable sense of hope. The central tropes were of peoples mobilized in many different locations and the imminent end to the authoritarianism that had plagued the region for decades and produced skewed or limited economic development. Countless questions had been posed and books written about the incompatibility of Islam and democracy and whether the region could ever become democratic. And then, as political mobilization seemed to spread from Tunisia to Egypt and elsewhere in the region, challenging long-extant forms of masculine authoritarianism, the multibillion dollar economy of Middle East experts, academics, pundits, and media mavens was completely taken by surprise. By 2017, instead of basking in the socio-economic benefits of democratization and development, the region has fallen into chaos. It boasts at least four failed or failing states: Syria, Iraq, Libya, and Yemen. War, violence, and the emergence of the caliphate of ISIL/Daesh have together precipitated the biggest population movement for years, with huge refugee camps in Turkey and Lebanon and a European refugee crisis that mirrors that of the Second World War. Egypt seems to be returning to pre-democratic ways. The Turkish-Kurdish accommodation has broken down. Palestinians still do not have a state. Yemen is one of four countries in the Middle East and Africa on the verge of calamitous famine. All of this has gendered dimensions, insofar as war, resettlement, and impoverishment are experienced differentially by men and women; and as usual, women's experiences are often overlooked. A focus on women's digital activities is one way of exploring unheard voices, weakly articulated issues, and new political realities. As the region descends into chaos, the more considered and mature voices of women need to be heard. This chapter explores how many are trying to do just that.

The Arab uprisings of 2010–11 changed the political landscape in the Middle East. Finally, change seemed thinkable and possible. That history does not come with guarantees is evident, but that is not the point here. Western media pundits, not known for nuance or even local knowledge, immediately pronounced these dynamics as a "Facebook revolution" (albeit developed in regard to Iran's Green Movement) and "Twitter revolution." Such synecdoche for complex political and social dynamics found a home in global public discourse, even as they have been criticized for both overstating and obfuscating the role of social media in change. Such hyped constructions function as zombie categories, explaining little about either new media or political process. Of course Twitter was used within the so-called "Arab Spring" movements of 2010–11. Its use has risen considerably in Saudi Arabia where—as elsewhere in the region—a sizeable proportion of the population is under age thirty-five and accesses the Internet via mobile phone, making it one of the world's top markets for time spent on the Internet. Clearly, digital connectivity and social media can be powerful tools for change, but that is not the same thing as triggering or producing that change.

Citizen movements and political struggles for democracy and rights in the region did not begin with the Arab Spring, and neither did women's political activity. Online politics and embodied social movements are not ontologically different activities, but rather different modes of being political. Yet it is reasonable to suggest that access to the Internet, the development of social media platforms in English and Arabic, and the growing popular awareness of change have produced a more conducive environment for women's political activities and thus for a general enlargement of what counts as the political sphere. Until now, the treatment of information

and communications technology (ICT) expansion and use in the MENA region has often obscured the gender dimension, and more specifically how the new environment is affecting women.

I explore the intricate and evolving relationship between new media practices, gender roles, and political processes, as well as the possibilities and limits of the new online environment for women in a region that is increasingly embracing the Internet and immersing itself in the digital experience. My concern is not to reflect again on whether women are better or worse off in the much-altered and fast-changing Middle East. Nor do I wish to challenge the manner in which the region vividly manifests the stand-off between Shirky's uber-optimism—"here comes everybody," and Morozov's uber-pessimism—"be frightened of strong states," about the possibilities of online activism in producing change. I consider this a false polarity since the region—and other locales—manifest the simultaneous existence of both practices, and much contemporary contestation is enacted in that competition of powers.

Dissident online activity by women and others is increasingly monitored and blocked by the regional authoritarian states, which have woken up to these novel forms of disembodied resistance that require new forms of policing. In 2010–11, the states of the region understood and could control physical demonstrations more effectively than the more invisible online organizing. But they are learning these lessons fast, now detaining and imprisoning bloggers and journalists. The 1,000 lashes meted down on the blogger Raif Badawi in Saudi Arabia became an Amnesty International case; while, as of yet, the national and "halal" Internets invoked by Egyptian and Iranian authorities have not emerged.

This chapter tries to reconceive the question of Middle Eastern women in the age of the Internet. If anything, the study of women's issues in an altered online environment affords the opportunity to theorize such issues beyond the traditional categories of female empowerment and gender equality. If the question of women's digital activism is of renewed interest, it is because it prompts us to reflect on the ways and the extent to which the new online environment has helped turn social issues that have been relegated to a rather narrow gender register into much broader political issues; and in so doing, it has extended their significance and their potential for serious change in the region.

