Edited by Alena Strohmaier and Angela Krewani

Media and Mapping Practices in the Middle East and North Africa

Producing Space

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in the Middle East and North Africa

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Amsterdam University Press

AUPX Amsterdam University Press

Cover illustration: VJ Um Amel (2017) Body of Cyborg 8.8/ سايبورغ مجسّم من البيانات Self-portrait. Dye sublimation on canvas. One original print. 30" x 20"

Cover design: Coördesign, Leiden
Lay-out: Crius Group, Hulshout

Acknowledgements

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Introduction: About Space as a Media Product

Alena Strohmaier and Angela Krewani

Keywords: Media practices, mapping, cartography, movements, agencies, Middle East, North Africa

Bourj Al Shamali, South of Lebanon, red balloons in the sky. In 1948, 7000 refugees fled or were expelled from their homes in Tiberias and Safad in historic Palestine, now Israel; second- and third-generation refugees (22,000 registered) currently form the majority of the population in the camp. The ancestors of Bourj Al Shamali's population led an agricultural existence that has now been completely lost; the camp residents have increasingly grown detached from the land. Al Houla Association, one of the local NGOs working in the camp, which also serves as the base for the local camp committee working to improve conditions in the camp, began exploring the possibility of launching an urban agriculture pilot project and creating a green space in the camp.[1] For this initiative, a map of the camp was needed to discuss potential locations and to visualize potential water sources. However, it turned out to be difficult to find a map of Bourj Al Shamali, even though it has been in existence for over 60 years. With the complex politics of the region, the maps that do exist are withheld by international organizations that justify their discretion in the name of security and do not share them with the camp inhabitants or with the local camp committee. On internet maps, only the main street is marked, and on Google Earth, the very low-resolution images of the area obscure the space, the narrow streets, and the buildings. Therefore, in 2015, the inhabitants themselves launched an initiative in cooperation with the local camp committee to map the area.

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1   See: *Greening Bourj Al Shamali. An Initiative that Aims to Green and Improve the Living Conditions in a Refugee Camp in South Lebanon*: http://bourjalshamali.org/

The solution was a reusable latex/chloroprene balloon measuring at one and half metres wide, a 300-metre-long line, swivel clips for attaching the balloon and the camera, rubber bands for making a camera cradle, reusable Velcro for closing the balloon, some carabiners to attach things together, and a camera that can be set on an automated mode to take images every few seconds. Everything was tied up, the helium-filled balloon rose up in the air, and after a flight of 10–20 minutes, it could be brought down again.[2]

Technology, digital media, and activism brought this project into being. However, the balloon mapping alludes to more enduring concerns that arose from the need to capture one's own space as a map. In its use of digital media, bottom-up cartography, and citizen science, the balloon mapping of Bourj Al Shamali offers a significant point of departure for any discussion of contemporary media and mapping practices in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Aspects of media, mapping practices, and the construction of spaces are interrelated and reflected into each other. Space is not a given, but produced in activities such as the balloon mapping of Bourj Al Shamali. Without media, the dimensions of space can hardly be experienced. Bruno Latour claimed, in reference to central perspective in painting, space could be a mobile medium in itself: 'in linear perspective, no matter from what distance and angle an object is seen, it is always possible to transfer it and to obtain the same object at a different size as seen from another position' (1990, p. 27). Besides this European linear perspective, diverging combinations of space and media can be considered valid, such as the song lines of the Australian Aborigines, which combine the constitution of spaces and places with their song lines – in this manner, orally constructing their cultural-geographical spaces (Winkler 1997).

When viewed against this background, media could always have been conceptualized as spatial agents, since most media – traditional and analogue ones as well as new and digital ones – inscribe themselves into spaces or help to construct and communicate these spaces. The history of the letter connects to the history of post, combining media with the crossing of spaces (Siegert 1993). The Hollywood genre of the western or the road movie recounts the conquest of the vast spaces of the American West with the media of the stagecoach, Bible, and law while completely ignoring the native inhabitants of the region. Some media carry their conceptualized spaces in their name: viewing into the distant spaces – 'tele' 'visioning' – addresses television as a window opening up into distant spaces. Other media have

