Spaces of Participation

**Dynamics of Social
and Political Change
in the Arab World**

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and Ulrike Freitag**

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Notes on Transliteration

The transliteration from Arabic generally follows the guidelines of The American University in Cairo Press. Well-known Arabic names follow the most conventional spelling (for example, Abdel Nasser rather than 'Abd al-Nasir). The same applies to names of streets and districts. Colloquial speech is transliterated individually and is subject to variation according to regional conventions and the choices made by the authors.

Introduction

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Hicham Ait-Mansour, and Ulrike Freitag

In late 2010 and early 2011, when protests erupted in Tunisia and Egypt and then quickly engulfed much of the Arab region, most people, whether locals or foreigners, were caught by surprise.[1] Authoritarian rule and culture had always seemed deeply entrenched in the region and citizens appeared to have adapted their lives to this fact. In spite of this general image, however, a number of manifestations of change in social, political, and cultural life had emerged that, as it turned out, prepared the ground for these eruptions.

Leaning on multidisciplinary perspectives, this volume examines different types of *space* invested by people—often youth—before, during, and after the events of 2011. Such an approach differs from existing books that touch upon the state of affairs and change in the region. By the last decade of the last century, leading scholars attempted to theorize why the Arab region is so stuck in authoritarianism (Sharabi 1992; Hammoudi 1997). Other more recent books, especially in political science, approached the dynamics of the region from the perspective of institutional change and leadership (Brownlee et al. 2015). These insightful analyses shed light on the factors for the persistence of authoritarian structures and the potential for change by focusing mainly on macrostructures and dynamics. Our volume attempts, rather, to emphasize the spatial perspectives behind the important long- and short-term micro-processes and various forms of engagement that in all likelihood prepared the terrain for subsequent larger-scale events. To reflect this diversity of factors and actors both in time and in different countries, the book also systematically explores various types of spaces that enabled social and cultural actors to come together and develop forms of cultural, social, and political expression, which proved crucial in the events of 2011 and which allowed

people to come together, not necessarily to pursue political activities but to participate in sports, arts, and other activities. These types of spaces enabled direct communication and the establishment of relations of trust.

In comparison with the treatment of physical spaces, which have received sporadic, albeit focused, attention in existing scholarly literature, it is more commonly acknowledged that the field of digital communication has been unprecedentedly operative in social and protest movements during the past two decades. Indeed, the use of digital communication is already acknowledged as one of the main conduits of change in the region (McCaughery and Ayers 2003; Howard et al. 2011; Ghannam 2012; Tufekci and Wilson 2012; Iskandar 2014; Castells 2015; Papacharissi 2015). Throughout the protest movements, virtual spaces, such as specific sites on Facebook and YouTube and groups on WhatsApp, not only helped organize events and later the protests but also amplified events and helped to disseminate information and specific messages, thereby altering people's relations to both space and time. The groups that came together through social media have often been characterized by informality. Nevertheless, through cultural and social practices, these groups appropriated both physical and virtual spaces and helped to foster new political positions and mechanisms of engagement at different times and in different ways. In many cases, they prepared the ground for the articulation of positions that became part of the protests in 2011 (see Bayat 2010). We argue that throughout the uprisings, physical contacts combined with virtual ones, and hence, we assume a dialectical relationship between virtual and physical spaces rather than contrasting them (see the chapters by Ait-Mansour, and El Harras and Benmouro in this book).

The protests themselves used urban spaces in particular ways, so that most countries had one iconic space—from Tahrir Square (Egypt) to Pearl Roundabout (Bahrain)—associated with the protests—or at least with a particular direction of protest. And later on, when there was a crackdown on the public spaces in question in order to minimize the chances of their becoming once again spaces of large demonstrations, as in the destruction of Pearl Roundabout or the reconfiguration of Tahrir Square, virtual space and minor spaces, such as the ones described above, became a refuge for activists and artists alike. What interests us in this volume, therefore, is less the events of 2011 but rather what preceded and what followed them.

This volume is the outcome of a three-year collaborative research project with partners in Egypt, Morocco, Palestine, and Germany that was initiated in 2013 and ran from 2014 to 2017. The book brings together case studies from Morocco to Kuwait on a variety of space-related

initiatives: from cultural and youth centers, to art collectives, to forms of political protests and virtual spaces. All of these case studies express, in different ways and in different contexts, the desire of different social groups to partake in socially meaningful activity. With this comparative approach, the volume (re)connects social, cultural, and political participation with space and expands our analysis of participation and the political functions of space. By 'participation,' we understand the different cultural, social, political, and economic mechanisms, venues, and practices with which people express themselves in the public arena.[2] The volume suggests that participation within the framework of cultural initiatives can be better understood as a sensitive knowledge-based process, rather than as merely a procedural rhetoric or act. It also emphasizes the need to look at the 'genealogies' of spaces of participation, which differ greatly in accordance with local political and social contexts, as well as with the temporalities of the participatory formats.

Investigating the making of spaces and of participatory practices under such different conditions is the main aim of the project. We have focused mostly on social and political interventionist space-related activism. Spaces can be appropriated by protests and political interventions, as discussed in the chapters on Mohamed V Avenue in Rabat and the appropriation of the square of Rabaa al-Adawiyya in Cairo. Cultural initiatives, such as Riwaq and Birzeit Museum in Palestine, the arts space L'Batwar in Casablanca, and an urban gardening project in Kuwait, all lay claim to physical spaces. To this can be added the sports center in Casablanca, which shows the struggle over the appropriation of extant—traditionally government-controlled—spaces. Cultural initiatives can also claim digital space, as in the case of the media collectives in Egypt. Finally, the community initiatives in the deprived neighborhoods of Cairo and in the surroundings of Ramallah could be described as social or sociocultural activism. In this book, different types of participation are analyzed in detailed case studies that ask which actors claim the respective spaces, who has the social and cultural capital to do so, and who becomes involved in which context. Mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, as well as the different ways in which class, gender, and citizenship play out in each case, are examined.