Annabelle Sreberny is Emeritus Professor of Global Media and Communications at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London. She was president of the International Association of Media and Communication Research (IAMCR) from 2008–12, and the first chair of the Centre for Iranian Studies at SOAS. She authored *Small Media Big Revolution: Communication, Culture and the Iranian Revolution* (University of Minnesota Press, 1994) with Ali Mohammadi; *Blogistan: The Internet and Politics in Iran* (I. B. Tauris, 2011) with Gholam Khiabany; and edited *Cultural Revolution in Iran: Contemporary Popular Culture in the Islamic Republic* (I. B. Tauris, 2013) with Massoumeh Torfeh; and *Persian Service: The BBC and British Interests in Iran* (I. B. Tauris, 2014), also with M. Torfeh.

6.   *Domesticating Foreign Intellectual Property Laws in the Digital Age: Of Pirates and* Qarsana *in the GCC*
Suzi Mirgani

Emerging from the shadow of British protectionism among other forms of political dependence, and buoyed by an indigenous and lucrative hydrocarbon industry, the six Gulf Cooperation Council states overhauled and modernized their developing economic, political, and social infrastructures over the span of a few decades. In the process of nation-building, the young GCC states took leaps in their national development, to emerge from being disputative tribal regions into stable and independent sovereign states, in under two generations.

The Gulf states' large-scale modernization efforts and exploitation of natural wealth reserves secured their place in the international economy. Acting within their new-found positions of power, key GCC states contributed to the founding of powerful consortia and cartels, including the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), and gradually established strong and beneficial protection for their nascent industries. Banking on foreign dependence on energy resources in an industrializing world, the GCC governments commanded powerful negotiating postures and assumed significant regional and global influence in international affairs and trade. From the outset, the Gulf states' existential relationship with the world has been defined by trade.

While GCC states maintained substantial control over the trajectory of hydrocarbon-dependent industries, many developed nations attempted to innovate and move beyond their energy dependencies by investing in, and instituting, industries based on knowledge production. In an era of technological advancement, intellectual property can be considered the driver of productivity and economic growth, with a new focus on the economic impact of information, technology, and learning.

Most of the value of high technology products lies in the invention, innovation, research, design and testing involved. The value of recordings, software, and online services, for example, is the information and creativity they contain. Postindustrial success in the digitally-sustained economic environment is being progressively defined by the prevalence and strength of information systems, technological innovation, and knowledge production. Within this transitioning world economy, ideas and knowledge are an increasingly important part of trade.

World markets are being dominated by globalized networks of developed, industrialized, and technologically-advanced nations, threatening to leave behind the old giants of industry. In this transitioning international economic environment, GCC states have had to keep up with the many fast-paced changes by diversifying their economies and by strategically using their accumulated oil wealth to invest in a future sustained by knowledge-based industries. However, with a new type of global economy based on knowledge production come new rules of engagement. Like most other emerging economies and industrializing nations, the GCC states must submit to new international standards of intellectual property protection enforced by powerful conglomerates and international organizations—standards that are not always in the favor of modernizing nations.

This chapter examines some of the challenges faced by GCC nations as they attempt once again to "modernize" their economies in the digital era and in the face of substantial technological transformations. The GCC states, like many countries in the world, are entering into a transitional phase and a new world order. In order to fit within a repositioned international market, the GCC must abide by the many new rules and regulations in the area of intellectual property protection that have been developed and dictated by the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the agreement on Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS).

Since the implementation of TRIPS measures is a strict requirement for WTO accession, this study examines how GCC governments are attempting to harness information industries as well as the related copyright and intellectual property laws that are largely alien to their local legal and social environments. In most cases, these new intellectual property protections are neither strictly implemented nor enforced by GCC authorities, and yet have been written into individual GCC state legal systems at the behest of the WTO. GCC governments are requested by the WTO, the European Union, and the United States to do more to encourage compliance with intellectual property protection in the digital era, even though the majority of GCC societies—local and expatriate—may be unreceptive to, and often fundamentally unfamiliar with, the concept of intellectual property itself and, by extension, the related concepts of copyright infringement and piracy (or *qarsana*).

After outlining some of the main social and economic challenges resulting from the GCC states' adoption of WTO rules regarding intellectual property protections, this chapter highlights some specific examples regarding the practical application and enforcement of these laws. GCC intellectual property laws vary—although not too significantly—from state to state. Each GCC country's idiosyncrasies relate to, among other things, "moral rights and translations of copyright works, compulsory licensing, protection of pharmaceuticals, and even the Arab boycott of Israel." This chapter does not propose to inspect the historical development of specific intellectual property laws that pertain to any individual Gulf country, but rather to examine the shared motivations of Gulf governments to introduce externally imposed legal systems, and the means through which these largely unfamiliar—and, in some cases, incompatible—legal frameworks have been implemented.