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2   See: *Balloon Mapping Guides*: http://bourjalshamali.org/2016/10/12/balloon-mapping-guides-in-arabic-and-german/

brought about new constellations of spaces and places, particularly the digital mobilization that offers new access to the spatial dimension, since it recombines spatial and medial aspects. Locative media – smartphones, GPS devices, tablets, and others – combine local and virtual elements. Adriana de Souza e Silva conceives spaces as inherently mobile, relating to the definition of 'augmented space' (Manovich 2005) as a connection of virtual and material aspects, 'mobile spaces are networked spaces defined by the use of portable interfaces as the nodes of the network' (De Souza e Silva 2006, p. 266). The idea of networked spaces offers a theoretical framework for the 'nomad existence and the spatio-geographic aspect' (De Souza e Silva 2006, p. 267). Accordingly, a nomad moves within predefined spaces and routes. De Souza e Silva connects to this concept of the nomad and rekindles it in the light of mobile media:

> Mobile technology users take the nomadic concept one step further, because not only their paths are mobile but also the nodes. With the fixed Internet, and fixed landlines, computers and telephones were primarily connected to places. Conversely, cell phones represent movable connection points, accompanying their users' movement in physical spaces. (2006, p. 267)

Technologically, the application of mobile phones is supported by 3G to 5G mobile networks, which are often not operated by governments, but by commercial companies. The prevalence of mobile media demands a modified conceptualization of space. De Souza e Silva concludes: 'I regard space as a concept produced and embedded by social practices, in which the support infrastructure is composed of a network of mobile technologies' (2006, p. 271). Following De Souza e Silva's references to the nomad as the new inhabitant of networked spaces, the features of these new spaces have to be reconsidered.

An additional consequence resulting from mobile media is a different aspect of media participation.[3] The idea of participatory culture is also recasting the way in which citizens, like the inhabitants of Bourj Al Shamali, engage with their surroundings and in political life. This is especially the case with the media upheaval away from broadcast mass media towards more individualized mobile media practices. This generates a shift in the connection between political power relationships and regimes of knowledge. Thus, mobile media practices constitute reconfigured spaces that provide

3   See also: Giaccardi 2012; Jenkins, Ford, and Green 2013.

both knowledge *about* spaces as well as knowledge *through* spaces. Hence, this book is centrally concerned with how space is not, as Henri Lefebvre famously stated, a social but rather a media product. In the following, we shall elaborate to what extent cartographies, movements, and agencies play a decisive role in both media and mapping practices in perpetually producing and creating space in and of the MENA region.

Media Practices

A few months into the popular uprisings in the MENA region, the promises of social media, including its ability to influence a participatory govern-ance model, grassroots civic engagement, new social dynamics, inclusive societies, and new opportunities for businesses and entrepreneurs, became more evident than ever. Arguably, social media tools and their influence on online and offline identities played a critical role in the MENA region before and after the popular uprisings, which tested the conceptual suitability of classical and traditional ideas of space. At the same time, digital and especially mobile media were a crucial factor in the reconfigurations of the production and circulation of the images of these popular uprisings:

> to the extent that there would appear to be an ineluctable logic to these developments, it is all the more crucial to observe how the rhetoric of revolution effects a subservience of the aesthetic to the spectacle of conflict, not to mention the claims and counter-claims of politics and the often ideological expectations of historicization. (Downey 2014, p. 18)

The Green Movement in Iran in 2009 and the simultaneous waves of popular uprisings across the Arab world in 2011 were strongly documented by so-called citizen journalists; in other words, private persons or amateurs with digital or mobile cameras who disseminated their images via social media. These videos soon circulated beyond social media: between 2010 and 2015, at least 20 documentary films were made both inside and outside the MENA region, consisting partly or entirely of this kind of internet footage. The documentary films reassemble the videos by shortening, recontextualizing, and adding intertitles or voice-overs. The origin of the source material featured in these documentaries is often partly or sometimes completely unknown; the original clips had often gone viral and become iconic in the social media landscape. The videos are presented in a new framing and

with novel meanings through the revised narrative and aesthetic contexts of the film.[4] These videos have also appeared in art installations, such as Rabih Mroué's lecture performance *The Pixelated Revolution* from 2012 and Birgit Hein's *Abstract Film* from 2014. Non-profit media collectives, such as the Egyptian Mosireen and Syrian Abounaddara and Bidayyat collectives have used them as well. Finally yet importantly, they have been stored in digital open-access and open-source archives, such as the Syrian Archive, the Yemeni Archive, 858 – An Archive of Resistance, and the Public Access Digital Media Archive (Dang and Strohmaier 2018).