The various contributions in this volume understand change as manifold: as a counter-accomplishment against hegemonic culture, whether authoritarian or religious, or, more generally, against increasingly globalized neoliberal policies. Change, or at least the potential for change, can also be located in practices of resistance against specific local developments and/or against political and other types of disenfranchisement.

Finally, our case studies privilege attempts to initiate change where the reclaiming of public spaces by active critical cultural production and political activism takes center stage, such as in horizontally organized sub-spaces and community initiatives that allow for alternative knowledge production and political action.

Why a Spatial Approach to Participatory Change?

This preliminary sketch shows why profound research on the spatial dimension of participation is increasingly needed. Walls, streets, and public squares, as well as platforms in digital space, had important functions during the wave of demonstrations and protests in the region and have been increasingly subjected to thorough academic scrutiny. Since Asef Bayat's classic *Street Politics: Poor People's Movements in Iran* on space-related activism in the Middle East (1997), more recent important empirical work on the politics of space has followed, more particularly since the onset of the recent uprisings in the region. A small collection, "Youth Activism and Public Space in Egypt 2011," published in 2011 by the ICP—the Innovations in Civic Participation project and the John D. Gerhart Center for Philanthropy and Civic Engagement at the American University in Cairo (2011) takes up the issue of space in relation to participatory activism, with a significant additional focus on cultural activism as a viable contribution to the power of the protests. Whereas the report is particularly concerned with Egypt, it can be seen to link theoretically and empirically with the present volume in its emphasis on the interrelatedness of space and grass-roots activism and in its conceptualization of participation as encompassing social and political practices, as well as cultural participatory ones. A special issue of the European Urban and Regional Studies, "Mediterranean Genealogies of Protest" (Fregonese 2012), also dwells on the role of urban space in shaping the protests and further addresses the transnational linkages between them. Mona Abaza also focuses on the urban transformation that took place during the protest and in its aftermath, as well as in the dissident street art that was created (2011 and 2012). Moreover, a contribution by Hasso and Salime (2016) discusses the interconnectedness of body and space in the recent Arab uprisings; their analysis particularly focuses on the role of concrete bodies and space in creating the gendered dimensions of the 2011 uprisings. Interestingly, in spite of the prominence of youth activists, they have hardly been studied in relation to space, and one of the volumes dedicated to youth and urban resistance (Gertel and Ouaissa 2014) is only partially attentive to conceptualizations of space.

Structurally, the space-related initiatives vary greatly within and between the countries and the case studies investigated in this volume. This

is at least partly due to their different political contexts and to the respective explicit and implicit rules on public expression. Thus, in the political landscape, Morocco and Kuwait have for some time enjoyed a certain amount of public debate and contestation, including organized opposition to the governments, though not to the institution of the monarchy (and certainly not to the actual monarchs). In Palestine, the ongoing internal political conflict and escalating Israeli military interventions have rendered the situation complex, thereby significantly impacting possibilities for social and political change. And finally, in Egypt, the overthrow of the Mubarak regime and the following forced dismissal of the Mursi government have mostly deflated hopes for political change.

In spite of the differences that influence the specific case studies outlined in this volume, and which form the backdrop against which these cases need to be comprehended, there are a number of shared characteristics that compel us to consider the cases together and to compare them. The initiatives that are investigated herein were generally action-oriented in the sense that they aimed at practical interventions, from organizing protests and walking tours to producing online content; they used decentralized and rather loose forms of organization (in contrast to parties and unions) as they creatively resorted to the street and public space as sites of activism. Moreover, they were involved in contestations over the ownership of public space (as conceptualized in the works of Harvey 2012 and Rabbat 2012) and the right to representation, mixing activism with the practices of everyday life and using a wide range of old and new media and art. On a more abstract level, these initiatives, in their variety, are highly spatial in their approach to social and political participation. It is therefore pertinent to take a closer look at the two key concepts which this volume foregrounds, namely *space* and *participation*. This will be followed by a closer elaboration of the categories of actors studied in this volume.

Notions of Space
Space in this volume is not understood simply as physical space in which objects are positioned or where activities are located. Rather, we adopt a relational conceptualization of space that considers it in relation to time, experience, and events, among other things (Low 2017, 28). As Martina Löw has shown, this approach, which emphasizes the impact of human actions, and thus the social, on the constitution of space, has become dominant in the social sciences (Löw 2016, xiv). Key concepts involving such a relational dimension include utopian and heterotopian spaces (Foucault 1997), the public sphere and public opinion (Habermas 1991),

mental and social space (Lefebvre 1974; 1991), and the concept of the commons as developed by David Harvey (2012, 67–88).

These concepts and others have been operationalized in this volume in relation to different contexts and research foci, such as (street) protests, cultural resistance and (cultural) initiatives, digital activism, and engagement in community initiatives in deprived neighborhoods. Indeed, these spatial notions appear in all chapters in their relational dimension, for instance, when participation in formal and informal spaces is discussed, when the reconfiguration of space through contestation is taken as a theme, or when we investigate alternative spaces of culture and the reclamation of space through cultural activism.

If we map the various functions of the concept of space across the chapters, we encounter its political dimensions in the examples of protest, contestation, and activism that resist mainstream politics and/or in sit-in spaces as the sites of discontent. This also includes a consideration of the ways in which the new emerging spatial practices of youth collectives mutate as the political context changes, that is, in counterrevolutionary processes. Other functions of the concept are related to the interaction between state and nonstate actors in micro-spaces such as youth centers and take into account the sociocultural factors that shape these spaces and power relationships. This analysis extends to so-called self-governed spaces, such as refugee camps, and the ways in which they foster community participation. The third function of the concept of space treated in this volume can be found in the chapters dealing with discourses of resistance. Here, space comes in as a heuristic device that allows us to combine online and offline (discursive) spaces of resistance in our analysis. The fourth function of space that we engage with is related to alternative cultural spatial practices that reconceive, redefine, and rework public space and that foster agency, new ways of perceiving urban space, and of claiming rights to the city. These various relational operationalizations of space reflect the conception of space proposed by Low (2009), namely as process-oriented, person-based, that allows for agency and new possibilities.