The study concludes with reflections on some of the ways in which Gulf states attempt to "domesticate" foreign intellectual property laws. Gulf states are endeavoring to gain a competitive advantage by investing in the production of locally produced—as well as Arabic—content, and especially the promotion of niche areas of intellectual property often overlooked by other interests, such as the protection of traditional knowledge rights. This is an area generally neglected by industrialized nations, which tend to promote the concept of "innovation" rather than promoting and protecting collective knowledge. GCC states are attempting to use intellectual property laws to their own advantage with an emphasis on digital archiving and protection of traditional knowledge, heritage, and folklore. Each GCC country has created a dedicated government department to oversee the digitization and protection of heritage materials. By promoting and protecting locally produced content, GCC states can aspire to the globalized international economic framework as envisioned and enforced by the WTO.

Suzi Mirgani is Managing Editor of Publications at the Center for International and Regional Studies, Georgetown University in Qatar. She is the author of *Target Markets: International Terrorism Meets Global Capitalism in the Mall* (Transcript Press, 2017). She co-edited *Bullets and Bulletins: Media and Politics in the Wake of the Arab Uprisings* (Hurst/Oxford University Press, 2016) with Mohamed Zayani; and *Food Security in the Middle East* (Hurst/Oxford University Press, 2014), with Zahra Babar. She is an independent filmmaker working on highlighting stories from the Gulf region.

7. *From Souk to Cyber Souk: Acculturating to e-Commerce in the MENA Region*
Norhayati Zakaria

For centuries, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region has drawn both local customers and foreign visitors to a local form of market known as the "souk." As a community-based space that brings together buyers from all walks of life and sellers who trade various goods and products, the souk is at the center of public life. Traditionally, the souk constitutes an open-air marketplace that throbs with activity and teems with customers and visitors strolling down endless walkways, eyeing goods and products, getting to know the merchants and examining their merchandise, bargaining on prices, and building relationships. The souk is a unique cultural phenomenon that continues to have a special appeal to locals and foreign visitors alike.

In Arabic, the word "souk" designates a marketplace. In former times, goods were carried to the docks near the souk, using small wooden ships known as dhows. The cargo was then sold to the merchants who would flock to the docks to examine the newly arrived merchandise and acquire what they could to supply their stands. This proximity encouraged the practice of haggling between merchants—wholesalers, suppliers, importers—and retailers. Once a price was agreed upon and a deal closed, the shop owners would bring the goods to their tents or stalls in the souk, usually set on narrow streets not very far from the docks. The hustle and bustle that accompanied the trading of goods at the docks created a dynamic, haggling-intensive environment that carried over to the souk itself. Although the souk in the MENA region still offers authentic local goods, such as spices, perfumes, and silk, the types of traded merchandise have changed considerably over the years. Today, one can shop at the souks for handmade carpets and authentic delicacies, but also modern electronics.

By and large, though, souks have been taken over by the more modern shopping malls, which have grown more commonplace and popular. The emergence of shopping malls has allowed people to experience a new type of marketplace. The new culture of malls extends the souk culture, but also alters it to accommodate the changing needs and tastes of customers. The shopping mall reflects an affluent contemporary lifestyle in Arab societies, and is visited by those who desire global brands and a refined locale where they can engage in conspicuous consumption.

Over the years, new shopping spaces and consumer trends have emerged, and the traditional souk culture has given way to a more modern mall culture throughout the region, particularly in the more affluent Gulf societies. While imitating the face-to-face business environment that prevailed in souks, malls have adapted commercial practices to the needs of changing societies. They also afford new spaces for socialization that appeal to people of all ages. In recent years, advances in information technology, changes in business strategies, and demand for enhanced shopping experiences have all contributed to the adoption of e-commerce. In the new cyber souk, business transactions take place "just a click-away," with the convenience of not having to leave one's home. Based on online transaction rather than the traditional face-to-face interaction, this new shopping experience affects both the nature of the shopping experience and the ways in which people relate to it.

This chapter probes the implications that digital transformations in the Arab Middle East have had on the business sector. A number of questions motivate the analysis. Does the absence of cultural practices in the online business environment, which are so inherent to the souk experience, make e-commerce less appealing than traditional forms of trade? Can Arab societies acculturate to the new ways of conducting business, and are they

likely to change their norms, practices, and values accordingly? How and to what extent does culture impact the development of e-commerce? Does the continued popularity of the traditional souk and the appeal of the modern mall hinder the development of e-commerce? What culturally-attuned behaviors lead buyers to adopt or avoid the new cyber souk environment? And, more generally, what barriers hinder consumers from engaging in e-commerce?

Addressing these questions necessitates paying attention to the factors that have contributed to the development of e-commerce in the region, and highlighting barriers that hinder its growth. A key contention of this chapter is that the most complex challenges for the development and adoption of e-commerce in the region are not so much economic, technical, or systemic, but cultural. The persistence of various cultural barriers raises questions about the extent to which e-commerce is likely to take hold in the region.