What these different appropriation processes have in common is that they pursue the visualization of crises in documentary and in post-cinematographic forms. In this context, post-cinema does not mean the pure accumulation of new media forms triggered by the changes of film as a material object of photochemical recordings. Nor is it limited to the cinema as a cultural and architectural institution in the digital age. Rather, the term enables a view that perceives media reconfigurations as interlocking cultural phenomena (Hagener, Hediger, and Strohmaier 2016, pp. 1–12). The theoretical field of post-cinema thus makes it possible to pursue such interactions on three levels: first, at the level of the specific technical and aesthetic possibilities of the audiovisual of so-called citizen journalists; second, at the level of the representation of norms and conventions that emerge in their media processing; and third, at the level of geopolitical aspects and positionalities, such as the Western view on popular uprisings. Artist and theorist Hito Steyerl proposed, with what she calls 'circulationism' (Steyerl 2014), that the importance of images lies no longer in the art of making them, but in the art of their post-production, distribution, and acceleration. On another note, media scholars Ramon Lobato and James Meese use the concept of 'circumvention' (Lobato and Meese 2016, p. 9) to analyse the geo-blocking of videos to emphasize the subversive potential of users of streaming platforms. Therefore, media practices, this book argues, mean more than the triad of production, distribution, and reception; instead, media practices designate not only forms of technical and economic dissemination but also a holistic view of various media practices that build on each other, are interwoven, networked, and, at times, contradictory.

In this context, it is important to note that as other world regions, the MENA region is not a well-defined, closed, and homogeneous area. On the contrary, it

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4   For recent research on cinematic appropriation processes of protest videos in the MENA region since 2009, see: https://www.uni-marburg.de/de/fb09/medienwissenschaft/forschung/forschungsprojekte/mena-film

is actually a region that is subject to continuous reconfigurations and for which numerous designations exist, such as the Orient, the Levant, and the Near or Middle East.[5] At the same time, economic, cultural, social, and political interrelations and processes of exchange unfold in very different regional contexts, which intersect with established spatial ideas. Political scientist Claudia Derichs equates such a shift to what she calls a 'new areas studies current' (2015, p. 33). It demarcates an open concept of the notion of 'area' as itself not hermetically sealed or self-contained. Her main argument is that how 'area' is understood, how it is defined, and what it designates is subject to historical and cultural processes. She refers in this context to Arjun Appadurai, who claimed that 'we need to recognize that histories produce geographies and not vice versa' (2010, p. 9). Likewise, social and regional scientists Anna-Katharina Hornidge and Katja Mielke argue that 'area' should not be understood as a singular or hermetic unit per se, but as a dynamic category (2015, p. 14). This development in area studies itself, and the accompanying change from an inflexible to an open understanding of 'area', therefore emphasizes structures that conceive of the MENA region not as a homogeneous and unified space but rather as a set of interdependent and interrelated places which are in a constant process of reconfiguration (Ouaissa, Pannewick, and Strohmaier 2021, pp. 1-21).

Following these approaches, the underlying assumption of this book is that mobility and movement increasingly challenge static political, sociocultural, ethnic, and religious boundaries. An open and flexible concept of 'area' is crucial for our understanding of what we would like to call *mobile media spaces*, which bring about varied and amorphous modes of producing space. Therefore, this book promotes a transregional perspective on the circulation of ideas, narratives, and images, without being limited to fixed metageographies. Thus, the second argument is that media do not provide simple technological tools or equipment, but *mobile media spaces* which work over time and beyond different world regions, including diaspora formations (Strohmaier 2019). Mobile media spaces undermine, defy, and blur state-centred notions of territory as well as notions of nation and political communities based on territorially fixed states. Therefore, the starting point for an examination of media as a factor of spatial production, which is based on social conditions and practices in the broadest sense, needs to include precisely the conditions of media and their transmission between academia and the public, between centres and peripheries.

'Mapping' has become a buzzword in this context. Digital cartography modifies conventional cartography by conflating it with forms of digital

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5   See also: Culcasi 2010; Culcasi 2012.

communication practices. Web spaces combine conventional cartography with the communication structures of social networks and the archive functions of computer hard drives. These new hybrid forms of digital spaces merge with mobile mapping practices.