Notions of Participation
Participation is often approached from a strong normative perspective that, furthermore, is generally inseparable from the tradition of Western democracies. Such notions of participation tend to focus on the institutional level of politics and assert that political participation must be intentionally aimed at influencing public policy (mainly through elections, political parties, and the Parliament). Consequently, participation is closely linked to normative notions of citizenship.[3] In the words of

David Barney et al. (2016, vii), it has "become a contextual feature of daily life in the liberal, capitalist, and technological societies of the contemporary West." The authors go as far as to describe our current situation—strongly influenced by the development of digital media technologies—as a "participatory condition" in which participation "has become both environmental (a state of affairs) and normative (a binding principle of right action)" (Barney et al. 2016, xii). Yet, this condition should be critically examined and the "tension between [its] promises and impasses of participation" (Barney et al. 2016, xiii) should be carved out. Bill Cooke and Uma Kothari's (2001) edited volume on the "tyranny" of participation addresses the systematic problems of the participatory development approach and how it can, among other things, "obscure, and indeed sustain, broader macro-level inequalities and injustice" (Cooke and Kothari 2001, 14). In a similar way, in *Nightmares of Participation* (2010), architect and analyst Markus Miessen criticizes how an uncritical and romanticized use of the term in projects of so-called participatory planning often disguises power structures. In his view, although any form of participation is already a form of conflict, it should nevertheless be seen as an enabling force (Miessen 2010, 53). These critical engagements with the concept of participation, and with practices labeled 'participatory,' are fundamental for a reflexive use of the term.

In terms of political participation in the Middle East, Charles Tripp (2013) distinguishes between four different conceptions: participation in the nation-state, participation through protest, participating in a Muslim community, and participation in the neo-patrimonial state—which, except for the protests, are all rather formal ways of participation. Leila Alhamad (2008, 8), in contrast, argues with regard to the Arab region: "When the state, through its formal institutions, represses, excludes or fails to listen or to respond to people's needs, people resort to the informal realm." This focus on informal participation has been put forward most prominently by Diane Singerman (1997) in her work on popular urban quarters in Egypt and by Asef Bayat in his treatment of the informal forms of political protest carried out by ordinary people (Bayat 1997; 2010; 2017b).

Building on these works, the contributors to this volume chose work with broader conceptualizations of participation and focus on the rather informal venues of participation that exist beyond the classical institutional level. Yet at the same time, the volume also goes beyond the formal/informal divide, since the modes of participation cannot always be strictly classified along these lines, as shown in Berriane's chapter on a youth center in Morocco—a space in which participation is coproduced by the

interaction of state and nonstate actors. Overall, our approach is mainly actor- and action-centered (see also Harders 2002) and focuses on different cultural, social, political, and economic mechanisms, venues, and practices of participation. This allows us to analyze the "various mechanisms and forms through which the population expresses itself in the public arena" (Lust-Okar 2008, 8; cf. Alhamad in Lust-Okar 2008, 8). Protests and media activism are analyzed as forms of political participation, as is the cultural resistance of artists and of other civil actors who participate in public debates and/or who reclaim predominantly urban spaces.

The majority of the contributions thus focus on contestation, which is in line with the current spread of an inclusionary understanding of governance that stresses the importance of decentralizing power and of including citizens in policy-making through nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), local councils, and intermediary institutions of participation. However, some chapters, such as those by Sarnataro on Egypt and Woroniecka-Krzyżanowska on Palestine, also analyze processes of cooperation, negotiation, and accommodation. While the contributions address the pitfalls of "participatory projects" that are trapped in clientelism (Sarnataro in this volume), they also counter the idealized visions of participation, which are rooted in the Western tradition and which dismiss more traditional forms of participation based on collective decision-making (Woroniecka-Krzyżanowska). Particularly with regard to digital media, participation has become both "environmental" (a state of affairs) and "normative" (a binding principle of right action) (Barney et al. 2016, vii)—conditions that have yet to be critically examined.

Though participation is said to be very much about the "promise and expectation that one can be actively involved with others in decision-making processes," at the same time these possibilities "can also be understood as rhetoric, as a set of empty habits, or as failed opportunities" (Barney et al. 2016, viii). It is exactly these tensions between the opportunities and limits or even fallacies of participation that this volume seeks to discuss, reveal, and question. It does so by broadening the empirical context of the discussion to a perspective on the Arab region that invites comparison, by showing how different political systems foster different types of engagement, and by focusing on the concrete material and digital spaces of participation. How can transformations in the venues, forms, and content of cultural, social, and political participation be understood? What does, or what can, participation possibly mean, enable, or hide under different authoritarian regimes in the Arab region? What might the negative effects of participatory rhetoric be, and how can participation, as both a concept and a practice, be critically revised and

reappropriated? These and other questions require closer consideration of the actors we are dealing with.

Who Shapes Spaces of Participation?

The discussion of participation's different possibilities, but also its limits, raises the next question: Who are the actors claiming and shaping the different spaces? The easy answer to this question is that they are very diverse and range from civil society activists, artists, entrepreneurs, media and journalism practitioners, and anonymous digital content creators to ordinary inhabitants of neighborhoods. In different concrete case studies, they include people of different ages and political orientations. In many cases, activists are of different genders, although, as the articles by Ayyad, and El Harras and Benmouro show, the gender roles present within one particular political action are often still divided. In other cases, as Jurkiewicz shows in the example of Kuwaiti cultural activists, female protagonists dominate the scene.