This chapter unfolds along four lines of analysis. First, I explore the nature of the souk in the MENA region, including its origins, business practices, and historical development from souk to mall to cyber souk, describing the similarities and differences between all three of modes of commerce. Second, I provide a critical review of the literature on e-commerce in the MENA region, with the purpose of understanding the previous studies that examined factors affecting e-commerce acceptance and its usage among Arab consumers. Third, I discuss the effect of culture on the adoption of e-commerce by applying cross-cultural theories along several cultural dimensions. Finally, I offer some reflections on the theoretical and business implications on the development of the cyber souk.

With globalization, the e-commerce market is fast becoming a one-stop shopping platform for customers around the world. Specific cultural values still matter, however, because customers make choices based on their preferences and tastes. As a result, universal values become less salient and therefore customers' values need to be accommodated by the e-commerce sellers, at least to a certain extent. In the Arab context, although customers are quickly learning about new business practices such as e-commerce, they also have fears and anxieties about trying new things due to their discomfort with change and uncertainty. A key question of this chapter is the extent to which e-commerce companies are capable of establishing an international marketing strategy that is congruent with the cultural values of their foreign customers.

Norhayati Zakaria is Associate Professor at the University of Wollongong in Dubai's Faculty of Business and Management. Her research interests include cross-cultural management, international business, and computer-mediated communication technology. Since 2006, she has served as Senior Research Faculty Associate at the American University's Center for Research on Collaboratories and Technology Enhanced Learning Communities (COTELCO), where she undertakes projects involving global virtual teams. She has established international research collaborations with global scholars and obtained international research grants from the Asian Office of Aerospace Research and Development.

8. *Working for Free: Hidden Social and Political Economies of the Internet in the Middle East*
    Jon W. Anderson

A curious hiatus has run throughout discussions in the Middle East of new electronic media, of the information and communication technologies (ICTs) that support them, and of the Internet that conveys them. On the one hand, political analyses focus on issues around informational freedom, with new actors and activities opening the public sphere and enabling civil society; on the other hand are plans for leveraging ICTs for development, ranging from ICT training and ICT-trained cadres to "free zone" industrial parks for local entrepreneurs and international corporations to bring the post-industrial revolution centered around "knowledge work" into the region. From the initial establishment of Internet connections in the early 1990s, through extending those to more users and more uses around the turn of the millennium, to today's proliferation of social media among youth, discussion has circled in political terms around informational freedom and eroding authoritarian regimes, and in economic terms around informational development laying the basis for development of "human capital" through information technology (IT). Each projection is cast as bringing larger and longer-term global shifts to the region and engaging the region with them, a knowledgeable polity on the one hand and a knowledge economy on the other. Each is also imagined as constrained by different local factors prioritized by their own points of view on catching up to global standards or in global frameworks.

This might seem a merely analytical hiatus of political and economic analysts not talking to, or taking account of, each other's analyses; but even that would be consequential, I argue, for obscuring or disattending processes closer to the grounds specific to ICT development, particularly as met in the Internet. To begin with, both the informational freedom and informational development theses share a bias to the supply side. Arguably, this works for infrastructure development, such as roads that attract traffic, but it becomes problematic with IT development, which engages additional values and practices, even its own habitus. "Habitus" is a concept cast to capture a denser concept of practice than the value-action formulations in mid-twentieth-century social sciences—not only more specific values, but also "dispositions" tied both to structures and to specifically located values—that unify analytically distinguished ontologies of choices and habits.

To elicit this IT or "digital" habitus and how the Internet conveys it, particularly in the digital Middle East, I start with the case of social media, which political and media-minded analyses focusing largely on impacts have left problematic, and then back up to values and practices that social media share with Internet habitus more generally, before proceeding to how that is manifest in the Arab Middle East. This is partly a multidimensional project of restoration: first, restoration of other values and practices elided by supply-side biases in projecting macro-theories down to micro-levels as assumptions of pre-existing "demand;" second, restoration of actual features of "communicative capitalism" in thinking about compulsions of the Internet; and finally, restoration of dense and evolving relations between users and developers in the IT realm. All of which throw up the conundrum that working on, with, and through the Internet often entails working not just "for freedom" but also "for free." I explore first how it is a problem, before comparing some key sites where these dynamics arise.

Comparisons help to identify ways in which developers from the original Internet's engineers, through programmers generally, and social media developers who emerged from the phase of Web development, all

form a multilayered epistemic community, or overlapping communities of practice, and share a habitus rooted in and transmitted through the Internet that links them. A (reflexive) "culture of the net" is present in the Arab Middle East—and to its locus in the medium that spreads it—a medium at once social and technical, each conveying the experience and habitus of the other around connectivity, making connections, imagining and being (through its habitus) connected. Further along this spectrum are incubators and accelerators that widen the types of relations engaged around startups, and begin to formalize them. Still further along this chain, tech and media "free zones" belong more to the relatively institutionalized international circulation of value through outsourcing. What may appear as a diffusion of innovations is a much more complex reality of nearly instantaneous spread, accelerated through the medium of the Internet and its constant morphing. In economic and political terms, this imagination may be thought of as the Internet Premium behind the various strands of the habitus that registers as "working for free."