Mapping Practices

With the start of the Cold War and the first attempts at space travel, efforts were undertaken to study the Earth from outer space, following from the military tradition of using either moored balloons or airplanes to produce photographs of landscapes from an elevated vantage point. Older satellites worked partly with photographic stills or moving pictures, and the resulting films were physically transported down to Earth in capsules. More modern technology worked in a manner similar to television. A television camera was used, and its images were stored on magnetic tape until the satellite had passed by a receiving station and the images could be passed as electric signals. This kind of technology was used in satellite transmissions until the end of the 1970s. At that point, photography was replaced by a new technology, which recorded and stored light using a sensitive electrooptical technique – just as in the video camera, which was to be developed later (Dyring 1992, p. 29). In cartography, there has been a long-standing tradition of collaboration between media and the military. In *War and Cinema*, French media philosopher Paul Virilio uses media theory to highlight the parallels between war and cinema, working with a tightly woven technological analogy between the apparatus of war and the film camera:

> It was in 1861, whilst travelling on a paddle-steamer and watching its wheel, that the future Colonel Gatling hit upon the idea of a cylindrical, crank-driven machine-gun. In 1874 the Frenchman Jules Janssen took inspiration from the multi-chambered Colt (patented in 1832) to invent an astronomical revolving unit that could take a series of photographs. On the basis of this idea, Etienne-Jules Marey then perfected his chrono-photographic rifle, which allowed its user to aim at and photograph an object moving through space. (1986, p. 19)

Nonetheless, Paul Virilio's argument fails to address some important aspects of the origins of visual traditions and of the discursive attributions of media apparatuses. In addition to the technical inscriptions of images, formative visual traditions and routinizations of images exist, which function as

more than just technical inscriptions. In this way, his ideas confirm the persuasive power of images, which has emerged in the course of a long historical process.

Over the last few years, cartography has received a considerable amount of renewed interest. Notably, with the introduction of Geographical Information Systems (GIS), cartography has merged with social media platforms and communication structures. Geobrowsing has emerged as a new name for this conflation. Apart from being an innovative aspect of communication in social networks, geobrowsing includes a variety of traditional media forms, particularly with regard to the transformation of the imagery of the Earth. Traditional cartography, specific forms of film and photography, and the satellite image are important predecessors of geobrowsing applications. Traditional cartography and digital satellite imagery were produced to document the shape of the Earth and the features of landscapes; these images nonetheless carry within them fixed visual conventions and meanings which, as Denis Cosgrove puts it, 'have drawn upon and reconstituted a repertoire of sacred and secular, colonial and imperial meanings, and [...] these representations have played an especially significant role in the self-representation of colonial and post-colonial nations' (1985, p. 46). In this sense, cartography and the possession of the landscape occurred in parallel, while the application of geometry often made the acquisition of actual space easier.

In this context, the visual zoom function provided in Google Earth is based on the visual and epistemic history of the images of the Earth in cartography and satellite photography. With the introduction of Google Maps and Google Earth, both released in 2005, cartographic images of the world have experienced a surge on social media platforms. Although a variety of GIS had previously been in use, Google Maps and Google Earth brought about a new quality and a broader popularization within GIS systems, which can be described with respect to their popular proliferation, as Michael Jones, Chief Executive Officer of Google Earth, stated in 2007:

> What's happening now [...] is that instead of just GIS experts talking to each other, or experts making maps for regular people, regular people are talking to each other, and they are making maps for each other. And that's very important [...] the story of the where is very important. (cited in Crampton 2010, p. 25)

Contrary to classical GIS, Google Maps and Google Earth, and later Open-StreetMap and Wikimapia, allow for the combination of social media with cartographic systems and thus take cartographic competence away from the

experts. Contemporary cartographic systems can be installed on personal computers or on smartphones. Data can be stored on a server and the client computer merely requires a browser to enter cartographic systems. Data and modules are loaded onto the client server on demand (Abend 2013, p. 150). These innovations made the general use of cartographic systems even easier, but not less controversial.

Image-related conventions and structures of mapping practices transform, so this book's third argument, means to enable them to function in adjacent discourses beyond technologies. Accordingly, images become nodal points for a multitude of different discourses. Taking for granted that geographical and national spaces are always mediatized spaces, the turn towards social media has nevertheless changed the understanding of space, which has become fragmented and individualized. This is reflected in the manifold approaches in this book towards space as a media product, which encloses a variety of practices such as digital cartography, gamification, video activism, cinema, parkour, data mining, oral transmission, and audiovisual representations.