Youth, however, is the one category of the population that stands out for its activism and that features particularly prominently in many of the contributions of this volume, as well as in recent works on protests in the Arab region (Ghannam 2012; Rabbat 2012; Gertel et al. 2014; Hasso and Salime 2016; El-Sharnouby 2017; Bayat 2011, 2017b). Youth as an 'imagined' category defined in social and cultural terms (Swedenburg 2007) is an amorphous concept and one that cannot be readily assumed to yield constant political engagement, as Bayat convincingly argues (2017b; cf. Oswald et al. 2007). The concept of youth is further problematized in scholarship on the Arab region (and the Middle East at large), primarily because considerations of youth in postcolonial societies are usually (and easily) embedded in questions of nationalist struggle. The political activism of young people in the Middle East during the late Ottoman Empire, which was often carried out in the context of secret societies, schools, sports clubs, the Boy Scouts, and various other types of youth organizations, is well documented (Zürcher 2012). Similarly, the Arab nationalist struggle in the interwar period, for instance, is often connected with the mobilization of the young generation (Khoury 1987, 404–14; Wien 2006). This politicization continued after the independence of most Middle Eastern countries, although the authoritarian backlash in countries such as Syria and Iraq meant that space for activism by students at schools, and increasingly universities, became restricted (for instance, Freitag 1991, 213–16). This notwithstanding, the example of Egypt shows how students managed to create spaces for activism (Anderson 2011, 119–50; Kohstall 2014).

Paradoxically, Arab youth have largely been entrapped by violence, instabilities, and economic struggles dominating postindependence settings in the region, and are therefore doubly marginalized (Wien 2006; Murphy 2012; Sukarieh 2012). Though recent mainstream discourses around 'The War on Terror' and terrorism in general might have helped consolidate such a view in some circles, research in the social sciences during the past two decades has tended to question the binary perception of the region's youth as either marginalized or agents of democratic reform (Murphy 2012). In general, empirical studies done before the recent uprisings depict a confident, assertive, and engaged generation (Hegasy and Kaschl 2007; Bayat 2010; Herrera and Bayat 2010), while studies focusing on the role of young people in the events highlight alternative means of activism and of engagement with politics (Khalaf and Khalaf 2011; El-Sharnouby 2017; Gertel 2017).

Though the present volume does not particularly foreground youth as a category of analysis, the fact that we are focusing on social and political participation outside of traditional institutional and partisan groups in the region has necessarily meant that youth featured as a prominent category of actors. In approaching the actors operative in the cases under study in this volume, we thus seek to downplay traditional constructions of youth and youthfulness in political and sociological research in favor of a look at activism as a condition engulfing a whole society during conflictual moments. As this volume shows, youth engagement can take very different forms, from peaceful demonstration to cultural activism, from activities in sports clubs and youth centers, to cultural entrepreneurship. This depends not only on the social status of the youth involved but also on the different political framings in the various societies studied. The different age groups associated with youth and studied among other actors in this volume are thus placed at the intersection of multiple positionalities (Bayat 2017b). For instance, cultural entrepreneurship in Morocco may well depend largely on connections to outside sources of funding, and there are different long-term political implications from the cultural entrepreneurship existent in Kuwait (also in this volume), where local capital derived from oil rents (Cohen 2017) is readily available.

Contextualizing Participatory Formats

Being situated in different national contexts, the case studies shed light on the various types of spaces that are conducive to the development of participatory practices under specific political, social, and cultural conditions. In Morocco, the highly symbolic Mohamed V Avenue in the center of Rabat, discussed from multiple perspectives, represents the space

par excellence for political expression and protest against mainstream politics that prompted constitutional changes from above—yet without significantly affecting the status quo. The demonstrations that take place there are also to be read as very well-orchestrated performances in terms of spatial and temporal planning. In spite of their general permissibility, they regularly cause tensions with the security forces and sometimes result in crackdowns on the demonstrators. In contrast, in Egypt, where protests have triggered a series of violent counterrevolutionary changes, participatory spaces, whether material or virtual, have been shrinking since 2013. Some of the self-fashioned venues and media used by activists that emerged in 2011 have thus started to rely more on online engagement and less on physical participation. In Palestine, which has a long history of resistance and protest against Israeli occupation, uprisings against the Palestinian Authority (PA) have remained limited. Palestinian activists are today searching for creative ways to challenge the stagnation that results partly from the authoritarian nature of the PA, which invokes unquestioning unity and loyalty in the face of Israeli oppression.

The contributions in this volume, which are concerned with examining cultural participation, mainly focus on initiatives that have managed to establish participatory spaces beyond the (immediate) control of the state. This includes institutionally and community-sponsored art and cultural initiatives, as outlined in the chapters by Anani, Shqeirat, Jurkiewicz, and Aït Mous; unstructured professional groups, as in the chapter by Khalil; and individual or loosely connected digital users, as in the cases presented by Aboubakr and Khalil. In Kuwait's constitutional monarchy, where protests after 2011 have been dwindling and the political opposition increasingly silenced, such cultural initiatives often understand cultural work as a better means for change than demonstrations. At the same time, the Kuwaiti initiatives are very much embedded in neoliberal notions of social entrepreneurship, which here take on an emancipatory agenda in a way that is typical of the Gulf states. One of the structural principles on which this volume (and the project at large) is founded is that space-based participatory practices are investigated before establishing categories of classification. What bound the case studies together as a starting point was the close relationship between the relationally conceived spaces and participatory practices leading to change. The variety and richness of the case studies allowed us at a later stage to discern connective patterns and hence to consolidate the results of individual studies. However, dwelling in more depth or at greater length on this comparative perspective would require further and more focused work.