Working for free is foundational to the Internet and its early development in the public sector, from the assiduous efforts of its creators to spread the ethos and practices of their work, to preserving those as alternatives against others that would modify the Internet. Locally, it is also reflected in common complaints in sub-communities of developers, from e-commerce Web portals in the late 1990s, to social media in the first decade of the twenty-first century. One has to do with piracy, or the experience of early developers of Arabic-language software, who—no matter how widely their work might be used—manage to "sell only one copy" in explaining why they turned to producing "middleware" components for international corporations.

A second way in which IT development is enmeshed in a habitus of working for free is more strictly financial than commercial. Developers, especially would-be commercial developers, from e-commerce portals to social media platforms, have consistently attributed difficulties in financing their projects to biases in Arab banking that favor trade finance, where premiums go to brokering over investment finance, which registers as speculation. That being their experience and its register in the system, some turn to personal or family sources, including spin-offs from family businesses; this is an economy of subsidizing otherwise unremunerated work partly for returns in reputation, like the engineers before them, partly for interest in the activity, partly for other pay-offs, from connection to similar others, to participation in a shared culture and extending its values and practices.

Jon W. Anderson is Professor of Anthropology at the Catholic University of America and has also taught at the Universities of Oslo and Bergen in Norway, the Free University of Berlin, and at Georgetown University's Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, where he was co-director of the Arab Information Project. He is the author of *Arabizing the Internet* (Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 1998); and co-editor with Dale F. Eickelman of *New Media in the Muslim World: The Emerging Public Sphere* (Indiana University Press, 1999, 2002); and with Jodi Dean and Geert Lovink of *Reformatting Politics: Information Technology and Global Civil Society* (Routledge, 2006).

9. *Digital Rights Activism after the Arab Spring: Internet Governance Politics and the Internet Freedom Proto-Regime*
Muzammil M. Hussain

Following the 2011–12 cascades of popular protests in the MENA states, transnational networks of technology-savvy activists, communications corporations, and foreign ministries have joined together in international policy arenas to define and enforce "Internet freedom." These stakeholders have been synthesizing policy norms to better monitor, promote, and regulate the political uses and consequences of information and communication technologies in non-democratic countries. This chapter examines the emergence and activities of several competing technology policy arenas, debates, and stakeholders sponsored primarily by Western democratic regimes since the aftermath of the "Arab Spring."

These efforts are ongoing, and the social construction of policy norms and frameworks by multi-stakeholder communities of actors have agitated since 2011; however, recent crises, like Edward Snowden's mass surveillance revelations, have further galvanized and disrupted this process. Therefore, this analysis is grounded under the rubric of examining "proto-regimes" in formation, where the involved stakeholders are engaged in introducing competing norms and goals, but are struggling to synthesize them under a coherent system. So our task is to examine and critique this regime construction process and the new communities of practices that are informing contemporary communication technology governance frameworks. The involved actors have competing intersections, understandings, and practices, but have converged with the aim of influencing the political attributes and capabilities of the digital infrastructure undergirding so many recent episodes of digitally-enabled social change. This discussion also identifies and traces a small Silicon Valley-based community of policy entrepreneurs—those who from outside the formal positions of government help to implement new ideas into public practice. This tech-savvy civil society network includes technologists and activists who have, since 2008, collaborated and articulated many of the new norms, vocabularies, and frameworks now referenced by officials, activists, and journalists, internationally, whenever "Internet freedom" is discussed and promoted.

This network of stakeholders and practitioners has been instrumental in driving the current ideas and discussions regarding Internet freedom, and is increasingly important in setting the agenda for what constitutes meaningful and effective policies for securing digital infrastructures in the public's interests. Given the complexities of the transnational political setting and challenges that these diverse stakeholders (activists, corporations, and governments) are addressing, their efforts thus far have been both foundational and problematic. Their policy efforts have been foundational because during the period of activities observed in this chapter (2012) contains the first major collective effort by which a large coalition of primarily Western nation states has collectively and materially supported "Internet freedom promotion." At the same time, these very states have since been found to violate the very efforts they champion, domestically and abroad. This is why we must trace the rise of this emergent policy regime, not by assuming that it is either effective or coherent, but by noting its apparent intention to affect fundamental communicative aspects of the global system.

The coalition of Western nation-states promoting Internet freedom broadly represents advanced industrialized democracies, and is supported most substantively by the United States Department of State. Ideological and material commitment toward promoting Internet freedom has also been provided by the

Netherlands and Swedish Ministries for Foreign Affairs, and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of the United Kingdom, to name three key state backers. This coalition of Western democratic states advancing Internet freedom promotion was formally launched—soon after major Arab Spring protests subsided, in December 2011—at The Hague, as the Freedom Online Coalition (FOC). During the launch, then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton offered keynote remarks and acknowledged Swedish and Dutch Foreign Ministers, corporate representative Eric Schmidt (Google), and civil society NGO leader Leon Willems (Free Press Unlimited) as "co-conspirators" of the FOC—acknowledging the intimate involvement of state, private sector, and civil society stakeholders during its early moments.