Cartographies, Movements, Agencies

The following contributions are informed by the idea that the fragmentation of spaces brings about new forms of media and mapping practices and are, at the same time, a product of these practices. Therefore, the book features multiple voices that share collective and individual stories within larger contexts of political and social challenges, enabling a plurality of interdisciplinary perspectives. This displaces binaries such as the division between the public and private sphere or the nation and the citizen in a collage structure that embraces disjuncture, heterogeneity, plurality, and dialogue. The contributions in this book provide compelling perspectives that privilege context over text. They engage different levels of creative abilities, participation, and viewpoints in dynamic iterative relationships. They circulate and reorganize scattered media remnants across different platforms and within different communities. In so doing, they create a more nuanced and shared construct to reimagine how we might understand space as a media product in the MENA region today. The book mirrors three different aspects of media-generated spaces. The first part, labelled 'Cartographies' relates to historic and contemporary practices; the second part, 'Movements', addresses the media and spatial activities of cinema, migration, and parkour; and the third part, 'Agencies', discusses the viable interest of global and local groups in specific areas.

The first part starts with a discussion of historic cartographic practices in the last century of the Ottoman Empire. Nour Nicole Dados focuses on the early period of cartographic practices in the MENA region (up to the 20th century) to consider how surviving maps and notes, in conjunction with other textual sources, can be used to develop a historical account of subjectivity and the production of social knowledge. She uses textual and cartographic material about Beirut to consider the ways in which the practice of mapping not only expands our geographical 'memory' of the city but also allows us to reflect upon specific urban histories.

Aspects of the cartographic organization of social groups also play a role in Christian Bittner and Georg Glasze's exploration of patterns of exclusion and inclusion in OpenStreetMap and Wikimapia, especially in the examples of the Gaza Strip and Jerusalem. These mapping platforms have proven that geographical information and maps can be generated via crowdsourcing by cartography amateurs. Yet several studies have excavated powerful exclusion mechanisms in such Web 2.0 cartographies, showing that privileged demographic groups often produce user-generated geographical content. Besides these strategies, the cartographic systems themselves are not neutral actors within these activities.

Frederik von Reumont's examination of cartographies within the Western Sahara takes a closer look at the connection between identity, territory, and borders as well as their construction via mapping processes. His analysis of different web maps voices the rootedness in dominant political world views and contrasts them with the perspectives of the parties of the opposition (Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic and Morocco). The delineation of borders is here directly linked to territorial identity and nation-building. This demonstrates the important role of web maps and other digitally disseminated maps in the definition of identity and (self-) governance.

Besides cartography's social and political partiality, its gamification represents a further step towards its becoming virtual. Janina Schupp analyses the evolution of digital training cartographies and critically investigates the growing gamification ensuing in these representations of Middle Eastern battlefields. The mapping capability – offered by the resulting simulation game *73 Easting* – to visualize the battlefield from any position and point in time revolutionized military exercises. With ongoing conflicts in the MENA region, these digital training cartographies have matured over the years and are now linked to real bodies and vehicles through digital and mobile technologies during live training in artificially constructed Iraqi and Afghan villages.

The following part, on 'Movements', focuses on the media impact of political movements and events, which are informed by audiovisual media and/or are represented throughout manifold media practices. In this part, space is not exclusively related to mapping practices and cartography, but it is understood as being brought about through cinematic strategies on the one hand and bodily as well as representational strategies on the other hand. In this manner, media practices interact with real locations and geopolitical discourses. Interestingly, these processes are not restricted to specific media but can occur in a variety of media configurations. Cinema seems to be the most obvious form of constituting social and political spaces, but these processes extend to other forms such as print media and parkour.

This section starts with Hamid Nacify's examination of the emergence of 'internet cinema' by focusing on Iran in the late 2000s, particularly since the 2009 disputed re-election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as president. Ahmadinejad's re-election unleashed the opposition Green Movement, undergirded by this internet cinema. Iran provides an example of the use of the new internet-driven digital global media in support of democratic ideals that, soon after the Green Movement, rocked many authoritarian regimes of the MENA region.

In her contribution, Katarzyna Ruchel-Stockmans investigates the possibilities of documenting historical events through mobile video footage. The so-called Arab Spring appeared on the news in countless video testimonials shot by participants and bystanders. Viewers all over the world could watch distant events immediately after they were recorded and uploaded on social media. Yet the sheer amount of such visual data, combined with the untranslatability and poor quality of the footage, often delivered opaque and ambiguous material. She compares Peter Snowdon's *The Uprising* (2013) to Harun Farocki and Andrei Ujică's *Videograms of a Revolution* (1992), and questions the possible shift in knowledge produced and performed by the amateur video-makers.