Cultural Participation and Digital Media

The present collection, as outlined above, also provides an outlook on participation that not only is based on social and political manifestations but also takes account of cultural participation as key to the changes sweeping the Arab region at present. Traditionally, participation in cultural terms has mostly been studied in European contexts within the framework of cultural policies aimed at engaging audiences within a widened scope of accessibility to cultural products (Ostrower 2003; Laaksonen 2005, 2010; Ateca-Amestoy et al. 2016; Falk and Katz-Gerro 2016). However, research on cultural participation can be seen to have recently paid particular attention to the extension of the active roles of users in transforming the very cultural production that various power nodes would have them struggle to simply gain access to (Jenkins et al. 2009; Schaefer 2010; Denecke et al. 2016). Even though this change of focus shows an interest in manifestations of citizen involvement and hence has undertones of social and political activism, research in this area does not generally foreground this aspect. Studies of cultural participation in the digital realm, for instance, have not specifically addressed the social and political dimensions of activism inherent in these participatory practices, except during the last decade, when digital platforms were heavily deployed in protest movements that have swept the world in the wake of 2010 (Bakardjieva et al. 2012; Obar 2014).

On the other hand, research on cultural participation in the Arab region remains rather limited, with prominence given to surveys of cultural policies, particularly in relation to issues of heritage and literacy (Cultural Policies Program in the Arab Region 2013). There have been some very interesting studies of cultural participation in the Arab region as a means of social and political activism, but they have been either restricted to particular geographical regions, such as to the Arabian Gulf (Lenze and Schriwer 2019), or have dealt with cultural participation from the perspective of a popular culture that involves both institutional and noninstitutional actors (Valassopoulos 2013). This volume views cultural participation in the Arab region as an important arena of sociopolitical engagement, stemming from the desire to reclaim both public space and representation (Baker and Blaagaard 2016), rather than social and political accessibility. In this respect, the book presents a fresh outlook on cultural participation as cultural production while positing ordinary people as legitimate producers of culture independently of cultural institutions and state-sponsored cultural production, thereby stressing everyday practices such as "encroachment" (Bayat 2010, 14ff) and "creeping" (Lenze and Schriwer 2019, xvii).

Digital media play a significant role in providing alternative venues for the dissemination of information, for public debate, for self-expression, and for documenting and archiving. As various contributions in this joint volume show, the role of digital media plays out quite differently in each context: Their use in the Moroccan case studies (Amghar, and El Harras and Benmouro) is influenced by the relative impact such media have on the authorities in Morocco, whereas in the case studies on Egypt (Aboubakr and Khalil in this volume), digital media are used instead to voice protest and to outline positions and are thus more vocal and visible as citizen media (Baker and Blagaard 2016), while rarely seeking to engage with the authorities in decision-making. In this volume's studies of Palestine, digital media play no major role, which, however, is not the case across the board in Palestine (see Aouragh 2011). Although the political youth movement's activity in street protests has decreased significantly in most countries since 2013, the emergence in social media of massive campaigns of indignation that denounce corruption, reject critical decisions by the King or government, and organize electronic petitions can be noted in many countries across the region. Earlier work on the role of digital media, particularly social media, in the protests of 2010 and later in the region has engaged with issues of relevance to the eruption and continuation of the protests, providing invaluable insights into the mechanisms of operation of the protests. Some of these works were particularly concerned with those media's impact on coordinating the protests (ASMR 2011; Ghannam 2012; Tufekci and Wilson 2012), while others set out to highlight strategies of confrontation and contestation with the state (Badr 2013; Papacharissi 2015). The main focus of the chapters in this volume that pay particular attention to the place and role of digital space (particularly the chapters by Aboubakr, Amghar, El Harras and Benmouro, and Khalil) is on the digital realm as a space where knowledge is produced and where creative-cultural input related to the protests extends the territoriality of such activities.

Temporality and Change

An important finding of the book is the *temporality* of participation in most of the spaces under study (see for instance the chapters by Aboubakr, Aït Mous, Berriane, Khalil, and Jurkiewicz). Temporal appropriations and participatory institutions diminish when the state's grip tightens (as happened particularly in Egypt); when specific persons or groups take control of the space in question (as Ayyad's chapter also makes evident); or, more subtly, when specific cultural or social spaces are de facto

limited to particular groups, whether they are defined according to class or other criteria (see the chapters by Berriane, Shqeirat, Jurkiewicz, and Woroniecka-Krzyżanowska). Such spaces are continuously in danger of being co-opted by official entities, political parties, and individual actors for their own purposes (Weizman 2010).

These considerations make the study of accessibility and control a crucial dimension of our case studies. They take temporality and durability into consideration when studying the interaction between participatory practices and their social and political contexts, highlighting the particularities of contexts and the myriad possibilities of coping and interpellation used by different actors (Bayat 2010; Badr 2013; Castells 2015). Whereas in scholarship on social movements, concepts of temporality and durability have traditionally received minor attention outside issues of the state's violent interference and the actors' micro-scale range of interaction (Gillan 2018), some of the articles in this volume provide new insights into these issues, based on the specificities of local contexts. In particular, the chapters by Sarnataro, El Harras and Benmouro, and Khalil relate the temporality of participatory practices to contexts of political turmoil.

The question of what changed with and after 2011 is not the explicit focus of this book—yet, first, the uprisings function as a kind of background against which most of the initiatives under study had to position themselves in their respective contexts and, second, we, as differently positioned researchers, had to engage with it in both disciplinary and public discussions. The initial overly positive reading of the Arab revolts has already been revisited in their ongoing aftermath and, in this vein, the hype around new political participation and participatory media has also been reassessed, as mentioned earlier.[4] As Hasso and Salime (2016, 2) point out, "these are multi-sited struggles with many historical precursors. Their conclusions have not been written." And indeed, it is too early to do so. While researching for this book, changing political circumstances prompted the reorientation of some of the projects. This is particularly true concerning Egypt, where, due to the continuing crackdown on civil liberties, empirical research has been substantially restrained. In Palestine, due to political conditions and travel barriers, participation in workshops abroad and inviting international scholars was limited. Only in Morocco did the project not need to be adjusted in terms of focusing on public protests. What did change in Morocco during the period of work, however, were the actual demands: whereas 2011 was characterized by the demand for political change, more recent demonstrations touch rather on concrete public policy issues, such as education and health reform or

employment. Demands for political change were now limited to annual anniversaries of the February 20 movement and a few sit-ins pertaining to human rights activist organizations.