While the FOC is a key object of examination, it is not the central case or site of study for investigating all the important norms and actors involved in Internet freedom promotion more broadly. One must be careful here not to conflate the FOC as "the" Internet freedom regime, for several reasons. First, in order to investigate Internet freedom promotion efforts, focusing solely on the activities of the FOC is not an ideal or conceptually valid strategy. This is because the diverse stakeholders working in the Internet freedom arena(s) often disagree and often misunderstand each other—consensus is not a core characteristic of Internet freedom work; consensus formation is this issue area's core problem and challenge.

Second, the transnational context of the investigative phenomena (i.e. Internet freedom promotion) necessitates that we corroborate its multiple understandings and outcomes being championed by the competing multisector stakeholders. This is particularly important as proponents of Internet freedom work are situated within governmental agencies, communication corporations, transnational civil society organizations, as well as loose networks of politically-minded technologists who tinker with and manipulate digital tools and infrastructure.

Finally, because Internet freedom promotion fits under the broader category of regulating or governing the global Internet infrastructure and all its surrounding and undergirding elements (i.e. what I refer to as digital infrastructures), we must also recognize the influence of pre-existing regulatory agencies and regimes that have been operating long before the Arab Spring of 2011, and also how discussions about Internet freedom have increased both in maturity and incoherence.

Muzammil M. Hussain is Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication Studies at the University of Michigan, and serves as a faculty affiliate of the Harvard Kennedy School of Government's Science and Democracy Network (SDN) and the Michigan Ford School of Public Policy's Program on Science, Technology, and Public Policy (STPP). He is co-author of *Democracy's Fourth Wave? Digital Media and the Arab Spring* (Oxford University Press, 2013) and co-editor of *State Power 2.0: Authoritarian Entrenchment and Political Engagement Worldwide* (Routledge Press, 2013).

10. *Citizenship and Cyber Politics in Iran*
Gholam Khiabany

Despite increased interest in Middle Eastern media as an area of academic inquiry, much of the existing research into mediated culture in the Middle East remains problematic, often because of an essentialism that has entrapped much of the debate about the "culture" of the region. Associated with this perceived and constructed "singular space" is the idea that the Islamic world forms a cultural unity that is based upon a common cultural core. The history of media and modernity in the region is also overshadowed by false binaries and a narrow optic of modernization dichotomies: modernity versus tradition, Islam versus the West, and secularism versus religious fundamentalism. Such binaries suppress the diversities of histories, cultures, struggles, and aspirations and obscure the real "divides" in a colorful quilt that is today's "Middle East."

In the dominant narratives of the region's history, culture, and media are invoked in terms of how they cause the Middle East to fit into or deviate from the narrative of the West's modernity. Iran is not an exception. This chapter examines key aspects of the contradictions and tensions in the Iranian media market and competing forms of "Islamism"/nationalism. By critically examining the role of the state in expansion of the Iranian communication system and the economic realities of the media in Iran, it challenges the essentialist reading of the Iranian state and media, and argues that the nature of Iranian media, in general, and the Internet, in particular, cannot be understood simply in terms of "Islamic ideology" or conceived in terms of the beloved dichotomy of modernization theory: modernity versus tradition.

To grasp the complex nature of cyber politics in Iran calls for some historical depth. The Iranian revolution of 1979 remains problematic, both theoretically and politically, and the "trans-class" and "religious" nature of the revolution has been the main source of confusion over the precise nature of the state that replaced the monarchy. The Iranian revolution has been described as a "permanent revolution in reverse"—something that started with such emancipatory potential, and could have grown into a socialist transformation, but instead produced a strange polity and state. Although the revolution without a doubt had an emancipatory character, elements of counter-revolution were clearly visible from the outset. The tension between the revolution and the counter-revolution, and the existence of multiple sovereignties, aspirations, and power contentions, calls for an analytical distinction between the Iranian revolution and the Islamic Republic.

The paradoxical nature of the state that came to power in 1979 is reflected in the political system that has combined elements of Islamic tradition and innovations with Iranian nationalism and a modern state structure. The Iranian constitution is also a contradictory and compromised legislation that, even while it lists some democratic principles, effectively subordinates the peoples' will to the clerical establishment via the institution of *velayat-e faqih* (rule of the supreme jurist). The idea of *velayat-e faqih* is presented as the intermediary between the true Islamic polity (which can be established upon resurrection of the twelfth imam, Mehdi) and the umma (community of faithful). This invention, however, and for the first time in Shia history, concentrated power and legitimacy of guidance (*marja'iyat*) in the hands of a single person. The "vaticanization" of Shia structure, so to speak, was against the historical pluralism of the clerical establishment, and it came as no surprise that many Grand Ayatollahs distanced themselves from the concept.