Whereas Naficy and Ruchel-Stockmans deal with documentary forms, Alena Strohmaier provides a close reading of Mohamed Diab's feature film *Clash* (2016), through which she foregrounds the idea of the truck as a cinematic space predicated on its ability to accommodate movement, both in a literal and metaphorical sense. The analysis allows for a discussion of cinematic spaces of the so-called 'Arab street' created by both mise en scène and cinematography that go against the more prevalent images of street fights and mass demonstrations as seen in documentaries. Her main argument is that cinema challenges and inverts traditional spaces of social upheavals, such as streets and squares, in their capacity to be spaces of knowledge and solidarity, in negotiating them as enhanced media-sensible spaces.

The last two chapters of this section turn away from the realm of moving images towards print and everyday media practices in urban spaces. Ines Braune follows the idea of a mediated constitution of spaces, placing her considerations within the context of everyday urban practices of parkour in Morocco. Furthering de Certeau's concept of reclaiming urban spaces, she introduces this movement as a corporeal practice of claiming urban spaces.

Regarding print media, Ayça Tunç Cox analyses the varied ideological affiliations subscribed to differing interpretations of the coverage on Syrian refugees in Turkey. She examines the coverage in *Hürriyet*, a mainstream conservative paper; *Cumhuriyet*, the nationalist Kemalist representative of the Turkish press; *Yeni Şafak*, a right-wing Islamist paper; and *Birgün*, a left-wing paper. Moreover, she focuses on certain periods that raised momentous public interest: the three days following the outbreak of the Syrian crisis; the three days following the discovery of baby Aylan's body washed ashore; and the three days following the European Union's three-billion-euro fund for Turkey.

The third and last part of the book, 'Agencies', aims to broaden the concept of space to agencies and artistic interventions into political structures and processes. These agencies can relate to visual media representations such as the media representation on YouTube, but it can also cover political unrest or be applied to define a state or nation.

The book's third part starts with Angela Krewani's exploration of the media coverage of the Arab Spring and the ensuing reactions of Western media communities. Focusing on interactive documentaries and websites, her contribution clearly demonstrates the extent to which media featured individualized coverage of major events. Digital media in particular have merged with cartographic competencies to provide topical information. Compared to the informational range of classic print media and television, these digital platforms and digitally distributed art forms create new and interactive forms of media participation.

Whereas Angela Krewani focuses on the site of visual representation of images, Laila Shereen Sakr looks at the digital practice of data mining. She presents a basic genealogy of the existing literature on the 2010–2012 era of the Arab Spring within Middle East and media studies. The aim of her analysis is to map the plurality of patterns, stories, ideas, and analyses networked across media forms. Her contribution is designed to refute the possibility of a monolithic narrative about contemporary Egypt and situates the study within the growing scholarship on social media and political change, introducing key concepts in design research methodology.

Annabelle Sreberny and Gholam Khiabany explore in their contribution how contemporary Iranian politics exist through media and how these

politics are played out through political geographies. They investigate three powerful spatial dynamics at work in the analysis of Iran's political orbit. The first is the classic remit of the international relations between states. The second is the mainstream remit of political analysis, the national dialogue – sometimes open, often constrained – between the state and its inhabitants. The third is the cross-border space between the state and its citizens who – as diaspora, exiles, and migrants – live in other countries.

Also concentrating on the visual politics of an ethnic community, Sebastian Maisel underlines an increased exposure to sacred knowledge as well as a re-intervention of religious dogma in Yezidi culture by unorthodox scholars, intellectuals, and politicians. He argues that their use of technology to spread deliberate knowledge has contributed to the development of new forms of identity and loyalty among Yezidi groups in Syria and Iraq.

Finally, Andrea Fischer-Tahir shows that colonial images of Kurdish bodies and of Kurdistan's geography still have use value in identity discourses shaped by the aid of social media, which witnessed the simultaneity of modes of representation, multiplied the possibilities of translocating knowledge, and promoted Kurdish national aspirations for a nation state.

Across the MENA region today, these varied, empirical, theoretical and interdisciplinary contributions show there is not only a development of a critical field of digital media, but also a proposition of alternative platforms for social and political engagement. In an attempt to rearticulate the relationship between media and mapping practices, while also addressing new and social media, this book nevertheless abides by one relatively clear point: space is a media product. The overall focus of this book is accordingly not so much on the role of new technologies and social networks as it is on how media and mapping practices expand the very notion of cultural engagement, political activism, popular protest, and social participation. To this end, space is produced, created, re-configured, reproduced, and recreated, which testifies to its status and role as a cultural media and mapping practice in itself.

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