An Interdisciplinary Dialogue

The various chapters in this collection reflect a multiplicity of disciplinary outlooks and methodologies, integrating methods from the disciplines of sociology, history, anthropology, urban planning, architecture, cultural studies, and translation studies. Taking into consideration the diversity of geographical, political, social, and cultural contexts under investigation here, this diversity introduces what we hope to present as a dialogue among these disciplinary methodologies, as well as among the different contexts studied. Though this dialogue is not specifically highlighted in the collection, it has enabled us to view our individual case studies from wider perspectives. For instance, the investigation of the role of digital media, particularly social media in the studies on Egypt and Morocco, reveals the political, social, and cultural specificities of each protest context. In the context of the weekly demonstration on Mohamed V Avenue in Rabat (chapters by Ait-Mansour, and El Harras and Benmouro), the use of social media reflects the dynamics of power and the spaces of contestation left open by the political system, rendering the space of social media a viable arena to influence public opinion and effect change, a situation more in keeping with the classical Habermasian formulation of the notion of public sphere (Habermas 1991). In Egypt, the dynamics of the use of social media are largely determined by a context of political participation in which venues for peaceful protest, let alone citizen participation in decision-making, are more heavily restricted. This, in its turn, dictated different lenses of investigation in which issues such as censorship, humor, and temporality feature more prominently.

The political, social, and cultural specificities of the range of regions and contexts under study here suggest varying methodological approaches, even though the case studies might involve similar media of participation. Studying the walking tours of the village of Jaba' in rural Palestine in the chapter by Shqeirat, and in Kuwait City in the chapter by Jurkiewicz, takes as a starting point that walking is an act of appropriating territories and hence consolidating participants' agency (de Certeau 1984). Whereas Shqeirat foregrounds the tools of historical research for the sake of reconciling the space with present-day dynamics, Jurkiewicz reads the walking tours from the perspective of the link between cultural activism and entrepreneurship. This exemplifies how the different disciplinary backgrounds of researchers, as much as the different sociopolitical

conditions of the spaces studied, can lead researchers who start with a similar observation to take quite divergent paths. This variety of methodological approaches potentially opens up the door for subsequent studies of the dynamics of social and political participation in the region that are less restricted in their reliance on disciplinary grouping, an effort, we believe, that would enable more comprehensive studies of political mobilization in the region.

The book introduces a collection of first-hand empirical research by scholars at different stages of their academic trajectories who are often directly involved in the contexts studied. Indeed, the boundary between academia and activism is more porous than the terms suggest. Furthermore, scholars from different parts of the Arab region cooperated with colleagues from Europe. Such collaboration requires multiple processes of translation. The texts reflect the different perspectives and degrees of involvement or detachment, ranging from the interventionist, activist perspective to the detached style demanded of a PhD thesis. They are united, however, in their deep commitment to saving the notion of participation from being hijacked by the types of neoliberal interpretations outlined above and in the conviction that the voices of activists of different orientations and in different fields need to be made visible and audible. This coming together of different perspectives creates an important dialogue between activists and academics and between Arab and Western scholars. With this diversity, the book displays not only different case studies but also a variety of angles and approaches to studying space-related activism.

The empirical parts of the research, though grounded in various theoretical standpoints, are built on bottom-up methods of investigation based on direct knowledge of the contexts studied and pertaining to anthropology and sociology in order to understand the microlevel aspects of social and political life. Among these are the ethnography of in situ participant observations, structured and unstructured interviews, archival and historical documentation collection, review, and content analysis.

Varying the scales of analysis, various chapters have attempted to address, from below, what the transformations of the studied (micro-) spaces of participation tell us about changes that affect participation on the meso- and the macro-levels.[5] This is the case, for example, with ethnography, which has recently gained prominence in the social sciences but is still underrepresented in the study of political participation.[6] Secondly, these methods were used with a focus on the historical dimensions of contemporary developments in the region by emphasizing their *temporal dimension*. Moreover, to better grasp how political participation and socialization have evolved over time in the studied spaces, some

chapters also include diachronic approaches borrowed from the field of (micro-)history (see for instance Levi 1991): archival research, the study of (auto-)biographies, pamphlets, written regulations, and so forth.

Topographies of Change in the Arab Region: The Chapters of This Book

The thirteen chapters included in this volume are grouped into four main sections, reflecting commonalities among the spaces they investigate, as well as among manifestations of participation and the nature of the participatory activities undertaken there.

Part I: "Rethinking Participation in Formal and Informal Spaces" focuses on mechanisms of participation and contestation taking place in both state-regulated spaces and spaces with a more fluid and informal structure. These chapters highlight the reciprocal relationship between the nature of various spaces and the kind of participatory activities they foster and, in turn, that operate in the transformation of such spaces. These spaces vary according to the degree of control that either the state or regional authorities exercise on them. Mohamed V Avenue in Rabat, perhaps, presents one end of the spectrum, where protests are sometimes tolerated by the state and are organized with a perceptible degree of coordination between protesters and the state. At other points in time, however, they are forbidden or cracked down upon, depending on the sensitivity of issues at hand and on the political circumstances. Along the spectrum, we find instances, for example, in Cairo's informal areas and in refugee camps in the West Bank, of participatory processes at grassroots level in which the state or local authorities figure mostly in the guise of webs of negotiations with citizens and occupants of space. The different configurations of spatial participation and activism presented in this section, which are to a large or small extent sanctioned by the state, can provide insights into broader debates on configurations of participation in the Arab region (Lust-Okar and Zerhouni 2008; Bayat 2010, 2017a), in which the role of the central state varies from one geographical context to another and in which configurations of activism are largely influenced by the desire, and sometimes the necessity, to collaborate with the authorities.