The power of *vali-e faqih* (supreme leader or jurist) is unlimited. He appoints the head of judiciary, the clergy members of the powerful second chamber (Guardian Council), commanders of all armed forces, as well as the leaders of two of the most important communication channels in Iran: imams of the Friday prayers and the director general of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB). He is also the custodian of two of the most established and powerful media organizations, Kayhan and Etella't. Popular representation has always been problematic since the system as a whole revolves around an unelected central core with truly unlimited powers.

It is also important to remember that all developments in relation to the Internet and cyberspace in Iran have occurred in a post-revolutionary state. Furthermore, the central issue is not the obvious and crude divide between a "traditional" and "religious" state and "modern," even "secular," technology, since that very state has, and many clergymen have, adopted new information technologies. Nevertheless a central paradox needs to be recognized. The role of the Iranian state in facilitating, developing, and expanding the ICT capacity of the country is undeniable. At the same time, the adoption, development, and expansion of ICTs are curtailed by the centralizing state's desire to control expression in a "new technology" environment that is highly conducive to widespread and popular participation. This paradox is important to note in the case of Iran, because the contentious politics and popular protests that have marked the country's recent history are often not dissociated from media dynamics.

The past few decades have seen the rapid emergence of the communication industry in Iran as one of the fastest growing economic sectors, and various uses of new media now constitute one of the most dynamic and vibrant politico-cultural spaces. Besides the expansion of Iranian media channels, popular desire for access to informal channels of communication and for greater cultural consumption is clearly visible in the increasing usage of mobile technology, the wide adoption of the Internet, and the astonishing rise and popularity of weblogs in the 2000s and more recently of software applications, which have become a particular site of struggle.

This chapter examines the relationship between the Internet and politics in Iran in a much broader social context. It engages with the possible lessons of digital activism, examines various organizational and media strategies by state and non-state actors, and outlines internal and external factors that help or hinder the success of rebellion against, or impede opposition to, regressive regimes and repressive state policies. It explores the expansion of the Internet in the country, paying particular attention to the implications of the ensuing media dynamics on the wider socio-political context.

Gholam Khiabany is Reader in Media and Communications at Goldsmiths, University of London. He authored *Iranian Media: The Paradox of Modernity* (Routledge, 2010); co-authored *Blogistan: The Internet and Politics in Iran*, with Annabelle Sreberny (I. B. Tauris, 2010); and co-edited *Liberalism in Neoliberal Times: Dimensions, Contradictions, Limits* (Goldsmiths Press, 2017); and *After Charlie Hebdo: Terror, Racism and Free Speech* (Zed, 2017).

11. *E-Government in the GCC Countries: Promises and Impediments*
   Damian Radcliffe

E-government is the process of using electronic tools to engage citizens, businesses, and residents with government-related information and services. Although there is no standard definition of e-government, there is a consistency to the key benefits that different actors attribute to it. These often focus on enablement and facilitation. More specifically, e-government can contribute to increased government transparency, greater convenience for citizens and businesses, revenue growth, and/or cost reductions, as well as enhance efforts to encourage civic participation in decision-making processes. Such moves can, in turn, help to make government bodies more accountable, transparent, and effective. These impacts are consistently present in definitions of e-government offered by major international institutions. E-government has the ability to transform relations with citizens, businesses, and arms of government, according to the World Bank. UNESCO holds that e-government can support different actors by improving their access to information and to build their capacities. The United Nations, a body which produces regular large-scale reports on the global progress of e-government, highlights the role that e-government can play in streamlining public administration workflows and processes, enhanced public service delivery, and the creation—and expansion—of communication channels for the engagement and empowerment of people.

The aim of this chapter is to explore the extent to which e-government has become embedded in policy and practice across the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council, and to identify the challenges that need to be overcome and the opportunities that need to be embraced if the region is to realize the potential that e-government affords. Given the pace of change in this environment, the chapter encompasses academic literature, industry perspectives, and news reports to tell this emerging story.

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, the implementation of e-government across the six countries in the GCC was often slow and protracted. Although the volume of academic literature in this arena is quite shallow, it consistently describes the paucity of these early efforts. Much of the literature focused on e-government in Kuwait, for example, is notably critical of efforts by the Kuwaiti government to establish different e-government programs; especially when benchmarked against the efforts of their Gulf neighbors. Kuwait's services are typically identified as being less advanced and sophisticated than its GCC counterparts. Issues include the limited availability of e-services across government agencies, the absence of integrated e-services involving multiple agencies, and the questionable value to users of some e-services.