Hicham Ait-Mansour's "Protests as a Space for Contentious Politics and Political Learning among Youth in Morocco: The Case of Mohamed V Avenue in Rabat" studies the protests organized in Mohamed V Avenue, which started shortly after the February 20 movement's appearance on the scene in 2011. A sample of the protests (which the state often tolerated but sometimes cracked down on) held in 2016 is studied with

the purpose of examining how that central urban avenue, where the Moroccan Parliament is located, is used as a space not only for political participation but also to foster an emergent political culture at the hands of new actors for whom the protests in the avenue become an arena for both political mobilization and political socialization.

Whereas Mohamed V Avenue in Rabat is a space of participation that is relatively tolerated by the state, Azzurra Sarnataro's chapter "The Concept of Participation in Cairo's Unplanned Areas" is a contribution to the ongoing, yet understudied, mechanisms of local governance in informal areas in the region. It examines how different forms of governance (state institutions, NGOs, and participatory resident initiatives) interact in the local governance of Ezbet el-Haggana, one of Cairo's biggest informal areas. Economic and sociocultural factors intertwine in such an effort, influencing in turn the nature and use of the space in question. The influence of this participatory effort extends beyond the specific developmental goals it sets out to achieve, producing mechanisms of resistance that unpack the intricate network of power relations shaping urban informal contexts.

Yasmine Berriane's "Interstitial Spaces and Controlled Participation: The Youth Center of Hay Mohammadi during the Years of Lead in Morocco" looks into yet another mode of participatory activity manifesting a differently nuanced interaction between state institutions and civil society in the governance of local spaces. The chapter traces the developments in covert relations between state power and civil society actors in a youth center located in Casablanca's working-class district of Mohammadi. Through a micro-historical survey of the development of the making of that participatory space over the past sixty years, the chapter analyses the transformation of state/society institutions and the evolution of the Moroccan participatory sphere.

In "Participation in Spaces of Exile: The Making of Change in a Palestinian Refugee Camp in the West Bank," Dorota Woroniecka-Krzyżanowska investigates the evolution and sustainability of systems of self-governance in a space of prolonged encampment in a case study of the nearly 70-year-old al-Am'ari Palestinian refugee camp in the West Bank. The chapter focuses on how three main factors—local ownership, political legitimacy, and potentiality to bring change—transform the space from a potentially traditional space of waiting and arrest of political action into a space of dynamic interaction and community participation and, therefore, of meaningful *political* action.

Part II: "Reconfiguring Space through Contestation" outlines the mechanisms of contestations in spaces of conflict with a particular focus

on the resulting (re-)construction of such spaces. The participatory practices reviewed in this section are (re-)created in active confrontations between participants and the state, as in the case of the confrontations on Mohamed V Avenue in Rabat and the Muslim Brothers' sit-in in 2013 in Cairo. As a result of such confrontations, interaction is created between the space and the performative practices taking place there. This section also examines discursive spaces and practices generated by these active confrontations and highlights how the (re-)construction not only of space but also of discourse is influenced by confrontations with authority and the resulting mechanisms of contestation. The case studies in this section also highlight the use of digital media as supportive of, and still often marginal to, action on the ground, thus providing a link to some of the chapters in the next section in which virtual space is the main space for activist participation. This, in turn, points in the direction of an investigation of online–offline strategies of protest that are emerging in the scholarship on the region (see Badr 2013).

In "The Challenge of Reconstructing Public Space: The Case of Mohamed V Avenue," Mokhtar El Harras and Youness Benmouro study protests staged by diverse groups on the famous Mohamed V Avenue in Rabat, focusing on participatory practices of a more confrontational nature, primarily in material space but also on virtual platforms. Studying some of the performative practices of protest taking place there, the chapter examines the interconnectedness and reciprocal relationship between spatial practices, on the one hand, and the tactics of containment by the state, on the other. The chapter thereby also investigates the dynamics of this spatial transformation in relation to the political, social, and gender designation of subgroups of actors.

Mai Ayyad's "The Muslim Brotherhood and the Creation of Spectacles in Nasr City" focuses on the transformation of space during an instance of heightened confrontational and conflictual encounter between the occupants and the authorities by examining the sit-in staged by members of the Muslim Brotherhood from June to August 2013 in the Rabaa al-Adawiya Square in Cairo. The chapter reads the formation and transformation of the sit-in against various theoretical conceptualizations of the relationship between spatial practices and official policies and examines how such interplay directly and indirectly influenced the appropriation of the space. This interplay is understood against the backdrop of the history of the presence of both the state and the Muslim Brothers in the larger space of the district of Nasr City where the sit-in was held.

Viewing mechanisms of contestation and confrontation with the authorities in the activities of protest movements, Mouloud Amghar's

"Topographies of the Discourse of Resistance in the Public Sphere: A Case Study of the Activists of the February 20 Movement" (originally in Arabic) investigates discursive confrontations and contestations by tracing the transformations overcoming the performance of protest in public space in the February 20 movement in Morocco. Focusing on the discourse of protest adopted by the movement, together with its mechanisms of movement in public space, the chapter presents a classification of these discourses and of their capacity to transform the discourse of the state in response to them. The study of such discursive confrontations requires a broadened vision to cover both material and digital space.

Part III: "Alternative Spaces of Cultural Production" takes a few steps away from the focus on the relationship between spatial participation and the state/authority, whether in terms of webs of subtle cooperation or of direct confrontation and contestation. This section examines the interaction between space and participatory practices by looking into the cultural production engendered by such interaction. The focus on cultural production in the form of visual art and street performances is taken up in an examination of a number of artistic spaces in Cairo and Casablanca, while cultural production in the digital realm is examined, in particular, in terms of humor. What these material and virtual spaces have in common is the aspect of the noninstitutionalization of the artistic/cultural production they represent, which characterizes most alternative cultural production spaces growing in areas of conflict between citizens and the state. The case studies in this section can be seen to contribute to the emerging discussion of the role of 'citizen media,' a debated concept used to provide a more coherent framework for the study of the mobilization of ordinary citizens around the world (Baker and Blaagaard 2016), as well as between that terrain and more stable cultural concepts such as that of 'popular culture' (see Aboubakr forthcoming 2020). Such spaces provide spheres of alternative cultural expression in search of visibility in a mostly state-dominated cultural and artistic scene. At perhaps the other end of the spectrum is the independent scene of user-generated content in the digital realm represented by the investigation of media and cultural collectives in Egypt.