Researchers studying Qatar, considered to be a regional broadband leader in the Arab World with a superior ICT infrastructure, found that in the initial period of e-government strategy formulation and implementation it was laggard compared with similar efforts in the same period in developed countries. The establishment of a single body (ictQATAR) with responsibility for national e-government had "accelerated progress," however. In Oman, despite the establishment of a single government organization (Oman Digital) in 2003 to take the lead on these issues, little was achieved for some time, with the new agency spending half a decade identifying the information and technological needs for different government agencies in the country to participate in e-government.

These efforts, or lack thereof, are in marked contrast with UAE and Bahrain, where earlier e-government initiatives appear to be more energized, with a more aggressive implementation of services and infrastructure, led by both government and the leading telecoms companies. Bahrain's e-government strategy goes back to 2007, and the country's innovative approaches have made it a leader in e-government and a model for other countries. The needs of a multicultural society combined with future economic development considerations, reflects a commitment to quality and growth. Bahrain's small population and geographic land mass have also aided this implementation, although the lower levels of smartphone access in the country—compared to several of its neighbors—may hamper the next stage of this e-government evolution.

The UAE is considered to have one of the most advanced and world-class information and communication technology infrastructures. This has created a strong foundation for e-government with efforts in this space mirroring the wider modernization agenda seen across the country and most clearly manifest in the cities of Dubai and Abu Dhabi. Despite this, however, the country dropped four places to 32nd in the 2014 UN e-governance rankings. One factor affecting the country's standing is the variance behind Dubai's enthusiasm for e-government and the attitudes and progress manifest in the other Emirates. A further consideration is the federal structure of the UAE, which may bring with it unique challenges in terms of developing e-government.

Governments in the GCC countries are all focused on developing new knowledge-based economies and ensuring that their products and services are competitive on a regional and global scale. Alongside challenging and changing the status quo, barriers to progress identified in a number of studies include: IT infrastructural weakness of government public sectors, lack of knowledge, limited ability to use ICT, and low awareness of government services. Within the government entities, the behavior and competence of government employees in the public sectors can be seen as an added internal challenge to the implementation of e-government systems in many organizations. Therefore, it is necessary to develop the public sector and train its employees to have a clear vision about the new nature of their public service, including their job descriptions, tasks, and application to customer service.

Damian Radcliffe is the Carolyn S. Chambers Professor in Journalism at the University of Oregon's School of Journalism and Communication; a Fellow of the Tow Center for Digital Journalism at Columbia University; an Honorary Research Fellow at Cardiff University's School of Journalism, Media, and Culture Studies; and a Fellow of the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce. He is a digital analyst, consultant, journalist, and researcher who has worked in editorial, research, and policy in the UK and the Middle East. He has led initiatives at the BBC, Ofcom (the UK communications regulator), CSV (a volunteering/social action charity), and Qatar's Ministry of Information and Communications Technology (ictQATAR).

Epilogue: *On the Digital Middle East and Computational Social Science*
Ingmar Weber

Changes in the global digital landscape over the past decade or so have transformed many aspects of society, including how people communicate, socialize, and organize. These transformations have also reconfigured how companies conduct their businesses and altered how states think about security and interact with their citizens. Glancing into the future, there is good reason to believe that nascent technologies such as augmented reality will continue to change how people connect, blurring the lines between our online and offline worlds. Recent breakthroughs in the field of artificial intelligence will also have a profound impact on many aspects of our lives, ranging from the mundane—chatbots as convenient, always available customer support; to the disruptive—replacing medical doctors with automated diagnosis tools.

The ubiquity and ever-increasing use of ICTs are not merely changing society, they are also changing the way we study society. With nearly every digital activity, users leave behind digital breadcrumbs. Digital traces of what we do, what we write, what we share, and what we consume are a by-product of Internet use and provide a record of human behavior at an unimaginable scale. Notwithstanding the concerns that data permanence raises in relation to the issue of privacy, these generated digital footprints open up exciting research possibilities. As such, they constitute a new opportunity for understanding the individual, the state, and society in an unfolding digital era.

The digital Middle East is particularly interesting to study from the perspective of computational social science. This new type of research is truly interdisciplinary, applying computational and "big data" approaches to address research questions that are posed by sociologists, political scientists, demographic researchers, and experts from other fields. The rapid diffusion of digital media infrastructure and the wide adoption of digital technologies in the region have put new methodological avenues for scientifically observing these ongoing changes at the disposal of Middle East scholars, Internet researchers, and data scientists. Social media in particular provide a valuable source of data to make sense of evolving Middle Eastern societies. Digital networks can serve as "observatories" of transformation in the region that are due to, and go beyond, the adopted digital technologies themselves.

Ingmar Weber is Research Director of the Social Computing Group at the Qatar Computing Research Institute (QCRI). He has held positions at the École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne and Yahoo Research Barcelona. He has published over 100 peer-reviewed articles and is co-editor of *Twitter: A Digital Socioscope* (Cambridge University Press, 2015).

CIRS

Center for International and Regional Studies

Georgetown University
SCHOOL OF FOREIGN SERVICE IN QATAR