Investigating resistance discourse in digital space, Randa Aboubakr's chapter "Mock Translation as Sociopolitical Commentary in the Egyptian Digital Sphere" examines the expansion of an already growing arena of social and political participation using instances of mock translation in digital user-created content in Egypt. The playful, carnivalesque aspect of mock translation is traced as a means of combating the hegemony of mainstream discourse and of boosting the social and political participation

of formerly nonpoliticized citizens through the use of humor, which functions as a force of legitimation. The chapter investigates strategies of representation in read/write culture such as instances of digital remix and mock reportage in the independent blogosphere in Egypt.

In a similar vein, in the chapter titled "Spaces of Culture in Casablanca: Isles of Creativity in an Often-Hostile Ocean," Fadma Aït Mous reveals that the tendency and mechanisms of establishing community-based spaces of cultural/artistic production are not uncommon in the Arab region. L'Batwar and L'Uzine, the two case studies introduced in the chapter (both located in Casablanca), are approached from the perspective of governance and power relations in the functioning and maintaining of this kind of cultural/artistic space. A description of the uses and history of these spaces analyzes the issue of power and the mechanisms of negotiation between civil actors and the state, highlighting how these emerging civic actors work toward the creation of new paradigms of cultural and artistic production.

Mona Khalil's "Citizen Collectives in Post-2011 Egypt: Contestation Mechanisms" investigates the issue of state–citizen interaction in the governance of public space by looking into the contentious space of citizen initiatives that use online–offline mechanisms of participation and mobilization. The chapter focuses on cultural and artistic initiatives that have evolved since the Egyptian uprising in 2011 (mainly Mosireen and al-Fann Maydan), tracing their durability and mutability under successive regimes in Egypt since 2011, and outlines how the internal structure of these initiatives, on the one hand, and policies of state censorship, on the other, are instrumental in shaping the mechanisms of the durability and hence temporality of such initiatives.

In Part IV: "Space Reclamation and Cultural Activism," the focus lies on space-related activism and the role played by cultural and artistic production in conflictual spaces. In the interface between space, cultural production, economic factors, and the politics of memory, cultural activism represents processes of intervention in the management of public space. The case studies reflect on how art and cultural initiatives provide alternatives to the domination of public spaces and cultural production that is inscribed in neoliberal politics and in the institutional politics of memory. At the same time, they open the door for an investigation of what may seem to be apolitical activism. Such cultural initiatives in urban centers like Ramallah or Kuwait City are a reclamation and reappropriation of public spaces governed by neoliberal politics and introduce new shapes of NGO- and business-based interventions. This section also studies the role played by communal initiatives in rural areas, such as the Palestinian

village of Jaba', in reclaiming the memory of place and hence in rehabilitating the relationship between the inhabitants and nature. The investigation of these community-based cultural initiatives can provide useful insights into broader debates around the role of entrepreneurship in activism (Banet-Weiser and Mukherjee 2012).

Yazid Anani's "Cultural Heterotopias and the Making of the Political" sets out to investigate the role played by the neoliberal transformation of cities and urban centers, which have deepened the dichotomies between public and private spaces and which, by introducing predesigned lifestyles and promoting dependency, have, thus, reshaped these spaces as well as the individuals and communities contained therein. Against this background, the chapter examines *City Exhibitions*, an art exhibition initiated by Birzeit University, as representing the emergence of agency in the shaping of cultural/artistic spaces and consequently in the shaping of 'the political' in Palestine. This examination asks about the roles played by both Israeli colonialism and neoliberal state policies in the contentious effort to create alternative spaces of cultural production where the personal, the political, and the historical interweave in producing the scene of art-making in Palestine today.

Engaged with the issue of the ownership and reclamation of public space, Renad Shqeirat's "Genius Loci: The Spirit of the Place" moves to rural areas in Palestine and investigates the web of interrelatedness of border, natural, and visual elements in creating a sense of place and in fostering a sense of responsibility toward the organization of the rural community in Jaba', a village on the outskirts of Ramallah. Aiming to counter what is perceived as a coercive relationship between the residents and public space, the effort to restore the historic center of the village tries to provide a different angle of understanding of the present dynamics between the residents and their space, as well as to introduce suggestions for reconciliation.

Arising from questions about the possibility of combining social engagement and entrepreneurship in space-related cultural activism, Sarah Jurkiewicz's "*Culturepreneurship* and Reclaiming Urban Space in Kuwait City" investigates two spaces in Kuwait's city center initiated by young women professionals. Both Madeenah and Secret Garden reflect efforts to reclaim urban space by engaging in practices (such as walking and gardening) that empower citizens to get actively involved in forming and maintaining the spaces they inhabit. Such 'social enterprises' are thus seen in terms of an ethical stance targeting change through either projects of knowledge production or hands-on approaches and, at the same

time, are framed as business ventures, a tendency that is on the rise in other parts of the Gulf region as well.

Notes

1. With thanks to Yasmine Berriane, who contributed to some of the theoretical underpinnings and text modules of this introduction.
2. See Lust-Oskar's reading of Alhamad's contribution to the edited volume on participation (cf. Alhamad in Lust-Oskar 2008, 8).
3. For a concise overview of the political history of participation (referring to Aristotle, Rancière, Arendt, and Habermas), see Barney et al. (2016, xiff).
4. See, for example, Lynch (2013) and, for a broader discussion on participatory media, Barney et al. (2016).
5. The link between local and global processes has been at the core of the research conducted at the Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient. See, for instance, Freitag and Oppen (2010).
6. On the advantages of privileging such approaches to explore the workings of political action, see, for instance, Joseph et al. (2007).

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